

READER

CHICAGO'S FREE WEEKLY SINCE 1971 | JUNE 18, 2020

The *last* responders

Funeral homes on the front lines of the pandemic

BY GONZALO GUZMAN | 8



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EDITORS IN CHIEF SUJAY KUMAR, KAREN HAWKINS
CREATIVE LEAD RACHEL HAWLEY
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GRAPHIC DESIGNER AMBER HUFF
LISTINGS COORDINATOR SALEM COLLO-JULIN
CONTRIBUTORS ED BLAIR, NOAH BERLASKY, LUCA CIMARUSTI, MARISSA DE LA CERDA, MARI COHEN, JOSH FLANDERS, SHERI FLANDERS, JACK HELBIG, IRENE HSAIO, CATALINA MARIA JOHNSON, MONICA KENDRICK, STEVE KRAKOW, NOËLLE D. LILLEY, JAMIE LUDWIG, MAX MALLER, ADAM MULLINS-KHATIB, J.R. NELSON, JEFF NICHOLS, MARISSA OBERLANDER, MATTHEW SIGUR, CATEY SULLIVAN

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THIS WEEK ON CHICAGOREADER.COM



Unchecked immunity

Governor Pritzker granted nursing homes and hospitals immunity for most malpractice.

A tribute to Big Floyd

A gig poster that imagines if George Floyd had survived and his rap career had a resurgence

From soldier to worker

Maya Dukmasova traces the history of police unions in last week's cover story.

FOOD & DRINK

A CULINARY CONFESSION



And why I wish I had a year ago

By MIKE SULA

Last July I told myself I was done with Abe Conlon. But here I go again.

If you've paid much attention to the *Reader's* food coverage over the last nine years, you know Conlon as the once obscure underground chef who opened Logan Square's Fat Rice and went on to build a national reputation for food inspired by the southern Chinese peninsula of Macau.

If, for some reason, you were paying attention to Chicago restaurant social media two chaotic weekends ago, you know that reputation got dragged—and dragged hard. In fact, the issue arose out of the collective agony and protest in the aftermath of George Floyd's murder: a number of Chicago chefs and restaurants were called out on social media for various forms of alleged bad behavior after posting seemingly self-serving support of the Black Lives Matter movement (or in one case, outright rejection of it).

But the Conlon Affair was the real popcorn

muncher. Spearheaded largely by another onetime underground chef and brief Fat Rice employee, Joey Pham, it took the form of a blizzard of Instagram posts quoting former employees accusing Conlon, and in some cases his partner Adrienne Lo, of everything from racism, to cultural appropriation, to wage theft.

But what comes across strongest is the picture of Conlon as arrogant and dismissive; a belittler and a berater prone to unpredictable explosions of rage; exhibit A in the case against culinary toxicity.

Some might find it easy to dismiss the complaints of former employees with suspicion, or downplay their severity as disgruntled snowflake sniveling, but the stories took me right back to a warm summer morning in a narrow condo kitchen when Conlon treated myself and two colleagues to the mother of all temper tantrums.

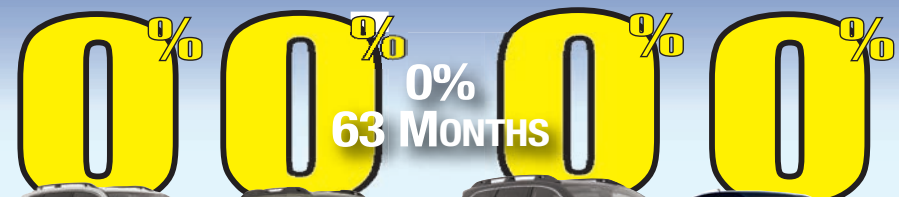
But let me back up. I moonlight as an editor

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for an independent magazine about cooking with cannabis. It's called *Kitchen Toke*, and like my job at the *Reader*, it's lots of fun. I get to work with chefs from all over the country, most of them passionate about their work and thrilled to see it featured in a coffee-table-gorgeous, internationally distributed print magazine.

I've written about Conlon a bunch of times over the years for the *Reader*. There's no question he's a brilliant chef. I've loved his food. His stories were funny, interesting, and entertaining. I always took Abe's calls.

I had heard him, on occasion, be a bit curt and dismissive to employees—and even to Lo—but I chalked it up to the everyday pressures of a busy chef on the rise. Some chefs punch their way up in the business by punching down on their staff. It's an all too commonly accepted truth about the industry. You could say I was among those in the media who considered Fat Rice a "darling," as Pham described the food press's infatuation with the chef and the restaurant.

Conlon had served cannabis-infused dinners with his underground supper club X-Marx before he opened Fat Rice, and I knew he loved to smoke weed, so of course I wanted to feature him in *Kitchen Toke*. Independent of myself, the magazine's founder and designer Joline Rivera had the same idea, and we each pitched Conlon about featuring him in our upcoming fall issue.

Rivera floated the possibility of Abe cooking at some high-profile events she'd been commissioned to curate (for a New York City clothing designer, a hip-hop festival, a New Year's Eve party). Meanwhile, Conlon and I spitballed ideas, imagining a twisted *Gourmet*-style photo spread with recipes, set in a forest preserve, with Abe cooking an outdoor feast infused with compatible strains and terpene isolates for his friends. Rivera and I told him he could cook whatever he wanted.

But it was a busy spring leading into a busy summer. In May, Abe was cooking at events surrounding the National Restaurant Association's annual convention and the James Beard Awards, and later things got hectic when Fat Rice got an expensive new kitchen remodel.

Rivera and I were busy putting together the rest of the issue, and working our other jobs, and communication became erratic. But in late June, Conlon proposed a menu of five dishes, and per his specs, I purchased a few hundred dollars' worth of cannabis for him to play with

in his recipes. I also arranged for several hundred dollars' worth of terpenes to be shipped my way from a San Francisco manufacturer eager to get them into the great chef's hands. (Terpenes are aromatic organic compounds that give different cannabis strains their distinctive aromas and flavors. They're fun to cook with.) Like a drug dealer, I delivered it all to Abe at Fat Rice's back door in a paper bag.

He seemed excited to get started, but by then our deadlines were fast approaching. It was too late to mount an outdoor photo shoot, and over the phone Rivera and Conlon had tense disagreements over locations and timing. After this, Rivera told me Conlon tried to "throw you under the bus" for the poor communication that had so far stalled the process. In a separate exchange with me, Conlon blamed her for the same thing. "Some shit might be coming your way," he texted me. "Sry."

One thing you can count on about Rivera is that she doesn't take shit from anyone. And another: she's fiercely loyal to the people who work for her. A third: she has no time for drama. She suggested that we kill the Conlon feature and move on to something else, but I was panicked that we had nothing to replace it with in time, and I convinced her to stay the course. "It's just one day," I argued. "You'll shoot [photos of] him. We'll get the recipes. I'll write the story, and we never have to deal with him again." I vouched for him, even after he tried to get me in trouble with the boss. I didn't tell her about Abe's text describing her as "kind of a mess." I desperately wanted to make it work.

A date and location was finally set, and Rivera distributed a detailed schedule with deadlines to all involved. Photographer Frank Lawlor would shoot Conlon in Rivera's kitchen while Conlon prepared one of the five recipes he promised but had yet to deliver: Pâté-Stuffed Onion Petals With Cannabis Brown Butter Aromatized With Terpenes and Shatter Sherry Gastrique. I was going to sit in, a fly on the wall, there to report on whatever came out of the ever-quotable Conlon's mouth as he did his thing. The other dishes, by necessity, would have to be shot later, in a studio with a food stylist.

In the days leading up to the shoot, we repeatedly asked him to tell us what he needed in terms of ingredients, equipment, and props. We asked him for the recipes he committed to develop because we had a commitment to send them to the tester in Los Angeles ASAP. But

FOOD & DRINK

stretches of days passed between communications, usually e-mails sent from Lo.

These were not ideal conditions for a photo shoot, but *Kitchen Toke* is a scrappy operation. We roll with the punches.

When the day came, I met Abe at the door. He seemed perturbed. He couldn't find a good parking spot, so he had to huff and puff a stack of plastic storage containers full of ingredients from a couple blocks away. On top of that, he'd cooked for the governor the night before, so I figured it had been a rough morning.

Maybe that's why I kept my mouth shut after I introduced him to Lawlor and Rivera, and he demanded she remove her little Malteses because he didn't want to "stomp on one of them and kill it."

There wasn't much time to process the level of threat in that statement before things went completely off the rails. Conlon became increasingly agitated as he set up his mise en place, complaining about what a shitty week he'd had, how the whole process had been fucked up and a huge pain in the ass for him, and how he wasn't getting paid for all the trouble he'd taken. That subject had never been broached—*Kitchen Toke*, like any journalistic endeavor, doesn't pay its story subjects. So I finally spoke up: "Abe, when *Food & Wine* does a feature on you, do they pay you?"

This stunned him into momentary silence before he schooled me: "But I get the equivalent of \$30,000 in free advertising! And you know what, Mike, you guys aren't *Food & Wine*." But the question set him off. He began pinballing around the kitchen, slamming ingredients around, and bellowing about the things we promised and never delivered, all punctuated by numerous salivary F-bombs. I couldn't help but notice his knife kit was open on the counter. At one point, Abe stepped toward Rivera, and Lawlor stepped between them.

That's when Rivera pulled the plug. "This is over," she said, and left the kitchen, while Lawlor and I offered Abe increasingly urgent encouragement to get out, as he continued to rant.

"Abe, shut up," I said. "Nobody wants to hear it."

"Keep your mouth shut and get out," I said.

And then like a dime-store Don Corleone: "You're dead to me," I said. "Fuck you."

Between Rivera, Lawlor, and myself, we've worked with hundreds of chefs in our careers, but this was something entirely unprecedented. In the aftermath, we were pretty shook up. But we shook it off. Within 20 minutes we had

a new chef on board, ready and raring to go. Forget him, we told each other.

When I reflected on it later, I actually felt bad that I'd lost my cool and spoken so unprofessionally. And I thought about the restaurant industry and its endemic problems and figured Abe might be dealing with issues a lot more troubling than a low-budget indie photo shoot. All I could think was "Thank God I don't have to work for that lunatic. That must be awful." I told a few friends what happened, but I mostly kept it to myself.

I'm not writing this story now, in all its ugly detail, because it feels good to kick Conlon when he's down. He's issued his apologies and promises to do better on Instagram and in interviews in the *Tribune* and Block Club. (But if you've ever spoken to Conlon for more than ten minutes, you know that they sound like they're coming from a completely different person.) By the time this went to press, he hadn't responded to my request for comment.

I'm writing this story a year after this all happened because I can't stop thinking about all the times I got hints and full-stop red lights that something was seriously wrong—and I continued to champion Conlon and his work.

There's been a debate in food media in recent years about whether it's ethical to cover the work of known abusers, and I've paid lip service to it myself. So I could've stopped for a minute and reconsidered writing about Conlon the time he broke away midsentence during a phone interview to chew someone out in the background.

I could've told him to fuck off when he started talking shit on my boss.

After that ugly morning last summer, I could've started asking questions instead of trying to put it all behind me.

And this spring, I definitely could have spoken up when a colleague secured a recipe from Conlon, via Lo, for the *Reader* cookbook project we were working on. But instead I let it slide. "The world's a mess right now," I thought. "That's all in the past, and it's big of them to help."

I've been looking back and wincing at some of the gratuitously shitty things I've written over the years as a restaurant critic. A few days ago a friend texted me their opinion that "every man, and certainly every white man, has behavior to regret." Maybe I'll end up regretting writing this story, but not as much as I regret using my platform to boost a media darling who turned out to be no darling at all. **✎**

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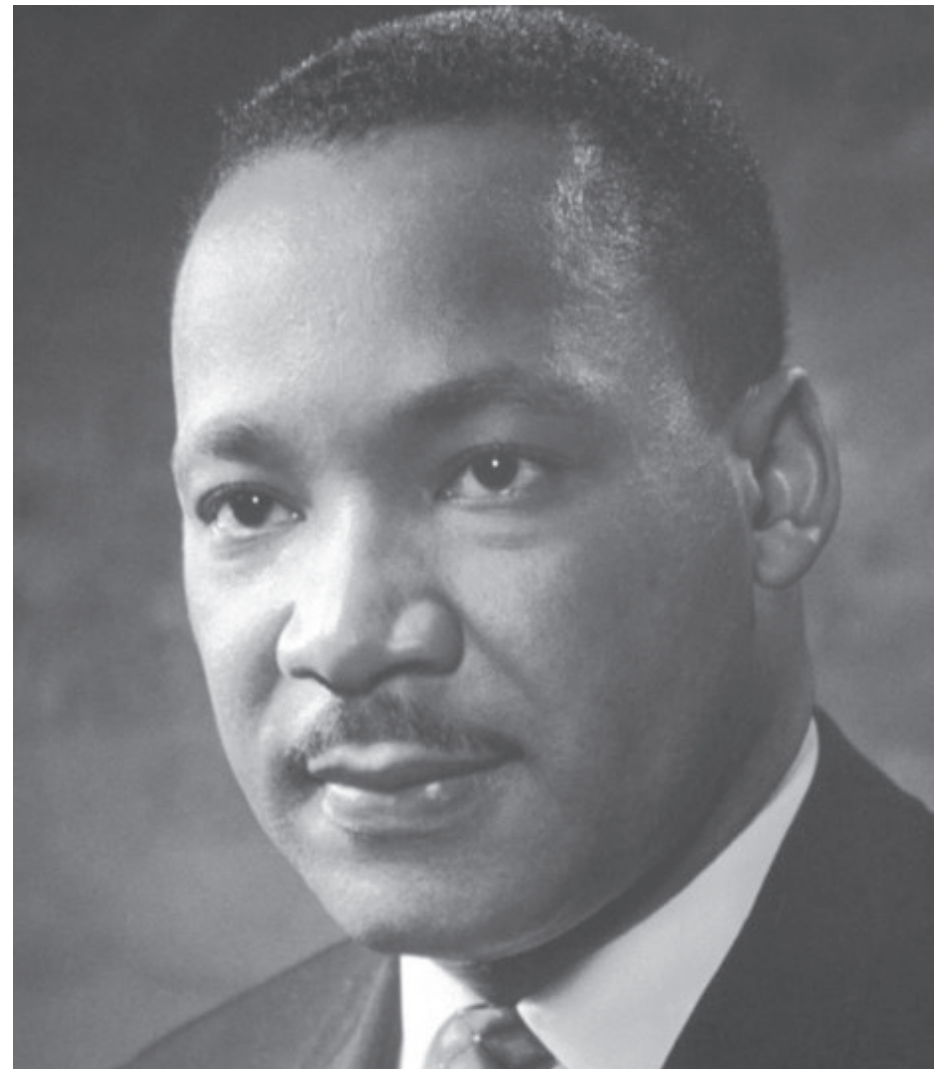
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POLITICS

Grave robbers

Hey, MAGA, stop using Dr. King to justify police brutality.

By **BEN JORAVSKY**

In a futile attempt to justify the unjustifiable, Trumpsters have resorted to grave robbery. That is, they're claiming great leftists and civil rights activists as their own—now that these great leaders are dead and unable to speak for themselves.

This is not new. I've seen Trump and his followers talk up everyone from Muhammad Ali to FDR when it suits their needs. Apparently, they have no American historical antecedents of their own that any decent human being would want anything to do with.

This brings me to the latest atrocity in journalism perpetrated by John Kass, the right-wing columnist for the *Chicago Tribune*.

In his June 11 column, Kass argues that Black Lives Matter activists who take a knee to protest police violence against Black people are members of a cult threatening to destroy America.

And if these "neo-Marxists" get their way, law-abiding Americans won't be allowed to stand for the national anthem. Or, as Kass puts it: "The high priests of the left tell us those who

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Dr. King would *not* be on your side, MAGA. 🗳️
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don't kneel during the national anthem are guilty."

In reality, the only person punished for his behavior during the national anthem is, of course, Colin Kaepernick, who was banished from the NFL for taking a knee to protest police brutality.

So, in one fell swoop, Kass plays the victim even though his crowd is the victimizers. Slick move, Johnny.

Now, to the grave robbery. In trying to explain that he's not really the racist his position would lead you to believe he is, Kass invokes the name of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. And I quote . . .

"I'm no theologian, but my ancient Greek Orthodox Christian faith teaches us to condemn racism and support the oppressed. We're judged on sins we commit as individuals. The late Archbishop Iakovos, seen in old news photos with piercing eyes and black robes, stood with the late Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. in Selma in 1965. Both religious men abhorred judging entire groups of people by skin color. But they are long gone."

To read this, you'd think Kass is righteous and holy because he belonged to a church whose former leader marched with King.

And that Archbishop Iakovos and Dr. King valiantly tried to judge all people fairly. But then they passed. And so . . .

Well, Kass doesn't come right out and say what his point is. But it seems to be that somehow or other those knee-taking Black Lives Matter "neo-Marxists" corrupted Dr. King's dream. Sooooo . . .

Protesters who actually take a stand for the oppressed and against racism killed Dr. King's dream. Which is also Kass's dream, as he belongs to Archbishops Iakovos's church.

Got that, America?

Look, Archbishop Iakovos deserves a lot of credit for going to Selma in 1965 to march with Dr. King. His presence helped win over public opinion for the civil rights movement—a movement that was vehemently opposed by the sorts of people who enjoy reading John Kass's column. Just saying.

But I think most of us would agree that Dr. King would be kneeling with the Black Lives Matter activists if he were still alive, and taking a strong stand against police randomly killing unarmed Black people.

In fact, I think this moment calls for a brief refresher on the life of Dr. King, for those too young to remember him.

He lived for about three more years after the Selma march—and he was active until the end.

In 1966, he moved to Chicago and led open-housing marches through the southwest and northwest sides. And how did the crowd of white southwest-siders respond to King's message? They called him the N-word and hit him in the head with a rock.

In 1967, King spoke out against the Vietnam War. For which right-wingers called him a Commie.

J. Edgar Hoover, the lunatic who ran the FBI back then, had a hateful obsession with King. Hoover had his agents tap King's phones and motel rooms. They collected dirt on King that they tried to use to discredit his movement and drive him to suicide.

It's called COINTELPRO—look it up.

In 1968, Dr. King planned a Poor People's Campaign in Washington, D.C., in which he called for a full jobs program, guaranteed income, health care for all, and affordable housing.

And the right told him to shut up and stick to civil rights. (Not unlike Laura Ingraham telling LeBron James to "shut up and dribble.")

And in the last days of his life, he was in Memphis standing up for the collective bargaining rights of striking sanitation workers, almost all of whom were Black.

Lastly, he didn't just sort of vanish, as Kass suggests. No, he was murdered at the age of 39.

And even after he was dead, Senator Jesse Helms and other Republicans fought to keep his birthday from being a national holiday. "King's action-oriented Marxism," Helms said, "is not compatible with the concepts of this country."

When in doubt, blame the Marxists.

Without Stevie Wonder's efforts, I'm not sure we'd even have a King holiday—if Ingraham was around back then, she'd probably have told Stevie to "shut up and sing."

So, sorry, I can't sit here and watch some dude use Dr. King to prop up a position that King would most definitely abhor.

Look, MAGA—as Donald Trump calls you—I can't help it if you've linked yourself to a despicable human being leading a racist cause.

But if you feel compelled to find someone from the past to justify your beliefs, go rob the graves of those who might share them. Like Jesse Helms. Or J. Edgar Hoover. Or the guy in Marquette Park who threw that rock—presuming he's not with us anymore.

And stop desecrating the life and legacy of the great Dr. King. 🗳️

🐦 @bennyjshow

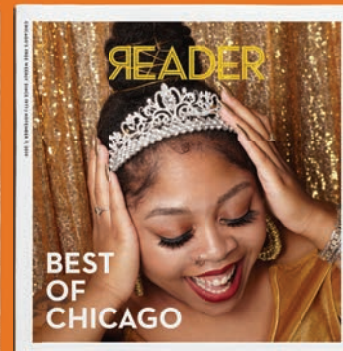
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Thank you, The Reader team



The *last* responders

Funeral homes on the front lines of the pandemic

PHOTOS AND STORY BY GONZALO GUZMAN



When we say *essential frontline workers* we think of doctors and nurses, delivery workers, and all of the industries and people providing us with the resources we need to stay alive. But as the United States surpasses 100,000 deaths from COVID-19, another industry has been witness to the devastating toll of the pandemic. Funeral homes have always been the last responders, serving families during some of their darkest moments. Now with an increased workload, a lack of resources and space, and ever-changing regulations, funeral directors are having to adapt to the unique needs of the profession, while worrying for their own safety.

“It’s been heartbreaking.”

I had one scenario where the man died of COVID and we were scheduled to go bury him and then the wife and one of the sons came down with it so they weren’t even able to leave the house. So I loaded the body in the hearse and I swung by their house. I let them come out and at least look through the window and see that the body was in the casket. I went by myself to bury him. And I had a young man that was only 37 that died from COVID and he worked at the Milagro tortilla factory.

“One weekend between Saturday and Sunday we got ten cases of COVID death where I had to actually close my doors for that week and not accept any more cases just to be able to service them and not get overrun. Right now, the non-COVID cases are like the minority, where we’re still sending some people to Mexico and we’re still doing some burials. In a normal month we would do 20 [funeral arrangements] and in May we are up to 65.”

—MANNY MARTINEZ, MARTINEZ FUNERAL HOME IN LITTLE VILLAGE



“The African American culture is to hug, kiss,

and greet family members at the wake as well as the repast, where we gather for a family dinner. This cannot be done at this time. The number of COVID-positive cases has doubled the number of cases we would generally have at one time. The number of cases has remained steady yet high.

“We are the ‘forgotten’ last responders, while the government focuses on getting PPE to health-care workers in hospitals and we that handle the deceased with the same virus are overlooked. This is a family-owned and -operated facility. We as a family are

all on the front line. From the removal from the place of death to directing the service and everything in between, it’s being done by a family member.

“It has always been a challenge to keep work separate from my personal life with the nature of the business, and our services are needed 24 hours a day, including holidays. During this crisis, it is that much harder to have time for yourself with the increase in death and confusion.” —**NICOLE NOBLE, WHO, ALONG WITH HER FATHER RAYMOND NOBLE SR., IS A FUNERAL DIRECTOR AT NOBLE FUNERAL HOME IN SOUTH SHORE**



“We have limited the hours

of wakes, changed the viewing room to only ten seats six feet apart, closed off our lounge and coffee area. We require everyone to use a face mask or face covering, and signs are posted throughout the funeral home to remind the family and guests to continue to practice social distancing.

“Most families that I help are big close-knit families where the decedent might have six or more siblings, three or more children, the spouse, and many more immediate family members. Following the ten-people guidelines has been a true challenge. Since we know that during the funeral arrangements more than two people usually come to help each other make the proper decisions on their loved ones’ funerals, we meet with them in our open lobby area to keep everyone safe and yet still help them in a dignified way.

“On a personal level, I have to keep my feelings and fears at bay. It is very stressful to keep myself safe and take the proper precautions at work. Staying at home does not count for me. I have my own family to care for and keep safe as well. So I’ve had to change how I enter my home after coming from work or doing a funeral so I do not expose my family to anything.”

—YADI PEREZ, OWNER AND FUNERAL DIRECTOR AT PEREZ FRANCO FUNERAL HOME IN GAGE PARK





“I would ask you,


‘Well your aunt died and you need to pick ten people from the family.’ I mean, can you do that? When people come to a wake they talk and they reminisce and there are picture boards and videos and memorabilia. The body is displayed for everybody to see and to offer a prayer, or it’s a cremation urn. The mere

fact of somebody coming and consoling that person, it means so much, and that’s just been erased and taken away.

“And so my message to people is just to reach out to this family because, depending on their situation, they are very isolated when they have a death due to COVID. If they live together they’re quarantined, they can’t leave the house, somebody else in their family might be sick. Reach out to them, call them, don’t

send an e-mail, don’t send a text, pick up the phone and call them and say, ‘What is it that I need to do for you today?’ And whether it’s a meal, sending flowers, cutting their grass, weeding their garden, getting groceries, or something, it could be the simplest things. Or it could just be that that person just needs to pour their heart out to you on the phone, and all you do is listen and it means the world.

“The funeral brings some closure to a fami-

ly, and when they can’t have that grand send-off that they’ve always wanted for their loved one, it leaves them broken. And we can only do so much as our profession, but we also need their family and friends to step up and to just circle them and to show them that nobody has forgotten, that they’re loved.” —**CLAUDETTE ZARZYCKI, A FOURTH-GENERATION FUNERAL DIRECTOR AT ZARZYCKI MANOR CHAPELS, LTD. IN ARCHER HEIGHTS** 



A mural by Squeak and Mario Mena on the South Loop Petco. COURTESY BARRETT KEITHLEY

COMMUNITY ART

How Chicago artists are spreading the message that Black Lives Matter

Muralists use boarded-up storefronts as their new canvas with Paint the City.

BY S. NICOLE LANE

I biked from McKinley Park to Humboldt Park last Friday to deliver a package to someone. A 30-minute ride up to the northwest side would be good to exercise my winter legs, although the 85-degree temperature was testing my ability to do so with ease. What I saw along the way—and what I’ve seen between the groups of folks at protests—were bright hues, large lettering, artwork, figures, and political statements adorning buildings, windows, and public spaces. These new murals have taken the place of many boarded-up storefronts, gas stations, and grocery stores,

covering up the sad plywood with words of affirmation and strength.

A few days before my bike ride, I saw “All Lives Matter” painted in lazy black lettering on a Humboldt corner store. Now “Brown people stand with Black lives” is painted over those words. Chicagoans have been empowered by the demonstrations and those emotions are being illustrated across the city.

Enlisting more than 75 artists to work on 15 buildings around Chicago, Barrett Keithley and Missy Perkins launched Paint the City, which creates images of hope and unity on

boarded-up storefronts. The project’s mission is deeply rooted in Black Lives Matter and the support of justice and equality, and so far the group of artists has painted ten buildings on the city’s south and west sides. Keithley explains that the inspiration behind the project started because of the boarded-up abandoned buildings that have long existed in the city, prior to the recent protests. “Once the civil unrest began, we too wanted to take a stand and use our form of art activism. We want to heal the city through art. We also identified that local businesses and artists were being affected by the pandemic to begin with, so we literally said, ‘Let’s do this!’”

Businesses contact Paint the City and are then partnered with artists who work on their storefront. Perkins and Keithley first began to e-mail chambers of commerce and a few alderpeople who sent them the names of boarded-up businesses. Some businesses have specific requests, like certain images, text, or colors, whereas others simply want to spread positivity to support Black Lives Matter. Paint the City has been working with Somos Arte Collective, an arts and education team, to help with outreach in the communities it serves. “We always make sure the businesses are aware of the murals to create a stronger bond with the artist’s community,” says Keithley.

Murals can be found at small businesses like Wildwood Photography, Conexion Salon and Spa, the Denim Lounge, Cafe Cancale, Mojo Spa, and Store B Vintage, as well as larger spaces like the Petco in the South Loop and two Jewel-Oscos on the south side.

Keithley’s background is in painting and event coordinating. He began to professionally paint six years ago, creating work based on his experiences growing up in Morgan Park. Perkins has an educational background and a master’s degree in art history and museum studies. She has curated in galleries all over Chicago and is now heavily involved in the hip-hop graffiti scene. The duo’s knowledge of curating and art-making combined with their experience working closely with Chicago Loop Alliance has provided insight into their planning moving forward with Paint the City.


Last week, they launched a GoFundMe campaign to support the artist community that has also been hit hard due to the pandemic. Although the project is already launched, Keithley and Perkins are asking folks to donate so artists involved in Paint the City can be compensated for their time and supplies. Keithley says, “The initiative is also the beginning of our continuous effort to connect local businesses with artists and to beautify our city’s abandoned properties.” And Paint the City hopes to prolong their support of local artists. This ongoing project has the intentions to help fellow artists and to stimulate the local economy through art and entertainment.

In places like New York City, murals are being painted over as they are considered “vandalism.” However, Chicago’s shops and neighborhoods are thriving with support as locals spread their message with art—for now. This is what makes these canvases so precious—they are ephemeral. Because businesses will eventually remove these boarded-up walls, the plywood canvas will take the artwork with it. And this is something that all major cities are seeing across the U.S. Arts initiatives are being taken to the streets, and to the storefronts lining those streets, filled with people seeking justice for the murder of George Floyd and the numerous stolen lives of Black folks around the world. 📍

If business owners are interested in participating in the initiative, they can e-mail paintthecity312@gmail.com.

🐦 @snicolelane



Martin Luther King Jr. at the Chicago Freedom Movement Rally in Soldier Field  FROM THE CHICAGO URBAN LEAGUE PHOTOS COLLECTION, THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT CHICAGO SPECIAL COLLECTIONS AND ARCHIVES.

HISTORY

The Blackivists on documenting movements

A group of Black archivists is helping communities create their own narratives, filling in what history books have left out.

BY ARIONNE NETTLES

When major movements rock the course of American history, Black voices and perspectives are often left out—out of textbooks, out of major museums, and out of public record.

Enter the Blackivists. Started in 2018, this group of six Black archivists in Chicago works to train and consult with community groups on how to properly preserve archives, prioritizing projects that fill in the gaps in history.

“Aside from our respective institutions, it’s important for us as Black information professionals, archivists, and librarians, and records managers, to be able to provide and share this expertise, these skills, with our communities and with our people,” says Skyla S. Hearn, a former chief archivist and director at the DuSable Museum of African American History. “So we all work together at various sites and events to educate the public about archives and also how to do the work as citizen archivists.”

The job of these memory workers is even more essential today as the police killing of George Floyd has reignited widespread protests across the country and discussions on the historic narratives. Black communities are again, in the current movement, working to ensure they have the power to document what

is happening. The importance of this is further amplified by what Blackivist Stacie Williams says seems to be “most of white America’s collective gasp moment” that racism and oppression still exists.

“I think just even knowing and seeing that in that moment is understanding that our history has not always been documented, according to the dominant structures that did that type of documentation in this country,” says Williams, who is director of the Center for Digital Scholarship at the University of Chicago Library. “So, the importance I think of all of us being in our respective spaces and trying to elevate the histories, the stories, the narratives, the material culture, all of it, of Black people in this country is so important.”

Last fall, some Blackivist group members worked on a project with the Smithsonian to speak with Chicagoans on the west side about what happened in days after Martin Luther King Jr. was killed in 1968. Those stories, says Blackivist Raquel Flores-Clemons, explain how the National Guard treated Black residents at the time, but aren’t found in any textbook.

“It traces directly to what is happening, why things are the way they are, why people are responding the way they’re responding, and why

certain communities are impacted by police brutality and over-policing more than other communities,” says Flores-Clemons, who is the university archivist and director of archives, records management, and special collections at Chicago State University. “A lot of that is still very much in the minds and hearts of our individual community members.”

Documenting the relationship between Black communities and law enforcement can show the connection between generations and the incremental progress made—or the lack thereof.

“When I think about the whole idea of community control of policing, that isn’t something new,” says Tracy Drake, an archivist at Reed College. “But if you know your history, you can trace that term back to what the Black Panthers were fighting for in the 60s. They used that exact same phrasing, but most people don’t know that and can’t make that connection. So that’s why it’s important to document it in all those phases. So you can see, ‘Wait, we’ve been fighting for community control of police for over 40 years.’”

Much of that history had not yet been recorded. Last year, the Blackivists consulted with members of the Illinois chapter of the Black Panther Party. An important part of the process was capturing the organization’s oral history.

“Largely, the records that we have are government documents and secondary book sources, but a lot of that story wasn’t told by the Panthers themselves,” Drake says. “So this was an opportunity to document that history [with them]. And that narrative creates a counternarrative to the larger history that we know about them and it allows us to disable any misconceptions and preconceived notions that are false that people have about them.”

Working directly with community members is a key focus of the Blackivists. The group has worked with Honey Pot Performance since 2018 on their Chicago Black Social Culture Map—an online public humanities project documenting Black social culture from the Great Migration through the early 21st century. This project focuses on the emergence of house culture in the 1980s so the group consults with those who attend the Honey Pot events to give do-it-yourself archiving help. That is a part of a larger commitment to help Chicago.

“There are a lot of materials out there that need preservation, that need care, and we don’t pretend to be able to do all of that work ourselves,” Hearn says. “So we really have to uplift, encourage, and also provide people with


the tools to be able to do that work. So you know, through this particular project, we were able to do that.”

And those tools can be essential in documenting history. Blackivist Erin Glasco, an independent archivist, researcher, and organizer, says, “archivists in this moment—especially in this revolutionary moment that we’re in—are really uniquely posed and have a lot of unique skills that lend themselves very well to what’s happening in the streets.”

Recently, citizen-recorded video has helped dispel police accounts of misconduct: a 75-year-old man pushed to the ground in Buffalo, New York; two students violently arrested in Atlanta, Georgia; beanbag ammunition shot at protesters in Austin, Texas. Stressing that social media isn’t an archive, the Blackivists say archivists can help people properly archive what they capture. The group published a guide this month that provides tips for organizers, protesters, and anyone who wants to document a movement.

“The video evidence doesn’t lie,” says Glasco, who served as the research team lead for the #NoCopAcademy campaign—a Black and Brown youth-led grassroots effort to stop the construction of a \$95 million police academy in Chicago. “I know when people were taking these videos, they weren’t thinking they were going to be seen, that they were documenting human rights offenses, but that’s exactly what they were doing. So I think that’s something very powerful that I would like to see more archivists very carefully and intentionally and mindfully get into.”

Even as the industry becomes more diverse, white archivists, curators, and museum technicians still make up a majority of positions nationwide—almost 90 percent. But there have always been Black archivists, the group notes, although the work of those trailblazers often went unseen.

“There has been this growth in terms of Black archivists being in the field, but for a period of about 30 to 40 years, there was just maybe about five or seven, and they all knew each other, and they were spread out across the country,” explains Steven D. Booth, an archivist with the U.S. National Archives where he manages the audiovisual collection for the Obama Presidential Library. “They weren’t in a position to do the work that we’re currently able to do now. And so, we do this work for our communities, for our families, but also in honor of them.” 

 @ArionneNettles



COMEDY

Celebrate Juneteenth with Bosses in Bonnets and Preach

The groups are teaming up for an all-day comedy party on June 19.

By **BRIANNA WELLEN**

On June 19, 1865, news of the Emancipation Proclamation freeing American slaves finally reached Galveston, Texas—a full two and a half years after it was signed. Accounts differ as to why it took so long for the slaves of Texas to be told of their freedom, but they didn't hesitate to celebrate, dubbing the day Juneteenth. For decades, Juneteenth celebrations were common in Black communities, but the holiday gradually faded into obscurity as it was written out of history. Still, the annual celebrations never completely stopped, taking the form of barbecues, church services, and, this year in Chicago, a comedy show.

Bosses in Bonnets, a sketch group made up of Black women, and Preach, an improvised spoken word collective made up of artists of color, are coming together for *Pass the Plate: A Juneteenth Celebration*. The virtual show will take place on each group's Instagram page (@Bossesinbonnets and @Preachimprov) starting at midnight on Friday, June 19, with 19 different videos featuring sketches and poetry dropping every hour. Eventually all the videos will be available as a playlist on YouTube for

those who can't watch along in real time, but the idea is for these artists of color to hold space for the Black community all day long.

"We wanted to set it up almost as like a sketch festival or video festival where we'll have the program out before we release our sketches to let people know when things are happening and when they can see certain performers perform their pieces," says Ashley Bland, a member of Bosses in Bonnets. "We wanted to make it a day of celebration since [Juneteenth] should be nationally recognized as a day of celebration."

Trinidad and Tobago was the first country to declare Emancipation Day a national holiday in 1985, and since then other Caribbean countries have followed suit. In the U.S., Juneteenth is still only recognized as a state holiday, with three states—Hawaii, North Dakota, and South Dakota—still holding out. And even in places like here in Illinois, where it has been a state-recognized holiday since 2003, there is not a universal agreement to celebrate by giving folks the day off work and encouraging cookouts and parties the way there is surrounding things like Memorial Day

ARTS & CULTURE

Preach is ready to celebrate Juneteenth

by ELIAS RIOS


or the Fourth of July, and still many don't even know what the holiday is. Bosses in Bonnets and Preach hope that *Pass the Plate* puts Juneteenth on more people's radar.

The members of Bosses in Bonnets first had the idea to do a Juneteenth show earlier this year—before there was even a threat of the city shutting down—and have been working on sketches for it ever since. Originally the show was going to be staged at Steppenwolf, but when the theater canceled its June programming, the group decided to pivot to putting on a virtual show so as to not waste the material they were already working on. At the same time Preach was thinking about putting on a Juneteenth show. That's when Kayla Pulley, who is a part of both groups, brought them together to not only collaborate but lighten the load of work that goes into putting together a virtual show, something neither group has done.

The show has been built through weekly Zoom video meetings that serve as more than just brainstorming sessions. "For my mental health it's been good because it's the one thing that's been constant right now," Pulley says. "It's something to continue lifting us all up during this time. Also creatively it's been really cool because like, one of us will have an idea and bounce ideas off of each other, and then we see all the different places this one idea can be taken. And that's a really cool thing with collaboration happening is just how all of us have started using different parts of our imagination while working with each other."

Bland agrees, "It's just kind of a creative party, which I love. It's really been therapeutic as well because along with being a think tank, it's been like we've been able to sort of confide in each other and let each other know that with everything going on that we're gonna be OK."

Some of the material Bosses in Bonnets originally created will remain in the lineup, but the content continued to evolve and grow in reaction to the ever-changing world the groups were creating in. But overall it is a celebration.

"We want it to be a release, where people feel heard, where there are pieces that they relate to," Pulley says. "We hope that this show can just be all the feelings that a person needs to feel right now." 

 @BriannaWellen



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ARTS & CULTURE



COMEDY

Dwayne Kennedy is the voice of Chicago

And it's a voice the rest of the world needs to hear.

By SALEM COLLO-JULIN

Comedian, writer, and actor Dwayne Kennedy is truly a comedian's comedian. He has appeared on screens and stages since the 80s, getting his start in Chicago at the open mike at Zanies on Wells Street. He's had guest spots on sitcoms like *Seinfeld* and *Martin*, and his TV debut wasn't too shabby: in 1989 he guest starred on the show *227* playing opposite fellow visiting actor Halle Berry.

After years of work in the clubs, he won the 2002 Best Comedian award at the U.S. Comedy Arts Festival, and appeared during that era on the *Late Show With David Letterman*. He's also written and produced for television (FX's *Totally Biased With W. Kamau Bell*, the 2013 *Arsenio Hall Show* reboot). Last year, Kennedy won an Emmy award as the supervising producer for fellow comedian Bell's CNN series *United Shades of America*.

He's probably the most successful Chicago comedian you've never heard of, and I think everyone in this city needs to buy his new album *Who the Hell Is Dwayne Kennedy?* (Oak Head Records) and pick up his 2016 EP *Oh No! It's Dwayne Kennedy* and sing his praises alongside me. Here's why:

His home base is still Chicago

Kennedy grew up both on the south side and

in the south suburbs, and frequently works into his comedy the kind of analysis about the city-state and community development that longtime Chicagoans can relate to. On the new album (a comedy set edited from three live nights at the Punchline in San Francisco in 2018), he talks about summertime in Chicago, a beautiful time but also "shooting season . . . I don't know what it is about the warm weather." He continues, "I'm glad when it becomes wintertime in Chicago and gets to like 39 degrees below zero, because all the gangsters got to go in the house . . . which I feel bad for anyone in the house now getting their ass whupped." He pauses, then jumps in with precise timing, "but at least now I can walk to the grocery store and get that wheat bread that I've had my eye on all summer!"

He's at the ideal corner of smart and funny

Kennedy's words on violence, race relations, and social justice are nuanced and thoughtful, and sometimes a train barreling into you that you didn't hear coming. A recent joke that didn't make the album (but which Oak Head Records issued on YouTube as a video preview): "I used to let white folks have it . . . let me tell you man, your pathological greed and compulsive need for control has been

© COURTESY THE ARTIST

the single most source of pain and misery for people of color throughout this world for generations! But I try not to say things like that anymore . . . because I've found once you have said something like that to a white person . . . you almost never get a second date."

Other comedians regularly sing his praises

W. Kamau Bell met Kennedy in 1994 in Rogers Park. "It was at one of the open mikes up at No Exit Cafe," Kennedy told me on a phone call last month. "Kamau was about two weeks into comedy, and I was coming back after a break. I had been there the week before, and he came up and introduced himself and we found some similar sensibilities . . . we've been friends ever since." In 2012, Bell suggested that Kennedy be hired for the writing staff on his FX political talk and variety show *Totally Biased With W. Kamau Bell*, and comedian Chris Rock (the show's executive producer) readily agreed when he heard Kennedy's name, saying that Kennedy was funnier than everybody else when they both were performing at the same clubs in New York City in the late 80s.

He's consistent . . . and did I mention he's hilarious?

The new album includes a track titled "The Dog Don't Bite Unless . . ." in which Kennedy dreams up a seemingly endless loop of ridiculous scenarios where a dog owner is laying down the rules for a new person meeting their big, vicious dog, including "the dog don't bite unless your heart rate rises above 120," and "the dog don't bite as long as you don't do yoga in front of the dog . . . don't do downward dog in front of the dog, because dogs feel like they invented that and they're not receiving any financial compensation." Kennedy's Facebook and Twitter feeds are always a testing ground for snippets of material, and he stays on current topics. Just in the last few weeks, he's shared his take on the intersection of the Black Lives Matter movement and social liberation alongside musings on the pandemic, and sometimes all in the same biting post—he attributed the quote "No Lives Matter" to "COVID-19" in one, and quotes "White Supremacy" as saying "Black lives matter? What's next, giving the Indigenous (peoples) their stolen land back?!" Kennedy is the voice that Chicagoans know and the voice that the rest of the world needs to hear. **✎**

 @hollo



Simeilia Hodge-Dallaway © COURTESY THE ARTIST

BIPOC PLAYS MATTER

Moving Beyond the Canon

Simeilia Hodge-Dallaway wants to decolonize dramatic literature.

By **SHERI FLANDERS**

George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Trayvon Martin, Sandra Bland, Renisha McBride, Atatiana Jefferson, Jordan Edwards, Botham Jean. The space of this article could solely consist of the names of those Black lives who are no longer with us due to police brutality. Police murder. Yet this is an article about theater, which in the shadow of death feels extremely small and insignificant.

What is the purpose of theater in the midst of a pandemic, in a political moment where the world is rising up to protest and march in solidarity with human rights? Theater serves as a device to document; it serves as a vessel to cradle the emotional weight of the moment, and perhaps most importantly, it serves as an investment in the future. As theaters across the world sit dark in a COVID quarantine, the arts hold the most optimis-

tic and fragile kernel of our hope; that one day Black lives will matter to not just some, but all, and that Black youth will have the freedom to indulge in art without the heavy weight of death pressing on their necks.

One artist helping to cultivate that hope is the founder and artistic director of Beyond the Canon (BTC), Simeilia Hodge-Dallaway. Each Wednesday on Instagram Live at noon (CDT), BTC offers a virtual writer's room that champions hidden plays by Black, Asian, Latinx, and Middle Eastern playwrights. During the chat, viewers can connect with the featured writers, comment, ask questions, and celebrate each other and the work.

Hodge-Dallaway is an award-winning author; dramaturg; founder of Artistic Directors of the Future; executive director and creative producer of the Black Lives, Black Words International Project, which will be hosted online; and producer of the I Am . . . Fest at the Goodman last year, which concluded with the U.S. premiere of *The Interrogation of Sandra Bland* by Mojisola Adebayo. Hodge-Dallaway is also a Black play specialist.

BTC began in 2016, and Hodge-Dallaway's initial intention was to find a way to share her extensive play library. "How do we get the plays from the shelf into the hands of those who need them most, and how do we help them to become teachers and ambassadors for the next generation?" she asks. The closure of the education system in the wake of COVID created an increasing sense of urgency.

Hodge-Dallaway went to publishing houses such as Methuen and Playwrights Canada Press and asked them to donate plays that are languishing on warehouse shelves to young POC students. "These plays are our legacy," notes Hodge-Dallaway. Then, each week, BTC gives away free play texts, the first week's literary selections being a two-book anthology edited by Hodge-Dallaway, *Audition Speeches for Black, South Asian, and Middle Eastern Actors*.

"It was important to me to ask publishing houses for anthologies so we are exposed to each other's cultural perspectives. I became richer in my mentality researching and reading Black, South Asian, and Middle Eastern plays," she says.

Historically, the traditional American theater canon has consistently regurgitated a

handful of predominantly white male-penned plays. While some of these works are indeed literary masterpieces, some audiences grow weary of their inevitable return, and many are sociopolitically outdated. For example, some works by David Mamet are arguably due for a decades-long rest in the archives before being revisited again, if ever.

The dogged repetition of these plays in academic curricula creates a damning conundrum for young Black theater students. "A lot of institutions had ignored this work and were still teaching the same plays that they were familiar and comfortable with," says Hodge-Dallaway. "How can you go your entire education and leave without knowing any living POC playwrights? We are setting students up to fail when competing with their white counterparts. The work exists. Let's engage with it."

Chicago theaters have made a push to put out more Black works. As the news often superficially reports on the tragically constant murders of Black people at the hands of police, the coverage can sometimes lack the same level of compassion and consideration afforded to white victims of murder. Stories are often reported alongside less-than-flattering-photographs, and call out irrelevant prior indiscretions, dehumanizing the victim. This is where theater can help to correct the record and soothe the hearts of a grieving community by shifting the point of view from the arresting officer to that of the victim.

Many plays in Chicago over the past several years have deftly addressed various perspectives on police brutality and Black pain, reclaiming the narrative and infusing the stories with compassion. One of the most recent and powerful examples of this was *Kill Move Paradise* by James Ijames at TimeLine Theater, a surrealistic, heart-wrenching, and challenging examination of the souls of the departed and the preference of white America to filter its empathy through the consumption of Black trauma as entertainment. Running in the same vein was *Tilikum* by Kristiana Rae Colón at Sideshow Theatre, a metaphorical, visually and aurally enchanting piece that leverages the story of a killer whale at SeaWorld against America's history of treating Black bodies as animals. (A streaming version of *Tilikum* runs this Friday, June 19, as a Juneteenth fund-raiser for Colón's Let Us Breathe Collective.) *Hooded, or Being Black for Dummies* by Tearrance

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THEATER

continued from 17

Arvelle Chisholm with First Floor Theater at the Den and *graveyard shift* by korde arington tuttle at the Goodman also explored these themes.

While it's important to honor and interrogate tragedy, it's also crucial to push back against the common and limiting narrative that the Black existence begins with slavery and ends with police violence. It's just as important, if not moreso, to explore works with broader themes of joy, family life, science, freedom, and adventure to create a well-rounded portrait of Black humanity.

Other recent Chicago plays that explore broader themes include two by playwright J. Nicole Brooks; *HeLa*, which reimagines the story of Henrietta Lacks through an Afro-futuristic lens, and *Her Honor Jane Byrne*, which dissects the mythos around the legacy of Chicago's first woman mayor. Byrne's on-stage run at Lookingglass was unfortunately cut short due to COVID. Another play, *How to Catch Creation* by Christina Anderson, beautifully explored the perils around indulgence in the life of an artist; *Lottery Day* by Ike Holter gave a window into the joys of having an invite to the proverbial cookout; Katori Hall's *Hoodoo Love* smoldered with romance infused with magic, metaphorical and literal; and Danai Gurira's *Familiar* comedically outlined the struggles of a Zimbabwean family assimilating (or not) into the U.S.

With BTC, Hodge-Dallaway and associate producer Sarudzayi Marufu hope to inspire the reading and production of even more

BIPOC plays in Chicago and beyond. While not wanting to spoil the surprise of all of the writers who may be featured and have their works given away for free through BTC, she provided a sneak peek of names and texts that may be featured. Some of the international playwrights may potentially include Lydia R. Diamond, Kwame Kwei-Armah, Donna-Michelle St. Bernard, David Yee, and works such as *The Convert* by Gurira, *Barber Shop Chronicles* by Inua Ellams, *One Night in Miami* by Kemp Powers, *Detroit '67* by Dominique Morisseau, *The Adventures of the Black Girl in Her Search for God* by Lisa Codrington, *A Wolf in Snakeskin Shoes* by Marcus Gardley, and anthologies such as *The Methuen Book of Contemporary Latin American Plays* and *Love, Loss, and Longing: South Asian Canadian Plays*, *Mojisola Adebayo Plays One and Plays Two*, *Lions and Tigers* by Tanika Gupta, and Wole Soyinka play anthologies.

Hodge-Dallaway hails from the UK and works as an artist in multiple countries. When asked how artists across BIPOC communities can band together to create lasting change as Black Lives Matter protests spring up worldwide, she says, "A lot of POC-led organizations rarely work with each other. Our eyes tend to be on the larger institutions that might validate us. We have to advocate for each other. Black and other POC writers simply cannot continue to let white directors direct our work."

The Black Lives Matter protests have sparked a reckoning, amplifying calls for change within arts organizations. While making promises to stage more Black and BIPOC plays is crucial, it has also been historically used as a MacGuffin to distract from a theater's inability to make fundamental changes at the board and executive levels. This lesson was recently learned in excruciating fashion when Victory Gardens Theater advertised a single Black play from its Ignition Festival to paper over controversy—just after their entire ensemble walked out in protest of the recent executive leadership changes.

Victory Gardens isn't the only theater learning in public that the bar has been moved, as theaters implicated on the infamous Theaters Not Speaking Out spreadsheet have also discovered.

Says Hodge-Dallaway, "Organizations simply think that they can write a statement and think that is enough—and artists are saying 'no.'"

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UrbanTheater Company's ensemble for *Back in the Day* © IVÁN VEGA

THEATER OP-ED

Moving beyond #OpenYourLobby

For BIPOC theaters, existence is resistance.

By MIRANDA GONZALEZ

On June 3, Chicago theater artists flooded my social media with #openyourlobby; a call for theaters around the nation to open their doors to #blacklivesmatter protesters. As the producing artistic director at UrbanTheater Company (UTC), a Black and Mexican Chicago native, and mother, this call exposed the truth about our theater community: the privilege of deciding to close our doors and separate ourselves from our neighbors is nonexistent.

When you grow up in and around your audiences, people hold you and your organization accountable in ways that a mainstream theater has never experienced. You see, UTC is a theater of color founded by, led by, and for people of color. This May, our beloved organization turned 15. Founded in 2005, and having done work in Humboldt Park since 2006, we use grassroots marketing to draw audiences who have never seen a live theatrical performance. We've never had the privilege of putting up art, just for art's sake. Our mere existence is a rebellious act. We exist because of need.

Our audiences raised us. Many of our neighbors have worked assembly lines with our grandparents, gone to school with our parents, and have had their children taught by our artists. Closing our doors would be turning our backs on our family. We are and have always been in service to them. UTC has been a donation center many times over, a press conference room, a polling place for numerous elections, a place for healers to gather, a screening location, and so much more. We've had an open-door policy since occupying a permanent space in between the Puerto Rican flags on Division Street. By partnering with our nonprofit neighbors, like El Rescate, Vida/SIDA, the Honeycomb Network, and the Puerto Rican Cultural Center, we are able to provide accessible theater productions to our residents. We are and will continue to be a theater based in our community.

Our last season was titled "Born and Raised: Chicago Stories by Chicago Playwrights." It began with a commissioned piece, *Not For Sale/No Se Vende*, written by Chicago native

Guadalís Del Carmen and focused on the issues Humboldt Park residents face with gentrification. We closed out our season with *Back in the Day: An 80's House Music Dancesical*, written by myself and inspired by José Echevarría's memoir on Chicago dance crews, *The Real Dance Fever: Book One*. Both stories reflected the voices of the residents in our community and had sold-out runs.

And yet we are constantly on the precipice of exclusion because of the coming and going of artists seeking to enhance their career, resulting in the gentrification of Chicago theater. Because UrbanTheater has not been given the same value by the institutions that are committed to Eurocentric ideology, our contributions to the ecology of theater are overlooked. It is a cycle of value that is perpetuated through academia, the press, and the regional theaters themselves that make BIPOC artists reject the learning or support of BIPOC theaters, in lieu of investing in the regional ecosystem.

The larger Chicagoland theater community will protest at Victory Gardens asking for fair and equitable treatment but will not rally, uplift, or visit UrbanTheater, while selectively choosing whose work to amplify. Why is that? Theater artists should not believe the lie that theaters of color are inferior to white-founded larger institutions. Larger institutions are inequitably funded in comparison to theaters of color. Marginalized artists will continue to be drawn to spaces where microaggressions feed their internalized inferiority by being sold on the idea of equitable pay. American theater began during the colonial era and gave birth to blackface, so why do we continue to uphold a model that was meant to exploit us?

In *American Theatre* magazine's November 2019 issue, dedicated to Chicago theater, there was an article entitled "How Chicago's Scrappy Storefront Scene Sustains Itself." As one of the few theaters of color with a space, UTC's contribution to theater was entirely overlooked. Our existence was absent, as were all Chicago theaters of color. Only white-founded organizations were covered. When our executive director wrote the author of the piece explaining how UTC "tends to be left out of the narrative," we were e-mailed the following response: "I'd prefer theater companies focus on treating their actors well and producing meaningful work, rather than telling writers

and critics who they 'should have' written about—essentially, how to do their jobs, which is what you are doing here." After making a Facebook post in a space for artists of color and tagging the editor of the magazine, we immediately were sent an apology e-mail. "I realize my response was unnecessarily aggressive and defensive, and I sincerely apologize for it—you are right that erasure is a very common issue for companies of color and a very valid concern." *American Theatre* is not the only publication that has left us out. The journalist of this story is not the only author to respond to us with a tone rooted in white supremacy. This is all very common.

UrbanTheater's legitimacy was never dependent upon receiving a Joseph Jefferson Award or being featured in *American Theatre*. While *Not For Sale*, a show that featured white actors, received a Jeff nomination, *Back in the Day*, a fully immersive experience centering queer Black and Brown stories, did not receive any Jeff recognition, even with double the budget of any show in UTC history. Both productions received critically acclaimed reviews, and even so we cannot ignore that access to more resources is a result of more mainstream press and awards.

The truth about American theater was exposed last week. A truth that BIPOC theaters have known for quite some time: very little has changed. Solidarity statement after statement flooded my inbox while I was still grieving, still hugging my Black sons, still praying they never have to call for me the way I read George Floyd called for his mother. I will never watch that video and I will never know what it's like to write a statement in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement. As you can tell, I am teetering between anger and sadness, as I put words to paper.

As an artistic leader, the following has never been clearer to me: our artists need to come home and BIPOC theaters deserve to be funded in order for us to adequately do so. We deserve to heal and we deserve to sustain ourselves while serving our communities. We deserve to have our voices lifted in every publication. We deserve to have whatever resources are needed to tell our stories. We deserve to have capacity to implement it all. We deserve to exist. Being in solidarity with that radical thought is nice, but being an accomplice and implementing that ideology is the most anti-racist thing the American theater can do. 📌

🐦 @urbantheater



Babyteeth

REVIEW

Babyteeth is a lot to chew on

Shannon Murphy's promising debut feature explores the difference between being alive and living.

By **CODY CORRALL**

Over the last decade, there has been an influx in films and novels about teen romance and terminal illnesses, especially cancer. From Josh Boone's *The Fault in Our Stars* to Alfonso Gomez-Rejon's *Me*

and *Earl and the Dying Girl* to Stella Meghie's *Everything Everything*, this "boy meets girl with a terminal illness" phenomenon has evolved into something of a genre all to itself, exploring—with different degrees of success

and sympathy—falling in love when you are young and dying.

Shannon Murphy's debut feature *Babyteeth* is the most recent addition to the genre, and one that feels far more mature and complex than its young-adult counterparts. But despite its undeniable beauty on the surface, the most emotional moments of *Babyteeth* are often muddled by its frantic and disjointed storytelling.

Babyteeth centers on Milla (Eliza Scanlen), an Australian teenager with cancer, a set of hyperprotective parents, and a baby tooth she still hasn't lost. Milla meets what seems to be her polar opposite: 23-year-old Moses (Toby Wallace) who sells drugs, has a rattail and face tattoos, and like many young white men, carries himself like he isn't afraid of dying.

Their budding relationship upsets Milla's parents and disrupts the safe but suffocating environment they have built for her. But Milla's parents also rarely have a grasp of reality or the repercussions of how they are raising her. Her father (Ben Mendelsohn) is a psychiatrist who substitutes meaningful dialogue with prescriptions that numb the pain. Her mother (Essie Davis) is his most affected victim, flipping between being too high on painkillers to make sense of what is going on in her own home and pushing her supply to Moses for him to sell.

But Moses and Milla's relationship, while complicated and bordering on exploitative, blossoms quite beautifully. Scanlen and Wallace have a magnetic chemistry and their characters talk to each other like they are the only people in the universe. Their love plays out in tender montages that feel reminiscent

of summer rom-coms, underscored by the experimental pop stylings of Tune-Yards.

One of the film's standout scenes follows Milla and Moses going to a party together. A slow tracking shot follows Milla as she explores the apartment, lit by projections and multicolor strobe lights, with an effervescent curiosity. Moses gives Milla a chance to actually live, rather than just be alive, as her parents have settled for.

Babyteeth eventually builds up to a powerful climax, but the disjointed path it takes to get there cannot be ignored. Several scenes are labeled with a pastel-colored title, like chapters in a book, that teeter on disrupting the film's spontaneous and unstructured nature. The film's strength is in its centralized family unit, and exploring the idiosyncrasies of each character and their relationship to being alive. And yet characters with no real stake in the narrative are spliced in and sometimes fracture the emotional momentum that is built throughout the film's runtime.

As Murphy's first feature film, *Babyteeth* feels raw and unfiltered, but it can also feel directionless and unrefined as a result. But if *Babyteeth* is a preview of what's to come from both Murphy and screenwriter Rita Kalnejais, it is certainly a promising one.

Babyteeth gives its audience a lot to chew on, namely how we think about death, dependency, and agency. It isn't a film that patronizes its sick protagonist or sees her as less than human because of a diagnosis. She is not cancer personified, she is a human being who wants to experience life in a way she was never allowed to, no matter how ill-advised that may be. It's a film about taking control of your life when it seemingly has already been dictated for you. **A-**

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NOW PLAYING

Creating a Character: The Moni Yakim Legacy

Creating a Character: The Moni Yakim Legacy aims to reveal the man behind the curtain, a movement teacher who's been training students at Juilliard for more than 50 years. Yakim, once a pupil himself, studied under the renowned mime Marcel Marceau. Still, viewers will probably be more familiar with his own star students, including Anthony Mackie, Jessica Chastain, and Oscar Isaac, all of whom took Yakim's class and sing his praises. Yet, it's lesser-known actor Alex Sharp's (*How to Talk to Girls at Parties*) success story that's used to bolster Yakim's. One year after graduating, Sharp wins a Tony Award for his very physical performance in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, which epitomizes Yakim's belief that movement is action and action is acting. While uplifting, the subplot dilutes the documentary, which would benefit from placing and leaving the spotlight on Yakim for a more in-depth look at his life. —**BECCA JAMES** 76 min. *Music Box Theatre Virtual Cinema*

RR *The King of Staten Island*

In both his comedy and acting ventures, Pete Davidson has always maintained a grossly weird yet achingly lovable charm. This is on full display in Judd Apatow's *The King of Staten Island*. Davidson helped write the semi-autobiographical film in which he stars as Scott, a 20-something tattoo artist who is struggling to figure life out while his widowed mom (Marisa Tomei) dates a new guy (Bill Burr). Like Scott, Davidson's real-life father was a firefighter who died on the job—Davidson's father died during the September 11 attacks, a detail left out of the film. *The King of Staten Island* follows Scott as he slouches through life, refusing to apply himself to anything that might be remotely good for him, like pursuing a relationship with a childhood friend or getting serious about his artistic talent. It's a story we've seen before (Miles Teller in 2013's *The Spectacular Now* comes to mind) that could easily go awry, but Davidson's sympathetic performance keeps your attention as we come to realize that sometimes growing up is just hard. Tomei is excellent as the understanding yet exasperated mother while Burr adds unexpected nuance to an often one-dimensional trope. Viewers familiar with Davidson's role as a similar good-natured yet immature loafer in 2019's *Big Time Adolescence* may find the typecasting unoriginal, but the fact of the matter is this: it's a type Davidson shines in. —**NOËLLE D. LILLEY R**, 136 min. *In wide release on VOD*

RR *Lucky Grandma*

Tsai Chin stars as Grandma Wong, a scrappy Chinese woman who experiences a sudden bout of luck, drawing the unwanted attention of neighborhood gangsters. Though Chin's performance as a cool, chain-smoking granny steals the show, Taiwanese film star Corey Ha's tender portrayal of Grandma Wong's hired body-

guard also shines, making for an unexpectedly charming duo in this 2020 U.S. film. Clever, quick-witted camera work complements Chin's impeccable comedic timing, while long shots depict New York's Chinatown in loving, hyper-saturated detail. In this incandescent and utterly delightful debut, director Sasie Sealy delivers a sparkling movie that centers the story of an elderly woman of color with the agency, care, and attention it deserves. English, Mandarin, and Cantonese with subtitles. —**NINA LI COOMES** 87 min. *Through 6/25, Music Box Theatre Virtual Cinema*

RR *Miss Juneteenth*

A small-town beauty queen reckons with big dreams in *Miss Juneteenth*. Nicole Beharie plays Turquoise, a hardworking mother striving to give her daughter a better future than she had, with powerful and elegant vulnerability. As a former pageant winner, she is the whole package—stunning, smart, hardworking, and empathetic—yet life has humbled her to cleaning toilets and crippled her self-confidence. Unresolved generational trauma looms thickly over the future of her daughter Kai (a sparkling and earnest Alexis Chikaeze) and drives Turquoise into a quiet existential panic. This screenwriting and directorial debut of Channing Godfrey Peoples is deceptively quiet and pared down. The simplicity of the story showcases the setting: a dusty Texas town inhabited by plain old Black people. She turns the camera with love on characters who might otherwise be peddled as broadly comedic or as common thugs, stripping away the legacy of caricature in favor of domestic normalcy, throwing open the window wide for a new, easy, languid breeze of Black cinema. The celebration of Juneteenth is that of overdue freedom, and Peoples paints a gentle portrait of waiting patiently through setbacks for the tiny triumphs that can transform the life of a humble poor Black woman and make her feel like Miss America. —**SHERI FLANDERS** 103 min. *In wide release on VOD*

The Surrogate

Jess (Jasmine Batchelor), an idealistic but flailing web designer, agrees to be the egg donor and surrogate for her best friend, Josh (Chris Perfetti), and his husband, Aaron (Sullivan Jones). Everything goes according to plan for the well-meaning Brooklynites until a prenatal test comes back positive for Down syndrome. Writer-director Jeremy Hersh's microbudget feature debut isn't a moral tale so much as a moral query: Josh and Aaron are reluctant to have the child, while Jess becomes more invested in the idea, and Hersh allows viewers to consider both sides of the issue. Tensions mount as Jess debates whether to have the child on her own, consulting family, friends, and even acquaintances, but getting no closer to the right answer. Hersh examines the situation with nuance; the film is compelling, if a little theoretical at times. Batchelor's performance stands out amidst the heavy subject matter (and in spite of the film's artless aesthetic; microbudget doesn't have to mean plain)—she's definitely one to watch. —**KATHLEEN SACHS** 6/19-7/2, *Facets Virtual Cinema*

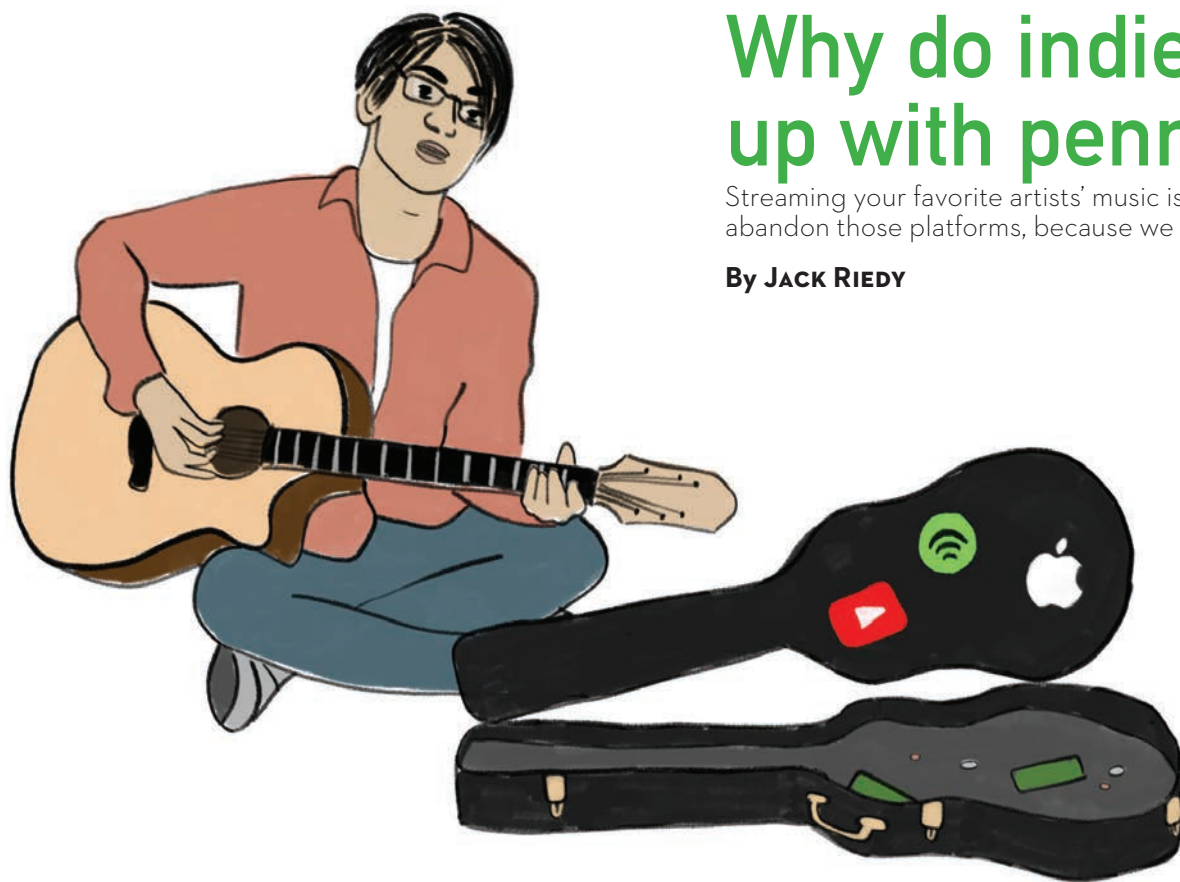
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For many niche artists, streaming revenue is negligible. But those services also represent huge numbers of potential new fans. RACHEL HAWLEY

Why do indie musicians put up with penny payouts?

Streaming your favorite artists' music is the least helpful way to support them. But they can't abandon those platforms, because we won't.

By JACK RIEDY

Sooper Records, estimates that Spotify pays Sooper roughly \$3,000 for a million plays, or 0.3 cents per play. Spotify isn't a monopoly, of course, but its dominance gives it power: as Rob Sevier of reissue label the Numero Group puts it, "They are able to dictate rates, and no one can say no to them."

The Numero Group has posted a Spotify playlist of the shortest songs in its catalog, which it describes as "perfect for . . . getting our artists paid in the least amount of time." (Spotify pays by the stream, not by the minute—bad news for jazz musicians, doom-metal bands, and other artists who tend to make longer tracks.) The playlist is titled ".004," because that's what Numero earns on average per Spotify stream (the playlist's description says the amount is in cents, but it's actually in dollars). For comparison's sake, an \$8 digital album sold on Bandcamp would typically net an artist or label a bit less than \$6.80, after the platform's 15 percent cut and payment-processing fees. Assuming the album has ten tracks, you'd have to stream the whole thing 170 times on Spotify to equal \$6.80 at a rate of 0.4 cents. Few fans are that devoted.

Still, Spotify doesn't pay the least for streams. Bandcamp doesn't pay for them at all, instead basing its business model on sales. In early 2019, a community blog called the Trichordist, which advocates for fairness in the online music marketplace, published a data set that analyzed the 2018 streaming revenue of a real but anonymous midsize indie label with about a billion streams annually. It estimated 0.331 cents per play on Spotify, which provided 29 percent of the label's streams and 49 percent of its streaming revenue. Pandora, now part of Sirius XM, managed just 0.155 cents (4 percent of streams, 3 percent of revenue), and YouTube Content ID trailed far behind with an abysmal 0.028 cents (49 percent of streams, 7 percent of revenue). Apple Music delivered the best combination of volume and rate, with 10

The price of music has been in flux since it was first commodified on wax cylinders. Artists have rarely had much say in that price, though, or in how much of the money reaches them—and in some ways recorded music has never been worth less. As long as you have a stable Internet connection, you can hear anything from several vast, overlapping catalogs at any time. Streaming services have made countless hours of music available for monthly subscription fees that average around \$10, and if you're willing to listen to ads, it can all be free.

The days of listening only to music you could hear on the radio, afford to buy, or copy from friends are long gone. Most musicians have had to accept that sales of records, CDs, and tapes will never support them again—and given the notoriously stingy payouts from streaming, they're focusing on live shows

and other merch to make money. But now the pandemic-related shutdown of live music has made even that precarious realignment untenable. "Most of the money I made from being a musician would come from playing a show, or speaking on a panel, or doing something physically with an audience," says Chicago rapper CJ Run.

Stripped of gig income, independent artists and labels are trying to squeeze more income out of their recordings. It's become suddenly urgent for them to decide whether the benefits of streaming make up for its drawbacks.

In 2019, according to a year-end report by the Recording Industry Association of America, streaming services such as Spotify and Apple Music accounted for 79.5 percent of U.S. revenue from recorded music, or \$8.8 billion. Artists and labels are paid from the pool of subscription fees and ad revenue that each streaming service accrues. Payout rates vary,

but they're typically a fraction of a cent per play.

Spotify is the most popular service: according to a December 2019 report by Midia Research analyst Mark Mulligan, at this time last year it had 36 percent of total streaming subscribers worldwide, and this spring it claimed 271 million users, including 124 million subscribers. As a result, it's been able to exert industry-wide influence on pay rates. The way Spotify calculates royalties is far from simple or transparent, though. The rate can vary depending on type of listener—subscribers generate more royalties—and by what country they're in. In the U.S., mechanical royalty rates are set by the Copyright Royalty Board, while performance royalty rates (Spotify pays both) are mostly negotiated with organizations such as ASCAP and BMI. Other countries have their own mechanisms.

Glenn Curran, cofounder of local indie label

percent of streams and 25 percent of revenue on a per-stream payout of 0.495 cents.

Legal efforts to increase streaming payments to songwriters and musicians (frequently one and the same in the indie world) have been halting, and the industry continues to fight them tenaciously. Despite public criticism from A-list songwriters (among them Nile Rodgers, Kenneth “Babyface” Edmonds, and Starrah), Spotify, Google, Pandora/Sirius XM, and Amazon are all individually appealing a 2018 ruling by the U.S. Copyright Royalty Board in favor of the National Music Publishers’ Association and the Nashville Songwriters’ Association International, which would increase streaming royalties owed to songwriters by 44 percent over a five-year period.

Even if you do pay for a streaming subscription, hoping to support your favorite artists, little of your money will end up in their pockets—unless they happen to be everybody else’s favorites too. Like most other streaming services, Spotify uses a pro rata model: all subscription revenue is pooled, and artists are paid a share of that total that’s proportional to their number of streams for the month. This is “fair” in a strictly mathematical sense, but it’s also a little like the electoral college, in that you’ll end up paying Drake even if you never listen to him.

A user-centric model, such as the one being developed by French service Deezer, could benefit fringe and indie artists at the expense of market-dominating stars, though industry observers are divided on how significant the effect would be. Each user’s subscription money is split proportionally among the artists that user streams, and the formula is unaffected by a user’s total number of plays—which has the side effect of minimizing bot fraud and the outsize influence of “super users” who stream hundreds of hours per month.

Though pop stars such as Taylor Swift have fought for better treatment from streaming companies, the currently dominant pro rata model would continue to disadvantage smaller players even if rates increased. Artists operating at a smaller scale also lack her leverage. “We’re not like Taylor Swift,” says Scottie McNiece, cofounder of Chicago-based progressive-jazz label International Anthem. “We don’t have the power to be like, ‘We’re not gonna use your streaming platform because you don’t pay good enough royalties.’ No one’s gonna give a shit if we do that.”

Spotify clearly has money to throw around—it just doesn’t want to share any more

of it with artists. It continues to invest heavily in its podcast business, and recently struck an exclusive \$100 million deal with Joe Rogan. Last month, Mark Mulligan of Midia Research told *Rolling Stone* that musicians would need tens of billions of streams to earn what Rogan was paid. “What Spotify is saying basically is, ‘We value this podcast more than we value any single artist on our platform,’” he said.

To its credit, Spotify has attempted to address the COVID-19 pandemic’s devastation of the music ecosystem. The company has donated ad time to governments and charities, and it’s created a music relief fund to match up to \$10 million in donations. In April it also debuted a new feature called Artist Fundraising Pick, a button that artists can add to their Spotify pages in order to solicit donations for themselves or for charities of their choosing.

Unsurprisingly, many independent musicians see this as a paltry response from the biggest player in the biggest segment of the music business. “They haven’t really done much to remedy the fucking cataclysm that has happened to people,” says rapper-producer Joshua Virtue of Chicago label and collective Why? Records.

“The tip thing on Spotify and all of that is a very half-assed way to be like, ‘If you wanna . . .’ What’s so hard about that is a lot of these fans aren’t doing well either,” adds Frances Farlee, a Sooper employee who also works for Why? Records and manages rapper Matt Muse.

Saxophonist and Aerophonic Records founder Dave Rempis doesn’t stream his label’s catalog through Spotify or any of the other major players—Aerophonic maintains a Bandcamp page, but Rempis has also built a clear, detailed label website to allow fans to buy CDs and vinyl directly from him. He’s frustrated by listeners who treat streaming services as a “one-stop shop for music.” The way streaming services siphon revenue and attention away from musicians, he believes, is much like what Amazon has done to bookstores or social media have done to independent publications. “It requires one extra step for people to go to the source,” he says, “rather than to buy it from these aggregators.”

It’s hard to argue that Spotify and its ilk don’t operate by extracting value from music—they’d be nothing without it, and if they didn’t pocket a share of what listeners think it’s worth, they’d never be viable. Why do so many independent artists and labels tolerate the mi-

serly royalty rates they get in return?

The market of streaming listeners is simply too large to ignore. Curran estimates that for Sooper’s most successful projects, streaming revenue is large enough to match sales revenue. “Not having digital revenue would be a huge loss,” he says. Because streaming has low or no barriers to entry for listeners, it can help artists grow a fan base—it’s much less of an investment to stream an unfamiliar album than to buy one. Placement in the right streaming playlists, whether created by users, labels, publications, or the services themselves, can also help musicians reach new audiences.

Playlists can help artists in fringe genres too. “We all know that a lot of these streaming sites have crook-level rates,” says Doug Kaplan, cofounder of oddball Chicago experimental label Hausu Mountain. “Things we’ve gotten into playlists have done very well, and that’s provided additional income. I’m not gonna complain about it.”

Labels and artists generally can’t conduct A/B tests to determine whether streaming is a net winner—that is, they can’t meaningfully determine whether abandoning streaming would help them make enough additional sales to offset the loss of streaming revenue, because they’re operating in an environment where most listeners expect streaming to be an option. “Thinking of the music business as you either use streaming or not is silly,” says McNiece. “You have to use all the channels available to you. I don’t think people consume that way either.”

And success on Spotify can lead to additional sources of revenue significant enough to be worth sacrificing an awful lot of potential sales. Curran estimates that a popular song could pull down \$10,000 to \$30,000 for a single sync in a commercial or TV episode. But the song’s popularity generally needs to be demonstrated by significant streaming numbers before it’ll attract the attention of music supervisors.

Matt Pakulski owns eclectic Oak Park label FPE Records, and his streaming payouts are so meager that for the past two years he’s focused on earning revenue through syncs. He sees it as the only way to provide a middle-class lifestyle to fringe or indie musicians. “You’re either Kanye or you’re somebody playing to a basement with your friends,” he says. “I feel like there should be that mid level, like, you’re a good musician and you get money for it. Not a lot of money, but more than negative. That’s what I think is missing.”

Despite a steep but brief dip in March, streaming consumption has continued to increase—unsurprisingly, self-imposed isolation and social distancing haven’t decreased people’s appetites for music. But if your goal as a fan is to help the artists you love support themselves, streaming their music is probably the least helpful thing you can do, short of nothing at all.

Buying music, for those who can afford it, obviously puts more money into artists’ and labels’ pockets. Record stores continue to operate online during the pandemic (albeit mostly in a diminished capacity), but no intermediary is necessary. The ease and ubiquity of e-commerce has made it easier than ever to buy directly from artists and labels, if listeners are willing to seek them out. “I like to bring people to my website, to my storefront, and actually create long-term relationships with fans,” Rempis says.

Bandcamp, founded in 2008, allows artists and labels to set their own prices for digital downloads, physical media, and other merch—for many of them, it’s replaced a freestanding website. Artists and labels can offer their customers subscriptions, but generally the site works like a shop. Bandcamp’s basic artist accounts are free, and it also sells premium monthly professional services. In contrast to the complex, opaque royalty schedules of the major streaming services, Bandcamp takes a fixed 10 percent cut of physical sales, and its aforementioned 15 percent cut of digital sales drops to 10 percent if a client does more than \$5,000 in business per year. The information fits on a single Web page.

“That’s one of the best things about Bandcamp,” says Jessi Frick, cofounder of Bay Area label Father/Daughter Records. “They are transparent about their fees and where they allocate their money.” Bandcamp is often compared to a giant record store, with an inventory that includes a range of esoteric genres, and it builds fan communities through social sharing features and the journalism on its editorial site (to which I occasionally contribute).

Bandcamp’s profile has risen in recent months thanks to its response to COVID-19. On Friday, March 20, as lockdowns were beginning around the country, the company waived its cut on all purchases for the day. Bandcamp customers eager to send that extra 10 or 15 percent to their favorite musicians and labels spent \$4.3 million in 24 hours, 15 times the total on a typical Friday; when the company did it again on Friday, May 1, customers spent \$7.1 million.

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“Even before March 20th we were already seeing huge numbers of fans use Bandcamp to support artists who were seeing tours canceled,” Josh Kim, Bandcamp’s COO, told the Recording Academy earlier this month. “So we wanted to highlight that even more and engage as an entire community, and also encourage more fans to continue supporting artists until things are recovered.” The company had another “Bandcamp day” on June 5, and there’s a fourth planned for July 3. This Juneteenth (and every subsequent Juneteenth), it will donate its share of sales to the NAACP Legal Defense Fund.

The revenue-share days have been a boon to independent musicians and labels. Curran says March 20 and May 1 were the two all-time best sales days for Sooper Records, with May surpassing March. “The real magic behind what Bandcamp is doing,” he says, “is they’re mobilizing their consumer base in a really intense way.”

Chicago industrial musician Jordan Reyes estimates that each revenue-share day has made enough money for his label, American Dreams, to commission an entire album pressing. “It’s nuts, dude,” he says.

Bandcamp’s quick payment turnaround—usually one or two days after a digital sale—has also helped artists in urgent need of funds. Streaming services typically pay monthly, but for streams that happened two or even three months ago. Kaplan has been trying to get money to Hausu Mountain artists within a week. “A lot of artists can’t wait right now,” he says.

Not everybody is Team Bandcamp—it’s still a middleman, after all. While Rempis acknowledges that Aerophonic’s sales went up 400 percent on May 1, he dislikes that Bandcamp uses the rhetoric of charity and community to push what he considers a marketing tactic. “Even if sales go up a ton that day, which they have, [the extra 10 or 15 percent] is not a lot of money for artists. And for Bandcamp, it’s way less than they would spend on marketing to get that number of new users and new data into their service,” he says. “For them, it’s a genius move, and I find it very cynical and problematic.”

Rempis would be more impressed with the company’s commitment to musicians if it made the revenue-share days weekly, or reduced its percentage permanently. An organization with Bandcamp’s resources that really wanted to take a stand for musicians and labels, he

suggests, could commit to taking a temporary loss itself, instead of leaving artists to absorb so much of the pandemic’s pain.

Some artists have used Bandcamp as the only platform for their projects during the pandemic—especially when they’re looking to see significant revenue in a hurry. Rappers Open Mike Eagle and Serengeti released *Quarantine Recordings*, their second album as Cavanaugh, on March 20. “We started making these songs a couple years ago and never finished them,” they explain on the release’s Bandcamp page. “Since we’re quarantined and are trying to replace lost income from shows we decided to put them out over the bandcamps to stimulate our personal economies.”

Eagle says that the statement was meant to set expectations appropriately for an unmastered album. “I can be confident it would have taken us a long time to make the same amount of revenue from it if we had put it on streaming services,” he notes.

When Eagle is promoting a solo album, he’s reluctant to deliberately limit access to his music, even if doing so might mean a faster payout. He has to worry about reaching as many people as possible. “When something is what I base my next year or two of career cachet on, I have to take every precaution to make sure it doesn’t fall through the cracks,” he says.

CJ Run was preparing for a year filled with national tours before the industry shut down. Instead Run is self-producing new music, posting exclusive digital songs and albums to their Bandcamp page (which they hadn’t really been using before) to make up some of that lost income. “I can actually make a few hundred dollars from selling my music, because it’s actually worth that,” they say. “Once all of this is over, I can know that I can go out on tour to make a living, but I can still also sell my music. Why did it take me this long to put my first thing on Bandcamp?”

Joshua Virtue has been unable to work his service-industry job, so he recorded the new album *Jackie’s House* in three days and released it in April as a pay-what-you-can Bandcamp exclusive. He’s using it as a fundraiser for his mother, who’s supporting his sister, his grandmother, and other relatives at her home in Florida. He didn’t expect many sales beyond friends and relatives, but in the first two weeks he earned more than \$2,500 in donations ranging from \$2 to \$100. *Jackie’s House* has made more money than any of his previous projects.

Virtue believes the clear charitable aim of the project, amplified by community-oriented

peers in Chicago, was key to its sales. “I wanted to make it clear that if you’re coming to listen to this album, you’re coming to help,” he says. He may upload *Jackie’s House* to Spotify eventually, but for now he’s happy to see it valued in a concrete way. “It lets me know you give a fuck about my family in this moment.”

Following the success of *Jackie’s House*, Virtue and the rest of the Why? Records crew released another Bandcamp exclusive in May: the compilation *Art Is Love Vol. 1*, which features musician friends from a variety of Chicago scenes. It’s a fundraiser for the Chicago Community Bond Fund—the \$1,300 raised so far is more than any of the label’s previous releases have earned in their lifetimes on major streaming services, where the main benefit is the potential to reach vastly larger pools of users.

Inspired by the most recent wave of Black Lives Matter protests, many musicians used Bandcamp’s June 5 revenue-share day to fundraise for local charities, activists, and other organizations supporting Black communities. Sooper Records artist and cofounder Nnamdi raised more than \$10,000 from sales of his new EP, *Black Plight*, one of the best-selling items on the site that day, and donated the money to Assata’s Daughters, EAT Chicago, and others in need. Soul singer Wyatt Waddell wrote and recorded his protest song “Fight!” in less than 24 hours, and has so far raised more than \$1,000 for Black Lives Matter Chicago, the Chicago Community Bond Fund, and the Greater Chicago Food Depository. Rapper Saint Icky released the single “Black Skin” exclusively on Bandcamp and has raised \$600 each for Healthy Hood Chicago and My Block My Hood My City. Bandcamp also made its Juneteenth announcement in response to the protests.

While musicians are unable to gig or tour, recordings remain a core source of income for them, whether streamed, sold, or licensed. But they’re also by necessity finding other ways to earn money. Livestreamed performances have proliferated rapidly, some supported by donations and some ticketed. Each seemingly emulates a different kind of in-person show: in Chicago they include street fests such as the first virtual Do Division, public-funded shows hosted by the mayor’s Instagram account, blues concerts from the stage of a mostly empty Rosa’s Lounge, and avant-garde showcases such as Experimental Sound Studio’s Quarantine Concerts series.

Livestreaming can make even the process of

creating music into a source of revenue. Chicago producer GLOhan Beats has worked for A-list rappers such as Gucci Mane, Juice Wrld, and Lil Uzi Vert. He occasionally livestreams his work in progress, talking viewers through what he’s doing, and his audience sometimes donates via Twitch’s tip function. “This generation is mostly focused on music that is everywhere for free,” says GLOhan’s friend and collaborator D2X. “I think I enjoyed albums a lot more when I used to buy them and listen to the CD.”

Open Mike Eagle suggests that consumer attitudes are at least partly to blame for the current state of the industry. “People get upset at streaming, as if Spotify or Apple are devaluing music,” he says. “Us as a society, we already devalue music, and these companies have stepped in to fill that void and create what the new marketplace is.” Though he continues to sell physical releases, he admits that in the digital realm he prefers the easy, instant access that streaming gives his fans—it beats the way he used to release music via carefully arranged zip files on file-sharing sites such as Mediafire.

He wishes fans and critics better understood the economic differences between indie and major-label artists. Even when he appears on year-end lists next to the likes of Drake and Young Thug, he feels closer kinship with indie rappers such as JPEGmafia and R.A.P. Ferreira—not because they make especially similar music, but “because we come from the same world economically; we’re craftspeople trying to live on the strength of the craft.” Eagle also says it more bluntly: “Everything about our career is life or death. If I don’t treat my album release properly, that’s my rent.”

McNiece hopes listeners use self-isolation to actively engage with music, not just passively absorb it. “The importance of artists and creative people and culture has never been more apparent than it is now, when we’re all stuck at home and we have nothing to do besides cook for ourselves and consume art and media,” he says.

Much like independent venues, independent musicians need extra support during the pandemic—otherwise they won’t be around anymore by the time the virus is under control. And for the vast majority of them, streaming revenue won’t cut it. For Joshua Virtue, the imperative is simple: “I don’t want you to be broke, because then you won’t be able to make your sick art that helps me live!”

 @jackriedy



#CHIMUSIC35

Martin Atkins's greatest moment in Chicago music history

With his supergroup Pigface, the industrial-music veteran brings together all sorts of scenes onstage.

By MARTIN ATKINS 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 provides business expertise and training to creatives and their organizations citywide. 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 *Reader* collaboration: a series spotlighting important figures in Chicago music serving as #ChiMusic35 ambassadors. This week, we hear from drummer, writer, and educator Martin Atkins. Born in the north of England in 1959, he joined Public Image Ltd in 1979. After stints

in London and New York, he moved to Chicago in 1989—"by choice," as he's quick to point out. Here he joined seminal industrial band Ministry, formed the supergroup Pigface, and continues to collaborate with a wide range of artists.

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

Ayana Contreras: First things first. What's your favorite Chicago music moment?

Martin Atkins: If you'd asked me this question, I don't know, six months ago, I would have said the beginning of industrial music, Wax Trax! Records. I'm talking '89, '90, '91, the band Ministry, and the same energy in the city that I felt in London during the beginning of punk rock.

PHOTO BY KARA HAMMOND

Today, I have a band called Pigface, and we played at Thalia Hall, November 30, 2019. And I'm so happy that we did that. My band is a collective of musicians from other bands and has always been diverse onstage in every conceivable way. But at Thalia Hall we were joined by Gaelynn Lea, who is a disability rights advocate. She won the Tiny Desk competition for NPR. She's brittle boned and wheelchair bound, and plays fiddle like a cello. That was really special for me.

But also through our connections with Add-2, the Chicago artist, he sent four artists that he is a mentor to: Just Chris, J. Lamar, Dai, and C.A.M. They jumped onstage and performed with us. I'm so happy to have had that connectedness across so many pieces of Chicago happen before things started to come apart. And I think, at least now, we can see them coming back together.

You mentioned that the music scene in Chicago had that same energy when you moved here as London. More broadly, why do you think Chicago musicians, across different genres, have become so influential worldwide? Everyone I've asked this question to before you has been a native Chicagoan. So I would imagine that you might have a slightly different perspective on this.

I've got to say, there's people just doing it, not complaining that they wish this could have happened or that could have happened. It's like, "In the meantime, let's roll up our sleeves and make all of the difference we are able to do today."

There are other cities that claim to be the capital of this or the center of that. And I think everybody here is so busy actually doing it that nobody takes the time to wave the flag and talk about it and promote it. It's a great place to be.

One of the artists that jumped onstage with us, she's called Dai. And I really like her music. I follow her on Instagram. And most of her posts recently are like, "Hey, we've got a car full of diapers and water. And we're going to be at this location if you need anything." And it's just so great to see—not just that energy of people trying to promote themselves, but people being involved in their communities and trying to make a difference. **FI**

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PICK OF THE WEEK

Hobbyist want you to dance in the dark to *Side Fx*

COURTESY THE ARTIST

HOBBYIST, *SIDE FX*Self-released
hobbyist.bandcamp.com/album/side-fx

CHICAGO EXPERIMENTAL ELECTRONIC-POP duo Hobbyist are well suited to capture the anxiety that's been our constant companion since the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic upended the world. Producer Marc Mozga creates a stark, austere sound from programmed percussion and synth licks, and his prickly, spacious beats and sparse melodies feel like they could raise the undead. Meanwhile the restrained vocals of front woman Holly Prindle split the difference between sinister and sultry, making her sound like a possessed lounge singer. Mozga and Prindle worked on their new self-released EP, *Side Fx*, throughout April, recording its wobbly, dark pop songs on a phone app while sheltering in place. Despite the circumstances that inform the EP, Hobbyist stop short of going full doom-and-gloom. When Prindle compares the way she lives in quarantine to the habits of bunker-bound survivalists on the dub-driven "Preppers," the two words she keeps repeating ("Cook my own / Build my own / Can my own / Shoot my own") suggest she takes comfort in the power she has to provide for herself.

—LEOR GALIL



Little Simz © TAM CADER

QUIN KIRCHNER, *THE SHADOWS AND THE LIGHT*Astral Spirits
quinkirchner.bandcamp.com/album/the-shadows-and-the-light

The Shadows and the Light, the new album from Chicago drummer Quin Kirchner, is an eclectic collection of freewheeling studio performances with a diverse range of sounds. On its second track, "Batá Chop," the album features influences of West African batá drumming and traces of Afro-Cuban drumming (which Kirchner learned as a teenager while studying in Havana), but elsewhere there are bebop flourishes and interplanetary adornments originally stylized by the mystical jazz mad hatter, Sun Ra. Opener "Shadow Intro" features Kirchner solo on overdubbed drum kit, congas, and synths, showcasing his chops without extraneous accompaniment. The album goes on to present organ- and horn-laden jazz that allows his compositional abilities to shine, played by a revolving all-star group of local musicians that includes bassist Matt Ulery, tenor saxophonist and flutist Nate Lepine, Wurlitzer player Rob Clearfield, alto saxophonist Greg Ward, bass clarinetist Jason Stein, and trombonist Nick Broste (who also mixed and helped engineer the album along with Kirchner and Brian Sulpizio). The first few tracks on *The Shadows and the Light* seem intended to be singular compositions, but then Kirchner begins to experiment with creating mini movements; as one song ends, the next picks up exactly where it leaves off. He does this with the fifth and sixth tracks, his own "Pathways" and an arrangement of the Kelan Phil Cohran tune "Sahara." "Pathways" is sparse and minimal, with Kirchner's kalimba accompanied only by Ulery's quiet pizzicato on upright bass; it ends with Lepine's soft flute flowing into "Sahara," which quickly swells with saxophones and rumbling drum fills. Kirchner reverses this technique on the next two tracks, the all-horn quintet "Star Cluster" and the septet piece "Moon Vision." The first erupts with a flood of free improvisation on trombone, bass clarinet, and three saxophones, wailing without

form or limitation, and the second immediately moves into something softer and more restrained. Kirchner isn't just playing around with these mini movements; he's exploring sound and visualization through evocative pieces that transcend tangible reality, and he adds additional context with vivid titles such as "Lucid Dreams," "Jupiter Moon," and "Horizons." *The Shadows and the Light* is a tightly plotted-out dream world that showcases Kirchner's creative spirit, as well as the seriousness and refinement he brings to the table—you can practically hear the cogs systematically moving in his head from track to track. It all works because Kirchner is a strong musician who knows how to transform eccentricity into something that can appeal to diverse listeners, rather than jazz aficionados alone. —JORDANNAH ELIZABETH

LITTLE SIMZ, *DROP 6*Age 101
littlesimz.co/Drop6

British rapper Simbi Ajikawo, who records as Little Simz, jumps right into your ears with her distinctive beats and fluid style on "Might Bang, Might Not," the first song on the new *Drop 6*. "You ain't seen no one like me since / Lauryn Hill in the 90s, bitch," she raps, laying down the law to anyone who might question her abilities or commitment. "I am a one-woman army / I am the force that we speak of." Born in London to Nigerian parents, the 26-year-old Ajikawo has been putting out music since she was a teenager, starting with the self-released 2010 mixtape *Stratosphere*. In 2014, she embarked on the Drops series of EPs (on her own Age 101 imprint), inspired in part by the experimental eclecticism of her early mixtapes—they combine a relatively minimal approach to production with raw lyrics and snippets of musical thoughts. Ajikawo put the finishing touches on *Drop 6* in April, while staying alone in her London home due to COVID-19 concerns. Its five songs retain some of the fiery elements of Little Simz's 2019 LP *Grey Area*, where her quick-witted lyrics portray her as a force working against any lov-

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OG Stevo @COURTSY LJ PRODUCTIONS

ers and power structures that might try to slow her roll. But on the new EP, dreaminess and dread creep into her songs: if she was a superheroine on *Grey Area*, then on *Drop 6* she's her slightly more mild-mannered alter ego, just trying to fit in with the humans. On the EP's last song, "Where's My Lighter?," Little Simz gives herself a progress review: "In this world we need balance / I'm here nurturing my talent." She's joined on this track by fellow Londoner Alewya, whose hazy voice adds eeriness to an understated beat punctuated by keyboard riffs. The songs on *Drop 6* are full of racing thoughts about relationships and responsibility, disrupted by moments of confusion provoked by the unseen forces that prevent us from leaving home. It's an entirely relatable journey as we all navigate the pandemic. —SALEM COLLO-JULIN

LUCKI, *ALMOST THERE*

Lucki/Empire
empi.re/blog.php?p=lucki--almost-there-album

Any future history of Chicago hip-hop would be incomplete without a chapter about rapper Lucki. Starting with his startling 2013 debut, *Alternative Trap*, he's been shaping and tightening a distinctive style built on forlorn storytelling and a languorous flow. His zonked-out affectations can make his songs seem tossed off, but when you listen deeper, the vulnerability, anxiety, and tension he carries in his gritty groan strike you with full force. Lucki has been on a remarkable streak the past couple years, and his third full-length in 15 months, May's *Almost There* (Lucki/Empire), lands like a three-pointer in the final seconds of a blowout second quarter in game seven of the NBA finals. Lucki fits vivid tales strewn with drugs, fast cars, and heartbreak into songs that barely break two minutes, and his subtle inflections lend each track a noirish gravitas. As dark as he can get, he steers away from the morose; on "Pure Love-Hate," Lucki's voice threads through a brittle bell melody and a melting vocal sample with a subtle uplift that gives his story of a past dalliance a sense of spiritual fulfillment. —LEOR GALIL

INGRID LAUBROCK & KRIS DAVIS, *BLOOD MOON*

Intakt
laubrock-intakt.bandcamp.com/album/blood-moon

Like so many other musicians based in New York, saxophonist Ingrid Laubrock and pianist Kris Davis migrated there. Davis moved from Canada in 2001; Laubrock was born and raised in Germany, then spent nearly a decade in England before moving to the U.S. in 2009. For as long as they've lived in the same neck of the woods, they've appeared on each other's records, and for a time they played together in the trio Paradoxical Frog with drummer Tyshawn Sorey. *Blood Moon*, their first recording as a duo, exploits their exacting attunement to each other's idiosyncratic moves. On the hushed Davis original "Flying Embers," their adjacent pitches shimmer like the haze of an open flame, in sustained tones and short, pianissimo phrases that make you forget what instruments you're hearing. The pianist's restrained touch on the title track, a Laubrock composition, seems to place her notes inside the tenor saxophone's sound. And on the improvisation "Gunweep," soprano saxophone and piano exchange quicksilver phrases through the other's staccato rhythms. Every one of the album's nine pieces is a distinct, absorbing world unto itself. —BILL MEYER

OG STEVO, *THE LAST OG*

OG Music Group
soundcloud.com/og-stevo

In the months since Rogers Park native Stevon Oduze graduated from Northern Illinois University in December, he's been singularly focused on transforming his music from an undergraduate extracurricular activity into a career. And judging from the pop-forward hip-hop he's released in the past six months, he's well on his way. As OG Stevo, Oduze encodes melody into the DNA of his mike technique to supercharge his instrumentals—even when he's not outright singing, he often ends his

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Jason Wilber © COURTESY WILBERTONE RECORDS

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rapped lines with a honeyed lilt. The sweet, ebullient hook on February's "Neighborhood Hero," a song about departed friends, gives it an irrepressible joy that's strong enough to make sure their memory lasts for generations. Odueze carries that energy into his latest EP, April's *The Last OG* (OG Music Group), which packs euphoria into even its most sorrowful songs; atop the melancholy acoustic guitar and doleful keys of "Voices in My Head," he unloads a tight string of bars with such power that it's clear he can meet whatever challenges lie ahead. —LEOR GALIL

TENGGER, *NOMAD*

Beyond Beyond Is Beyond
tengger.bandcamp.com/album/nomad

A vacation sounds pretty good right about now, doesn't it? Or it would in a world without COVID-19, large-scale lockdowns, and an overabundance of existential dread. Seoul-based Korean/Japanese duo Tengger can't do anything about the pandemic, but their music can provide a bit of a mental escape, or at least uplift the spirit. Inspired by their own experiences traveling, the group create meditative, light-as-silk sound sculptures by interweaving drone, psychedelia, Krautrock, and new age music with occasional field recordings and wordless vocals. On their latest album, *Nomad*, Tengger embrace the natural universe; chirping birds and sung melodies from vocalist and harmonium player Itta lend a bright spirit to opening track "Achime," before the birds seem to swoop down over a cliff to reveal softly crashing waves on the following track, "Bliss." Though Tengger's 2019 album, *Spiritual*, dealt more in pulsating textures and gritty noise, *Nomad* is serene. Krautrock rhythms still appear on tracks such as "Eurasia," but the album's overall sense of movement feels more like the airy flow of shapeshifting clouds than the mechanical throb of earthbound machines. *Nomad* wouldn't sound out of place played in the background at a spa, but by the end of its long-form closer, "Flow," you'll be convinced that's a good thing. —JAMIE LUDWIG

JASON WILBER, *TIME TRAVELLER*

WilberTone
jasonwilber.com

Jason Wilber is known to audiences around the world for his impeccable guitar tones and tasteful playing in support of the late John Prine over the past 25 years. As Prine's musical director, Wilber helped steer him back to the minimal sound of his records from the early 70s and, in the process, showcased that material's lyrical and emotional weight. Throughout, Wilber also released his own impressive body of work. His latest album, *Time Traveler*, is his finest hour; its transfixing songs are as quiet and sparsely arranged as Prine audiences have come to expect from Wilber onstage, but the style is unmistakably his own. "I was there at the dawn of the here and the now when I opened my eyes and cried," he sings in the first lines of the title track, which opens the record. "And throughout the years, all of my fears have come true a thousand times." These meditative folk songs circle a central theme: the negligence of humans toward the environment and themselves. But Wilber is too good a songwriter to write mere polemics. These songs are their own excursions into reflective dreamscapes ("The Old Ones"), folk blues ("Spider"), acoustic pop ("Dust to Dust"), and other prime singer-songwriter fare. His protagonists are often outcasts: In "The Disappearance of Bigfoot," Sasquatch is a wild beast attuned to her world until the scent of man wafts by and gets her running. In "Living Space," an astronaut tumbles through the stratosphere and figures out that space "wasn't what it was supposed to be . . . I miss my dog / I miss my family." Wilber has a unique perspective about the planet too: "We took it all for granted like a spoiled kid / Now we live to regret it." Wilber's relaxed vocals, like Paul Simon's, make those kinds of lines hang an extra beat until their gravity brings up a lump in your throat. *Time Traveler* isn't a drum record: Wilber's finely laced guitar and mandolin arrangements are accented by Susan Anderson's violin and Shannon Hayden's cello. Producer Paul Mahern (who's worked with the likes of Blake Babies and John Mellencamp) makes every moment glow. Despite its somber themes, *Time Traveler* isn't meant to dull the pain; instead, these songs will likely make you feel at peace living with it. —MARK GUARINO



A tragic plane crash denied horn-rock juggernaut Chase their legacy

Bill Chase's virtuosic nine-piece band, powered by four trumpets, belongs on the same pedestal as Chicago and Blood, Sweat & Tears.

By STEVE KRAKOW

When classic-rock fans refer to “the Chicago sound” they’re usually talking about bands with horns. The city’s rich history of jazz and soul, with horn sections often at the forefront, influenced its 1960s boom of “horn rock,” exemplified by groups such as Chicago and the Ides of March and innovated by an earlier but less celebrated act called the Mob. As it continued to evolve, this rock-meets-jazz sound would be christened “fusion.”

One Chicago horn-rock band that gets short shrift these days is Chase—no doubt in part because their career was cut short by tragedy. The group’s founder, Bill Chase, was born William Edward Chiaiese in Boston on October 24,

1934 (his Italian American family changed its surname to make it easier for others to pronounce). There were a lot of musicians in the Chase family—Bill’s father was a trumpeter, and a great-uncle on his mother’s side had played for the New York Philharmonic and the Metropolitan Opera’s orchestra.

Bill started on violin, switched to drums, and then settled on trumpet in 11th grade. After seeing Maynard Ferguson play with Stan Kenton’s orchestra, Chase began taking his own playing more seriously—and shifted his focus from classical to jazz. After graduating high school, he enrolled in the New England Conservatory and then the Berklee College of Music (then called Schillinger House). By

1958, he’d landed a gig with Ferguson’s group, and in the 1960s he recorded and performed extensively with Woody Herman’s legendary band the Herd.

Chase soon became an in-demand soloist, and made several appearances on *The Ed Sullivan Show* and *The Tonight Show*. In the late 60s, while freelancing in Las Vegas, he developed an itch to start his own ensemble, and in 1969 he began to assemble players. By 1970 he’d formed a nine-piece band named after himself, “Chase,” recruiting three other trumpeters—Ted Piercefield, Alan Ware, and Jerry Van Blair. All were likewise veteran jazz players and skilled arrangers, and Chase backed them up with a rock-style rhythm section: keyboardist Phil Porter, guitarist Angel South, bassist Dennis Keith Johnson, and drummer Jay Burrid. Though Bill Chase had conceived of his group as instrumental, he soon added Terry Richards as lead vocalist.

Chase moved to Chicago in order to take advantage of booking and recording contacts here, and the band played regularly on Rush Street. After signing to Epic Records, they released their self-titled debut LP in 1971, which tapped into the horn-rock zeitgeist—it would turn out to be their commercial peak, and the driving, funky single “Get It On” became their biggest hit.

That year Chase was nominated for a Grammy in the Best New Artist category, losing to Carly Simon. Chase was named the top pop group (and number two jazz group) in the 1971 *DownBeat* magazine poll, and WBBM even gave them their own local half-hour TV special. The band had a reputation for blowing headliners off the stage, and they toured as far as Europe, Africa, and Asia.

Chase released a second LP, *Ennea*, in 1972, but during its production they had to replace two crucial members, Burrid and Richards. The album didn’t get the same love as the debut, though the single “So Many People” earned some airplay. Bill Chase soon declared personal bankruptcy, dissolving the band, and when he started rebuilding a few months later, he tried several sounds and lineups, hoping to find a combination that would click with audiences again.

When Chase recorded their third LP, 1974’s *Pure Music*, Bill Chase himself was the only member remaining from *Ennea*. The band’s material also changed direction radically, relying less on vocals and more on heady, instrumental jazz fusion. Unfortunately *Pure Music* wasn’t terribly commercially successful either, despite featuring songwriting and lead

vocals from Jim Peterik of the Ides of March. But at least the band were back on the road.

On August 9, 1974 (the day Nixon resigned), Chase were flying to a gig at the Jackson County Fair in Minnesota when bad weather caused their small plane to crash, killing everyone aboard: Bill Chase, keyboardist Wally Yohn, guitarist John Emma, drummer Walter Clark, and the pilot and copilot.

A tribute album titled *Watch Closely Now*, featuring alumni and associates of the band and released under the name Chase, came out in 1977. Beginning in 2007, surviving members of Chase presented memorial concerts in various cities. In 2014 they finally returned to Chicago for two “Chase Revisited” gigs at Reggies’, which featured original bassist Dennis Johnson—a certified badass who had become a founding member of Peterik’s band Survivor in 1978. **✎**

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Nikki Hill LESLIE CAMPBELL

NEW

Bev Rage & the Drinks 6/24, 8 PM, livestream at facebook.com/beatkitchenchicago

Garth Brooks Drive-In Concert Experience (screening) 6/27, 8:30 PM, SeatGeek Stadium, Bridgeview

Butl3r's Funky Mondays with DJ Butl3r Mondays, 6:30 PM, livestream at facebook.com/subterraneanchicago

The Carole King & James Taylor Story with Phoebe Katis & Dan Clews 6/22/21, 8 PM, City Winery

Circa Survive, Gouge Away 1/16/21, 6:30 PM, Concord Music Hall, 17+

Dance Yourself Clean Indie-Pop Dance Party featuring Lights & Music Collective DJs 6/20, 8 PM, livestream at twitch.tv/lights3music

DJ Jeff Moyer's Virtual Music Video Mash Up 6/19, 9 PM, livestream at pscp.tv/ChgLateBar

Facs 6/25, 8 PM, livestream at audiotree.tv

Fiesta Back of the Yards 2020 9/25-9/27, 47th between Ashland and Damen

Nikki Hill 7/31, 8:30 PM, FitzGerald's, Berwyn

Jazz Journalists Association 2020 Awards Party featuring Carla Bley, Miguel Zenón, Kurt Elling, Zakir Hussain, Roscoe Mitchell, Tomeka Reid, Nicole Mitchell, and more 6/18, 7 PM, livestream at hothouse.net/hothouse-global

Juneteenth Virtual Celebration with DJ Vince Adams 6/19, 5 PM, livestream at twitch.tv/djvinceadams

Angelique Kidjo 6/25, 6 PM, livestream at youtube.com/user/NYCSummerStage

Roy Kinsey 6/19, 5 PM, live performance on the roof of the Empty Bottle; livestream viewable at emptybottle.com/music-friendly-distancing

Lake County Folk Club Song Circle 6/28, 6:30 PM, livestream at thelakecountyfolkclub.org/online.html

Live From Where They Live featuring Billy Prine with Dave Hoekstra 7/15, 8 PM, livestream at facebook.com/fitzgeraldsnightclub

LP's Happy Hour with Lawrence Peters 6/19 and 6/26, 5 PM, livestream at hideoutchicago.online

Anthony McGill & Anna Polonsky 6/26, 7 PM, livestream at facebook.com/uchicago-presents

Option series presents Ab Baars 6/29, 1 and 8 PM, livestream at ess.org/the-quarantine-concerts

Option series presents Nat Baldwin 7/6, 8 PM, livestream at ess.org/the-quarantine-concerts

Jeremy Pinnell 7/22, 8:30 PM, FitzGerald's, Berwyn

Planet Glazed featuring Wife of Wrath, Mister Wallace, Hijo Prodigio 6/27, 8 PM, livestream at hideoutchicago.online

The Quarantine Concerts curated by International Contemporary Ensemble 6/25-6/26, livestream at ess.org/the-quarantine-concerts

Rookie 7/7, 8 PM, livestream at noonchorus.com

Todd Rundgren 1/26-21-1/27/21, 8 PM, House of Blues, 17+

Sequesterfest (Vol. 4) presented by Corbett vs. Dempsey 6/28, livestream at ess.org/the-quarantine-concerts

Small Business Live featuring

2 Chainz, Allen Stone, Bam Marley, Brandi Carlile, Brittany Howard, Jufu, Leon Bridges, Moon Taxi, Nathaniel Rateliff, T-Pain 6/20, 3 PM, livestream at facebook.com/bustedotcom

Song for Song with James McMurtry & Jon Dee Graham 7/8, 8 PM, livestream at facebook.com/fitzgeraldsnightclub

Soul Uprising featuring Sam Trump, Nola Ade, DJ Duane Powell 6/18, 6 PM, livestream at youtube.com/user/ChicagoCultureEvents/featured

Stay at Home Sessions featuring Dabura, Adam Rostek, Hummingbird 6/27, 8 PM, livestream at twitch.tv/spybartv

Stay at Home Sessions featuring Jake Shore Drive, Flynninno, Maximo 6/25, 7 PM, livestream at twitch.tv/spybartv

Billy Strings 7/22-7/23, 7 PM, livestream at nugs.tv

Tatsu Aoki presents Friends of Asian Improv Arts Midwest: Chicago's Asian American Cultural Diaspora Volume 3 featuring Antonin Hoang, Yuko Fujiwara, Hiroshi Mehata, Yoko Reikano, Ayaka Nakama, Jason Finkleman & Joy Yang, Miyumi Project, Skylanding 6/20, 7 PM, livestream at hothouse.net/hothouseglobal

Tenci 6/25, 8 PM, livestream at hideoutchicago.online

Tiny Meat Gang (Cody Ko & Noel Miller) 10/1, 8 PM, Chicago Theatre

Virtual Juneteenth Celebration presented by the AACM & Old Town School featuring the Young Masters directed by Ernest Dawkins, AACM's Great Black Music

Ensemble featuring Dee Alexander, Angel Bat Dawid, and more 6/19, 8 PM, livestream at youtube.com/user/oldtownschool

Vizitorz (Dushun Mosely & Kenneth Green) 6/25, 7 PM, livestream at hothouse.net/hothouseglobal

VoiceBox with Cathy Richardson 7/14, 8 PM, livestream at facebook.com/fitzgeraldsnightclub

Vox Effusis Vol. 2 curated by Lou Mallozzi featuring Pamela Z, C. Spencer Yeh, Alessandro Bosetti, Audrey Chen & Phil Minton 6/27, 2 PM, livestream at ess.org/the-quarantine-concerts

Write On! Part II with Ben LaMar Gay & Sam Lewis 6/24, 6 PM, livestream at facebook.com/artspubliclife

UPDATED

NOTE: We suggest that you contact the point of purchase if you need information about ticket exchange or refunds.

... And You Will Know Us by the Trail of Dead, Greenbeard 7/11, 9:30 PM, Empty Bottle, canceled

Archers of Loaf 7/25, 10 PM, Subterranean, canceled

Randy Bachman & Burton Cummings 6/12/21, 8 PM, Rosemont Theatre, Rosemont, rescheduled; tickets purchased for the original date will be honored

Clem Snide 7/17, 8:30 PM, FitzGerald's, Berwyn, canceled

Dreary North Fest featuring Bastard Noise, Midwestlust, Sea of Shit, and more 8/22, 3 PM, Subterranean, canceled

Eluveitie 10/4, 8 PM, Concord Music Hall, canceled

Emo Night Brooklyn 6/26, 10:30 PM, Metro, postponed until a date to be determined, 18+

The Format 7/23/21-7/25/21, 8 PM, Lincoln Hall, rescheduled; tickets purchased for original and previously rescheduled dates will be honored, 18+

Goo Goo Dolls 8/6/21, 7 PM, Huntington Bank Pavilion, rescheduled; tickets purchased for the original date will be honored

Hammerfall, Beast in Black 10/7, 7 PM, Concord Music Hall, canceled

Hoodoo Gurus 11/3, 8 PM, City Winery, postponed until a date to be determined

Hrvy 9/23, 6 PM, Chop Shop, canceled

Charlie Hunter & Lucy Woodward 6/11/21, 7 PM, SPACE, Evanston, rescheduled

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Mya, 702 8/23, 8 PM, Thalia Hall, canceled

New Order, Pet Shop Boys 10/1/21, 6:45 PM, Huntington Bank Pavilion, rescheduled; tickets purchased for the original date will be honored

Nombe, Bad Child 3/27/21, 8 PM, Lincoln Hall, rescheduled; tickets purchased for original and previously rescheduled dates will be honored

Off Broadway 10/31, 8:30 PM, FitzGerald's, Berwyn, rescheduled

Eric Roberson 4/1/21-4/3/21, 8 PM, City Winery, rescheduled

Maggie Rose, Them Vibes 2/13/21, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston, rescheduled

Santana, Earth Wind & Fire 7/3/21, 7 PM, Hollywood Casino Amphitheatre, Tinley Park, rescheduled; tickets purchased for the original date will be honored

Simrit 7/7, 8 PM, City Winery, postponed until a date to be determined

Soulwax 10/3, 8 PM, Metro, canceled

Southern Hospitality featuring Damon Fowler, J.P. Soars, Victor Wainwright 6/18/21, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston, rescheduled

Lindsey Stirling, Kiesza, Mako 8/10/21, 7 PM, Huntington Bank Pavilion, rescheduled; tickets purchased for the original date will be honored

Harry Styles, Jenny Lewis 9/24/21-9/25/21, 8 PM, United Center, rescheduled; tickets purchased for the original dates will be honored

The Sword, King Buffalo 7/1, 9:30 PM, Empty Bottle, postponed until a date to be determined

UPCOMING

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

Chicago 10/14, 7:30 PM, Rialto Square Theatre, Joliet

Elrow 11/27, 8 PM, Radius Chicago, 18+

FitzGerald's Drive-In Concert featuring Waco Brothers, School of Rock 7/3, 7 PM, location to be announced before the show



GOSSIP WOLF

A furry ear to the ground of the local music scene

GOSSIP WOLF SOMEHOW failed to cover local trad-metal masterminds **Satan's Hallow** before they went on hiatus in 2017, but thankfully four of that band's five members kept going as **Midnight Dice**. If you enjoy banging your head till it falls off, cutting the sleeves off denim jackets, and making out with a hottie while blasting Dokken, then you'll dig Midnight Dice's new five-song EP, *Hypnotized*. This wolf especially loves the delightfully punishing "Starblind," with **Mandy Martillo's** lacerating vocals and a ripping solo from guitarist **Steve "Lethal" Beaudette**. *Hypnotized* should be out on CD, vinyl, and cassette this fall, but you can buy a Bandcamp download now if you don't want to wait for an epic blast of adrenaline!

Since Gossip Wolf first wrote about Chicago indie-pop veterans **Varsity** in 2015, they've become one of the city's most consistently excellent bands, balancing clever hooks, airily diverse arrangements, and the trenchant, insightful lyrics of singer and keyboardist **Stef Smith**. On Friday, May 29, Varsity dropped their third full-length, *Fine Forever*, via Boston label **Run for Cover**, and it's as wide and open as a long drive through a midwestern summer afternoon. Standouts include the divinely sprawling "The Memphis Group," about a crew of entitled jerks who collect nice furniture, and the crisp, effervescent "Reason to Run," which features superlative jangle from guitarists **Dylan Weschler** and **Patrick Stanton**. A multicolored vinyl version is available via Varsity's Bandcamp.

Avondale record shop **No Requests**, which opened in February 2019, will close at the end of June—co-owners **David Beltran** and **Diana Bowden**, who also run the **FeelTrip** label, say they can't justify renewing their lease during the pandemic. The shop is open by appointment till June 28 (reserve a time on the FeelTrip site), and curbside pickup is still available. Beltran and Bowden will keep selling music online, even without a physical store. —**J.R. NELSON AND LEOR GALIL**

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



June 1 in Washington, D.C. © KOSHU KUNII / UNSPLASH

NATIONAL POLITICS

Let the people decide

The major parties benefit too much from our rigged system to pursue reform.

By **LEONARD C. GOODMAN**

Leonard C. Goodman is a Chicago criminal defense attorney and co-owner of the newly independent Reader.

The inept response of our leaders in Washington, D.C., to nationwide protests following the police murder of George Floyd can best be depicted with two images. First, there was the image from June 1 of U.S. Park Police officers in riot gear using tear gas and flash grenades to clear peaceful protesters out of Lafayette Square, so that President Trump could have his picture taken holding up a bible in front of St. John's Episcopal Church.

Not to be outdone, last week Democratic leaders of the House and Senate had themselves photographed kneeling in Congress's Emancipation Hall wearing kente cloth scarves. This performance was intended to illustrate the party's deep concerns about the epidemic of police violence against African Americans.

Our nation's leaders are finally being forced to listen to concerns raised by peo-

ple in the streets. Their initial response of symbolic gestures and tokenism is not encouraging.

Contrast these images with Washington's response to the cries of its major donors when, in March, the COVID-19 pandemic forced American businesses to shut down and workers to shelter in place. The leaders of both political parties quickly joined together to save the investor class by unanimously passing the CARES Act, whose 880 pages—clearly written by highly paid corporate lobbyists—bailed out big business (i.e., big donors) to the tune of \$4.5 trillion, including companies like Boeing that were already sick prior to the virus. Congress decided not to save the rest of the real economy. As a result, small businesses are particularly at risk, as FEMA estimates some 40 percent of them don't reopen after a disaster, a devastating blow to our great cities. Some 40 million Americans have been disconnected from their jobs and their health care, and must stand in mile-long food lines to provide for

their families.

To be fair, the Democrats have gone beyond mere gestures. The party introduced the Justice in Policing Act, a package of modest reforms acceptable to the party's corporate donors. But protestors are demanding real change.

The federal government must stop sending money and military hardware to police departments. It must end its disastrous war on drugs that has devastated communities of color and turned America into the world's largest jailer of its own people. It must end the fraudulent war on terror that enriches corporate donors while making the world more dangerous for ordinary Americans. The money saved by ending these failed programs must be invested in programs that actually help crime-ridden communities, like free child care, adequately funded public schools, youth programs, a true national health-care system that includes treatment for mental illness and addiction, and a federal jobs program to transition America to a green economy.

Of course, most of these reforms are unlikely as long as our national politics is controlled by corporate-owned parties. The for-profit insurance and health-care industries will continue to block any movement towards a national health-care system. Silicon Valley and industries that depend on keeping American workers in a precarious state, so that they will accept low-paying gigs driving us around or delivering our groceries, will block any federal jobs program. Weapons makers and fossil fuel extractors will block any reductions in the trillion dollars spent annually on military adventures and the security state.

The only way to achieve real reform is to end the duopoly of the corporate parties and to elect candidates to high office who are free from corporate influence. In theory, this is an achievable goal. Fewer and fewer Americans express loyalty to the Democratic or Republican parties. Roughly 40 percent of Americans do not belong to either major political party. The largest block of eligible voters are nonvoters who see no reason to participate in a rigged system.


According to Poll Watch in Sunday's *New York Times*, "This November's election could become only the second presidential contest in the history of modern polling in

which both candidates are seen negatively by most voters." You can probably guess the other election. It was four years ago when "both Mr. Trump and his Democratic rival, Hillary Clinton, were disliked by a majority of voters."

The Democratic and Republican parties will continue to throw roadblocks in the path of third-party candidates—fighting to keep them off the ballot and out of the debates, and denying them federal matching funds. But the biggest obstacle to viability for third-party candidates is easily fixed. Our system of winner-take-all elections demands that voters cast their ballot for the lesser of the two evil establishment candidates, rather than "waste" their vote on a third-party candidate whom the corporate media has declared unelectable. (Members of my own family refuse to speak to me because I support third-party candidates for president.)

This insidious system can be fixed with a simple program called Ranked-Choice Voting or RCV. In an RCV system, voters rank the candidates in order of preference. If none of the parties get to 50 percent of the vote, the least popular candidate is stricken, and their votes are allocated according to the second choice of the voter. This system allows voters to select a candidate they actually believe in, rather than feeling pressured to choose the lesser evil. RCV encourages more voters to go to the polls. And it encourages third-party candidates to get on the ballot without worrying that they will be blamed for electing the greater evil, just as Ralph Nader was unfairly blamed for the election of George W. Bush in 2000.

Of course, RCV is vigorously opposed by the corporate parties, who use the fear of electing the greater evil to convince voters to withhold support from third-party candidates. Nevertheless, this opposition can be overcome if Americans demand real change. In 2018, Maine adopted RCV over heavy opposition. The result? Voter turnout was up, implementation was uncomplicated and inexpensive, few errors were made, and outcomes were perceived to be fair. Nine other states have implemented RCV at some levels.

RCV is an important reform worth fighting for. It empowers independent and third-party candidates by eliminating the "wasted vote" argument. And it gives Americans a fighting chance to achieve real reforms that benefit people over corporations. 

 @GoodmanLen

SAVAGE LOVE

I have recurring wet dreams about myself

Straight men question what it means to be heterosexual.

By **DAN SAVAGE**

Q: I'm a 32-year-old straight guy. My wife and I have been married for four years and together for nine. We have a great marriage and all is well. We have been quarantining at home since March. During this time, we have been exploring things sexually, which has been really fun. We have also been talking more about our kinks and fantasies. One thing my wife really wants to try is an MMF threesome. I've agreed and she's been talking about how hot it will be to make this happen once quarantine is over. She is particularly turned on by the fact that this would be my first sexual experience with another guy. The only issue is, in reality, it won't be. The truth is that when I was in high school, a guy friend and I fooled around a few times. I have no regrets but those experiences only served to reaffirm that I preferred women. I never did anything with another guy and I never felt the need to mention these early experiences to my wife. She just assumed I had never had a same-sex encounter. Now I feel like I've misled her or lied to her somehow. Should I tell her the truth or just let her believe our MMF threesome would be my first time with a guy? —**NERVOUSLY OMITTED HOMOSEXUAL OCCURRENCES, MOSTLY ORAL**

A: If your wife reads my column, NOHOMO, then you've just told her the truth and the advice that follows is moot. So here's hoping she doesn't read my column: You don't have to tell your wife about the handful/mouthful of times you messed around with

another guy in high school. If you're like most straight guys with one or two cocks in your past, NOHOMO, I'm guessing you didn't tell the wife because you didn't want her to feel insecure or spend all her free time corresponding with advice columnists about whether her husband is secretly gay.

In fairness to the wife, NOHOMO, not every woman whose straight-identified male partner admits to a little same-sex messing around worries her boyfriend or husband is going to leave her for a dude or all the dudes. But this worry is common enough to be something of a cliché. A straight guy doesn't even have to admit to having sucked one dick one time for his wife or girlfriend to worry he's secretly gay; I get at least one letter every day from a woman who's worried her husband is gay because he likes to have his nipples played with or his butt touched or because he has feelings. So while it's not ideal that straight or mostly straight guys don't feel they can be honest with their wives about their long ago and faraway same-sex experimentation, NOHOMO, it's understandable that many straight guys err on the side of keeping that shit to themselves.

But your question isn't "Why didn't I tell her then?" but rather "Should I tell her now?" And I don't think you have to. She wasn't harmed by this omission—you didn't deprive her of information she was entitled to—and disclosing now would only serve to deprive her of something, i.e. the excitement she feels about being there to witness what she thinks is your

first same-sex encounter.

Q: My wife questions my use of the word gay as being potentially offensive and I'd like to get your take. I'm male and my male friends like to flirt and joke about performing sex acts on each other. We've never actually carried through with it but I consider myself on the "spectrum" and might be open to gay sex. My male friends and I say we're being or acting gay (though we're all practicing heterosexuals) and this is where my wife takes issue. For example, I might say "We're so gay!" in our conversations but the word is used in a positive way. My wife makes the point that the word has a history of being used negatively, so may be considered offensive, and should only be used casually by people who are more legit gay. Should I stop using the word gay this way? —**GAY POSER**

A: Jesus, just suck off one of your male friends already—just get it over with—and then you have my permission to keep using "gay" as a compliment.

Q: I'm a 35-year-old seemingly straight man, but in the past year—roughly corresponding with the longest sex drought in the history of my adulthood—I have had recurring wet dreams where I suck myself off. Probably a dozen or so of these dreams, and I very much enjoy both sides of the transaction. What do you think it means? Am I witnessing the stirrings of some latent bisexuality or am I just desperate? Should I heed the call? —**ORIGINALLY UNILATERAL REGARDING ORAL BUT ONEIROMANCY REVEALS OPENING SEXUALITY**

A: I usually don't allow elaborate sign-offs, OUROBOROS, but I'm making an exception for yours because it's brilliant. (To save my other readers the trouble of googling: "oneiromancy" is the interpretation of dreams to predict the future and an "ouroboros" is an image of a snake swallowing its own tail, often used as an infinity symbol.) That said, I'm not sure there's really any call to heed here—other than a call to start doing the kind of stretching that would allow you to suck your own cock if you were 1. to get limber enough and 2. your cock is long enough. But a desire to suck one's own cock—or even an attempt, successful or not—doesn't mean a man is latently bisexual or gay. I assume you've been masturbating for more than two decades, OUROBOROS, and just as there's nothing gay about all those hand jobs you've given yourself, there's nothing gay about the blow jobs you can only dream about giving yourself.

Q: I'm that rare gay man who doesn't like

sucking dick. It wasn't hard for my VGL husband to find guys who wanted to blow him before quarantine and for years I didn't ask about it because I didn't want to know the details. But I knew he had video on his phone of some guys blowing him that he sometimes watched and I recently asked to watch one and I was completely shocked. It wasn't just a blow job. He spat in the guy's face, called him homophobic names, and was just generally brutal. The intensity and violence wasn't something I've ever detected in my husband or been on the receiving end from my husband. When I pressed my husband he shrugged and said, "That's how a lot of guys like it." I'm not sure what to do. —**GAY AND GLOOMY GUY EXTREMELY DISTURBED**

A: I read your letter three times and I still can't tell whether you're appalled or you're jealous. Do you disapprove of your husband treating someone that way or are you disappointed that your husband has never treated you that way? If it's the former, well, don't watch any more videos of your husband throat-fucking his subby cocksuckers. If it's the latter (and I suspect it is), GAGGED, then you're going to need to figure out how to articulate that clearly—something you failed to do in your letter—so you can tell your husband you'd like it like that too. Not being used for oral like that, of course, since you don't like performing oral sex. But maybe you'd like anal like that?

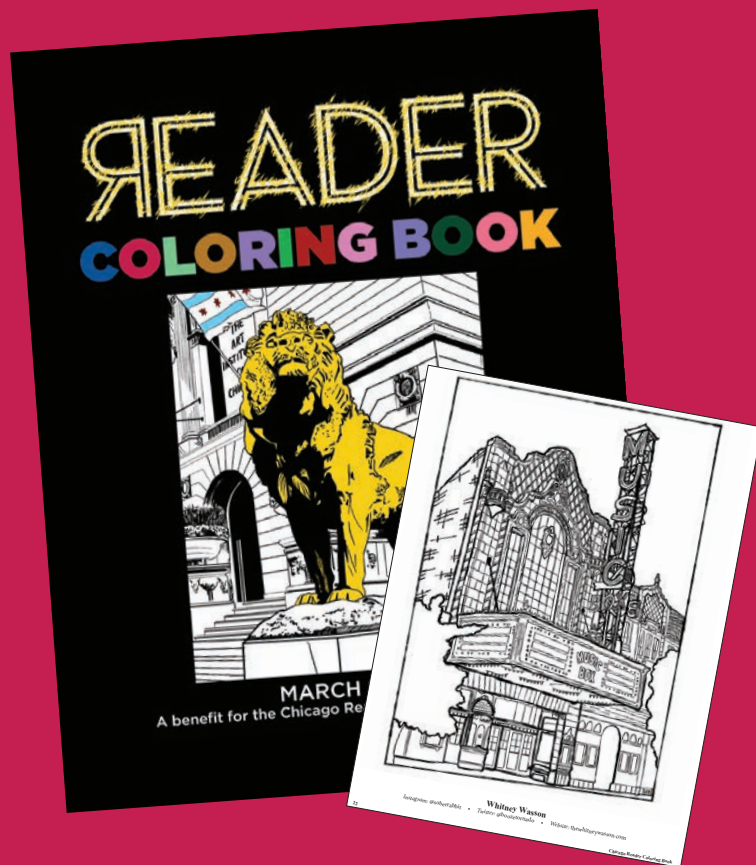
Dear Readers: This is gonna feel a little weird stuck onto the end of this week's column, I realize, but I wanted to say something about the protests all over the country and the world. While I haven't been able to personally attend a Black Lives Matter protest over the last two weeks—I have deeply shitty lungs and I'm concerned about contracting coronavirus—I fully support everyone who has taken to the streets to protest the violence of systemic racism and the specific violence inflicted upon Black people by racist cops. And while I can't be at the protests, my husband and I made a donation to bail funds across the country to help out people who were arrested. (You can donate at actblue.com/donate/bailfunds.) Please keep marching, please wear your masks (they work!), and please—please—make sure you and everyone you know is registered to vote. 🗳️

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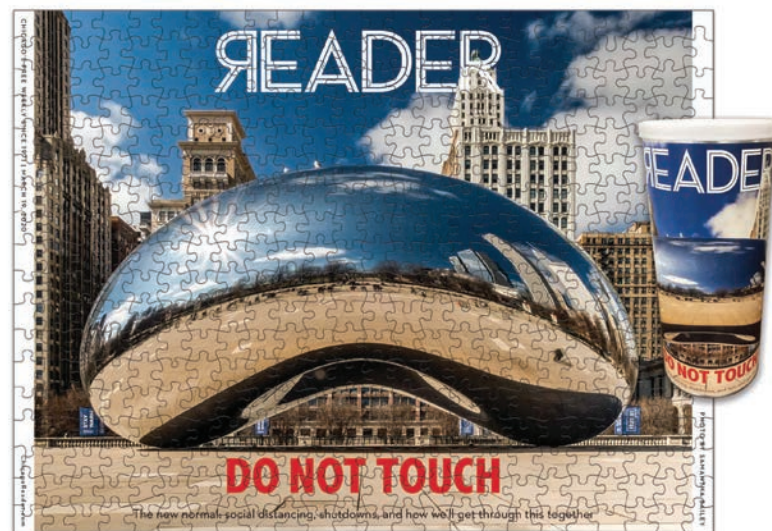
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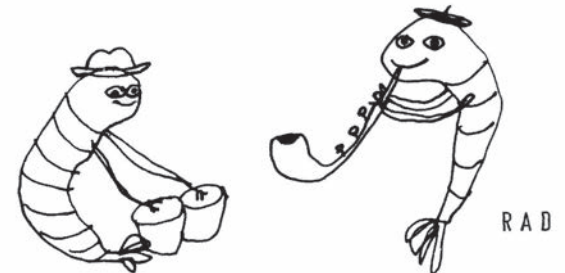
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