

# READER

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## THIS WEEK ON CHICAGOREADER.COM



### We (don't always) love TV

Two television addicts scream about how much they hated Netflix's *Emily in Paris*.

### Get me rewrite!

Aaron Sorkin rewrites Chicago history to help beat Trump, writes Ben Joravsky.

### 'Essential, not disposable'

We need a new ethic of care that values workers for their labor and for the lives that they are living.

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ISA GIALLORENZO

## STREET VIEW

### Out of the box

Defying boundaries, two entrepreneurs mix business, community, and prints.

BY ISA GIALLORENZO

When spotted at Garfield Park Conservatory, Maria LyVonne, 35, and Ashley Bassett-Parkins, 33, looked like they belonged in a fashion editorial—and they did! They were being photographed for the “lifestyle brand” they introduced last April, named LYV-ON (pronounced “live on” or “love on”). “We are on a mission to change the role the fashion industry plays in climate change, make sustainable fashion inclusive, and bring a more relatable and transparent approach to the industry,” says LyVonne. Before they launch their first capsule collection next spring, LyVonne and Bassett-Parkins are focused on building a community “where real women with real experiences can come together, get inspiration, feel empowered to have a voice, and love and care for themselves.”

While busy producing their very own garb, the business partners and longtime friends were sporting garments that represented their “mix-and-match” aesthetic: “I love emotional pieces, which is why I gravitate towards the mixture of prints and fabrics. I love pieces that tell a story and are inspirational,” says LyVonne, who described the look she rented from *Rent the Runway* as “eclectic fall garden party.” Bassett-Parkins, dressed in a “whimsical garden” theme, likes to mix leopard and floral prints year-round and favors a blend of femininity and masculinity with an edge. “Not one style defines me,” she says. “I don’t like to be put into a box, since I feel that everyone’s style is constantly evolving and I like to push my limits.”

For more about LYV-ON, check out [lyv-on.com](http://lyv-on.com) and [@lyvonlife](https://www.instagram.com/lyvonlife) on Instagram.

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Dinkey DaDiva  JEFF MARINI FOR CHICAGO READER



## FOOD REVIEW

# Meet Dinkey DaDiva, creator of the Jerk Chicken Egg Roll

The Egg Roll Lady has 75 varieties in her arsenal.

By **MIKE SULA**


**D**inkey DaDiva, the Egg Roll Lady, and her sister Pinkey grew up on the west side eating their Auntie Cathy's egg rolls stuffed with ground beef and cabbage. So when they opened L&B Soul Kitchen in Bellwood in 2012, it made sense to put them on the menu.

"I called them 'soul rolls,'" says Dinkey, who, along with Pinkey, was given her nickname as a child, and whose real names are Ernesta and Lekia Berry. The soul rolls did OK, but it wasn't until 2015 when she noticed the jerk taco trend sweeping the west side that the light bulb lit up the path to her destiny—as the probable originator of the current jerk egg roll wave and the creator of some 75 egg roll varieties.

I learned about Berry after reading taco scholar Titus Ruscitti's recent egg roll round-up where he wondered why these deep fried jerk rolls seemed to have become the unofficial snack of the west side. Turns out Ruscitti had visited ground zero two years earlier, long after Dinkey and Pinkey changed the name of the restaurant to Tastee Rolls in the midst of a marathon, 18-month egg roll brainstorming session.

"After I did the jerk chicken egg roll, it went crazy," she says. "I set a trend on social media. There are so many restaurants and so many people trying to do it. We sat at the table and came up with so many egg rolls—jerk chicken, jerk steak, jerk shrimp."

DaDiva's original jerk chicken egg roll

The OG jerk chicken egg rolls  JEFF MARINI FOR CHICAGO READER





Unofficial snack of the west side 🍷 JEFF MARINI FOR CHICAGO READER

is a shatteringly crispy bundle of chopped breast meat, carrots, and cabbage bathed in the warm spiced glow of the tropics. But the sisters didn't stop there. They stuffed rolls with scratch-made Italian beef, Philly steak, Buffalo chicken, and gyros. There was a surf-and-turf egg roll, a "mean green" veggie roll, peach cobbler and cheesecake rolls, and a "mystery roll." They made mini egg rolls for kids' parties, supersized 12-inch egg rolls for big eaters, and breakfast rolls like bacon, egg, and cheese. Every egg roll can be ordered with molten hot cheese inside.

The sisters didn't just rebrand, they expanded. While Pinkey held down the fort in Bellwood, Dinkey introduced the rolls to the city, opening a new soul food spot in 2017 on Madison with a partner. But that arrangement fizzled in April 2018, and Dinkey pivoted to making egg roll deliveries from a family food truck.

Last November she and another partner opened Eggsplosion Rolls on Chicago Avenue, where they introduced "make your own egg rolls" that encouraged customer-driven, genre-bending mashups like Italian beef and Philly steak in one roll. But that relationship was short-lived too. Dinkey struck out on her own again in June, and while Eggsplosion Rolls is still open, its egg roll offerings are much diminished.

There are bitter feelings about the breakup, but Dinkey is proud of the overall ascendance of jerk egg rolls. "I don't care about anybody

else doing them," she says. "It's just like chicken wings. Anybody can do chicken wings. Anybody can do egg rolls. I feel honored that I started a trend in Chicago and everybody wants to do it because of me." To complete the circle, the Jerk Taco Man, probable originator of the jerk taco craze, now has a jerk egg roll on his menu.

Dinkey still controls the Eggsplosion Rolls Facebook page, which she uses to steer fans to her new location, Dinkey's Lucky Rolls. She's now inside a small carryout kitchen next to the video slot and poker machines at Bobby's, a strip mall gaming parlor in Hillside, part of a burgeoning suburban chain. Dinkey has been planning to expand along with it, offering her rolls in each new location, along with breakfast, sandwiches, nachos, wings, rice bowls, and tacos—"Make it jerk," recommends the menu. She's projecting egg rolls in 29 total locations.

To ensure consistency, she's mandated a two-week egg rolling course for employees. Graduates—eight of them so far—get a certificate upon completion.

She's hired a restaurant consultant to help her grow, and she's plotting a return to the west side too, Chicago Avenue in particular. Meanwhile, there are always new egg rolls to conceive. "I'm steady creating," she says. "I love this business. My mind—I eat, sleep, poop egg rolls." 🍷

🐦 @MikeSula

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## POLITICS

# Shame, shame, shame

Blago, Donnie, Phyllis, and other shameful campaign absurdities

By **BEN JORAVSKY**

The weirdest, almost psychedelically surreal moment of the campaign season occurred last week when Blago showed up at Trump Tower to rally Black support for President Donnie.

We know about this thanks to Tom Schuba, ace reporter for the *Sun-Times*, the only media person to gain access to the affair. As such, Schuba was on hand to witness a maskless Blago make his pitch.

"I'm one of your homies," former governor Rod Blagojevich told the crowd of about 25 or so Black MAGA lovers, few of whom bothered to wear a mask.

Wow. I mean—wow. If there's a voter in the universe—Black or white—moved to vote MAGA because of Blago's endorsement then . . . well, I don't know, maybe the qualifications for voter eligibility aren't high enough.

Oh, no—I feel a surge of Baby Boomer vote-shaming coming up . . .

Not proud of these moments. It's an affliction that comes with age. Be warned, millennials, it will happen to you in about 30 years, whenever you see an abnormal abundance of voter ignorance and irrationality.

Like, to go back to our example, Blago wooing Black voters for Trump by denigrating the Chicago Democratic Machine.

Let me pause to remind you that for better or worse, everything Blago got in politics he got as a result of his connections to the Democratic Machine.

In particular, his father-in-law—former Alderman Richard Mell—without whom Blago would never have been elected state representative, much less congressman, and then governor.

Black people voting MAGA because of Blago's endorsement is not even this campaign season's most self-destructive act.

That distinction goes to pensioners who plan to vote no on the Fair Tax in part because of a fraudulent TV commercial paid for by billionaires.

I'm alluding to the infamous commercial featuring Phyllis, a retiree from Park Ridge who tries to scare pensioners into voting against the Fair Tax on the grounds that it would slap a tax on their retirement income.

It won't do that.

Repeat, the Fair Tax won't do that.

Phyllis—or whoever wrote the script she's reading—just made that up.

I get so frustrated at the thought of Phyllis scaring retirees into voting no on the Fair Tax that I wind up howling at the moon . . .

Shame, shame, shame on you people!

Are people really going to take political advice from this guy? 🗳️ U.S. MARSHALS SERVICE

Even though I realize that shaming voters will never get you anywhere in campaigning. A message that lefties—like state senator Robert Peters and activist Amisha Patel—have been telling me for years.

I mean, you don't have to be Saul Alinsky to realize that insulting people is not a productive way to organize them.

Besides, I learned long ago that hate has a strong influence on voting behavior. It can even get people to vote against their own self interest.

It doesn't take much for MAGA voters to hate and thus vote against anyone who opposes Trump.

I bet there are many pro-police retirees on the northwest and southwest sides who hate Governor Pritzker because he's had nice things to say about the Black Lives Matter movement.

So, they'll vote against the Fair Tax largely because Pritzker supports it. And they figure by voting no they'll be punishing Pritzker, even though they're really punishing themselves. Let me explain . . .

The state does not tax retirement income—pensions included. To be even clearer, you pay zero state taxes on your retirement income. Pensions included.

The Fair Tax would raise the rates the wealthiest residents pay in state income tax. But it doesn't affect retirees—because retirement income is not taxed.

People, I'm trying to make this as clear as possible. So, one more time . . .

Pritzker could raise the highest rates to 50 percent, and it still would not affect retirement income. 'Cause—all together now—retirement income is not taxed by the state!

If the tax is zero, and they raise the rate to 50 percent, you still pay zero 'cause zero times 50 percent is still zero.

You freaking idiots!

Sorry, sorry, that was really inappropriate. I humbly apologize for that shameless outburst of shameism.

All the extra money raised with higher rates on the wealthiest residents would help pay for the state's massive obligations, including pensions. And so retirees could vote to have someone else fortify their pensions.

But, guess what—many will vote no because they hate Pritzker.

In contrast, those Black MAGA lovers cheer-

ing for Blago don't look so bad after all.

Here's a question for all you wannabe political scientists out there. How loyal is MAGA to Trump? We already know they'll vote for him even though he allegedly raped a woman, cheated on his taxes, and called American war heroes "losers" and "suckers."

But would they vote for the Fair Tax if he endorsed it? I think they would. Consider the evidence . . .

Blago was the epitome of Democratic corruption. The man Republicans used to turn Illinoisans against the Democratic party.

And then in a shrewd move, Blago started sucking up to Trump while he was still in prison. That motivated Trump to commute his sentence, largely on the grounds that Blago was set up by the same sinister deep-state forces that were going after him.

Now Blago's the public face of Trump's campaign in Illinois. He's so popular with Republicans that he was invited to be the featured speaker at a Republican fundraiser in Will County.

If Blago ran for governor in the 2022 Republican primary, he'd probably get a bunch of votes. With a few tweets from Trump, he might even win the nomination. Blago v. Pritzker—what a showdown!

Now imagine if Trump harnessed all of his power and tweeted out support for the Fair Tax. It would probably win by a landslide.

Sigh. If only my shaming had the power of one tweet from Trump. 🗳️

🐦 @bennyjshow

## artist, writer, performer?

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*The Dilemma of Desire* COURTESY THE DILEMMA OF DESIRE

## CULTURE

## The Dilemma of Desire

A new documentary celebrates cliteracy.

By DEANNA ISAACS

Given that—as legal pundit Jeffrey Toobin recently and so unexpectedly reminded us—everyone is sexual, here’s a question: If I handed you paper and pencil right now, could you draw a clitoris?

Not just the button. Could you draw the whole thing?

*The Dilemma of Desire*, a new documentary from Kartemquin and Chicago director Maria Finitzo, poses this question early on, and then takes a hard look at the reasons why you probably can’t, and their consequences.

For starters, neuroscientist Stacey Dutton pulls a vintage *Gray’s Anatomy* from her book shelf, locates “clitoris” in the table of contents, and then searches in vain for any discussion of this subject in the text, though there’s plenty there about the penis. “As a woman biologist,” Dutton asks herself, “how is it possible that I

don’t know what my own biology looks like?”

The answer, according to the film? We put a man on the moon in 1969, but it wasn’t until 1998 that the full clitoris was extracted from a human body. By a woman doctor.

The visible part of the clitoris, it turns out, is the tip of the iceberg—a tiny bowed head on a hidden neck. Behind it stands a staunch root with two pairs of branching appendages that hug the vagina. The entire, wishbone-shaped structure might bring to the boggled mind a tulip, or a cephalopod, or—for those inclined to something more anthropomorphic—a long-limbed, dancing humanoid.

If you already knew this, it could be because you’ve seen the work of Sophia Wallace, a New York-based artist who’s featured prominently in the film. Wallace turns the clitoris into jewelry and sleek metal sculpture, plasters

clitoris stickers on museum art, and is the creator of *Cliteracy: 100 Natural Laws*, a poster-style text installation that’s been touring since 2012, covering gallery walls with facts and proclamations like, “The Hole is Not the Whole,” and “Democracy without Cliteracy? Phallusy.”

She’s driven by the memory of her grandmother, who bore five children but didn’t think she’d ever had an orgasm.

The film intersperses glimpses of Dutton, Wallace, University of Utah psychology professor Lisa Diamond, and industrial designer Ti Chang (who creates sex toys that look like lipsticks and can be worn as pendants) with profiles of five Chicago women shot over a three-year period. Identified only by first name, they are artist and activator Coriama, Northwestern University dropout and strip-

per Jasmine, economist and budding stand-up comic Sunny, artist and poet Becca, and Umnia, whose memories and video clips from a loveless marriage make for some poignant, hard-earned wisdom.

There’s a lot of Chicago on screen: Coriama interviews bearded local drag queen Lucy Stooile, Becca gives away her poetry at a Fullerton Avenue bus stop, Sunny and a friend shop for vibrators in Lakeview, and Umnia reminisces about her father on a deck with a view of the downtown skyline at night. Jasmine strolls down Michigan Avenue, and the “Democracy without Cliteracy? Phallusy.” slogan is projected onto Trump Tower.

But the takeaway is anything but strictly local. The movie opens (and closes) with the searing words of Black lesbian poet and essayist Audre Lorde, initially in her own voice, reading from “Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power,” at Mount Holyoke College in 1978:

“The erotic offers a well of replenishing and provocative force to the woman who does not fear its revelation,” Lorde says in that essay. But also, “We have been taught to suspect this resource,” and to suppress it, because “women so empowered are dangerous . . . We have been raised to fear the yes within ourselves.”

The point is that the absence of information about the source of female erotic pleasure is no accident: it’s integral to a system that wants to control women and trap them in a position of inferiority. “Girls are separated from the reality of their bodies,” Wallace tells the camera: “They don’t think they have the right to feel good.”

“While this is a film about sexual desire,” Finitzo told me in a phone interview last week, “it’s mostly a film about equality and power, and how if you don’t understand the full capacity of your body in your life, then you’re disconnected from your power both politically and personally.”

*The Dilemma of Desire* was slated to premiere at SXSW in March, but it was canceled a week prior to screening by COVID. Finitzo is hoping for an in-person Chicago premiere in 2021, but we don’t have to wait that long to see it. It’ll be available for online viewing as part of the DOC NYC festival, November 11-19; tickets are \$12 at docnyc.net. **FI**

[@Deannalisaacs](#)



ANNA JO BECK

# What happened to YOUMedia?

The Chicago Public Library's flagship teen program was a refuge for Black and Brown youth. Recent layoffs put that in jeopardy.

By **TAYLOR MOORE**

Walk through the doors of the cavernous 5,500-square-foot YOUmedia space and your senses are overwhelmed immediately by the whirring of 3D printers, the shouts of middle schoolers locked in a tense game of *Mario Kart*, and ecstatic rhymes in the recording studio from a young artist who, years later, you'll swear you knew them way back when. On a typical school day afternoon, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, it wouldn't have been unusual to see 100 teens stream into—of all places—the Harold Washington Library downtown.

It's no wonder that Chicago's most respected rappers, such as Saba, Vic Mensa, and Mick Jenkins, extol the program's virtues. Chance the Rapper, YOUmedia's most high-profile alum, famously recorded much of his first mixtape, *#10Day*, at the Harold Washington recording studio—a closet outfitted with a microphone and a Mac desktop—during a two-week suspension from Jones College Prep High School. "I'm still Mr. YOUmedia," he raps in "Acid Rain," a single off his second mixtape, *Acid Rap*.

In "Yesterday," Bronzeville native Noname pays tribute to her beloved friend and mentor "Brother Mike" Hawkins: "Me missing Brother Mike, like something heavy / My heart just wasn't ready / I wish I was a kid again." Hawkins, who died in 2014 at age 38, was a founding YOUmedia mentor and "spiritual father to a generation of Chicago rappers," Leor Galil wrote for the *Reader* in 2014.

For Trey Raines, a 20-year-old rapper who performs as the Third, joining a YOUmedia open mike around 2014 was formative in his career. "Looking back, it's one of the weakest verses I have ever written," he recalls, laughing. "But to see everybody being really loud, gassing me, and cheering me on, it was amazing to see that. My confidence in my rap . . . started there."

Alex, a 17-year-old living on the south side, remembers the day he first walked into the YOUmedia lab of the Harold Washington Library his freshman year of high school. He originally came for the computers and 3D printers—"just overall expensive stuff that I couldn't afford"—but felt moved by the warmth of the mentors. "It's like that friend you make on the first day of school where you know you'll be friends," he says. They became invaluable not only for their expertise in STEM and the arts, but also for their life advice.

"It's rare for a high school student to have

an adult they could go to in a friendship capacity and professional capacity that wasn't a teacher or parent," says Matt Jensen, a founding YOUmedia mentor who left the library last year to move to Michigan. "Kids could come and talk to us about difficult topics, like 'I can't afford college' and 'I might be gay' and 'I don't know how I feel about this person in my house.'"

In the absence of a social safety net, YOUmedia mentors have also mobilized to respond to crises. "There were lots of occasions where kids would come to the library with problems that you hope would've been addressed in other arenas, like [homelessness]. Through having this teen space and nontraditionally trained library staff, we would be able to put them in contact with resources. . . . Kids could come in and it was a safe place for them to be sheltered," Jensen says.

Which makes what was to come all the more painful. In a surprise move on July 14, the Chicago Public Library Foundation, the nonprofit fundraising arm of the Chicago Public Library (CPL), laid off all staff members whose wages were funded by philanthropic grants. Among these workers (known as grant staff) were CyberNavigators, tech-support professionals who offered digital literacy training to adults; Teachers-in-the-Library, educators employed by the library as after-school tutors; and all the YOUmedia mentors.

More than seven months into the COVID-19 pandemic, Chicago unemployment stands at 11.7 percent, three times higher than the same time last year, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The hundreds laid off by CPL join 30 million unemployed Americans seeking work in a decimated job market. To the mentors laid off and the CPL librarians still at work, though, it's unclear why the layoffs needed to happen. "Before all of this, it really felt like they cared about us. Now I feel stupid for feeling that way," says one mentor. "They just left me out on the street."

Before YOUmedia was an institution, it was an experiment. Founded in 2009 as a MacArthur Foundation-funded partnership between the Chicago Public Library and the Digital Youth Network (DYN), an educational project centered on media arts, YOUmedia was built on a simple premise: "HOMAGO." It's an acronym based on a theory by Mizuko Ito, a media technology professor at the University of California, Irvine, that youth learning spaces should allow kids to do

three things: hang out, mess around, and geek out.

A storage room at the Harold Washington Library was cleared for a space that looked like a cross between a lab, an art studio, and a living room, intended to accommodate all three needs. "Ten years ago, we created these places that didn't exist. Youth need spaces that are designed to allow them to engage and tinker with one another," explains Dr. Nichole Pinkard, YOUmedia cofounder and founder of DYN.

Mentors were originally employed by DYN as specialists in STEM, art, music, and other creative disciplines. Unlike librarians, mentors were not required to go through the draconian city job application process or hold graduate degrees in library science (or any degree at all). Mentors were therefore more likely to have nontraditional professional backgrounds and were more diverse than the majority-white librarian workforce.

Jennifer Steele, a founding DYN mentor who worked as YOUmedia's partnerships manager and left in May to be executive director of 826CHI, describes the program's early success among teens as a "groundswell." Unlike other after-school programs, YOUmedia does not require application fees or an approval process to get in. The low-pressure environment of the library, understood as a public space, made it easy for teens to feel welcome. "Teens vote with their feet, and they ended up coming back," Steele says.

The YOUmedia model was so lauded that the concept was replicated in more than 20 other cities as part of the YOUmedia Learning Labs Network. YOUmedia spaces of varying sizes were carved out of 22 more branches across Chicago, staffed by either teen librarians (adult librarians who work in teen services), YOUmedia mentors, or a combination of the two. In a ten-year anniversary announcement last year, the library promised 30 total YOUmedia spaces by the end of 2020.

Over time, YOUmedia evolved from a space into a community. Not only has the program produced fashion shows, podcasts, literary magazines, and more, it's also given students agency. "It gave you experience in so many different things, but without the expectation that you needed to be good at it or that it needed to be graded," says one alum.

Such programs are vital not only because of the activities offered but also because they function as social safety nets for Black and

Brown youth. The majority of teens who visit YOUmedia are low-income and nonwhite. In a city that erodes public schools, community spaces, and social services in Black and Brown neighborhoods, YOUmedia felt like a refuge for many.

In 2015, DYN's contract with the city ended, and the mentors were switched to another employer—but it wasn't CPL. Mentors and all other grant staff were contracted by a staffing agency called Advanced Resources, which managed payroll and acted as the middleman for CPL communications. Unlike union-represented city staff, the largely part-time grant staff were not provided benefits such as health insurance and paid time off.

This was a source of tension for some grant staff and a source of confusion among city staff. "I never understood why they outsourced branch labor," says one teen librarian, who requested anonymity because CPL employees aren't allowed to speak to the press. "They should've been employees of the city and guaranteed their jobs."

Over the years, grant staff heard murmurings of management internally advocating for them to become city staff and some speculation that AFSCME Local 1215, the union that represents CPL workers, would want to work with them someday. (AFSCME Local 1215 did not respond to interview requests.)

Mentors and current librarians attribute this lack of urgency to City Hall politics. Carving out millions for these grant-funded programs would've taken a lot of political gymnastics, so it was cheaper and more expedient for the Chicago Public Library Foundation to continue courting philanthropists and corporate donors like Allstate, Comcast, and Boeing to fund public programs. "We questioned how much they were really fighting [for us]," says one mentor.

"[Mentors] don't get health care, but they loved the job so much they didn't want to leave," says another mentor. Engrossed in the day-to-day work of youth programming, mentors did not feel a sense of urgency when it came to advocating for themselves, a different mentor tells me. "We didn't realize in 2020 all of us would be laid off at the same time."

On March 17, Mayor Lori Lightfoot and Governor J.B. Pritzker acknowledged the severity of the COVID-19 outbreak by closing Chicago Public Schools. Libraries, however, were not part of the initial shutdown—a move that generated fierce pushback

from the library workers' union.

"We were the last major public library system to close," says one teen librarian. The New York Public Library closed on March 14, the Los Angeles Public Library closed on March 16, and the Boston Public Library closed on March 17. CPL closed a week later, on March 22.

Library workers employed by the city were sent home and paid their full salaries through the closures. Grant staff were given two weeks of pay. In a March 25 e-mail to grant staff, Brenda Langstraat, president of the Chicago Public Library Foundation, called YOUmedia and the other grant-funded programs "more essential than ever" and extended another week of wages. "Your work truly transforms lives," Langstraat wrote, promising regular updates on library operations. A week later, she followed up in another e-mail to suggest that YOUmedia mentors file for unemployment.

In mid-May, library branches began to reopen. One mentor says that at first, it was a relief they weren't called in to work so early in the pandemic, given uncertainty about the virus. On the other hand, the grant staff says they hadn't been informed that their branches were opening, and instead heard from other staffers.

Then the mentors started to worry. They tell me they didn't receive any communications from CPL, the Chicago Public Library Foundation, or Advanced Resources in May or June. It was "utter silence," according to one mentor, until July 14. In-person programming was paused indefinitely, a representative from Advanced Resources wrote in an e-mail to YOUmedia grant staff. "Given the likely long-term impact of COVID-19, CPL is reimagining it's [sic] current offerings and planning for future needs. At this time, YOUmedia mentors will not be rehired to work at branch locations."

According to the e-mail, the Chicago Public Library Foundation had to make "budget modifications given the many uncertainties in fundraising, including the YOUmedia budget," though it does not directly attribute the layoffs to lack of funding. The announcement came just two weeks before the \$600 weekly unemployment benefit from the CARES Act ended on July 31, which made the situation feel more dire.

"When I got the e-mail, I was crushed," says one mentor. They had fully expected to go back to work and had even been practicing new skills for future programs. "If there were

issues leading up to [the layoff], I would like to know why."

Three librarians tell me they were not notified by e-mail or in person by managers that their grant staff colleagues, with whom they worked daily, would not be coming back.

**"It really felt like they cared about us. Now I feel stupid for feeling that way. They just left me out on the street."**

*—YOUmedia mentor*

"This isn't a staff cut, and it's not a cut to services for teens. It's us following public health guidelines," library spokesperson Patrick Molloy tells me. According to Molloy, YOUmedia grant staff were contracted to provide specialized in-person programming, and because COVID-19 precautions prohibit in-person programs, it would've been impossible to keep them on the payroll.

Molloy points to the teen librarians, who are union-represented city staff, still employed and creating digital programs for YOUmedia. "The library and library foundation haven't made a decision to lay people off."

To some current library workers, CPL's purported concern over public safety feels disingenuous. One teen librarian says the library's delay in closing could have exposed librarians, their families, and patrons to COVID-19. And when their branch reopened in May, the only supplies they received were expired nonalcohol hand sanitizer, too-large latex gloves, and a box of 10 masks. The librarian ended up sewing homemade masks at their own expense to outfit the rest of the staff.

Some librarians speculate that the program was shut down because of budget shortfalls and the cancellation of key in-person fundraising events that the Chicago Public Library Foundation usually relies on—they earned it \$1,786,723 in net revenue last year. "The foundation loved [the mentors]. I don't think it was personal," one teen librarian says. Langstraat of the Chicago Public Library Foundation declined requests for an interview and deferred to CPL. A review of the foundation's financial statements shows that the nonprofit spent \$979,438 on teen programs in 2019, with \$673,723 going toward grant-funded positions. In April, the foundation applied for and received a \$147,500 Payment Protection Program loan through the CARES Act.

As for programming, it has all gone online. The annual ChiTeen Lit Fest, originally planned for April before the pandemic hit, will be all-virtual in November. During the summer, CPL teen librarians launched a Summer Learning Challenge program, a teen internship program through One Summer Chicago, author talks, and book clubs. One mentor calls the library's online summer programming "traditional out-of-touch stuff," since the planning seemed top-down and not arising from teens' natural interests.

Another mentor says they tried to persuade the administration to let mentors develop digital programming at the beginning of the pandemic, but those proposals fell on deaf ears. "They didn't communicate with us at all," they say. "If they had worked with us, and we didn't find a solution that worked, and the funding just wasn't there, and then they had to let us go, it would still be hard. But it wouldn't have been so heartbreaking, because we would've tried. It would've felt

like they cared."

Matt Jensen, the YOUmedia mentor who left in 2019, says he didn't understand why the mentors weren't asked to use their digital-media knowledge to build out online programming. "There's a huge amount of knowledge and experience that the library specifically paid to craft, and now they've just decided to jettison it. It seems like it's going to cost them far more money in the long run to rebuild that expertise. I don't know what kind of business decision that is."

The physical YOUmedia spaces have since reopened, but even the largest branches receive only a few teenagers a day. Walking through the Harold Washington Library's YOUmedia space on an August afternoon, you can feel a palpable sense of loss. A large table that once held an elaborate model train now sat empty. The recording studio is still closed, and the areas where teens used to play live music and video games were roped off with caution tape to enforce social distancing.

COVID-19 precautions prohibit the face-to-face interactions that would've been happening now, but that isn't why YOUmedia teens feel that they've been cut off from the relationships that originally bonded them to the program.

"This really angers me, because those people in the YOUmedia Center made it come alive. . . . They are my family," says one 18-year-old student, who asked to remain anonymous. Another teen named Samson says, "I could just tell by . . . spending time with them that they had genuine love for me and all the students who would go there—just something you can't replace."

Alex, the 17-year-old who started coming to YOUmedia his freshman year, says that right before the pandemic, he had been planning to work with mentors to build a telescope and experiment with astrophotography. With the quarantines and layoffs, he's had to scrape by on YouTube tutorials at home. "I should have professionals teach me how to do such things. . . . The administrators really don't know what they are taking away from YOUmedia."

YOUmedia mentors share stories of the economic anxiety they've faced while unemployed as well of the heartbreak they felt when laid off. "I'm sure I could've found something at Target for more hours, but I chose [working part-time at YOUmedia] because . . . it was an important job that needed doing," one mentor says. "Even when I had issues or problems to deal with, at the end of

# NEWS & POLITICS

the day I could say I love my job. . . . It's very frustrating to have my last memory of being in that space, not knowing it would be the last time."

"YOUmedia created a movement. It created something the city never thought [it would]," another mentor says. "This is a kid that's disenfranchised doing science. I would show them that they're smart enough to do this." Now, with the layoff, the mentor has stopped visiting their library branch altogether. "It's too emotional. Too much for me."


Library spokesperson Molloy says that the library will offer in-person YOUmedia programming as soon as possible, though he declined to answer whether or not the mentors laid off would be hired back. A petition asking Lightfoot to rehire the Chicago Public Library Foundation grant staff has received more than 200 signatures since July.

But even if the world were to return to normal a year from now, the mentors say the layoff was devastating enough they may not want to come back. "Knowing I am completely dismissable isn't an easy feeling to shake," one mentor says. "Stepping back into that role—and knowing that, [when CPL is faced with] hardship, you may be among the first people to go—isn't something I would take lightly."

As jarring as it was to lose their jobs, the mentors suspect the loss is taking a similar toll on the teens. Beyond losing access to hobby equipment, teens are also grieving the loss of a safe community space and of the knowledge that someone they admire and trust will always be at the library after school.

"A lot of these kids, it felt like they were my own children," says one mentor. "I watched them grow up. I watched them graduate. . . . It's difficult to know that work is over."

Many mentors still receive e-mails, messages on social media, and texts from teens they've mentored. Sometimes, the teens share art or music they've been working on in quarantine, or send messages to check in, like "How is your family during the pandemic? I miss you." Others ask when they can come back, when they can use the recording studio again, if they can get help with their homework.

One mentor says many of the teens haven't found out yet that the YOUmedia mentors don't work for the library anymore. "I don't have the heart to tell them." 

 @taylormooresays

## POETRY CORNER

### Chiraq

By Ciara Darnise Miller

A gang of white college frat boys walked into CVS  
loud & laughing the term "Chiraq".  
I turned around like the Black man  
in Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*,  
when the little French child said:  
/Look a Negro/  
because in naming, it's always about what you answer to.

In Bloomington, Indiana, a name like Chiraq  
is for the shadows of Chicago's west & south side  
where news stories about bullet wounds can only be compared  
to a Third World country.

The four frat boys continued to laugh  
as I remained stuck in an aisle confused  
about the meaning of artificial & natural flavors.

/Chiraq/  
I laughed & then laughed again at the memory  
of my saxophonist friend complaining about journalists  
who refer to his sound as "Coltraneish."  
The two sound nothing alike  
besides maybe an instrument.  
In this case, maybe a gun.

*Tell me what I sound like*, my friend demanded.  
So, I turned to the laughing frat boys & asked the same thing:

Do you pronounce it Chi-RACK OR Chi-ROCK?  
As in, who is the president of I-RACK or E-ROCK?  
As in, who came to occupy Englewood or North Lawndale?  
As in, do you even know about Englewood or North Lawndale?  
As in, who started the war anyway?  
As in, when you merge the names of a city & a nation  
do you know anything about either place?

The boys were stunned. One stepped forward  
with the "hands up, don't shoot" pose.

I fired anyway.

What does seven gunshots sound like to a girl

who comes home before streetlights glare

to avoid being gunned down?

Could it sound like home?

What do Iraqi children dream about besides war or religion?

Wasn't I the child stuffed in windowless classrooms built like prisons?  
Wasn't I the child given books with torn front & back covers,  
restrooms with ripped down doors where us girls had to pee  
in front of each other, quelling the awkwardness with reminders that  
*it's okay, we all have the same thing.*

Tell me about mothers raising children amongst bullets.  
Tell me about mothers who kiss their sons who carry guns  
& bullet wounds in their chests.  
Tell me about black-on-black crime.  
Tell me about human beings being murdered.

"It was just a joke", one of the gentleboys said.  
"You know, Chicago is a scary place."

I told him/them, that yes, I do know  
& that until they've actually held the names  
of girls & boys on their tongues  
for longer than a five second sigh at the deaths  
of people rendered invisible in this American landscape,  
don't talk to me about war. About bodies falling.  
About this Black. Body. Here.

What do you have to say to the woman whose name you speak?

/CHIRAQ/  
I am here, as alive as a ghost reborned  
in Bloomington, Indiana & when you call my name,  
always expect an answer.

Ciara Darnise Miller, a native of Chicago, holds both an MFA and MA in Poetry and African American/African Diaspora Studies from Indiana University. She also received her BA in Liberal Arts from Sarah Lawrence College. She has published poems and academic essays in such collections and periodicals as *The Whiskey of Our Discontent*, *Break Beat Poets*, *Mosaic*, *Fjords Review*, *African American Review*, *Callaloo*, *Muzzle*, *Alice Walker: Critical Insights*, *Chorus*, and many more. She currently lives in Chicago where she serves as an Afro-American Studies professor at Kennedy King College and the CEO of Miller's Learning Center (MLC), a test prep and career-support company.

A biweekly series curated by the *Chicago Reader* and sponsored by the Poetry Foundation. This week's poem is curated by poet Tara Betts. Tara Betts is the author of two poetry collections, *Break the Habit*, *Arc & Hue*, and the forthcoming *Refuse to Disappear*. She also co-edited *The Being of America* and edited a critical edition of Philippa Duke Schuyler's *Adventures in Black and White*. In addition to her work as a teaching artist and mentor for young poets, she's taught at prisons and several universities, including Rutgers University and University of Illinois-Chicago. In 2019, Tara published a poem celebrating Illinois' bicentennial with Candor Arts. Tara is the Poetry Editor at *The Langston Hughes Review* and the Lit Editor at *Newcity*. Betts is currently hard at work to establish The Whirlwind Center on Chicago's South Side.

### Free events at the Poetry Foundation

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MADE IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA



The Man's Country exhibit at the Leather Archives & Museum. ADAM M. RHODES

## BATHHOUSES

# Can these queer havens survive another pandemic?

Hookup apps and cultural changes had them barely hanging on. Then came COVID-19.

By ADAM M. RHODES

It's month eight of the pandemic, and while some might be wishfully thinking about enjoying a drink from their favorite bar or ordering their favorite meal in person in the hopefully not-too-distant future, others are waiting for when they can indulge in pleasures that are harder to order to-go.

On its exterior, Steamworks is rather unremarkable. Its door isn't clearly labeled. There aren't any posters or advertisements on the side of the building. It looks more like an armory or a warehouse than anything else.

But in true *if you know, you know* fashion, the space opens up once you're inside, past a check-in counter to a complex that includes a gym, a steam room, and saunas, as well as private rooms and public spaces to have sex—often called “play spaces”—and the opportunities they present.

To the untrained eye, gay bathhouses like Steamworks are mere dens of iniquity, where taps on the bathroom floor, a lingering glance, or a door ajar says much more than you'd expect; but to the initiated and the experienced, they are indeed that, but also so

much more.

“Yes, they're about sex,” says Gary Wasdin, executive director of the Leather Archives & Museum. “We don't run from that because, you know, sex is awesome. And having, you know, a lot of sex is awesome. But, there was always this concurrent side that was just as important, especially in the 60s and 70s, as bathhouses emerged and became popular. You know, even just meeting with your friends to hang out and chat was dangerous in this country.”

The explosion of dating apps and the

landmark 2003 U.S. Supreme Court decision striking down homophobic anti-sodomy laws have certainly made it safer and actually legal to seek out same-sex hookups. But even still, bathhouses have historically provided a certain amount of safety and ease to the gay male community that can't be denied.

And Wasdin says that continues to this day. Even finding hookup partners via apps comes with its own degree of risk, either in going to a stranger's home or having them come to you, as does meeting at bars and good ol' fashioned cruising. Bathhouses, Wasdin says, can provide a neutral, safe space to meet and have sex.

“For gay men in particular, bathhouses were about risk reduction,” Wasdin says. “And it's a place that allows you to meet others to have sex in a relatively safe environment; and so, you know, boom, March comes, that's gone.”

As with many other businesses amid the ever-continuing pandemic, bathhouses and play spaces are also under significant financial stress; and that's alongside a historic shuttering of these spaces, adding another head to the hydra of the forces that are closing these doors.

Like many explicitly queer spaces, bathhouses were frequently the target of homophobic vice raids in the 1960s and '70s. While gay sex was an obvious and significant part of bathhouses, the greater conversation about them has largely ignored the civic good also undertaken at these spaces.

A 2010 article from *World of Wonder*, the production company behind the *RuPaul's Drag Race* franchise, details that before the 1980 presidential election, the New St. Marks Baths in New York City and the League of Women Voters held a registration drive at the now-shuttered gay bathhouse.

And according to an exhibit at the Leather Archives & Museum about the now-closed Man's Country bathhouse in Chicago, owner Chuck Renslow closed the glory holes and the orgy room at the bathhouse in the 1980s after the HIV/AIDS crisis reached the city.

According to the exhibit, safe sex pamphlets and condoms were passed out at the bathhouse after the HIV virus had been identified, and STI testing was done at a clinic upstairs at the bathhouse.

That community work continues to this



In addition to its gym, whirlpool, and glory holes, Man's Country had retail shops and a music hall.

© ADAM M. RHODES

one of such folks.

Through Twitter DMs, he says he would go to Steamworks, as he put it, to relax.

"I mainly go for the jacuzzi and sauna, relax, and if someone starts chatting or wants to have fun then I let it happen," he says.

But the advent of social networking apps, and the ability for queer people to meet in public without as pronounced a fear of arrest, assault, or worse, has undoubtedly impacted bathhouses' finances, causing many to shutter across the country. That trend reached Chicago just three years ago, when Man's Country closed at the end of 2017.

Gary Chichester was the first manager at Man's Country when it opened in 1973.

"A lot of times there were customers that didn't particularly like to go out to the bar scene," Chichester says. "Man's Country was a little more comfortable; bathhouses are more comfortable. There was more space between people, you didn't have to push and shove, and the intensity of the cruising, et cetera. But then we also had some of the best talent, you know, in what was then called the K-Y Circuit."

During its 44 years in Chicago, Man's Country evolved into a complex of repeatedly changing spaces. Local gay historian Owen Keehnen, who co-wrote with *Reader* publisher Tracy Baim a biography of Chuck Renslow, says Man's Country at one point boasted a leather shop and a shop selling western wear, alongside its gym, whirlpool, glory holes, and music hall.

"I think one of the things that [Renslow] really focused on was that it was much more than a place to go just for sex; it was also a communal area," Keehnen says. "It was very important to him to have the music hall, and that the music hall, you know, would have entertainment. And it could be a place to socialize."

Renslow also founded the International Mr. Leather contest that draws thousands to Chicago every year.

In an essay on his website, "Brotherhood of the White Towel," Keehnen also described how Man's Country brought in popular performers with a gay cult following, including Boy George, the Village People, and Divine.

And as a testament to the love for Man's

day, albeit in a different form.

Emjay Rawls, who worked at Steamworks from November 2015 to October of 2018 and calls it the best job she's ever had, says that the bathhouse often sponsors events in the community at popular gay bars in Boystown, including Hydrate, Roscoe's Tavern, and Sidetrack.

Rawls says Steamworks also financially contributes to annual pride celebrations in the city.

"The Pride Parade literally is all because of Steamworks and all the money they dish out. That's just all Steamworks," says Rawls, whose most recent position at Steamworks was lead clerk.

Similarly to Man's Country's efforts in the height of the HIV/AIDS crisis, Rawls says that when Steamworks was open before the pandemic, the bathhouse worked with LGBTQ+ organizations Center on Halsted and Howard Brown Health to conduct STI testing on site.

And if that's not enough to dispel preconceived notions that bathhouses are petri dishes of STIs and other diseases, Dr. Gregory Phillips II of Northwestern University says

he observed robust sexual health practices among bathhouse patrons when he was part of a CDC-funded study in the National HIV Behavioral Surveillance program back in 2011.

The NHBS program, founded in 2003, studies behaviors of populations at high risk for HIV infection, such as men who have sex with men, and is conducted in 22 cities around the country—including Los Angeles, Chicago, New York, and San Juan, Puerto Rico.

Phillips, who directs the Evaluation, Data Integration and Technical Assistance program at Northwestern's Institute for Sexual and Gender Minority Health and Wellbeing, says that as part of that study, he recruited participants at bathhouses, observing that their safe-sex practices were nothing out of the ordinary.

"We had lots of questions about number of partners, condom use, types of sex they were engaging in, and we didn't really find anything that stood out in terms of like, 'Oh, yeah, these people are using less condoms, or they're having more partners.' It was just people engaging in the same level of behavior," Phillips says. "There's a difference be-

tween the ease of finding a sex partner versus the riskiness of the behavior."

But a shuttered bathhouse or play space isn't just a lost venue for sex; for those without robust queer communities around them, bathhouses and places like them can be a lifeline to crucial community and intimacy.

Northwest Indiana resident Harvey Quinn, 31, says Steamworks was an escape from what he called the "cultural wasteland" around him. Quinn says that before the pandemic, he had only been a handful of times but plans to go back, as he put it, "the moment it's open."

And Rawls says she saw a lot of Steamworks patrons there just to socialize. For them, she says, sex felt like a bonus.

"A lot of clients came in there just for the social interaction of it all and just to like, use our facility, use the jacuzzi, and just chill out," Rawls says. "A lot of these people, they're running 24/7, running all types of hours throughout the day, and they just want to go there to relax."

One Steamworks patron, a 29-year-old Latino male who says he went to Steamworks roughly once a month before the pandemic, is



## SEX ISSUE

Country, a 13-hour New Year's Eve party closed the storied space, with some patrons taking a literal piece of it with them. Adam and Skye Rust, the owners of Andersonville's Woolly Mammoth Antiques & Oddities, removed a handful of the glory holes in the days after the space closed, selling all but one. The remaining glory hole now hangs proudly in their shop.

But despite the historic good these spaces have done, for some gay people like Michael Gifford, who loaned a salvaged Man's Country glory hole to the Leather Archives & Museum in June 2019, bathhouses are a microcosm of some of the most serious problems facing the community, namely chemsex—or sex under the influence of drugs—and blurred lines of consent.

“Even though there need to be safe sexual spaces for different people, we really have to be open and honest with ourselves that there are serious problems going on in Boystown whenever it comes to taking advantage of young people of color,” Gifford says. “And within our own community, there needs to be a serious reconciliation with drugs and alcohol abuse.”

Chemsex isn't a problem exclusive to bathhouses, and Wasdin says that in his experience, bathhouses' typically robust check-in policies weed out most drug use before it makes it into the space. And he says bathhouses are no less safe than anywhere else people illicitly use drugs—bars, clubs, and their own homes.

He acknowledged there are typically two or three drug-related deaths at Steamworks every year that are often labeled as heart failure or something similar.

The importance of these quasi-public spaces doesn't just stop at a bathhouse or the back room of a bar, however. Sophia Chase owns and operates Chicago Dungeon Rentals, which offers BDSM dungeons for sex workers and the casual kinkster alike. She says a space that allows even just two people to be sexually free is an important lifeline that the pandemic has cut off from many.

“For a lot of people, a very important part of not only their identity, but their self-care is their sexuality,” Chase says. “And then people cannot play at home, if they have kids, [or] they have roommates, you know, if their elderly parents live with them.”

Kink, in particular, can be important for her clients' mental health, Chase says.

“Kink, whether it includes sexual activity

or it doesn't, is such a stress reliever for people,” Chase says. “A lot of clients come to see me, and come to see other mistresses because it is like a steam valve for the pressure cooker of life, and all of a sudden you don't have that. And now, we have even that much more stress on us with everything happening. And that normal place where people would have that outlet, all of a sudden isn't there. And so people's mental health suffers.”

But even in the world of bathhouses and rentable dungeons, impacts of the pandemic are not created equal.

Smaller, locally-owned spaces like Chicago Dungeon Rentals are under greater threat than corporate-owned chains like Steamworks, which has locations in Seattle, Berkeley, Toronto, and Vancouver.

Chase says she had to shut down her dungeons completely during the Chicago stay-at-home order, and since the gradual reopening, her business is roughly half of what it was before the pandemic. As someone who is immunocompromised, Chase says she will not be able to safely work until there is a vaccine available.

And though it might go without saying, corporate-owned chains are much more likely to weather the economic fallout from 2020's compounding crises than your average mom-and-pop bathhouse.

“Smaller local organizations just don't have the resources to go a year with no income, you know, while you're still paying rent bills and things like that,” Wasdin says. “So yeah, I think there's a huge likelihood that some of them will close.”

If there is a silver lining to any of this—and it would be a microscopically thin lining at that—it's that the pandemic has illuminated among many queer folk and queer adjacent just how important these safe spaces are to the community.

And hopefully, Wasdin says, that translates to visitors and financial support for these spaces once the pandemic is over.

“Our gathering spaces are dwindling, but at the same time, I feel like during the pandemic, at least we're reminded about how important those spaces are,” Wasdin says. “It's human nature, we take things for granted, we expect they'll always be there. So it feels like at least many of us have maybe developed a greater understanding and appreciation that those spaces are still open.” 

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# Sex and the suburbs

The swinging lifestyle creates solace and friendship for those seeking sexual freedom.

By **S. NICOLE LANE**

“Swinging is like any other social activity, just dialed up to 11,” says Andrew\*, 41. He and his wife first began swinging shortly after they began exploring nonmonogamy in 2018. Before the pandemic, the couple would frequent a western-suburb location every two months.

Swinger parties usually have a set of rules, require an ID, cost some money, and take place in hotels or private homes. Some clubs and parties have been occurring for years, while others are simply pop-ups. But there is a looming threat of them being shut down by city officials, particularly suburban locations

where ordinances impact the ease of having a party in your home without your neighbors calling the cops.

In Markham, Illinois, Mayor Roger Agpawa has been working toward closing adult swinger clubs and specifically targeted Couples Choice, a popular location that has a dance

floor and 18 bedrooms. In March, the owner and his son were arrested for operating an illegal business in a residential area. When I first started writing and researching this piece a year ago, the Couples Choice hyperlink was dead. Now, the website is back up again and explicitly states that, “This is not a business

MADDIE FISCHER

in any way and under no circumstances should be viewed as one. Couples Choice Social Club is a gathering of like-minded adults who enjoy the lifestyle.” Agpawa started the “Clean up Markham” campaign, closing strip clubs and other so-called “seedy” businesses in order to solve the crime and corruption concerns in the south-suburban town with a population of 13,000. Unlike Agpawa’s belief that swinging leads to crime, Rachel Zar, a licensed marriage and family therapist from Spark Chicago Therapy and Northwestern Medicine’s Center for Sexual Medicine, says just like any sexual activity, safety is key for swingers. Clubs offer solace and community for patrons because there is “security, boundaries, and rules” within these spaces. She says, “It’s interesting that there’s this idea out there that sex clubs are inherently dangerous, but I’d argue that would be the exception, not the rule. I’d liken it to restaurants that don’t follow health codes—they’re out there, and they’re worth taking precautions against, but that doesn’t mean that all restaurants should be shut down just in case.”

Couples Choice owner Tim Geary told WGN that his guest list is made up of doctors, nurses, dentists, and police, “I mean, they’re everyone,” he says. First, Agpawa told Couples Choice they had code violations. The club spent thousands of dollars to fix these concerns. Then, there was a zoning issue which turned into the passing of the “No Live Sex Act” ordinance. Peoria enacted a similar ordinance in 2011 which prohibits businesses where folks can watch or view live sex. In a 2019 city council meeting, Alderman William Barron said that Markham is a “Christian-based town,” and just because the club has been there for 30 years doesn’t “make it right.”

Dr. Mary Madrake, a clinical psychology postdoctoral resident at Balanced Awakening in Chicago, says, “Much of society still views different types of kink, including swinging, BDSM, and other aspects of kink as abnormal or deviant, which can take a toll on the mental health of those who identify as part of these communities. Having a place in which individuals within these communities can express their authentic selves without experiencing stigma and judgment is really important.” Online communities are also imperative: social media, FetLife, Facebook, Twitter, and Only-

Fans have become a way for kink communities to thrive safely.

“When places are closed due to complaints or legal issues, this can also increase the negative views of individuals not involved in these communities, who could then view the community as causing trouble or engaging in unacceptable activities,” says Madrake on the closing of swinger clubs. By increasing the understanding of these spaces and communities, society can change their preconceived, often harmful judgements.

When I ask Andrew what swinging means for him and how folks can break down stereotypes surrounding the clubs, he says it’s a way for him to let loose and to “have fun with the woman I love more than anything else in the world. If I or my wife thinks someone is attractive, we don’t have to bury that feeling. We can communicate and have fun with it.”

Since the pandemic, the couple has been staying away from parties. “We have been pretty down about missing that part of our lives during this pandemic but ultimately understand. We have heard of some groups getting together to do Zoom meetups and other online events involving some level of nudity and sex, but for us, that’s nowhere close to satisfying, plus the possible security issues make that a no-go,” explains Andrew. Many clubs have closed during the pandemic due to “disagreements concerning how to safely get together,” as well as “disagreements about how dangerous the virus really is.” For Andrew and his wife, they are learning to adapt without attending parties. “Since swinging for us was always more of a bonus to add some fun than a need, we’re both pretty fulfilled in a lot of ways still.”

A club in Indiana did attempt to organize an event during the pandemic at a Roseland Hotel with 160 participants. However, someone leaked this information to the authorities. Organizers of the party explained that folks concerned with COVID-19 would wear different color bracelets that were assigned different meanings. Red would mean “do not approach, we are social distancing,” yellow would mean, “do not touch without consent,” and green would mean, “you can touch me, I’m here for human contact.” Ultimately, the party was canceled.

Carla, AKA the Purple Diva, 45, runs an inclusive members-only lifestyle club, Always Wanting More (AWM), out of the western suburbs near Elgin. When I mention the closure of swinger clubs due to ordinances,

she laughs and says, “There’s a lot of us.” Last year I attended Karen Yates’s *Wild & Sublime* talk show event at Constellation where Yates read aloud quotes from folks who were upset over a recent club closing in the southwest suburbs. Carla reassures me that there are clubs popping up everywhere.

With 11 years of experience under her belt, Carla knows how to run the show. After the end of her marriage, she began searching online for clubs, and after attending a few events, Carla says she realized what she liked and didn’t like. As a result, she opened up her own club. “I thought to myself, ‘I can do this better,’” and that’s exactly what she did.

After being in the swinger community for three months, she started hosting hotel parties. “I’m a big girl, I’m a normal person, I’m not a Barbie. I like sex just like the next person. Why can’t I have my own club? Why can’t I have a space where people like me feel comfortable?” she says.

Carla was always honest with the hotel staff about hosting an adult party behind closed doors. After some time, she decided to host parties once a month in the house where she lives near Elgin. The Purple Diva’s parties have a cover of \$20 for women, \$50 for a couple, and \$60 for men. In other clubs, women can get in free, but Carla says, “I’m providing you a meal. I’m providing you supplies. I’m providing you a venue.” Like many swinger parties, food is offered, but Carla goes above and beyond by cooking a full buffet dinner (think: enchiladas, lasagna, “actual good food”). There are non-alcoholic beverages and it’s BYOB (sloppiness is not accepted in swinger clubs). Supplies like condoms, puppy pads (for those who are messier than the next), lube, towels, and shampoo are all offered for the price of entry. With room for 150 guests, her four-bedroom, four-bathroom house is converted into a sanctuary for couples and singles. The guest list for Carla’s parties generally includes those in their 30s to 50s, and she requires that folks are 21+. However, she says those numbers aren’t set in stone. She does see folks in their 20s and over 60 as well. “It’s just mature people who know whatever the hell they want,” she tells me.

Carla lives in the house with her children, who are in their 20s and help her set the house up before each event but leave once it begins. She has security, tour guides, kitchen staff, and a front desk with a check-in. “My staff members are like family. We hang out all of the time,” she explains. One staff member drives three hours just to help Carla with her

parties. When guests check in, they are given a colorized name tag that indicates what they are looking for throughout the evening. A girl looking for other girls is indicated with a pink tag, bisexual folks have a purple tag, straight women looking for men will wear a blue tag, and red tags are for folks just checking things out and observing. New folks have a cherry sticker on their name tag.

“My landlord knows what I do. They don’t have a problem. My neighbors, however, don’t exactly like me,” she explains. She’s had issues with parking, where folks legally take up all of the spots for ten hours one day a month. Every now and then, a disgruntled neighbor will call the cops. “I’m not hurting anybody. I barely play music in the house. You can’t even tell that I have 100 people in my house other than the parking. It could be anybody on the street. So that’s the slight issue I’m having currently, but that’s my own issue because I’m using my own residence,” she says when we talk before the pandemic. Before she moved into the house, she specifically checked the parking and city codes. The city is aware of what kind of parties she’s throwing and they do not care as long as she doesn’t violate parking or noise. “My next house will have a parking lot!” she says.

In terms of ordinances, clubs have to deal with minute details to find loopholes, which means the city will also find loopholes. Carla explains that she wasn’t able to publicly share a link online for her parties, and other cities don’t allow folks to run a business out of a residential space. Just like other owners, Carla is dedicated to her events. “I could be deathly ill and I would still have a party,” says Carla. “Something has to be significant for me not to have one.” Recently, on her website, she wrote that she has had to cancel all events during the pandemic and that, “NO ONE should be hosting any lifestyle events at this time,” because it is “impossible to maintain social distancing.” All of the profit that Carla does make goes right back into the party. She has a regular 9-to-5 job and says that the parties do not financially sustain her. Although she invests time, money, and energy into the events, it’s more of a passion project. If she’s having a party on Saturday, she says the planning and coordinating begins on Tuesday and doesn’t stop until Sunday.

Cook County has an ordinance regarding exchanging money when it comes to sex. Many clubs use the term “membership” as a loophole. Folks can buy a membership for an evening which blurs the idea of folks paying

for sex as commerce. This is why many more clubs exist outside of the city limits where regulations and ordinances vary per city. That isn't to say swinger parties aren't happening in Chicago; they are just more private. "You have to get on things like FetLife or SLS" to find parties happening around the city, says *Wild & Sublime* founder Yates.

Yates explains to me over a Zoom call that it's been a small coming-out process for her. Last year in November, we met up at a coffee shop in Lincoln Square where we briefly discussed her experiences in the swinger community, but on our Zoom call, we got into the nitty gritty. Now that she's started a podcast and her thoughts on sex positivity are publicly being shared, she says, "I'm so much more comfortable being like, 'I'm a sex positive babe, and I have sex.'"

About five years ago, she attended her first swinger party as a single woman. A previous partner led her through the process and explained how the parties work. "It was so new to me," she says. "I was so intrigued and I was so frightened simultaneously. It was this push-pull."

"I did not want to be around heteronormative people. I knew enough about swingers to know that it was extremely heteronormative. The men were content to see two women getting it on, but God forbid two men actually touch," explains Yates. "What I did was I spent a month or two researching online trying to find a party." She decided to look for explicitly bisexual male-friendly parties. As a result, she found Couples Choice. Dawn and Dave ran Couples Choice in Markham for 16-and-a-half years before it was closed down by the town's mayor. "It is explicitly bi-friendly and a larger number of men are allowed," explains Yates.

While it wasn't a queer scene by any means, it was still largely open and accepting. Through Couples Choice, she found folks having parties in Chicago inside of people's homes.

Yates explains to me that hotel takeovers happen a lot more than private housing parties. Renting an entire floor is easier and more relaxed than dedicating your entire home to a party. "People just run around and they fuck," says Yates. "It's also a way for people to organize larger sex parties. They will rent out two adjoining suites and invite 15 friends who all chip in. People are creative if they need mattresses."

When I ask Yates about the demographics at swinger parties, she tells me, "In the cis-heteronormative world, they are younger, under 40. Swingers in their 20s and 30s. And then there's the swinger umbrella term that is going to typically skew a little older. My assumption is that people start knowing their sexual proclivities as they get older. Second, if people have been in long-term relationships, eventually [they] want to add something to it. There are these two dynamics."

In my research, I've found that clubs can be very segregated and specific. "A lot of times they are very white," says Yates. "What you see happening are more specialized swinger clubs, or sometimes, like at Couples Choice, they always rented out to specialized groups. And by 'specialized,' I mean African American, Latino, bisexual." Cities like New Orleans, Miami, and San Francisco have more flourishing swinger parties and clubs that aren't getting shut down by law enforcement. "But in [Chicago], there is not as much interplay. However, if you're looking at queer play parties, those are different than swinger parties. There are subtleties. There are differences. After a while I found that the swingers parties

were a little bit bloodless," explains Yates.


She describes her experiences at swinger parties like a "hit and run." She had a harder time building relationships, whereas with queer parties in the city, there is "emotional juice" developing between folks as there is more fluidity. "At first, swinger parties were super, super fun for me in my sexual journey. It felt like a fucking playground. After a while, I was like, 'eh.'" She explains that the certain amount of effort in going to the parties eventually wore on her, and like with any process, she began to learn more about herself. "I took time off, but I probably will return." For a year, Yates says she used to go every other month to a party, but then she started to move toward the private play parties (with more curated guest lists) that were more interactive and relational. "That was the next phase for me," she says.

One woman in particular who threw private parties recently moved away, leaving Yates feeling crushed. The guest list was curated and invite-only which eradicated any feelings of uneasiness for Yates. "It's a very real factor. It's like a dance club. Like, 'Hey babe, wanna dance?' and you're like, 'No . . .'" Although Yates assures me the parties are a safe environment, there is still an effort to navigate the space and manage single cis men. Hosts and hostesses have to calibrate how many guests make sense. There can't be too many single cis men, but there do need to be enough. "If there are too many single men, the men who are partnered feel threatened. Again, this is a hetero thing," so hosts of the parties have to make sure there is an even ratio where certain folks don't overpower the others in the overall setting.

I ask Yates if she has any tips for how newbies can get into the swinging lifestyle.

She reminds me, "You don't have to play at a play party." Folks can simply attend and walk around and watch. "Yes, people are voyeurs, so it's a very real sexual thing. But a lot of times in couples, one person in a couple wants to swing and their partner is not on board with it, so the person who wants to says, 'Well let's just go to a party and you can at least see it. We don't have to do anything, or we can go have sex by ourselves in a corner.' And that happens! That's enough of a thrill." Yates explains that there isn't one way to play the swinger scene. "You don't even have to take your clothes off. A lot of times what happens is that [people] are getting less and less dressed. In terms of exploration, you can just go and not do a damn thing." In the past few years, Yates hasn't played as much as she used to, but she still attends.

But the sex positivity community is essential for Yates. She literally created an event where she interviews sex experts to combat stereotypes and taboos. "People who live outside of the heteronormative, monogamous culture often experience a good amount of sexual shame—they may feel that they have to live in secret; it can often feel isolating, and they may have experienced ridicule from others," explains Zar, the marriage and family therapist. "Shame can be healed by feeling like part of a community, knowing that you're not alone, and sharing your experience with others."

For many folks, swinging involves friendship and community more than sex. The safety and ability to eradicate shame creates a healthy, consensual space for folks. When I ask Carla what the swinger community means to her, she says, "They are my best friends." 

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## RETAIL THERAPY

# Sex shops offer pleasure at a distance amid COVID-19

They're seeing different kinds of clientele and more intentional shopping.

By **EMMA OXNEVAD**

When Chicago businesses saw citywide shutdowns as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic earlier this year, Eric Kugelman says that he “went into shock.”

Kugelman, one of the owners of adult entertainment store Leather 64Ten, says that the store quickly adapted their in-person business model to a curbside pickup and home delivery service. The store still includes these services, in addition to new regulations for in-person shopping.

“We allow up to seven people at a time in the store, and that doesn’t include the employee,” he says. “We’ve already had one incident where we’ve had a line out front; that was when the bars first reopened on a Saturday night. There was a line to get into the bar and

there was a line to get into the store.”

While businesses throughout the city have had to make various concessions in order to prevent the spread of coronavirus, sex shops are faced with the unique challenge of providing an intimate service from a distance.

Searah Deysach, owner of Early to Bed in Andersonville, remarks that the usual personalized customer service of the store has suffered as a result of social distancing.

“Pre-COVID, our staff had this ability to help multiple people at a time and to really get up close and personal and talk to people about the specific product,” she says. “It’s so much easier to show somebody the features of a vibrator when you feel more comfortable standing close to them. There’s a lot that this kind

of barrier puts between us that just makes it harder to really make that connection and help somebody figure out what they want.”

Retailers have also remarked that masks—while mandatory in stores—can lead to further challenges with communication.

“Because of the delicate conversations, it’s not ideal to be [six] feet away from people and masked up and asking them to repeat what they said, but we’ve definitely worked around it,” says Natalie Figueroa, store manager at HUSTLER Hollywood.

Deysach says that the reduced customer capacity ultimately prioritizes patrons explicitly looking to purchase. This can reduce the more “casual” shopping experiences of those looking to educate themselves on sexual response

and gender identity, among other topics.

“We’re still providing education, obviously, but it’s a little different in that we don’t have that group of people who are using us as a place to learn solely, as opposed to just, you know, coming in and buying stuff,” she says. “So I miss that. I think that it’s what has to happen right now; we have to really focus on people who are coming in to buy something.”

In spite of the challenges associated with adapting store operations, Deysach says that Early to Bed has seen an increase in customer engagement since the start of the pandemic.

“I would say that people staying home has led them to spend more time with their bodies or their partners, and they are definitely trying new things,” she says. “I think people are bored, and they’re masturbating more than they were before. People are still having relationships with their bodies and their partners and they’re looking for ways to make it more fun, more interesting, more satisfying. So we have had an OK time surviving this.”

While Kugelman says that Leather 64Ten is currently “running 30 percent down,” he also notes the store has recently seen a more diverse client base, namely couples looking to experiment sexually.

“We’re finding people to be more interested and curious than normal. It’s something that’s happened since this has all started,” he says. “They have so much time on their hands so a lot of people are having sex. We’re getting a different type of customer. It’s not just the kids, the club kids, and the gay people. It’s the heterosexual coming in and exploring.”

While adult retailers are still finding their footing in regard to adapting to the pandemic, Figueroa says that access to exploring one’s sexuality is crucial during an ever-tumultuous time.

“In this moment, we deserve the pleasure and as much pleasure and joy as we can get. And it’s so difficult for us to access those things right now because of the stress that everyone is under,” she says. “And so we get to offer people pleasure and joy and then also a sort of escape, like a little bit of a fantasy, where they can go into a different world and they don’t have to really deal with everything that is bombarding them all.”

@emmaoxnevad



Gaby Labotka and Carin Silkaitis JOE MAZZA/  
COURTESY CARIN SILKAITIS

## SAFE SEX SCENES

### Intimacy directors protect actors

They promote boundaries, communication, and respect.

By **ALMANYA NARULA**

Seven months and over 223,948 lives lost. As a theater practitioner who has given her heart, soul, and emotional well-being to her craft, I think a lot about how we protect artists going forward. As studios resume production, theater conservatories open up to students, and theatrical unions release their own COVID-19 guidelines, we have to consider the importance of personal boundaries and emotional safety of every individual involved with these productions.

I can't help but think about the importance of intimacy directors during this time period and their role as we transition back into the world of entertainment.

Intimacy direction is a practice in which a trained movement practitioner is employed for a stage or film production to choreograph a simulated sex scene or an intimate moment. They are the advocate for the actors in the room and act as a voice between them, the director, and the rest of the crew.

This practice was codified by Tonia Sina via her theater pedagogy graduate thesis, "Intimate Encounters; Staging Intimacy and Sensuality," in 2006 at Virginia Commonwealth University. She eventually cofounded a non-

profit, Intimacy Directors International (IDI) with Alicia Rodis and Siobhan Richardson in 2016, with its core pillars being "Context, Consent, Communication, Choreography, and Closure."

Rodis was one of the key players responsible for bringing this practice to TV/film during the #MeToo movement with HBO's *The Deuce*. Cast member Emily Meade advocated hiring an intimacy director to showrunner David Simon, in part because of past uncomfortable on-set experiences.

Rodis was hired for a new position—the intimacy coordinator. Rodis's work on *The Deuce* was so successful that HBO pledged to have an intimacy coordinator on board for every production involving intimate scenes.

Since then, Rodis has also collaborated with SAG-AFTRA to create new standards and protocols to address intimacy on set and to make an intimacy coordinator a requirement for any scenes that involve intimacy.

IDI closed its doors on March 15, 2020, giving way to a new company—Intimacy Directors & Coordinators (IDC)—that provides online workshops, education, and pathways to certification for intimacy direction and coor-

dination while assisting "in preventing sexual harassment in the workplace."

Recently We See You W.A.T.—an organization created to combat racism and prejudice within American theater—demanded "the presence of a contracted intimacy director for every production."

Chelsea Pace, an intimacy choreographer, coordinator, and educator, developed her own pedagogy for staging theatrical intimacy. She eventually collaborated with Laura Rickard in cofounding Theatrical Intimacy Education (TIE) in 2017, specializing in "researching, developing, and teaching best practices for staging theatrical intimacy."

Their core principles are "Ethical, Efficient, and Effective." They have worked with multiple institutions including Boston University, Princeton, and most recently Columbia College Chicago to further education surrounding theatrical intimacy.

Carin Silkaitis, chair of the Columbia College Chicago theater department, has worked alongside both IDC and TIE on numerous occasions. She finds tremendous value in the work both from an education standpoint and an industry standpoint.

Silkaitis said, "When I was going through theater school, it was truly horrifying. I remember teachers being so cavalier about these things, and it was so damaging. They would say things like 'Y'all know you want to go rehearse and make out with each other, so have a good time!' I was put in so many situations where I had to go to my scene partner's house to rehearse and when we got to the kiss scene, he pushed me back to his bed and was like 'Well, while we are at it.' I was just put in unsafe situation after unsafe situation, and I didn't know what to do. I just never want anybody to go through this ever again!"

After reading Pace's book *Staging Sex: Best Practices, Tools, and Techniques for Theatrical Intimacy*, Silkaitis decided to work in collaboration with Pace to create a program at Columbia College Chicago.

They hosted workshops for both undergraduate students and faculty supported by the department "to create a culture of consent and to outline a system of best practices that we can work together at this department, so that everyone in my program is speaking the same language," said Silkaitis. She and Pace are also currently pushing for a graduate certification program in collaboration with TIE.

Gaby Labotka is a performer, fight choreographer, writer, director, and certified intimacy director with IDC. I spoke to her about intimacy direction and COVID-19.

Labotka said, "When there's a vaccine and a way to safely return to the rehearsal hall, I believe that intimacy directors are going to be our shepherds to being able to be close to each other again. Intimacy directors are armed with the knowledge of how to articulate, share, and respect boundaries between people. Now everybody has a better awareness of boundaries because of COVID-19. A mask and six feet apart are measurable, vital boundaries, and for so long theatermakers were taught not to have boundaries. The only option was to say 'yes, and,' but that doesn't allow for actual consent if you are only allowed to say 'yes.' Now everybody has a boundary of a mask and boundary of distance, and it may be easier to articulate boundaries because now everyone has practical experience with them. I think intimacy directors are going to be the ushers back into creating safe and healthful work."

Labotka also noted, "Zoom productions are creating interesting problem-solving opportunities for us. It's tricky because if the script says there is nudity, you can't do nudity over Zoom and you can't necessarily simulate sex acts because the line is still nebulous. I would ask the director the same questions as if I was choreographing for the stage anyway: 'What does this nudity or sex act mean to you? What are feelings you want the audience to get from this? What is the story that you are trying to tell? Why does the playwright want this character to be nude?' We can then have a conversation to figure how we can accomplish that without using actual nudity. For example, do they just shed a layer of clothing and still have a tank top underneath it?"

"Figuring out how can we communicate a sex act and its meaning to the audience without simulating it, what the context is, why we're telling that story, what do we want the audience to feel . . . That's how we can be creative on how we interpret those stage directions and to permeate the feelings that we want through the computer screen."

We're in a time when individuals are trying to navigate their own boundaries and what that means, especially while sharing a rehearsal space with someone else after being quarantined for nearly seven months. We need intimacy directors now more than ever, for our emotional, mental, and physical safety.

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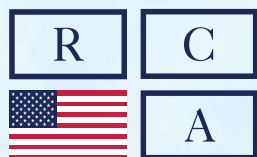
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Elsa Hiltner © JOEL MAISONET

## FAIR PAY

## Transparent by design

Elsa Hiltner crunches the numbers on theater designer salaries.

By **SHERI FLANDERS**

This past week, Theatre Communications Group (TCG) announced that its job search engine, ARTSEARCH, would not only be free of cost to all users, but would additionally require all prospective employers to list a salary range for all postings. This announcement comes on the heels of seismic changes within the theater industry aimed at dismantling inequity and financial exploitation.

It is common practice for a job seeker to respond to a posting for a seemingly full-time or contract paid position, only to discover upon receiving a “job” offer that the position is unpaid, paid in “exposure,” or paid at a stipend rate that averages out to far less than minimum wage. And once they finally snag coveted jobs at top theaters, they are often appalled to discover that the wages aren’t much better, re-

sulting in a culture of shame and secrecy. Who wants to admit that their expensive MFA in directing earned them a plum position at the top theater in the city, only to earn less than a mid-level manager at the local McDonald’s?

Most frequently, calls for pay equity have centered on the most visible members of the industry—actors, directors, playwrights, and arts administrators—but have often ignored a large group of critical theatermakers working diligently in the shadows: designers and technicians. Enter: Elsa Hiltner.

A freelance costume designer and wardrobe stylist with over 16 years of experience in the industry in Chicago and beyond, Hiltner is also an advocate for pay and labor equity for designers and technicians, author of the viral essay on HowlRound, “A Call for Equal Support in Theatrical Design,” and creator of

the Theatrical Designer Pay Resource spreadsheet, which began to collect and track rates of pay from designers nationally in order to demystify the process and create one of the first repositories of hard data.

“So much of the arts coverage focuses on the product and not the process,” says Hiltner, who knew she wanted to be a costume designer beginning in high school. “I have always loved arts, people, personalities, and history, so costume design was a pretty natural merging of those things.”

Hiltner earned her BA in costume design from Western Washington University in Washington state. “It was an ultra liberal arts school and I really liked the program there, but there was really very little conversation about the business side and the labor side of things.” Throughout her career she has designed at nu-

merous Chicago theaters including Steppenwolf, Silk Road Rising, Windy City Playhouse, Teatro Vista, Lifeline, and American Blues Theater, and finally received the business education she had been missing.

When she moved to Chicago, her rent increased and Hiltner quickly learned that she had to wear many different hats in order to survive. She quickly snagged part- and full-time jobs within the industry while continuing to freelance in the evenings. When she had her first child, she began freelancing full time to accommodate childcare. Three years ago she started working in development for Collaboraction, where she is a company member, while also designing lights. Hiltner also does commercial wardrobe styling, which unsurprisingly pays far better than theater.

For most of her career she worked in a vacuum without other designers to commiserate with. But once her HowlRound article went viral, she discovered that the unionized costume designers of United Garment Workers had just formed a costume committee, and she connected with them to compare notes. Says Hiltner, “If you’re having a hard time negotiating a contract for labor support or pay, your circumstances can seem very individual. Everyone is dealing with the same or very similar issues.”

One of the common roadblocks to pay negotiations is that theater budgets are often made in such a way where certain line items are fixed, such as rent, utilities, and materials. Dollars for artist labor are the last line item to be allocated and unfortunately also the most malleable. Hiltner once experienced a contentious contract negotiation over being offered \$1,500 for a show where other designers were offered \$2,000. “This particular negotiation lasted about two weeks and they threatened me with legal action. This was over \$500.”

Frustratingly, if raw materials such as paint go over budget, the money is usually immediately found. Says Hiltner, “It just feels like the money is treated differently when it’s going to individual artists rather than a tangible, visual thing that is seen by the audience.” Part of what makes everything so challenging is that there isn’t an accepted standard as to how fees are established. Few theaters are transparent about their process and can’t explain why they



## THEATER

choose arbitrary hourly or flat fees other than the vague metric of “experience.”

“Experience is a very problematic term for me” says Hiltner, who further notes, “Who is given experience often goes along the lines of race, gender, sexual orientation. A company will say they are going to pay the unionized designers the union minimum, but the non-unionized ones, we will pay the lower rate.”

Further complicating the process, the amount of work for the fee can vary wildly depending on details, such as what period in history a director decides to set the play. Additionally, roles such as costume design, which have historically been dominated by women, often face barriers that male-dominated design categories do not.

For example, the role of a costume designer typically includes reading the script, analyzing the script, going to meetings, conducting research, attending preliminary meetings about design concepts, drawing sketches and perhaps a second round of sketches after receiving feedback, and then potentially making patterns, building the garments, and conducting fittings if there is not a costume shop. The majority of Chicago theaters do not have costume shops or costume labor support.

In contrast for the traditionally male role of set designer, after the design and concept phase (sketching, drafting, modeling), they can typically hand the work off to a technical director, team of carpenters, set painter, and properties designer. Quips Hiltner, “Costume designers are doing multiple jobs for the same—if you’re lucky—fee.” Properties designers, video designers, and composers are also often expected to build the product, and in the case of composers, they often have to play the music as well as compose it for the same fee.

Hiltner feels that the solution to all of this is transparency—“having a community and culture in place that allows these conversations to happen without individual artists getting blamed, being called difficult to work with, having offers rescinded, not being called back, all the things that happen currently when artists attempt to negotiate on their own behalf.” Some companies are beginning to offer transparent equal designer fees across the board, like Collaboraction, which pays everyone \$18 per hour.

The spreadsheet Hiltner created in 2017 to break the stigma of talking about money is gaining momentum. Just in the last month or so it has received a flurry of submissions, and theatermakers from other cities have begun


collecting their own data and sending it to Hiltner in bulk. She recently added a column for executive pay from publicly available 990 tax reports, which has illuminated some interesting takeaways; for example, the range of designer pay between organizations is large and not necessarily tied to operating budget. Says Hiltner, “You can have fees that are pretty similar [between smaller organizations] and operating budgets that are ten times the size.”

The demographics of who has participated in the spreadsheet reveal additional truths. The costume designers and lighting designers who are voluntarily participating in the spreadsheet are predominantly women and BIPOC as compared to the industry at large. Hiltner reflects, “That speaks to who benefits from pay transparency and pay equity.” She hopes to continue to receive even more data and begin to track and analyze changes over time. Of course the pandemic has created a hopefully temporary hiccup in that plan.

Hiltner recognizes that actors also suffer from pay equity within the same production. “I expect that directors between shows do as well.” She notes that her spreadsheet isn’t the only one, with others across the nation starting similar Google sheets tracking pay for actors, stage managers, and other positions. She hopes to merge them all together someday. In January 2020, Hiltner joined fellow designers Bob Kuhn, Christine Pascual, and Theresa Ham to form On Our Team, an organization dedicated to “creating a united front in requiring equitable pay and support for theatrical designers.”

“It’s really good for companies,” says Hiltner. “All the science shows that people who are paid equitably, where there is pay transparency, people work harder when those things are in place. The product is better, you retain employees better, these are things that will be visible to the audience and make a difference for the company’s bottom line, if you want to go to capitalist school terms.”

As theater productions struggle with the limitations of Zoom, one cannot help but notice that productions with the more sophisticated lighting, sets, and costumes have the ability to transform the online experience into something more cinematically stunning. Hopefully more theaters realize the power of this advantage and pay designers accordingly.

Says Hiltner, “One thing that I love about the theater industry is that we all care enough about it to hold it accountable.” 

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## NOW PLAYING

### RR *American Utopia*

Spike Lee's onscreen vision of David Byrne's Broadway hit is the perfect salve for those craving togetherness. Part concert film, part one-man show (though the stage is stacked with members of the band clad in matching gray suits throughout), *American Utopia* is filled with Byrne's musings on existence, punctuated by a mix of Talking Heads hits, Byrne's solo work, and a particularly powerful Janelle Monáe cover. In the show's second half, as things get more political, Byrne and company sing "Hell You Talmbout," asking the live audience present when filming to say the names of Black men and women killed by police. It's moments like this, paired with the graceful way in which Lee weaves through the performers on stage and view from the audience, that make it easy for at-home viewers to get swept into feeling as if they were in the seats in Broadway's Hudson Theatre that night. *American Utopia* is not just a masterful concert film, but a magical escape and much-needed reminder of the importance of human connection. —**BRIANNA WELLEN** 135 min. [HBO Max](#)

### *Bad Hair*

Justin Simien is the latest filmmaker to blend Black social issues with horror elements in the Sundance standout *Bad Hair*. Anna (Elle Lorraine), a young woman in late 80s LA, dreams of being a host at the urban music television channel she works for. When the network brings in new management to rebrand the channel for a more "mainstream audience" (see: white people), Anna ditches her 'fro for a weave to assimilate into the new beauty standards, despite having a fear of hair styling ever since a childhood perm-gone-wrong. However, the weave turns out to have demonic roots and begins to take over Anna's life. *Bad Hair* begins with compelling cultural commentary that explores the complicated, often fraught, relationship Black women have with our hair—even to this day when many schools and workplaces still engage in hair discrimination. However, the film fails to facilitate a well-rounded dialogue, simplistically

### *American Utopia*

they-won't-they, which Roberts and Bracey convincingly sell. An ensemble rom-com that blatantly references better ensemble rom-coms, such as *Crazy, Stupid, Love*, *Holidate* is still smart enough to know what it isn't and highlight what it is: a self-aware and serviceable comfort film to get the holiday season started, one that is well worth the stream. —**BECCA JAMES** 103 min. [Netflix](#)

### RR *Martin Eden*

Italian painter-turned-director Pietro Marcello's floating adaptation of Jack London's eponymous, semi-autobiographical 1909 novel—not a veritable classic, but a somewhat arcane exemplar beloved by various cultural luminaries—stumbles as does its titular protagonist, the strapping young sailor Martin Eden (Luca Marinelli); both are metamorphosed and burdened by their respective creators' visionary appetites. Marcello, who cowrote the script with Maurizio Braucci, relocates the story from Oakland to Naples, the exact era indeterminate. Born into a working-class milieu, Martin turns to writing after he meets the beautiful, wealthy Elena (Jessica Cressy), having been galvanized to pursue education as a means of elevating himself above his proletarian station. This motley Künstlerroman charts Martin's onerous rise and existential fall as he grapples with his desire for individualism (inspired by the teachings of English sociologist Herbert Spencer) amidst his countrymen's—and to some extent, his own—thirst for social equality. The complex political ethos is absorbing, but it's Marcello's formal experimentation that commands. Throughlines from the director's previous films are present, specifically his clever use of archival footage to complement narrative; combined with the variety of film formats employed (primarily 16-millimeter and Super 16-millimeter, though also some 35-millimeter and expired film stock) and his subtle use of unfixed anachronisms, the film is a living history of its quixotic, though ultimately disaffected, protagonist. In Italian, Neapolitan, and French with subtitles. —**KATHLEEN SACHS** 129 min. [Music Box Theatre Virtual Cinema](#)

### RR *Nationtime*

Once presumed lost, this newly restored, original cut of William Greaves's rousing documentary about the 1972 National Black Political Convention is approximately 20 minutes longer than the version that aired on television (the longer iteration then considered too militant for broadcast). Greaves, a prolific documentary best known for his 1968 avant-garde meta-documentary *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm: Take One*, was invited to chronicle the momentous occasion by co-organizer Amiri Baraka. Working with a small budget, Greaves assembled a three-camera skeleton crew, and the spirit of their filmmaking reflects the determined fervency of the subject matter. The Gary, Indiana-based convention, composed of delegates and spectators from a range of political backgrounds, was intended to espouse "unity without conformity," per Baraka; unfor-

tunately, the convention adjourned without a consensus being reached, causing some to consider it a failure. Greaves's film largely proves otherwise, as the speakers and performers—who include Baraka, Jesse Jackson, Betty Shabazz, Bobby Seale, Issac Hayes, and Dick Gregory—pertinently elucidate the incommensurable experiences of Black Americans and stress the need for vast sociopolitical reform. (Furthermore, they later published the National Black Agenda on Malcolm X's birthday.) The topics discussed are myriad, the sheer breadth of oppression and the problems which the delegates seek to solve immense. Greaves's filmmaking is raw and inspired; the roving cameras capture the staggering magnitude of the task at hand, while frenetic editing and sudden, startling zooms intensify the sense of convivial disorder. Sidney Poitier and Harry Belafonte co-narrate; Belafonte reads poems written by Baraka and Langston Hughes, while Poitier reads Greaves's dully magniloquent commentary. —**KATHLEEN SACHS** 80 min. [Through 11/5, Facets Virtual Cinema](#)

### RR *On the Rocks*

Laura (Rashida Jones) is having problems with her marriage. Naturally, she calls up her playboy father (Bill Murray) for advice. *On the Rocks* marks Sofia Coppola's first collaboration with Bill Murray since *Lost in Translation*—and it's clear they've both done some growing up in that time. The film is a departure from much of Coppola's work as she shifts her focus from youth and beauty to the endless confusions of adulthood—dealing with your fractured familial relationships, uncovering paranoia and rising tensions in your marriage, and finding out where exactly you fit in with the world. Rashida Jones shines as a dramatic lead, and her rapport with a philandering Murray is sharp and charming. Some will argue that there's not a lot going on in this film—and they'll be right to an extent—but Coppola delivers a lightness to the uncomfortable but inescapable relationships in our lives like few others. —**CODY CORRALL** R, 98 min. [Apple TV, Landmark's Century Centre Cinema](#)

### RR *The Witches*

The sheer terror of Nicolas Roeg's adaptation of Roald Dahl's *The Witches* is surely cemented in many a millennial's brain—now the story gets a retelling for a new generation. Robert Zemeckis crafts a fun take on the tale of shapeshifting witches who want to rid the world of children, but it's not an entirely necessary or inventive reimagining of the story. Along with Zemeckis, the screenplay touts film and fantasy giants Alfonso Cuarón and Guillermo del Toro—who pay a weird and wacky homage in line with the original story. The story may be a bit too familiar to stand out, but it's worth a watch to see A-list actors have a fun and ridiculous time. Anne Hathaway and Stanley Tucci, notably, both don cartoonish accents and mannerisms, rightfully forgoing their appearances for the spirit of a children's movie. —**CODY CORRALL** PG, 105 min. [HBO Max](#)

putting natural hair against weaves, and never acknowledging Black women on the other end of the issue who simply enjoy switching it up. Simien also tries to do too much at once. With its uneven tonal shifts, it's hard to tell if this movie wants to be a campy B-movie horror, a thoughtful comedy (its strongest suit with a hilarious bit part from Lena Waithe), or a social thriller. But after watching *Bad Hair*, one thing is clear: it can't do it all. —**NOËLLE D. LILLEY** 115 min. [Hulu](#)

### RR *Cadaver*

*Cadaver* creates a world where survival gets vile. When husband and wife Jacob (Thomas Gullestad) and Leonora (Gitte Witt) and their daughter Alice (Tuva Olivia Remman) find themselves struggling to survive the aftermath of a nuclear disaster, the starving family accepts a generous offer they soon regret. Invited to a hotel to attend a dinner theater performance, the famished family attends with high hopes. Instructed by a man named Mathias (Thorbjørn Harr) that the entire hotel is a stage and everything they're about to see is acting, the audience then dons golden masks to separate themselves from the actors. Once the show starts, however, things turn sinister fast as audience members begin disappearing, including Alice. Dark and dirty in a way that calls to mind such films as *Hostel* and *Saw*, *Cadaver* is the story of one woman's will to save her child, and in the process, her own humanity. —**BECCA JAMES** 86 min. [Netflix](#)

### RR *Holidate*

*Holidate* is prime pandemic escapism. Fed up with being single on the holidays, strangers Sloane (Emma Roberts) and Jackson (Luke Bracey) agree to be each other's platonic plus-ones, or "holidates," all year long to escape constant judgment from their meddling families. Treating viewers to a slew of holiday outings and gatherings throughout the Chicagoland area, it doesn't offer the best depiction of the city (and the two find themselves at a mall all too often), but beggars can't be choosers. So sit back and soak in the before times scenery and the absurdity of a very predictable will-

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Rancho Huevos tenants and regulars from the past 16 years or so, clockwise from top left: Benny Hernandez, Lindsey Rae, Josh Piotrowski, Chris "Kisston" Georges, and Chris Cabay. 📍 ERIC STROM FOR CHICAGO READER



Chris Cabay of the band No Slogan, aka Chris Huevos, was the second tenant during the house's DIY years. 📍 ERIC STROM FOR CHICAGO READER



Benny Hernandez never lived at Rancho Huevos, but he helped run Southkore Records there with his No Slogan bandmate Cabay. 📍 ERIC STROM FOR CHICAGO READER

# The life and death of Rancho Huevos

A Bridgeport DIY house that nurtured an antiauthoritarian community for nearly two decades stands vacant and slated for demolition.

By MICCO CAPORALE

“It’s been 20 years since Y2K and the world is still going even if it’s burning,” begins the Facebook event page for Distort Midwest, a two-day release party at the end of February for a compilation tape of heartland hardcore. “We’re fucking bored out here in the land of milk and honey with our mundane jobs and weekend benders. Long live this decadence from here until the apocalypse!”

Put together by Thaib Wahab and the mononymous Spawn—immigrants from Singapore and Nepal, respectively, who run Chicago tape label Third World Kaos—the *Distort Midwest* comp showcased the ferocity and talent of flyover-country punks. And if the tape was a love letter, then the festival’s two shows were Lloyd Dobler with a boombox: 13 hours of screeching guitars, cheap beer, righteous outrage, and unrestrained joy that celebrated Wahab and Spawn’s chosen home and announced, “We are nothing without our community.”

Distort Midwest’s first day was at Rancho Huevos, a tiny, dilapidated Bridgeport house that had been a staple of the Chicago DIY scene for almost 16 years. It was a living space, a show space, and a practice space—Spawn used to live there, for instance, and at the time he also rehearsed there with his bands Mock Execution (which also includes Wahab) and Tzar Bomba. DIY venues tend to come and go quickly, and Rancho’s longevity eventually made it something of a local institution.

During the house’s tenure as a DIY space, around 20 tenants passed through it. They established a distinctive culture built on inclusivity, accountability, mutual support, and free-spirited rebellion—against internal obstacles as much as external oppressions. In the parallel universe where Rancho Huevos might put together a political platform, it would make the Bernie Sanders campaign seem quaint. Though the politics of the house’s community evolved constantly, it stood for the

abolition of policing and mass incarceration, for the humanity of all people regardless of immigration status, for sex workers’ rights—basically for a long list of positions questioning the power of the nation-state and even its right to exist.

What no one knew during Distort Midwest was that it would be the house’s last concert. Like licensed music venues, Rancho was forced into hiatus by the pandemic. And then in July, the landlord announced he’d sold the land under the house. The house would be demolished, and the sole remaining tenant needed to vacate ASAP.

The sale wasn’t a total surprise. Toward the end of 2019, when Rancho was already down to that same sole tenant, a realty sign had quietly appeared outside. “We were like, what the fuck?” says Spawn, whose bands were pitching in on rent to help keep the space going. “And then we checked online and saw that it was on the market.”

Long before that, Rancho’s days felt numbered simply because the house was in such bad shape. Built in 1870, it hadn’t been well maintained, and many people who’ve lived there or seen shows there have speculated that it should’ve been condemned. It was poorly insulated, and one winter the heat allegedly went out. Nine different tenants from the DIY years say the landlord was so resistant to making serious repairs that they learned to stop asking—though Troy Ishkanian, a former resident who also plays in Tzar Bomba, says the landlord did fix a window broken by a disgruntled showgoer who’d been thrown out for saying racist shit.

Rancho’s tenants claim they weren’t offered leases, though for the most part they were happy not to sign one. The landlord lived nearby and knew the house was booking shows from very early on, but he didn’t interfere. He seemed happy just to get rent on time—if tenants didn’t ask much of him, he didn’t ask anything else of them. (Rancho’s landlord did

not respond by publication time to phone calls seeking comment.)

During Rancho’s life as an underground show space, renters made most of the repairs and alterations themselves. They fixed a collapsed kitchen floor and enlisted the help of a tenant’s parents to upgrade the electrical system. In Rancho’s early years, it had no working outlets in the basement, so to host a show the organizers had to run an extension cord downstairs through a vent from the kitchen. Circumstances forced the upgrade in the late 2000s, when half the house lost power.

The basement was spectacularly neglected and dirty, and the crowd at most shows would kick up enough filth that everybody breathed it in all night. A hallmark Rancho experience was blowing black snot for days after a gig—in fact, “black snot” gets its own segment in *A Wave of Us*, a 2014 documentary about the venue by Dave Fried. Spawn remembers moving junk that he thinks might’ve been down there for decades, only to find dog skeletons wedged behind it.

As Rancho Huevos passed from tenant to tenant, each new resident moved in with the understanding they might be the last. Still, when the end finally came for one of Chicago’s longest-running punk houses, it felt abrupt—not least because COVID-19 meant that the people who’d loved it couldn’t say a proper goodbye.

DIY show spaces tend to be born from a desire to host people who have few if any other places to do what they want—especially those whose identities or interests fall somewhere on the Venn diagram of unpopular, marginalized, and forbidden. Rancho Huevos wasn’t for people who would’ve preferred to play legitimate venues but didn’t have the means to run one or get booked at one. It was about sustaining a music culture outside the music business, and living and playing there represented a small opposition to capitalism’s colonization of everyday life.

Many people believe that 2966 S. Archer became a show house during the tenancy of Chris Cabay, a punk veteran from the band No Slogan who’s affectionately nicknamed “Chris Huevos.” But that honor actually belongs to Ryan Ross, who in 2003 hosted a few noise sets and then Boston folk-punk band Bread & Roses. As Cabay recalls, Ross decided to move out of the house after about six months because it was such a difficult and unpleasant place to live. But Ross also saw the value of maintaining the house as a venue—and he already had another show booked. Did Cabay want to take over?

“It was like \$50 more than my rent in Pilsen,” Cabay explains. And his roommate

was moving to the north side anyway. “Then I could practice and have shows in the basement, you know? So of course, yeah, I’ll take it over, why not?”

For Cabay, finding the extra \$50 to move into Rancho Huevos was about more than seizing an opportunity to live alone and save money on a practice space. At the time, he was 27 and had a decent-paying nine-to-five job. He could afford better than a run-down house, and he was at a life stage where most people would take any better option. But to keep Rancho going as a venue, someone had to deliver the rent checks—and its continued existence promised a lot of benefits for the DIY scene.

Having a whole house with a hands-off landlord helped Cabay and bandmate Benny Hernandez grow their record label, Southkore Records, which they’d launched in 1999. Southkore focused on rising Latinx punk bands, and running Rancho meant always having a show spot for them—including groups seldom noticed by north-side venues or those whose tour options were limited by obstacles Hernandez didn’t see white peers facing, such as immigration status or the need to financially support multiple family members. Hernandez’s work at Rancho Huevos also helped him grow the network necessary to organize the Southkore fest, which as far as he knows became the first Latinx punk festival in America in 2006.

No Slogan’s influence on Rancho fell off when Cabay moved out after a three-year stay, but the band’s impact lingers in the name.

Before Rancho, Cabay had lived across the street from No Slogan’s practice space at 21st and Damen. “Chris would always be late,” Hernandez says, laughing. “He would sometimes just not bother to show up because he was too tired. So our drummer at the time, Danny, kept calling him *huevoón* . . . which just means big, heavy balls, and therefore you’re lazy. It just kind of morphed into ‘huevos,’ and then he became Chris Huevos. When he moved, we decided that, since it was a little house in the middle of the street—kind of an outpost with nothing around it—we’ll just call it ‘Rancho.’”

The house’s relative isolation—its large lot means it has few immediate neighbors—is part of why Rancho Huevos endured. Its sleepy part of Archer Avenue remains untouched by redevelopment, and businesses in the area are mostly mom-and-pops that close early. The only adjacent structure is an apartment building that houses an intergenerational family, and they treated Rancho Huevos with a mix of indifference and amusement. Longtime Rancho tenant Lindsey Rae says she’s heard that one of the daughters has grown up to be a punk.

Basement overflow often spilled into Ran-



A poster promoting the second annual haunted house at Rancho Huevos. ART BY JOSH PIOTROWSKI

cho's "yard," which is at least as big as the area of the house. Still, cops seldom patrolled the area. Most folks in the neighborhood shared an unspoken understanding that calling police didn't solve problems. When neighbors got angry about things—shows running too late, showgoers peeing in an alley—they talked to Rancho's residents directly instead of involving the cops. Punks lived in and ran the house, but they recognized themselves as part of a community beyond their scene. All these reasons help explain why no show at Rancho ever got shut down.

Among comparable DIY venues, Rancho had unusual success bringing together people from across Chicago and its suburbs because it was fairly transit accessible. It was less than a

half mile from the Orange Line and near several major bus routes. It stood practically in the shadow of the Stevenson Expressway, and it had plenty of free parking.

Around 2007 Cabay moved out and passed the house along to Josh Piotrowski, who was joined in early 2008 by his girlfriend Chris "Kisston" Georges. Georges already knew Rancho Huevos because she'd regularly ridden the Metra in from the suburbs to visit it, just so she could feel connected to something. Lindsey Rae, who lived at Rancho for about three years starting in 2009, remembers making a phone call to the parents of some teenagers she didn't know who'd come to a show at Rancho—she promised that a friend of hers would drive the kids to the train afterward, so they

could get permission to stay late enough to see the final band.

Unexpected negotiations come with the territory at a punk house, but they're just part of what makes it tough to live in one. Hosting all-ages DIY shows—which Rancho's residents did as often as two or three times per week—requires flexibility and generosity of spirit. You have to surrender to whatever your guests (especially intoxicated ones) might do to your home, and if you're smart you'll prepare for any crises they could create. You might be confronted with teen girls passing out alone in dark corners, your friends brawling with strangers over an inflammatory remark, or someone you only vaguely recognize stealing all your makeup from the bedroom you thought you'd locked.

In some ways it was especially hard to live at Rancho Huevos. A one-story house with interior space totaling only 768 square feet, it was decent for one person but not especially large for two—even taking into account its unfinished basement, which had a comparable footprint. But sometimes three or four people lived there: one in the bedroom, another in the living room, a third in the pantry, and maybe someone in the nasty-ass basement who'd have to shove their mattress out of the way once or twice a week for shows. When multiple touring bands came through on the same night, it could easily mean another seven or eight people trying to crash on the floors.

One former occupant believes they developed asthma from living at Rancho because it had such pervasive mold. But that problem, like so many others, was part of the price everyone there chose to pay so they could do what they wanted with the house. They were pretty sure that if they put too much pressure on their landlord to fix things himself, he'd raise the rent—or worse, he might evict everybody.

"I have best friends that are not punk," says Hernandez. "They just never understood why I was into this—you know, like, 'What's the payoff?'" My answer is always: Punk is the only thing I control in my life, on my terms. I get to book where my band plays, who I play with, what the door price is. If someone is acting out of hand, I get to kick them out. Back in my late 20s, early 30s, I was starting my professional career. You're a nine-to-fiver, and everything's dictated to you. It made having that space beautiful."

If your life is so micromanaged that you barely feel like a person—you're just going through the motions, toeing someone else's line about how to act or spend your time—then any break from that regime is precious. And if your life keeps you guessing with

unmasked-for chaos, then any chance to choose what happens to you can feel liberating.

Rae was a teen runaway when she moved to Chicago in the aughts from a small town in Indiana. "I stood outside the Alley on Belmont and Clark and asked people who looked punk if they knew where I could sleep, and that's how I found a place to live," she recalls. "From then on, it was just, like, shows! Shows! Shows! Venues! Bands! Just all the time." She'd lived in multiple punk houses already when she moved into Rancho in her early 20s. It had sat vacant for a few months after Georges and Piotrowski left unexpectedly, and Rae wanted to build on its particular inclusive and politically radical character.

"Rancho was the first time I felt in control," she says.

Throughout the years, Rancho hosted all kinds of music—stoner metal, crust punk, black metal, D-beat hardcore. Eventually, it became well-known enough that bands started seeking it out, sometimes from very far afield—all-woman Japanese hardcore band Banjax played CLIT Fest in 2008, when Rancho ran the third day of the event. CLIT Fest returned to Chicago five years later and became a precursor to Fed Up Fest, which kicked off in 2014. FUF and Black and Brown, its big-sibling festival (launched in 2010 by the Black and Brown Punk Show Collective), both held fundraisers at Rancho because it supported their radical, inclusive politics.

Concerts weren't all that happened at Rancho. In 2008, for example, Piotrowski put together a homemade haunted house for Halloween, and it became an annual tradition—it lasted almost ten years there before graduating to larger DIY spots. His birthday was near Halloween and his family loved the holiday, so he'd grown up helping his mom and dad trick out their own house every year. He'd also worked in costume shops, which helped him accumulate props and materials for his own spooky installations.

Piotrowski took inspiration from the neighborhood for many of his scares, and he dramatized hauntings detailed in the 2005 book *Weird Illinois: the woman in white at Archer Woods Cemetery*, for instance, or the devil dancing at Kaiser Hall in Bridgeport. His fright night was something local families could count on, not just punks. One reason it moved on from Rancho was that it became too popular. Piotrowski and Rae estimate that at the haunted house's peak, it attracted more than 250 people in a night.

Other events Rancho hosted included art installations and self-defense trainings for queer people and sex workers. Residents also allowed organizer friends to use the space



Members of Tropiezo, No Slogan, Tensions, and Rumores outside Rancho Huevos in September 2015.

© COURTESY BENNY HERNANDEZ

for Anti-Racist Action meetings. During the pandemic the last group of folks still paying rent considered running it as an art studio. For a few years, pro dommes would pay to use the basement for scenes.

“One time I was listening through the vents because I’m a creep,” a former resident admits with a giggle, “and somebody shit on a donut and fed it to their slave.”

You can see why somebody might laugh at a story like that. But it’s worth remembering that many sex workers get into the business because they can’t secure more conventional jobs—in some cases because they’re trans or undocumented. Other sex workers need more money than they can make in the straight jobs for which they’re deemed qualified. Some have disabilities that can’t be accommodated by potential employers, or they’re someone’s sole caretaker and need extreme scheduling flexibility. It’s important to know you can do the work that pays your bills reliably and safely, no matter what it is. Rancho provided that peace of mind to at least a few people who needed it.

While the house didn’t attract beat cops, the political slant of many shows at Rancho seems to have attracted undercover officers, judging from facts that came to light during the domestic-terrorism trial of the out-of-town activists dubbed “the NATO 3.” The trial highlighted a pattern of entrapment and “Red Squad” tactics from Chicago police—and a 2014 *Sun-Times* article revealed that Rancho Huevos was one of many spots where under-

cover cops collected license-plate numbers and other identifying information, supposedly because “rock bands” played there that “were known to attract anarchists.”

The cops weren’t technically wrong on that last point—plenty of people who frequented Rancho Huevos sympathized with anarchist beliefs—but as usual they imagined a violent threat where none existed. (This also helps explain why many people connected to Rancho were wary of being named or quoted in this story.) Anarchism doesn’t advocate chaos; it wants everyone to be free from coercive systems. And no matter who was living or playing at Rancho, it retained its commitment to DIY as an intentional alternative to the monoculture.

That’s one reason the house’s name never changed. About four years into its life as a DIY space, Rae and her roommates at Rancho attempted to mark a new era by renaming it Archer Nemesis. In part they felt they didn’t have a right to use the old name—they were trying to own up to being Chicago transplants who didn’t speak Spanish. But south-side punks pushed back. Honor the lineage, they said. As Hernandez explains: “If you inherit something beautiful, respect it.”

“People who can’t speak Spanish always butcher it up and change the name,” he adds. “You know, *huevos rancheros podridos* or *ranchero huevos*. A lot of south-side Latinx kids would chime in and say, ‘No, it’s Rancho Huevos. There’s no ‘s’ at the end.’” The name

became a shibboleth separating insiders and outsiders—if you were invested in south-side punk and DIY, you’d know how to say it, but if you were just glimpsing that scene in passing, you probably wouldn’t.

Of course, now there’s nothing left to glimpse at Rancho Huevos—but the scene lives on. “As long as there’s pissed-off kids learning three chords in a basement or garage somewhere, punk’s gonna keep going,” Hernandez says. “At the end of the day, really, losing Rancho is no big deal. We should really be concerned and worried about families being displaced by gentrification.”

Gentrification also threatens the future of punk, though of course that danger is much less serious than the hardship faced by displaced families. One thing Wahab and Spawn have enjoyed about being in the States is that DIY punk thrives here in part because rent is cheaper and space more abundant than in Singapore or Nepal. They don’t have to rely on licensed venues to approve of them, their bands, or their ideas. They’ll play a basement, a yard, or a generator show. Rancho was a dream come true for them: not only did they have an affordable place to practice, but they could also provide show space to bands they knew from Asia as well as the friends they’ve

met here. But cheap rent and abundant space are magnets for developers, venture capitalists, and the kind of well-off new neighbors who call the cops on loud cookouts—and the forces of the state reliably line up to enforce those people’s will.

The community nurtured by Rancho Huevos gave people a place to go that would always feel like home, even if they’d been away for years and all the faces were new. It’s where they met bandmates, collaborators for their next art show, comrades to help organize protests. And it wasn’t just punks talking to punks—the house was also connected to its neighborhood.

“I think it’s a big loss in terms of what it means for Chicago,” Spawn laments. “In the bigger picture, it’s not just the house. It’s, like, the whole block. . . . Bridgeport is changing rapidly. Every year, it’s not like it was. Rancho—I loved living there. All our neighbors—just regular working-class folks. They never had a problem. They didn’t care ‘cause we talked to them, we hung out with them. Who knows what shit’s going to be like on that street now. Are they just going to build another condo?” 📺

🐦 @miccoslays

## MUSIC

## PICK OF THE WEEK

## Decades of friendship enrich a new collaboration by rapper Rich Jones and producer Montana Macks



Montana Macks and Rich Jones © JASON NELOMS

**RICH JONES & MONTANA MACKS, *HOW DO YOU SLEEP AT NIGHT?***

Self-released

[richjonesmusic.bandcamp.com/album/how-do-you-sleep-at-night](http://richjonesmusic.bandcamp.com/album/how-do-you-sleep-at-night)

**RAPPER-SINGER RICH JONES** and producer Montana Macks have been friends for nearly two decades, which surely helps explain how the Chicagoans' new self-released album, *How Do You Sleep at Night?*, hits so smoothly. For the past few years, Jones has leaned into the downy plushness of his voice, more and more often rhyming in a relaxed croon—and he's also one of the few MCs who can drop Yiddish into the middle of a verse without sounding fakakta (the exact word he uses in "Clicksonmyphone"). For the new record, Macks has crafted loose-limbed instrumentals to match Jones's mood, providing a subtle percussive kick that accentuates his friend's sharp observations and syllabic twists. Jones and Macks recruited a load of talented Chicago guests for this full-length—the leisurely, triumphant "Locals Only" features an all-star team of rappers Matt Muse, Defcee, Skech185, Psalm One, and Jovan Landry—and the two of them work as hard to make their collaborators shine as they do to show off their own skills. —LEOR GALIL



Cordoba © AYETHAW TUN

**CORDOBA, *SPECTER***

Amalgam

[music.amalgamusic.org/album/specter](http://music.amalgamusic.org/album/specter)

When *The Sick Muse* interviewed Chicago jazz-fusion sextet Cordoba in 2019, vocalist Brianna Tong talked about the ways improv-based music can be a megaphone for protest movements. "I don't think it's revolutionary, but I think it can deepen the things that are in the lyrics of those songs, and provide an outlet to feel more about the song," she said. "I think it is an important part of people's radicalization to actually feel about what the fuck is happening, and not just be like this is how it is, it sucks." Tong speaks from experience: she's been part of the People's Lobby and Reclaim Chicago, and was already engaged in organizing and activism when Cordoba began releasing music in 2016. You can feel the intensity she wants to communicate in the irascible clomp of "No Answer," from Cordoba's new *Specter* (Amalgam). And even when Tong's screams are so garbled that it's impossible to make out individual words, the outrage comes through—and the lyrics that are clear put the capitalist system squarely in her crosshairs ("Why do I have to pay for water . . . and a place to fucking live").

Cordoba went big for *Specter*, enlisting Chicago's Kaia String Quartet and other auxiliary musicians to enrich their ambitious sound. (In that same *Sick Muse* interview, guitarist Cam Cunningham said, "I want Cordoba to be a Wagnerian experience, without any of the racism.") But the core members of Cordoba—Tong, Cunningham, multi-instrumentalist Eric Novak, keyboardist Zach Bain-Selbo, bassist Khalyle Hagood, and drummer Zach Upton Davis—have also developed a synchro-

nicity powerful enough that they can actualize most of their grand visions without any help at all. The velvety "Ghosts 1" could smooth-talk its way onto an R&B-heavy playlist made to woo a new flame, and if it can help love happen—or if any song on *Specter* can—then I'd consider that a positive revolution in this acutely painful year. —LEOR GALIL

**CRIPPLED BLACK PHOENIX, *ELLENGÆST***

Season of Mist

[crippledblackphoenixsom.bandcamp.com/album/elleng-æst](http://crippledblackphoenixsom.bandcamp.com/album/elleng-æst)

Listening to a new Crippled Black Phoenix record is a bit like unwrapping a present. Even if you have an idea what's under the intricate ribbons and shiny paper, you can still get surprised. That's partially by design. Though the the songs of British multi-instrumentalist Justin Greaves provide the group with a common thread, Crippled Black Phoenix have routinely changed lineups—and their sound has changed with them, at various times adorning the band's tapestry of cinematic prog and post-rock with threads of British folk, spaghetti western scores, psychedelia, doom metal, and cabaret. In a 2016 interview with *Music Radar*, Greaves said he didn't even own a guitar until he launched Crippled Black Phoenix in 2004 (he'd spent years drumming in influential sludge and stoner bands, including Iron Monkey and Electric Wizard). Each of the group's ambitious releases is a testament to what creativity can do when it doesn't put itself in a box.

Crippled Black Phoenix prove that point again on the new *Ellengæst*, which they describe as a mini album even though it's nearly an hour long. On the



first day of recording, it came out that longtime guitarist Daniel Ånghede, who also shared lead vocals, was leaving the group. Rather than halt production, they recruited an eclectic assembly of guest vocalists to pitch in. Each hefty song rolls into the next, pairing ornate, gothic, and sometimes mysterious music with lyrics that serve their messages straight up—including recurring themes of humanity's cruel and self-destructive nature. On *Ellengæst* the transfixing voice of lyricist Belinda Kordic threads the songs together, whether she's singing backup or lead (as she does on the cover of Vic Chesnutt's "Everything I Say"). The album takes aim at leaders who sow chaos to tighten their own control (as on opener "House of Fools," with lead vocals from Anathema's Vincent Cavanagh), but it's less about despairing over that chaos and despotism and more about fighting back, even if only by embracing compassion and empathy over their opposites. On the hook-driven "Cry of Love," vocalist Ryan Patterson (Coliseum, Fotocrime) sounds resigned to the numbness of heartbreak but hopeful that he'll someday reconnect with his softer side. Kordic sings lead on "Lost," a song about apathy and ignorance at the dawn of the apocalypse, and when Cavanagh joins in on the chorus they transform it into the kind of jet-fueled anthem that could turn the masses around. The record's one true duet is the somber, proggy "In the Night," sung by Kordic and Kristian "Gaahl" Espedal, which culminates with the reso-

lute and elegiac refrain "Live to fight another day." Sometimes surviving the darkness is a bigger "fuck you" than going extinct in a head-on battle. And the way *Ellengæst* ends—with a cover of the Bauhaus tune "She's in Parties"—suggests that dancing can be an act of resistance. —**JAMIE LUDWIG**

**MOLASSES, THROUGH THE HOLLOW**  
Season of Mist  
[molasses.bandcamp.com/album/through-the-hollow](http://molasses.bandcamp.com/album/through-the-hollow)

Molasses was born from the ashes of influential Dutch band the Devil's Blood. Founded in 2006 by guitarist and vocalist Selim Lemouchi ("SL") and fronted by his sister Farida ("the Mouth of Satan"), they took their name from a Watain song but never went full black metal. Instead they made sweeping, elegant, complex, and ethereal heavy psych informed by occult-rock progenitors such as Coven, Black Sabbath, and Roky Erickson and colored by Selim's satanism and other spiritual beliefs. He disbanded the group in 2013, released the solo album *Earth Air Spirit Water Fire* as Selim Lemouchi & His Enemies, and then took his own life in March 2014, just weeks before the Enemies were scheduled to play at Roadburn—the Dutch heavy-music festival where the Devil's Blood made their live debut in 2008. The Enemies set became a tribute to Selim,

and several members of the Devil's Blood took part before going their own ways musically—some got involved with other Dutch bands, including Dool and Rrrags.

Nearly five years later, Roadburn founder and artistic director Walter Hoeijmakers invited the band's surviving members—Farida, guitarists Oeds Beydals and Ron van Herpen, and bassist Job van de Zande—to collaborate with other members of the Dutch music scene (including Marcel van de Vondervoort of Astrosoniq and Matthijs Stronks of Donnerwetter) for a special commissioned performance at the fest's 2019 edition. They called the group Molasses, after the final track from *Earth Air Spirit Water Fire*, and quickly realized they weren't done making music together. Their first release, the 2019 seven-inch "Mourning Haze" b/w "Drops of Sunlight," is a haunting, majestic acknowledgment of profound loss, but their expansive debut album, *Through the Hollow*, sounds like the work of musicians who've been chafing at the bit for a long time and are finally able to unleash their potential. Though the Devil's Blood are a hard act to follow, Molasses draw you in immediately with the 11-minute title track of *Through the Hollow*, which opens the album by walking the line between progressive metal and a more romantic, mythical sound that weaves and dodges and surges behind the cavalry charge of Farida's rich, powerful voice. "Get Out From Under" is a jaggedly heavy piece of dark,

wailing blues-rock with an anthemic undertone and lyrics about survival and endurance. The long-form "Formless Hands" has a regal, entrancing shuffle, almost like a sharper-edged Can, and builds to a ritualistic peak that manifests the bandmates' occult-rock history in a dazzlingly fresh and urgent way. Despite their links to the past, Molasses are confidently their own thing. —**MONICA KENDRICK**

**AQUILES NAVARRO & TCHESER HOLMES,**  
**HERITAGE OF THE INVISIBLE II**  
International Anthem  
[intlantem.bandcamp.com/album/heritage-of-the-invisible-ii](http://intlantem.bandcamp.com/album/heritage-of-the-invisible-ii)

Trumpeter Aquiles Navarro and drummer Tcheser Holmes begin their new duo album, *Heritage of the Invisible II* (International Anthem), with "Initial Meditation," a red-hot vortex of percussion and electronics whose abrasive, hypnotizing swirls sometimes sound like a helicopter flying overhead. That powerful opening statement makes clear that these musicians—best known from unrepentantly political jazz ensemble Irreversible Entanglements—can sound just as colossal as a duo as they do with that five-piece band. Navarro and Holmes first clicked when they met at the New England Conservatory in 2008, and throughout *Heritage of the Invisible II* you can feel how deep their bond runs; they speak



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## MUSIC



Sen Morimoto DENNIS ELLIOT

**continued from 33**  
 gratefully of each other on “Plantains,” and the synchronicity of their playing tells us more than words ever could. On that track, Holmes’s tight, unyielding drumming projects a relentlessly explorative mindset that pairs well with Navarro’s reverberating trumpet declarations. The musicians constantly push each other forward on songs such as “Navarro-holmes,” a boisterous eight-minute romp bristling with palpable, unresolved tension. But Navarro and Holmes do more than just display their iron-sharpening-iron artistry: they’re forever celebrating their partnership and their cultures. That’s most evident in the Afro-Caribbean rhythms and humid atmospheres of “Pueblo,” a contemplative, cheerful piece that allows for the kind of inward-looking reflection that can build confidence and hope. Music this rich and festive is innately communal, and Navarro and Holmes bring in four guest artists, including vocalist Brigitte Zozula and pianist Nick Sanders, to broaden the scope of their arrangements. *Heritage of the Invisible II* is a reminder that the simple act of having fun can spur individual and collective growth. —**JOSHUA MINSOO KIM**

**SEN MORIMOTO, SEN MORIMOTO**  
 Sooper  
[morimotosen.bandcamp.com/album/sen-morimoto](http://morimotosen.bandcamp.com/album/sen-morimoto)

Chicago art-pop wizard Sen Morimoto made national news in July, when the Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events removed him from its Millennium Park at Home virtual summertime music series. Morimoto had prerecorded a series of mystical, gentle musical movements, but he began his set by delivering a brief statement lightly criticizing Mayor Lori Lightfoot for her inaction in the face of public protests about police brutality. DCASE asked him to remove the statement, and when he refused, the department chose not to broadcast his set. DCASE’s public statement said that the Millennium

Park at Home series “is not intended to provide a platform for public discourse and debate”—a counterintuitive way to think about a program intended to lift up local musicians. In his lengthy response, Morimoto wrote, “Without that social depth of expression, the City is merely perpetuating an Entertainment Industry, and not fostering the vitality of its artistic community.”

On Morimoto’s new self-titled album, his second full-length for Chicago indie label Sooper Records, he foregrounds the artistic community he’s fostered. Morimoto co-owns Sooper, and long before he came aboard with Sooper cofounders Nnamdi and Glenn Curran in 2017, he’d perfected a pragmatic approach to home recording—just an MPC, keyboards, a saxophone, and his voice. Throughout *Sen Morimoto* he combines hip-hop, indie rock, R&B, and city pop, creating unexpected juxtapositions of placid synth soundscapes, skittering percussion, and delicately layered vocals. And while he can create a rich, full-band sound alone if he has to, he no longer has to: he also brings in his friends, including Pivot Gang rapper Joseph Chilliams and fellow Sooper stars Kaina and Nnamdi, to give his music new flavors of pop bliss. Lala Lala’s Lillie West, poet and songwriter Kara Jackson, and rapper Qari make “Taste Like It Smells” an album highlight; their vocals not only add emotional complexity to the dreamlike instrumental but also enhance its vivid textures until it feels like I can reach out and touch the sound. Morimoto knows how fulfilling it can be to give other voices a platform, and it’s part of what makes his music great—even when he’s the only one doing the recording. —**LEOR GALIL**

**TAWNY NEWSOME & BETHANY THOMAS,**  
**MATERIAL FLATS**  
 Fine Alpinist  
[tawnyandbethany.bandcamp.com/album/material-flats-2](http://tawnyandbethany.bandcamp.com/album/material-flats-2)

Tawny Newsome and Bethany Thomas became

friends in the 2000s, when they put in time as backup singers for a long list of forgotten bar bands, and in 2017 they both appeared on Jon Langford’s album *Four Lost Souls*. But it’d be a mistake to pigeonhole them as supporting players—their soulful voices have always commanded attention rather than blending into the background. In addition to her musical career, Newsome (now based in Los Angeles) has an exhaustingly full resumé as an actor and comedian (she’s currently voicing a lead character in *Star Trek: Lower Decks*), while Thomas has appeared onstage at Steppenwolf and the Second City, portrayed Billie Holiday in a dinner-theater production, and fronted a David Bowie tribute band, among other things. Both women are clearly comfortable with an eclectic range of projects, but they’re not dilettantes—and their debut album as a duo, *Material Flats*, is out-and-out rock ‘n’ roll. They throw themselves into the music like they were born to do it, and they probably were. Rather than sticking to simple harmonies or answering each other’s verses, they seamlessly weave their multi-octave voices together, in and out of different keys. Newsome and Thomas bring every one of these brooding rock songs to a simmer—even ballads such as “Pincushion” have a certain tension—and on “June-teenth 2020,” a solemn meditation on the abolition of slavery, the music starts to boil over. The duo put their acting skills to good use during the spoken-word bits, and they’re smart enough not to get too hammy. Like all good actors and musicians, Newsome and Thomas know the value of restraint.

—**JAMES PORTER**

**STAR, VIOLENCE AGAINST STAR**  
 Half a Cow  
[star13.bandcamp.com/album/violence-against-star-2](http://star13.bandcamp.com/album/violence-against-star-2)

As tempting as it is to indulge my wee-lad love of all things dream pop and compare Star’s fresh take on shoegaze to early-90s wombadelic practitioners (I’m not making up the term “wombadelia,” though it never really caught on), the band prefer the more open-ended tag “noise pop.” That said, the catchy three-minute nuggets on the local trio’s second album, *Violence Against Star*, sound like they could’ve charted in the UK alongside Ride and Lush if they’d been released in, say, 1992. Opening cut “Angel School Anthem” is basically a mission statement for their wall of sound, combining Shannon Roberts’s dark, cooing vocals bathed in oodles of delay, Theodore Beck’s subterranean bass and huge, four-on-the-floor programmed beats, and Scott Cortez’s scuzzy ripples of guitar. Cortez definitely has dreamy string-god credentials: he’s spent time in 90s Michigan goth-gaze duo Lovesliescrushing and long-running My Bloody Valentine-indebted Chicago band Astro-brite. His buzzing, high-end axe frequencies and speaker-blowing low end fuel “Noise Parade,” which recalls the DIY spirit of ye olde indie-fuzz bands such as Black Tambourine. Roberts scornfully calls out some surely evil soul, her airy voice revealing a tinge of malevolence: “With your dirty silence / With a nasty violent stare . . . You’ve gotta lotta nerve to crash my noise parade.” She’s even more pissed off on “Artificial Planes”: as Star reach full-on punk velocity, Roberts sounds like she’s intoning from a far-off mountaintop as Cortez’s roaring guitar pitches landslides down its flanks.



Star  COURTESY THE ARTIST

“Last Star” backs away from this aggro approach, with dreamy atmospheric a la the Cocteau Twins or Purple Ivy Shadows (the nine-tees references keep flying, folks), a slow drum-machine pulse, and Frippertronics-style drones; Roberts gently delivers the line “I’m trapped in a bloody hell” (goths, please take note). When I pressed Roberts about the inspiration behind these songs, she replied “cult movies/politics/love, anger, redemption, and revenge.” Fair enough.

The first side of the album closes with the stripped-down “First Grade Still,” which starts like a Morricone soundtrack, with just guitar and wordless vocals, and then tumbles to the bottom of a deep, reverberating well. Side two, which starts with fuzz-ball popper “Cruel 15,” is just as epic. With its triumphant multitracked vocal choruses, “White Fear” reminds me of the second wave of lo-fi shoegaze bands (Velocity Girl, Swirlies, Eric’s Trip) before they chucked their pedals and got boring, while the massive title track ends the album with thick Jesus and Mary Chain-style six-string scree and a cavernous bass rumble. When Roberts exclaims “Blast the music up,” it’s already there—Star have entered the canon of angsty noise-pop greats. Tragically, this will be the band’s last album, at least with this lineup—Beck died of cancer last week. He was also Roberts’s husband, so for her it’s a double blow. Deepest condolences to everyone touched by this loss. —STEVE KRAKOW

#### VARIOUS ARTISTS, *NEW NEIGHBORHOODS*

Freedom to Spend

[freedomtospend.org/catalog/new-neighborhoods](http://freedomtospend.org/catalog/new-neighborhoods)

You don’t have to know Ernest Hood’s 1975 album *Neighborhoods* to understand what’s going on in the new compilation *New Neighborhoods*, but it doesn’t hurt. Born in 1923, Hood was a Portland jazz musician who kept up with new recording and production techniques throughout his life, and in 1964 he cofounded the listener-supported Portland

radio station now known as KBOO. In the early 70s, he assembled and edited field recordings he’d captured around the city in the 50s and 60s, augmenting them with new original music made primarily with zither and synth. In 1975 he self-released this material as *Neighborhoods*, pressing around 1,000 copies and giving most of them away, usually to family and friends. In the decades that followed, the album became sought after by private-press record collectors for its combination of audio documentary and proto-ambient synth work. Hood suffered from post-polio syndrome and passed away in 1991, but his influence has only grown—and in 2019 New York label Freedom to Spend remastered the original *Neighborhoods* recordings for a vinyl reissue with new liner notes, donating a portion of the proceeds to KBOO.

*New Neighborhoods* is inspired by Hood’s work, and includes new compositions and field recordings by 16 musicians and groups from all over the world, including UK dub and techno duo Space Afrika and former Chicagoan Ka Baird, cofounder of Spires That in the Sunset Rise. Baird’s contribution, “West End,” remixes a series of field recordings she made in her native Decatur, Illinois, including the sounds of splashing water and a distant train horn. Most of the tracks recall *Neighborhoods* in their mix of bucolic city soundscapes, but the globe-spanning roster on *New Neighborhoods* adds a texture and variety that the original lacks; Japanese electronic musician Sugai Ken created the haunting “Symphonic ‘Joya no Kane’” using a field recording of gong sounds and wind from his native Kanagawa Prefecture. Freedom to Spend is donating all proceeds from the first edition of *New Neighborhoods* to the Association for Neighborhood and Housing Development’s Center for Community Leadership, a New York-based training program for grassroots activists and housing-focused groups. The compilation makes a great addition to the ambient music canon as well as a fine tribute to a visionary, civic-minded musician who loved his city and his community. —SALEM COLLO-JULIN 

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10/22/2020

## Sonali Dev

*Recipe for Persuasion*  
November 20  
11/19/2020

## Riva Lehrer

*Golem Girl*  
December 20  
12/17/2020

## Emil Ferris

*My Favorite Thing Is Monsters*  
January 21  
1/28/2021

## Eve Ewing

1919  
February 21  
2/25/2021

## Nnedi Okorafor

*Remote Control*  
March 21  
3/25/2021

## Natalie Moore

*The South Side*  
April 21  
4/22/2021

## Rebecca Makkai

*The Great Believers*  
May 21  
5/27/2021

## Fatimah Asghar

*If They Come for Us*  
June 21  
6/24/2021

## Kayla Ancrum

*Darling*  
July 21  
7/22/2021

## Jessica Hopper

(TBD)  
August 21  
8/26/2021

## Precious Brady-Davis

*I Have Always Been Me: A Memoir*  
September 21  
9/23/2021

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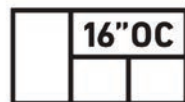
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Book Club Month

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Author Talk

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## Sonali Dev Author

USA Today bestselling author Sonali Dev writes Bollywood-style love stories that explore issues faced by women around the world. Dev's novels have been on *Library Journal*, NPR, *Washington Post*, and *Kirkus's* best books of the year lists. She has won the American Library Association's award for best romance, the RT Reviewer Choice Award for best contemporary romance, multiple RT Seals of Excellence, is a RITA finalist, and has been listed for the Dublin Literary Award. Shelf Awareness calls her "Not only one of the best but one of the bravest romance novelists working today." She lives in Chicagoland with her husband, two visiting adult children, and the world's most perfect dog. Find more at [sonalidev.com](http://sonalidev.com).



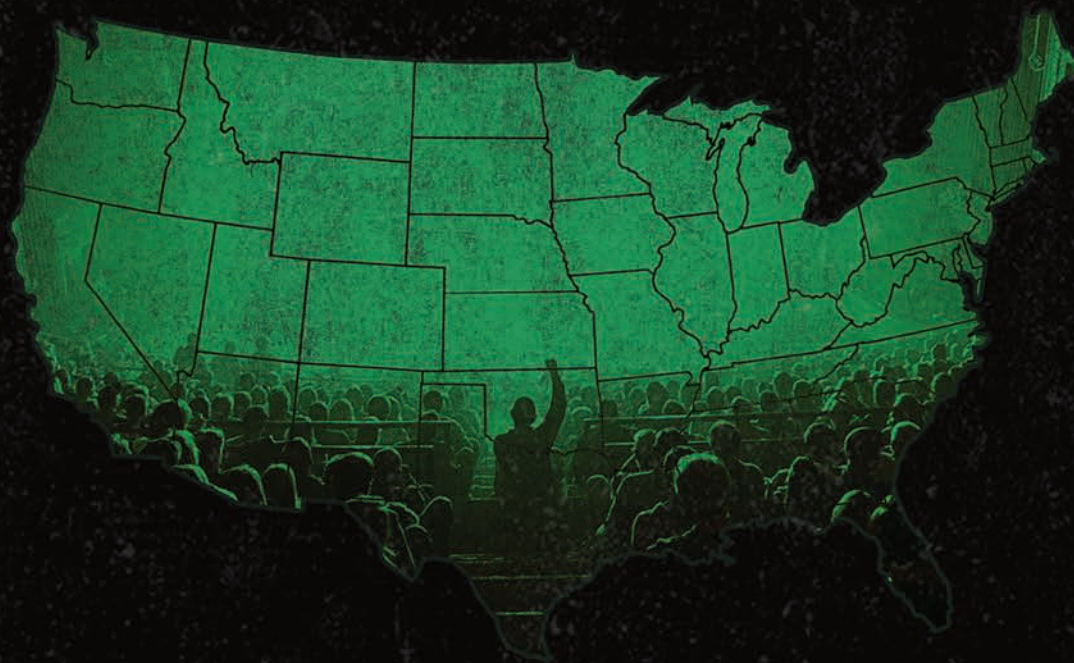
## Brianna Wellen Moderator

Brianna Wellen joined the *Reader* in 2013 as an editorial assistant and since has covered everything from stand-up comedy to medical marijuana to riot grrrls and so much more. Now, as culture editor, she continues to work to celebrate the people, places, and communities of all shapes and sizes that make up the city's vibrant and thriving arts and culture scene. She spends her free time (when not in a pandemic) laughing at comedy shows, drinking in dive bars, and (now more than ever) watching as many TV shows and movies as possible with her cats, Miso and Tofu.



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Andrew Tham and friend JENNA LYLE

## CHICAGOANS OF NOTE

## Andrew Tham, composer, performer, and cofounder of Parlour Tapes

“I was just livestreaming myself from my room for eight hours a day, just to see what it felt like. It was weird.”

As told to SALEM COLLO-JULIN

Andrew Tham, 31, is a composer and performer who grew up in Edgewater. He’s a founder of art-music cassette label Parlour Tapes, a member of performance collective Mocrep, and an occasional sound designer for the Neo-Futurists.

I grew up in Edgewater and went to college in Iowa and then immediately came back after graduation in 2011. I went to a really small school called Cornell College, maybe ten miles from Iowa City. I went there for music and English basically and tried to fit in some theater classes.

My dad is a conductor. He used to conduct

the Civic Orchestra, and he’s also worked as the conductor of the orchestra at DePaul. I tried to take piano and I could not hang with it, but then in the middle of high school I came around to classical music again. Because I had been playing bass in grade school and in my own bands, I started playing jazz at school as well. And then I started playing tuba for the wind ensemble. It was all bass, all the time for me in high school. Every Sousa march sounds the same, but it was kind of fun.

In school I played in rock bands with my friends. In the band I had in high school, we played our last gig at the Empty Bottle, and none of our friends could come because it was

the Empty Bottle. So the audience was literally just our parents and their friends.

I was a music director at our college radio station and I booked this band called Volcano! from Chicago, and Sam Scranton—he’s a good friend of mine now and a composer—he was the drummer in the band. He told me about Access Contemporary Music (ACM), who do a lot of composer-advocacy stuff for contemporary classical music. That was my first gig that let me go back to Chicago. I moved back in with my parents and I started interning at ACM, and then I just started going to all these contemporary classical concerts.

One of the first gigs I went to in that period was the Spektral Quartet at the Empty Bottle. And I was blown away—it seems outdated now, but at the time I was like, “Oh my God, a string quartet at a punk venue, that’s so crazy!” I started interning for Spektral Quartet too. It was sort of that initial seed, just finding those shows and seeing the same people at every show and then finally stopping being awkward for a second to strike up a conversation.

That’s how Parlour Tapes started, at shows. Kyle Vegter and Jenna Lyle and I knew each other from meeting at shows, and then Kyle and I shared a coworking space. None of us had run a record label before. We didn’t really have a lot of funds, so we thought tapes would be cheaper to make. We also thought that doing a cassette would give us an avenue to create an art object of sorts with each release, to collaborate with artists and designers.

Later, I fantasized about putting out a mixtape on floppy disk, which became our release *Mini MIDI Mixtape*. That was a high-concept project where I e-mailed ten composers and told them to make a track that is only MIDI—it’s only MIDI playback, and you can post it on Finale or Sibelius or whatever composing software you use. And then you forward it as a MIDI file, and it has to be under 3.4 MB because I’m going to put it literally on a floppy disk. People really ran with it.

We haven’t really released that much in the last couple of years. It’s slowed down to maybe one or two releases a year. Our Parlour Tapes project in 2021 is that four of us who also work with the Mocrep collective (me, Zach Moore, Deidre Huckabay, and Jenna Lyle) are all going to make our own record, and we hope to release it as a quadruple-tape set. Really go big.

We just put out this record by Zachary Good

and Lia Kohl (who are also in Mocrep), and we did a record-release party on the Experimental Sound Studio’s Twitch series. We all decided to create prerecorded video. We wanted to create a series of demos, like “Here’s an instructional on how you might listen to the album.”

I don’t think we think of ourselves as a classical-music label anymore, but we’re still in that realm no matter what, just because those are a lot of our friends. All of us who are in Parlour Tapes joined Mocrep, and the Mocrep vibe is also very much like that. Mocrep started out as a contemporary classical-music ensemble, and then they were performing in ways that were further from just a concert where you sit down and play your instrument. It felt very much like a merger when they asked us to join the group.

In terms of solo stuff, I had to go into quarantine for two weeks because I was exposed to somebody with COVID (I’ve tested negative since). I was just livestreaming myself from my room for eight hours a day, just to see what it felt like. It was weird. That kind of endurance is sort of discipline exploration. I really like the artist Tehching Hsieh. I feel like I’m always thinking in that vein a little bit for myself.

The *Sims* soundtrack is in my desert island discs. I e-mailed the composer, Jerry Martin, to ask if he had sheet music I could borrow. And he responded, which is amazing. I’m on his personal newsletter now, so like once a month I get “Here’s an old demo I did for *Sim-City 2000*” or something.

Jeff Kimmel (who plays in Aperiodic) and I have done this set a couple of times where we DJ Weather Channel music. There’s a website of these people who host old Weather Channel videos and make emulators where you can create your own TV broadcast in the style of the 1980s and 1990s Weather Channel. It’s unreal. These people are really good about crediting all the music that they find, and they note down playlists—so Jack and I ripped all the music off YouTube, and we’ll just do like an hour-long set.

*The Sims* I have a nostalgic attachment to—I played *The Sims* growing up. But Weather Channel music, which is mostly smooth jazz—I have no relation to that. I don’t know if it’s because I’ve been primed by *Sims*-type music or something, but now—I cannot get enough of it. I discovered the Rippingtons last year and I am obsessed. I listen to one track for like a week. So now I’m thinking, “Do I just like smooth jazz?”

@hollo



# VOTE YES! FOR FAIR TAX

To our Fellow Illinoisans,

We represent communities of faith from around the state of Illinois who are publicly declaring our support for the Fair Tax amendment. We believe that in the coming election, voters in Illinois have the power to promote justice, equity, and compassion by eliminating the clause in the state constitution that requires a flat rate income tax.

Year after year, those with the least means, often people of color, pay twice the share of their income in state and local taxes as those with ample income at the top. This year, a question on the November ballot could fundamentally reform the current broken tax system that holds back those with the least means. Illinois has a flat income tax system that is at the core of these tax inequities. By voting for a fair tax, you can help restore the path for people to get ahead instead of behind because of an unfair tax system.

We recognize the pervasive harms of systemic racism and know that the education provided for our children is not equitable, that Black and Brown communities are underserved, that health and mental health and jobs are underfunded in our state. Through a fair, graduated rate income tax, Illinois can better invest in programs and services that can strengthen communities that have long been neglected. Your vote in favor of the fair tax can make this structural change possible.

Fair Tax reform means 97% of Illinoisans, those making under \$250,000 a year, will pay less or the same in taxes while wealthy people making more than \$250,000 a year will finally pay their fair share. This small sacrifice by the wealthy provides better funding for education, human services, health care, infrastructure, and public services our communities need. These are works of mercy and justice.

In our sacred texts, time and again we see how God demands that society reorder its priorities to care for one another. This is a moral issue impacting every community within our state and it is up to all of us to not only vote for a Fair Tax, but use our voice to ensure Illinois makes this fundamental change!

As faith leaders, we are called to help build a better world through our commitment to building love for neighbor into our public policies. That's why we're voting for the Fair Tax amendment in November. We invite you to join us by voting YES.

Thank you.

For more information about the Fair Tax, visit:

[www.YesForFairTax.org](http://www.YesForFairTax.org)

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## SUPREME COURT

# Democrats let Barrett happen

Because she's exactly the kind of judge their corporate donors support.

By **LEONARD C. GOODMAN**

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

On March 16, 2016, President Barack Obama nominated Merrick Garland for the U.S. Supreme Court to succeed Antonin Scalia, who had died one month earlier. But Senate Republicans blocked his nomination on the grounds that it was too close to the presidential election, which was then seven months away. Four and a half years later, President Donald Trump nominated Amy Coney Barrett to succeed the late Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg. Although Barrett's nomination was made just over one month from the presidential election (which Trump appears to be losing), she was confirmed.

Democrats claimed to be united in their opposition to Barrett's confirmation. Yet their resistance to having a justice rammed through at the 11th hour of a lame duck presidency feels like the resistance that the Washington Generals used to show against the Harlem Globetrotters. That is, pure theater in which the outcome is never in doubt.

What this tells us is that the corporate donors who control the Democratic Party are happy with a Justice Barrett. In her short time on the bench, she has ruled consistently in favor of corporations. Just weeks before her nomination, Judge Barrett delivered a key ruling blocking many gig workers from suing when tech companies cheat them out of overtime pay. This and other business-friendly rulings is why corporations have given millions to campaign for Barrett's appointment. Barrett also belongs to the business-backed Federalist Society and will join five other Federalists on the Supreme Court.

The differences between Democrats and Republicans on issues like abortion and gay rights are important to be sure. But the areas of agreement between the two parties—both parties favor the interests of corporations over their workers and the environment—are also important. And these issues don't get discussed because there is no disagreement. It is just accepted by both parties that a lawyer must be business-friendly to qualify

for a federal judgeship.

In a true representative democracy, a lawyer should not have to demonstrate her fealty to corporate power to become a federal judge. The interests of corporate America are closely aligned with only a small fraction of Americans: the investor class. Most of our interests are more closely aligned with those of workers and consumers. There are scores of talented lawyers who go to top law schools but do not go to work at corporate firms. Many of these lawyers devote their careers to representing ordinary people, often taking on the most powerful interests in industry and in government. These pro-people lawyers should also have a place on the federal courts.

Thurgood Marshall was a civil rights activist who distinguished himself representing victims of racial injustice before being nominated by President John F. Kennedy for a federal judgeship, and later to the Supreme Court. Marshall would never get on the court today. Without a track record of pro-corporate advocacy, the donors would reject him.

Some lawyers distinguish themselves by taking on powerful corporations that harm ordinary people through negligence or malfeasance. These lawyers often exhibit great skill, resourcefulness, and integrity.

Probably the most successful lawyer ever in taking on the criminal acts of massive corporations is Steven Donziger. Donziger graduated from Harvard Law School, worked as a public defender in Washington D.C., and in 1993 agreed to represent a group of 30,000 Indigenous people and villagers in Ecuador who had been deliberately poisoned by Chevron, one of the world's largest corporations with over \$260 billion in assets.

Beginning in 1964, Chevron (then Texaco) began extracting oil in Ecuador. To save about \$3 per barrel of oil produced, the company decided to ignore waste regulations and dumped some 16 billion gallons of toxic wastewater into rivers and pits, polluting groundwater and farm land, and destroying a large section of the Ecuadorian Amazon in what came to be called the "Amazon Chernobyl" by locals and experts. Local drinking

water became noxious, and citizens became ill. This has all been confirmed by courts in Ecuador after an eight-year trial, the submission of 105 technical evidentiary reports, and testimony from numerous witnesses.

"I did not set out to be an environmental lawyer," Donziger recently told Greenpeace. "I simply agreed to seek a remedy for 30,000 victims for the destruction of their lands and water; to seek care for the health impacts including birth defects, leukemia, and other cancers; and to help them restore their Amazon ecosystem and basic dignity."

Donziger made more than 250 trips to Ecuador over the next two decades as he led the legal fight against Chevron. Then in 2011, Donziger and his team secured a \$9.5 billion judgment on behalf of the victims. The trial court decision was affirmed on the merits or for enforcement by multiple appellate courts in Ecuador and Canada, including the supreme courts of both countries.

Chevron refused to pay. During the trial, it threatened the affected communities with a "lifetime of litigation." Afterwards, Chevron engaged a team of 2,000 corporate lawyers to retaliate against Donziger and the lead plaintiffs in the case, filing a barrage of SLAPP (Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation) and RICO suits, legal tools used—and abused—by large companies to punish people who take them to court.

Chevron's vile and cynical legal strategy—designed to avoid paying compensation to the Indigenous people whose lives it deliberately destroyed to earn an extra \$5 billion over 20 years—could not succeed without a federal judiciary populated by judges willing to bend the law to protect corporate profits.

Chevron's RICO suit against Donziger was filed in the Southern District of New York, a Wall Street-friendly court. The case was presided over by U.S. district Judge Lewis Kaplan who, before being appointed to the bench by former President Bill Clinton, a Democrat, spent decades as a corporate lawyer representing tobacco companies and banks. The record of the RICO case shows that Chevron paid a disgraced former Ecuadoran judge named Alberto Guerra about \$2 million to testify that the verdict in Ecuador was the product of a bribe. Chevron's cash payments to Guerra should have disqualified him as a witness. Moreover, Guerra admitted to lying about the bribe in another international proceeding. Nevertheless, after denying Donziger his right to a jury trial, Judge Kaplan found that Guerra's story was credible.

Judge Kaplan later charged Donziger with criminal contempt, but the New York prosecutor's office refused to take the case. In a rare legal move, Kaplan then appointed a private corporate law firm (that also represents Chevron) to prosecute Donziger. Kaplan assigned Judge Loretta Preska, a member of the Federalist Society, to hear the case. Preska placed Donziger under house arrest and confiscated his passport.

I reached Donziger by phone at his apartment in Manhattan, where he lives with his wife and teenage son. He says that his contempt trial before Judge Preska is scheduled for November 4, the day after the election. He is again being denied a jury trial.

Some 29 Nobel laureates, including nine Peace Prize winners, have signed a letter declaring that Chevron's legal assault on Donziger is "one of the most egregious cases of judicial harassment and defamation" ever seen. He has also been backed by 475 lawyers and bar associations who wrote an open letter outlining his wrongful detention and mistreatment by U.S. judicial authorities.

Donziger's story is also a story about the sad condition of the U.S. court system which, like the other two branches of our government, primarily serves the interests of the wealthy. On this topic, I strongly recommend Ronald Goldfarb's book *The Price of Justice*.

Although the Democrats did nothing to stop Barrett's nomination to the Supreme Court, their leader, Joe Biden, has pledged that if elected, he would establish a bipartisan commission to study whether to expand the courts to achieve greater balance.

We recall from history class that President Franklin D. Roosevelt also threatened, in 1937, to add enough liberal justices to the court to protect his programs from the "obstructionist" conservatives. The key difference then was that FDR had an agenda of bold programs to pull the country out of the Great Depression, such as putting Americans to work building post offices, bridges, schools, highways, and parks; supporting farmers and labor unions, and ending alcohol prohibition.

The Democrats of today, however, offer nothing but a promise to wear a face mask and to not send mean tweets at 3 AM, while Biden assured his wealthy donors at a New York fundraiser that "nothing would fundamentally change" if he is elected president. Even a Supreme Court packed with Republicans is likely to go along with that agenda. **■**

 @GoodmanLen



JOE NEWTON

SAVAGE LOVE

Don't let the patriarchal gaze kill your kink

There's nothing wrong with objectifying someone who wants to be objectified by you.

By DAN SAVAGE

**Q:** I've been in a relationship with a wonderful guy for the past year. The only problem is that he works with a girl he used to fuck. It wasn't just sex—they would go on dates and even went on vacation together. He kept this little "detail" to himself for six full months before giving himself away by mistake. He then apologized, said he hadn't told me so that I wouldn't worry for no reason, and that he no longer has any feelings for her whatsoever. Disclaimer: I'm an extremely jealous person with huge trust issues, so knowing he kept all this from me is devastating. I no longer trust him. Just thinking that he's seeing—on a daily basis—a woman he used to sleep with is driving me nuts! I repeatedly asked him to let me meet her in person, at the very least, but it didn't happen. So one night, after giving him a heads-up, I showed up at their workplace. He had said it would be OK for me to

stop by sometime but once I got there he freaked out. He accused me of not trusting him! My question: Am I being crazy and overreacting—I'll admit I've been agonizing nonstop about this—or is he acting like an asshole with something to hide? I've been struggling to curb my anxiety about this, and I've even had a few panic attacks he's not aware of. Him changing jobs is out of the question. —I'M TERRIFIED ABOUT LOSING IT AND NUKING EVERYTHING

**A:** How long were you dating this guy before you outed yourself as an extremely jealous person (EJP)?

I'm guessing at least a few weeks, ITALIANE, if not a few months. Because as you're no doubt aware—as all EJPs are aware—it's not a desirable trait, which is why very few EJPs disclose on the first date. ("I grew up in Milan, I have two sisters, and I'm the type of person who'll show up at your workplace and

cause a huge scene if I think you might be fucking someone else or have ever fucked someone else.") If you're anything like EJPs I've dated and dumped, you didn't show your boyfriend this side of yourself until long after he'd developed feelings for you, making it harder—harder by design—for him to end things.

I'm gonna go out on a limb and guess he found out his new girlfriend is an EJP before you found out your boyfriend works with a woman he used to fuck. At some point before the six-month mark, ITALIANE, you blew up at him about a waitress or someone he follows on Instagram. And at that moment he realized he couldn't tell you he works with a woman he used to fuck. Because now he feared—because now he knew—you would lose your EJP shit over it because he'd seen you lose your EJP shit over far less.

The only thing more exhausting than being with

an EJP is dealing with an EJP who resents you for hiding something from them—something like working with an ex—that would set them off for days or months. I get it, I get it: *he kept this from you*. But if the last six months (!) are proof of anything, ITALIANE, they're proof your boyfriend was right to keep this from you. Since changing jobs wasn't an option and since he can't jump in a time machine and go unfuck this woman, what other option did he have? Given a choice between telling you and spending the next six months dealing with your bullshit or keeping his mouth shut and hoping you never found out, he quite understandably chose the path of least bullshit.

If you can't see how your own behavior may have contributed to his omission—and if you can't forgive him and you can't take, "No, I'm not fucking her now," for an answer and you refuse to see this as your problem, not his—then do your boyfriend a favor and dump him. If you don't and if you keep this shit up, if you keep saying you can't trust him one minute and then complaining about him accusing you of not trusting him the next, be prepared to have your ass dumped. Because there's only so long a person, guilty of wrongdoing or not, will put up with an EJP's bullshit.

And finally: Your boyfriend was under no obligation to disclose the current location of every girl he'd ever fucked at the start of your relationship, ITALIANE, or at any other point, for that matter. While some people can be open with their partners about their pasts and their partners can be open with them, it's not compulsory. And if someone wants to try and make it work with an EJP, it's not a good idea. I don't know why anyone would want to make it work with an EJP, ITALIANE, but there

are people out there who do. Your boyfriend might be one of them. But don't push your luck.

**Q:** I've been with my partner for a year and a half and have been long distance from the start and she's working towards moving closer to me in a more permanent way. But I'm worried about the sex as I feel a lack of desire for her. I believe it could be my newfound awareness of "patriarchal gaze," which I wasn't conscious of before meeting her. I used to enjoy kink but I no longer consider it sexy. I used to have a lot of sex with my ex-boyfriends and used to feel some conflict but power games were a turn-on. Loving care has replaced dirty games and I feel wrong if I try to watch porn and I no longer enjoy touching myself because I cannot get off without thinking in sexist ways. I'm feeling pretty confused. Although I love my partner in a very special and deep way, it's quite confusing. Please advise on how to feel sexy again without being destructive. —STILL HORNY DEEP DOWN SOMEWHERE

**A:** There's nothing wrong with objectifying someone who wants to be objectified by you and there's nothing wrong with being objectified by someone you want to be objectified by. (That's what you mean by the "patriarchal gaze," right?) In addition to being three-dimensional human beings with wants, needs, agency, and autonomy, we are also physical objects, SHDDS, and sometimes we want to be appreciated for the objects we are. (Or the objects we also are.) So long as the person you're objectifying—the person on the receiving end of your gaze—enjoys receiving that kind of attention from you and vice versa, there's nothing wrong with it.

To gaze at someone who desires your gaze, to touch them and play dirty games with them, isn't inherently sexist or dehumanizing—so long as it's consensual and mutually pleasurable, which I realize it all too often isn't, particularly for women. But we shouldn't let assholes (mostly men) who can make people (mostly women) feel unsafe or uncomfortable with a look ruin what isn't just enjoyable when consensual, but affirming and at times transcendently pleasurable.

To be perfectly frank, SHDDS, I'm concerned about your relationship. If you feel so awful about your sexual desires and sexual history that you're incapable of enjoying sex anymore—if you can't even masturbate anymore—and those awful feelings entered your life at roughly the same time your partner did . . . maybe your partner is part of the problem. If you were evolving in a different direction with her sexually, if you were moving away from power games—which can be very loving—and toward something else, I wouldn't see a problem. But you aren't opening up to something new in this relationship, SHDDS, you're shutting down. Even if your partner hasn't said or done anything to make you feel ashamed of your sexual desires or history, SHDDS, I'm not sure she's right for you. And I don't think it would be right of you to let someone you don't desire move across the country to be with you.

But whether you decide to stay in this relationship or not, you would benefit from speaking with a sex-positive/kink-positive therapist about your conflicted feelings. ☑

Send letters to mail@savagelove.net. Download the Savage Lovecast at savagelovecast.com. @fakedansavage

# Men's Virility Restored in Clinical Trial; 275% More Blood Flow in 5 Minutes

A newly improved version of America's best-selling male performance enhancer gives 70-year-old men the ability and stamina they enjoyed in their 30's.

America's best-selling sexual performance enhancer just got a lot better.

It's the latest breakthrough for nitric oxide – the molecule that makes E.D. woes fade and restores virility when it counts the most.

Nitric oxide won the Nobel Prize in 1998. It's why "the little blue pill" works. More than 200,000 studies confirm it's the key to superior sexual performance.

And this new discovery increases nitric oxide availability resulting in even quicker, stronger and longer-lasting performance.

One double-blind, placebo-controlled study (the "gold-standard" of research) involved a group of 70-year-old-men.

They didn't exercise. They didn't eat healthy. And researchers reported their "nitric oxide availability was almost totally compromised," resulting in blood flow less than HALF of a man in peak sexual health.

But only five minutes after the first dose their blood flow increased 275%, back to levels of a perfectly healthy 31-year-old man! "It's amazing," remarks nitric oxide expert Dr. Al Sears. "That's like giving 70-year-old men the sexual power of 30-year-olds."

## WHY SO MUCH EXCITEMENT?

Despite the billions men spend annually on older nitric oxide therapies, there's one well-known problem with them.

They don't always work.

A very distinguished and awarded doctor practicing at a prestigious Massachusetts hospital who has studied Nitric Oxide for over 43 years states a "deficiency of bioactive nitric oxide... leads to impaired endothelium-dependent vasorelaxation."

In plain English, these older products may increase levels of nitric oxide. But that's only half the battle. If it's not bioactively available then your body can't absorb it to produce an erection.

Experts simply call it the nitric oxide "glitch." And until now, there's never been a solution.

## NEXT GENERATION NITRIC OXIDE FORMULA FLYING OFF SHELVES

Upon further research, America's No. 1 men's health expert Dr. Al Sears discovered certain nutrients fix this "glitch" resulting in 275% better blood flow.

He's combined those nutrients with proven nitric oxide

boosters in a new formula called *Primal Max Red*. In clinical trials, 5,000 mg is required for satisfying sexual performance. *Primal Max Red* contains a bigger, 9,000 mg per serving dose. It's become so popular, he's having trouble keeping it in stock.

Dr. Sears is the author of more than 500 scientific papers. Thousands of people listened to him speak at the recent Palm Beach Health & Wellness Festival featuring Dr. Oz. NFL Hall of Fame quarterback Joe Namath recently visited his clinic, the **Sears Institute for Anti-Aging Medicine**.

*Primal Max Red* has only been available for a few months – but everyone who takes it reports a big difference. "I have the energy to have sex three times in one day, WOW! That has not happened in years. Oh, by the way I am 62," says Jonathan K. from Birmingham, AL.

## HOW IT WORKS

Loss of erection power starts with your blood vessels. Specifically, the inside layer called the endothelium where nitric oxide is made.

The problem is various factors THICKEN your blood vessels as you age. This blocks availability causing the nitric oxide "glitch." The result is difficulty in getting and sustaining a healthy erection.

How bad is the problem?

Researcher shows the typical 40-year-old man absorbs 50% less nitric oxide. At 50, that drops to 25%. And once you pass 60 just a measly 15% gets through.

To make matters worse, nitric oxide levels start declining in your 30's. And by 70, nitric oxide production is down an alarming 75%.

*Primal Max Red* is the first formula to tackle both problems. Combining powerful nitric oxide boosters and a proven delivery mechanism that defeats the nitric oxide "glitch" resulting in 275% better blood flow. There's not enough space here to fully explain how it works, so Dr. Sears will send anyone who orders *Primal Max Red* a free special report that explains everything.

## MORE CLINICAL RESULTS

Nutrients in *Primal Max Red* have logged impressive results.

In a *Journal of Applied Physiology* study, one resulted in a 30 times MORE nitric oxide. And these increased levels lasted up to 12 hours.

"I measured my nitric oxide levels, you can buy a test kit from Amazon," reports 48-year-old Jeff O. "Monday night I showed depleted."



A new discovery that increases nitric oxide availability was recently proven in a clinical trial to boost blood flow 275%

Then he used ingredients in *Primal Max Red* and, "The results were off the charts. I first woke around 3 a.m. on Tuesday very excited. My nitric oxide levels measured at the top end of the range."

## FREE BONUS TESTOSTERONE BOOSTER

Every order also gets Dr. Sears testosterone boosting formula *Primal Max Black* for free.

"If you want passionate 'rip your clothes off' sex you had in your younger days, you need nitric oxide to get your erection going. And testosterone for energy and drive," says Dr. Sears. "You get both with *Primal Max Red* and *Primal Max Black*."

## HOW TO GET PRIMAL MAX

To secure free bottles of *Primal Max Black* and get the hot, new *Primal Max Red* formula, buyers should contact the Sears Health Hotline at 1-800-488-9870 within the next 48 hours. "It's not available in drug stores yet," says Dr. Sears. "The Hotline allows us to ship directly to the customer."

Dr. Sears feels so strongly about *Primal Max*, all orders are backed by a 100% money-back guarantee. "Just send me back the bottle and any unused product within 90 days from purchase date, and I'll send you all your money back," he says.

The Hotline will be open for the next 48 hours. After that, the phone number will be shut down to allow them to restock. Call 1-800-488-9870 to secure your limited supply of *Primal Max Red* and free bottles of *Primal Max Black*. You don't need a prescription, and those who call in the first 24 hours qualify for a significant discount. Use Promo Code NP1020PMAX102 when you call in. Lines are frequently busy, but all calls will be answered.

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### NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING WILL BE HELD VIRTUALLY ONLY

Chicago Transit Authority  
Proposed 2021-2025 Capital Program of Projects,  
2021 Operating Budget and Program and the  
Financial Plan for 2022 and 2023

Notice is hereby given that the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) Board desires public comment before it considers an ordinance to adopt the proposed 2021-2025 Capital Program of Projects, 2021 Operating Budget and Program, and the Financial Plan for 2022 and 2023. A virtual public hearing will be held on Thursday, November 12, 2020 at 6:00 PM.

Because of the pandemic and the Governor's Executive Order prohibiting large public gatherings, the public hearing will proceed only virtually.

A link to view the hearing will be available at [transitchicago.com/finance](https://transitchicago.com/finance). Members of the public who wish to speak at the virtual public hearing are encouraged to submit their request prior to the hearing. Options for providing comment at the virtual hearing or for submission to the CTA Board on the proposed 2021-2025 Capital Program of Projects, 2021 Operating Budget and Program, and the Financial Plan for 2022 and 2023 are detailed below:

**WRITTEN STATEMENTS.** Written statements will be taken into consideration prior to the adoption of the proposed 2021-2025 Capital Program of Projects, 2021 Operating Budget and Program, and Financial Plan for 2022 and 2023. Written comments for the CTA Board's review and consideration must be submitted by 5:00 PM, Monday, November 16, 2020. Written comments may be submitted in any of the following ways:

- Via US Mail, CTA Board Office, 567 W. Lake Street, 2nd Floor, Chicago, IL 60661.
- Via drop off at CTA Headquarters, 567 W. Lake Street, 1st floor mailroom.
- Via fax at 312-681-5035.
- Via email at [GLonghini1@transitchicago.com](mailto:GLonghini1@transitchicago.com).

**ORAL STATEMENTS.** Members of the public who wish to speak at the virtual public hearing are encouraged to register prior to the hearing, by completing and submitting a Request to Speak form online at [transitchicago.com/finance](https://transitchicago.com/finance). Individuals registered online by 6:00 PM on November 11, 2020, the day before the hearing, will be called by CTA, at the telephone number provided, during the November 12, 2020 hearing, to be connected to the virtual public hearing proceedings.

**DIAL IN AT THE TIME OF THE HEARING.** Members of the public may also dial-in, while the hearing is in progress, to request to speak, by calling 312-681-3091.

Individuals who pre-register to speak will be taken up first at the virtual public hearing. Individuals who call while the hearing is in progress will then speak in the order that they call in.

The proposed 2021-2025 Capital Program of Projects, 2021 Operating Budget and Program and the Financial Plan will be available for public inspection, beginning on Thursday, October 22, 2020, on CTA's website [www.transitchicago.com](https://www.transitchicago.com) in both pdf and plain text formats.

At the virtual public hearing CTA will afford an opportunity for interested persons or agencies to be heard with respect to social, economic, environmental and other related aspects of the proposed 2021-2025 Capital Program of Projects, 2021 Operating Budget and Program, and the Financial Plan for 2022 and 2023.

At the virtual public hearing, an American Sign Language interpreter and a Spanish interpreter will be provided. Individuals with disabilities who require other accommodations to review the budget or provide feedback should contact Amy J. Serpe, Manager, ADA Compliance Programs, at [aserpe@transitchicago.com](mailto:aserpe@transitchicago.com) or 312-350-2301 or Relay.

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## JOBS GENERAL

**Director, Project Coordination Services**  
UI Health Hospital Administration at the University of Illinois at Chicago, located in a large metropolitan area, is seeking a full-time Director, Project Coordination Services to assist the department to provide high-level business planning, project management and analytical support for key strategic initiatives of the health enterprise. Works closely with hospital and clinic leadership to manage the analysis, design, development and implementation of diverse enterprise-wide strategic projects and initiatives. Partners with executive leadership to drive the development and execution of large strategic initiatives. Provides comprehensive business planning support to analyze feasibility and desirability of potential health system initiatives and provide management support in the planning, development, and implementation of those initiatives. Responsible for all aspects of project management including analysis, solution design, project development and implementation; integration of key stakeholder input and best practice innovations to achieve transformative change. Develops and maintains project specifications including business and user requirements, functional and operating systems specifications. Measures and projects growth opportunities and enterprise performance around strategic goals and objectives, including development of an enterprise performance dashboard. Manages project budgets and expenses, as requested. Prepares required reports and submittals by developing, analyzing and presenting related data and information. Performs other related University duties and special projects, as assigned. Travel may be required for conferences and professional development. Requires a master's degree in business administration, health services administration, healthcare management, or related field, or its foreign equivalent. For fullest consideration, please submit a CV, Cover Letter, and 3 Professional Reference Letters to the attention of the Search Coordinator via email at [ajpobs@uic.edu](mailto:ajpobs@uic.edu) or via mail at UI Health Human Resources, 1747 W. Roosevelt Rd., (MC 807), Chicago, IL 60608. The University of Illinois at Chicago is an Equal Opportunity, Affirmative Action

Employer. Minorities, women, veterans, and individuals with disabilities are encouraged to apply. The University of Illinois may conduct background checks on all job candidates upon acceptance of a contingent offer. Background checks will be performed in compliance with the Fair Credit Reporting Act. The University of Illinois System requires candidates selected for hire to disclose any documented finding of sexual misconduct or sexual harassment and to authorize inquiries to current and former employers regarding findings of sexual misconduct or sexual harassment. For more information, visit <https://www.hr.uillinois.edu/cms/One.aspx?portalId=4292&pageId=1411899>

**Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago seeks Reporting Workbench Radar Specialist for Chicago, IL** to administer all aspects of EPIC Reporting Workbench & Radar reporting tools. Bachelor's in Info Tech/Healthcare Informatics/related field+3yrs exp req'd. Req'd skills: 3 yrs w/ EPIC: data warehouse dev, RW, Radar. Background check&drug test req'd. Apply to <https://careers-luriechildrens.icims.com/jobs/13735/rw-radar-specialist/job> Tracking code: 2020-13735

**Groupon, Inc. is seeking a Sr. Software Engineer in Chicago, IL** w/ the following responsibilities: Develop, construct & implement the next generation of company products and features for Groupon's web & mobile apps; design high-performance RESTful service-oriented architectures & software that is fast & efficient for millions of users. Apply at [www.grouponcareers.com](https://www.grouponcareers.com) by searching keyword R23982

**TransUnion, LLC seeks Consultants** for various & unanticipated worksites throughout the U.S. (HQ: Chicago, IL) to support global analytics initiatives. Master's in Statistics/Mathematics/Analytics/related Quantitative field + 2yrs exp or Bachelor's in Statistics/Mathematics/Analytics/related Quantitative field + 5yrs exp req'd. Skills req'd: exp w/statistical analysis & data analytics using R, SAS & SAS automation, SQL queries for data extraction, Tableau, predictive modeling, Clustering, Decision Trees; Education/exp using Python, Hadoop/Hive, Spark, enSelection. Telecommuting permitted. Send resume to: R. Harvey, REF: NM, 555 W Adams, Chicago, IL 60661

**TransUnion, LLC seeks Lead Developers** for Chicago, IL location to act as subject matter expert & provide sw architectural framework. Master's in Comp Sci/Comp Eng/any Eng field + 3yrs exp. or Bachelor's in Comp Sci/Comp Eng/any Eng field + 5yrs exp req'd. Req'd skills: sw design, architecture exp. w/high volume, high concurrency sw applications; Java, Spring, SpringBoot, Git, Maven, Jenkins, Confluence, SonarQube, Linux, Big data; WebServices, Tomcat, Soap UI, Shell Scripts, Squirrel SQL Client, WebSphere. Send resume to: R. Harvey, REF: KBS, 555 W Adams, Chicago, IL 60661

**TransUnion, LLC seeks Sr. Analysts** for Chicago, IL location to design & execute all aspects of statistical analysis projects for predictive modelling, business reporting and customer evaluations. Master's in Statistics/Applied Mathematics/related Quantitative field + 1yr exp. req'd. Req'd Skills: Exp. performing segmentation & statistical analyses, R, Linux, SQL, GLM (Logistic), data visualization, time series analysis, scenario & sensitivity analysis, machine learning, Unix Command, MS VBA, Dimensionality reduction techniques (feature selection/extraction, stratified sampling), scripting language, statistical techniques. 10% travel required. Send resume to: R. Harvey, REF: RL, 555 W Adams, Chicago, IL 60661

**The Northern Trust Company seeks a Specialist, Applications** to design, develop, test, and deploy software applications and solutions. Analyze user requirements, procedures, and problems to automate and improve existing computer systems. Maintain software applications, including coding, debugging, and installations as needed. Conduct feasibility studies and define and design system requirements for complex software development projects. Confer with users and translate application storyboards and use cases into functional applications. Position requires a Bachelor's degree in Computer Science, Engineering, Information Systems, or a related STEM field, followed by 5 years of progressively responsible experience with financial industry front and back office trading platforms and applications. Experience must include a minimum of: 5 years of experience with dataflow and data processing across various systems; 5 years of experience

with integration for client reporting, internal reporting, and regulatory reporting systems; 5 years of experience with consulting with business unit partners and within the enterprise regarding new techniques, approaches, practices, and technologies in data processing and the impact on proposed and ongoing projects; 5 years of experience with Agile and Scrum methodologies; and 5 years of experience with Java, J2EE, Ant, C/CD, J2EE design patterns, JAX-WS, JAXB, JMS, JSON, Maven, MQ Series/Kafka, MS SQL/Oracle, PL/SQL, REST, Spring, Spring Boot, Tomcat, and WebLogic. Job location: Chicago, IL. To apply, please visit <https://careers.northerntrust.com> and enter job requisition number 20097 when prompted. Alternatively, please send your resume, cover letter, and a copy of the ad to: S. Schachter, 50 S. LaSalle St., Chicago, IL 60603

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**Universal Logistics Group LLP seeks CEO for Woodridge, Illinois office.** Req. Bachelor's or equiv. in Business Admin or closely rel. field & 6 yrs wrk exp as CEO or similar executive position in supply chain industry performing HR & market analysis, business development & sales management. Up to 30% domestic & 20% int'l trvl req. Email resume w/ cvr ltr to [diana.martinez@unilogicgroup.com](mailto:diana.martinez@unilogicgroup.com) & reference job #CEO-001

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to unanticipated client sites within continental US, ea. visit not lasting over 5 days. Must report back to HQ after ea. visit, & must reside within commuting distance of Chicago, IL. Req. Bachelor's in Accounting, Mgmt., or Internal Audit. Email resumes to Adelfia LLC at [mfbalita@adelfiacpas.com](mailto:mfbalita@adelfiacpas.com).

**Assemblers, Inc seeks Food Safety and Quality Assurance Manager in McCook** to Ovrsee dvlpmnt of SQF system & procdr to ensr prod of qlty prdcts. Req BS in Fd Sfty & Tech or r/td fld + 2 yrs exp r/td fld + 24 mnths exp in: GFSI; HACCP; Ln Sx Sgma + 18 mnths exp in: Fd San & Pst Cntrl; mcrblgl environmntng; & lab mng & analy mthds. 5% dom trvl. Mail resumes to Paul Siefert 2850 W Columbus Ave, Chicago, IL 60652

**AArete, a fast-growing global management consulting firm, is recruiting a Manager - Talent Acquisition:** Master's Degree in International Business, Marketing, or HR Management; plus 18 month's 18 months' exp. In: Full cycle recruiting experience, with either a management consulting firm or staffing agency; Recruiting mid, senior, and C-level executives; Supervising employees; Managing at least five vendor relationships and negotiating contracts; and Benchmarking candidate and compensation information for positions/roles hired for. Please visit: <https://www.aarete.com/join-our-team/open-positions/> for instructions to apply.

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that is affirming, empathic, and interactive. To talk contact Michael J. Bland, Psy.D., LCPC. Northside location. 773-404-8161. Michael@BlandTherapy.com/www.BlandTherapy.com

## PERSONALS

**Wise Guy - Max**  
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