

# READER

## A racial reckoning for Boystown

By ADAM M. RHODES 16

**BEST OF CHICAGO**  
2020



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## THIS WEEK ON CHICAGOREADER.COM



### Lyft eyes Illinois

The ride-hailing giant is funding a local super PAC that could drastically change the gig economy landscape in Illinois.



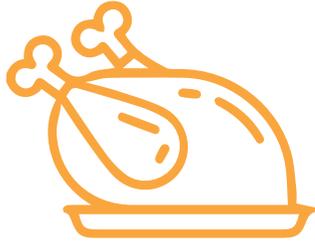
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Here’s how to deal with health inequity at the community level.



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ISA GIALLORENZO

## SHOP LOCAL

### Small but mighty

There's no room for waste at Tinyshop.

BY ISA GIALLORENZO

Few aspects of modern life require a larger amount of denial than the waste we produce every single day. We're seeing the planet turn into a huge garbage can, but it seems like there isn't much we can do because most of what we consume comes wrapped in disposable containers. But environmentalist Christine Sorich, 34, decided to face this urgent issue and do things differently.

"My hypersensitivity to packaging waste, food miles, and commercialized agriculture could all be addressed with a new food shopping experience," she says. After meticulous

planning, which took into consideration every aspect of the food chain, Sorich launched Tinyshop last September, a zero-waste grocer "where the shop is eensie, the waste is weensie, and your impact is teenie-tiny," according to her slogan. "Even ethical brands overlook the problem of single-use packaging waste," she says. "I am working with many vendors to create a container swap program for my wholesale purchases, which effectively cuts down on packaging waste that consumers don't even know exists. Then, once the products arrive at Tinyshop, they are portioned into jars. These jars go out on a deposit system with hopes that our customers will bring them back for us to sanitize and refill. So in a way, Tinyshop is really just an anti-packaging, packaging company—a closed-loop packaging shop. I'm really just a modern-day milkwoman, with hopes of carrying plant-based milks as soon as we get refrigeration."

Conscious not only of the environment but also of the busy lives people have, Sorich—an art director for TV commercials and a very busy person herself—decided to create an easy system for people to shop while using non-disposable containers. With a small deposit of up to \$2, she conveniently provides the mason jars that contain the grocery items she sells. To carry those jars, Sorich designed a special tote bag that perfectly accommodates them. For now, customers can place orders online at Tinyshop's website ([tinyshopgrocer.com](http://tinyshopgrocer.com)). Pickup and payment are done on Sundays at pop-ups in restaurants and markets such as Middle Brow Bungalow and Daisies in Logan Square. Delivery made by electric car is also available for \$5.

"Most zero-waste shops and bulk sections around the world cater to folk who are already acclimated to the cumbersome and lengthy shopping process of filling personal contain-

ers themselves," she says. "Tinyshop does that packing in house, to make the shopping experience more like just pulling what you want off of the shelves. This offers customers a simple, convenient way to buy in bulk responsibly and without waste."

But it's not only packaging Sorich is concerned about; she is also careful about what goes inside those mason jars. Products should be "as local, organic, and fair as possible."

"There are certain things that just aren't grown here," she says, "but as a rule, I start my hunt in Chicago then look into options within Illinois, into the midwest, and outward from there. By supporting local farms and businesses, we can support our economy and lower food miles. I figure if people have a grocer they can truly trust, who gives all of the info transparently, then it takes a lot of the guesswork out of the very complicated act of grocery shopping." Tinyshop's website tells customers the contents and provenance of each product, and what kind of packaging they were delivered in. Transparency is at the heart of Sorich's business: "I thought, let me curate a selection of goods that I deem most environmentally sound, items that I use myself, let me work with vendors and makers on setting up new, zero-waste systems, and let me do all of that research for you. I promise, with every Tinyshop product, I have exhausted all questions and options, and if I haven't yet, I will let you know that too. It's a transparency and loyalty service that really focuses on making the most out of your grocery spending," she says.

Established just a few months ago, and still considered a pilot program, Tinyshop already carries more than 50 products. Those include grains, flours, vegan proteins such as seeds, nuts, and legumes, dried fruits, and a selection of environmentally-friendly hygiene and household goods. It also offers honey from Hive Supply, coffee beans from Kusanya Cafe, and bread from Middle Brow Bungalow—all local businesses with community outreach programs. As for prices, Sorich vows to keep them down by buying in bulk, trimming her operational costs, and keeping rent low by working from Garfield Park. "I want healthy, conscious buying to be accessible to all Chicagoans," she says. With the support of eco-minded friends like Jay Moore, who often helps her at Sunday pop-ups, Sorich runs not only a tiny but also a tight ship. **IA**

# Store

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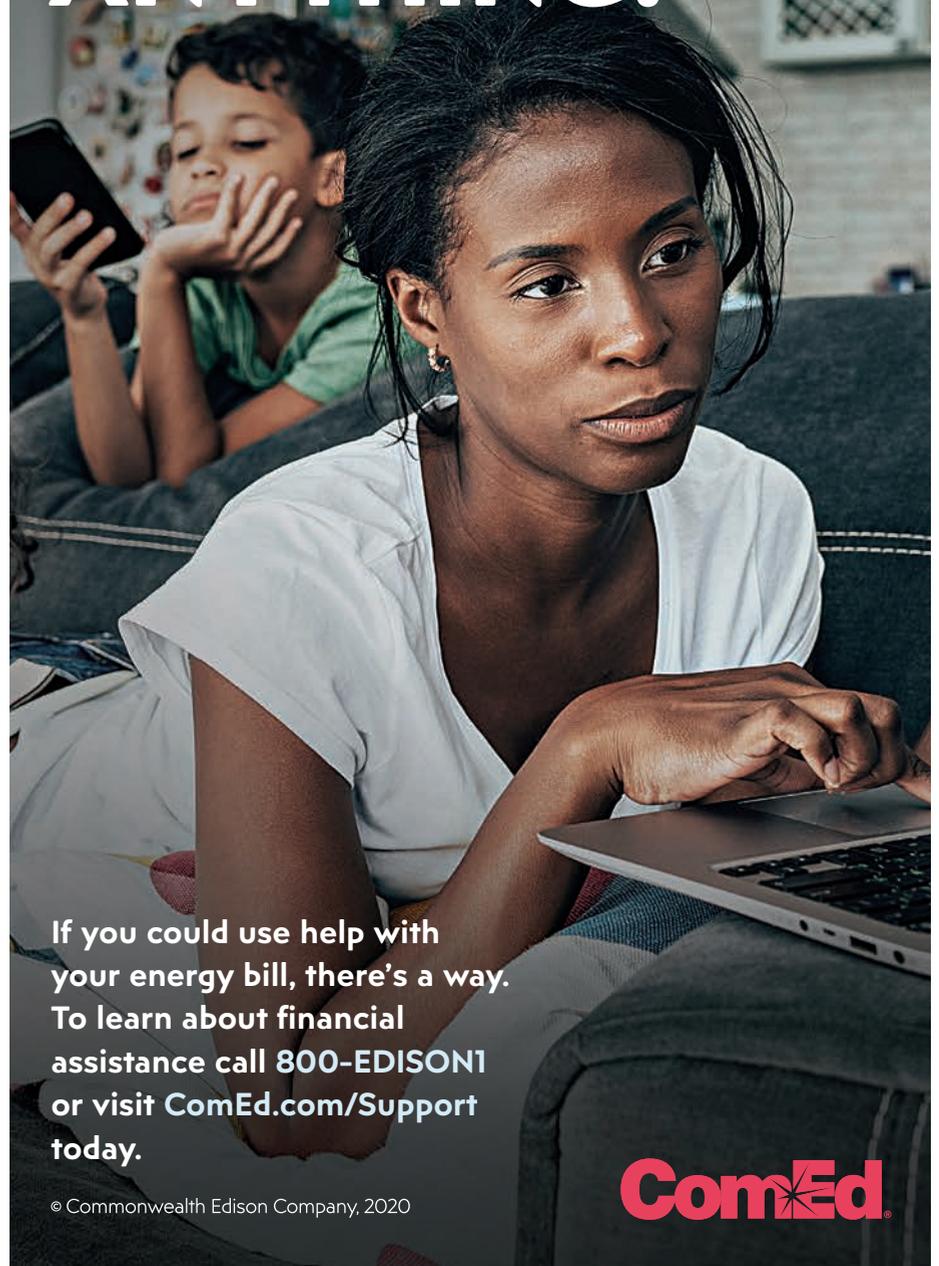
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# FOOD & DRINK

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# THE Chicago FOOD CULTURA CLARION

**FoodCultura: The art and anthropology of food and cuisine ANTH 25320**

THE ART OF CUISINE

## Extra! Extra! Chicago Food Writing Inside!

Read all about it in the *Chicago FoodCultura Clarion*.

By MIKE SULA

This week some copies of the *Reader's* print edition are served with a lagniappe. Tucked inside 2,700 copies of the paper is the premiere issue of the *Chicago FoodCultura Clarion*, the culmination of a collaboration between artist Antoni Miralda and University of Chicago anthropologist Stephan Palmié.

Miralda is a Barcelona-born multidisciplinary food artist who explores the role of food in culture. Since the 60s he's built pillars of vegetables and walls of brightly colored bread, staged parades of giant steaks and ears of corn through Kansas City, and held a wedding between the Statue of Liberty and Barcelona's Christopher Columbus statue with prenuptial documents written on dried codfish. Last May I wrote about *The Magic Banquet*, a Miami performance celebrating the international ubiquity of Maggi Seasoning. But Miralda, along with his partner, the Catalan chef Montse Guillen, might be best known for *El Internacional*, a Tribeca installation that was a fully operational tapas restaurant. In 1984 it was the country's first (and one with an interesting Chicago connection I'll explore at another time).

Last fall Miralda and Palmié taught a course at the University of Chicago's Gray Center for Arts and Inquiry called "Foodcultura: The Art and Anthropology of Cuisine," during which students fanned out across the city conducting fieldwork on everything from live poultry shops to fried chicken; the connections between Roeser's Bakery cakes and Bauhaus architecture (River City, Marina Towers) to comparisons between food choices in South Shore and Albany Park.

Their final projects, which took the form of papers, sculptures, videos, photography

displays, and a few dinner parties, were meant to be featured, along with a Chicago-centric version of Miralda's *Sabores y Lenguas/Tastes and Tongues* collage work, during a two-day symposium in October at the Chicago Cultural Center, but the pandemic put an end to that.

Instead Palmié and Miralda, along with an editorial team consisting of noted investigator of south-side culinary oddities Peter Engler, chef and founder of Roots & Culture Contemporary Arts Center Eric May, and food writer Paige Resnick, put together the *Clarion*, a 12-page folded insert of original Chicago food writing and artwork. There's Engler on the origins of Chicago tamales; anthropologist Magnus Fiskesjö on the weird history of presidential turkey pardons; an essay on navigating the pandemic from the point of view of a restaurant by Phillip Foss, and from Miralda, a centerfold "Chicago Tongue," portraying the culinary topography of Chicago.

May has a piece about 58-year-old Southwest Signs, a family business specializing in the hand-painted grocery store signs found on carnicerias, fast food joints, and car lot windows all over the city. The headlines of the *Clarion* are all set in this unique Chicago-style lettering.

The 2,700 copies will be distributed more or less randomly all over the *Reader's* distribution area, with a slight concentration in Hyde Park. But if you don't manage to snag one, you might get another chance when issues two and three publish next year. For those Miralda is soliciting contributions—photos, texts, ideas—for his next "Chicago Tongue" collages at [thechicagoclarion@foodcultura.org](mailto:thechicagoclarion@foodcultura.org). 

 @MikeSula

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## DRINK UP

### Quarantinis delivered

Here's where you can get to-go cocktails around Chicago.

By **JENNA RIMENSNYDER**

As we begin to make our way into the winter months, the skies begin to grey, and the streets become windy as hell, we all begin to feel a little like Bill Murray in *Groundhog Day*. To escape the mundane and survive the upcoming Thanksgiving Zoom, we've compiled a list of 14 local bars and restaurants offering to-go cocktails for pickup and delivery, all of which are a little more imaginative than Au Cheval's Pickleback Kit, but just as effective during your virtual holiday gatherings.

#### Beatrix

While the restaurant has a variety of beer and wine to choose from, customers can also grab carry-out cocktails (serves two) for \$20 each. The selection includes a blueberry gin collins, pineapple-habanero margarita, espresso old fashioned, ginger sangria, and a frozen piña express with rum, coconut liqueur, pineapple, coconut, and lime. *Multiple locations, beatrix-restaurants.com*

#### Cafe Ba-Ba-Reeba

The Spanish small plate concept offers beer, cava, wine, and cocktails for pickup and delivery. Each cocktail offering serves two and costs \$26 each. The menu includes classic

cocktails like margaritas, mojitos, and mezcal mules as well as more elaborate creations like La Paloma and El Botánico made with gin, chartreuse, lemon, agave, passion fruit, mint, basil, and orange bitters. *2024 N. Halsted, 773-935-5000, cafebabareeba.com*

#### Club Lucky

No need to slide by the supper club for a buzz, it can be delivered. Through GrubHub you can order wine, six-pack, or single bottle brews, as well as a Quarantini Martini Kit beginning at \$45, loaded with a liter bottle of private label Club Lucky vodka and your choice of olive. There's also a Ketel One Mule Kit for \$59 with your choice of plain, Grapefruit Rose Botanical, or Peach Orange Blossom Botanical Ketel One vodka. *1824 W. Wabansia, 773-227-2300, clubluckychicago.com*

#### Daisies

The midwestern pasta-focused restaurant has a slew of boozy options. From beer to wine to craft cocktails, you can pick your poison for pickup or delivery. The cocktail selection includes bottled and ready-to-drink sips for \$9.99 each, like a beet old fashioned, two gin options, and a House Nocino with Nocino li-

Enjoy a signature La Luna cocktail from the comfort and safety of home. COURTESY LA LUNA

queur, walnuts, cinnamon, orange peel, lemon peel, cloves, allspice, and vanilla bean. But beware, there is only a limited amount of each selection. *2523 N. Milwaukee, 773-661-1671, daisieschicago.com*

#### Furious Spoon

A ramen-cocktail pairing sounds prime in cold climates. Guests can snag DIY home cocktail kits (\$40), as well as beer pong and sake bomb packages (\$20-\$25). You might not be able to remember Thanksgiving this year with Furious Spoon's help. *Temporarily only offered at Logan Square and Lakeview locations, furiousramen.com*

#### Kanela Breakfast Club

If you're having a virtual brunch date, Kanela might be the move for pickup or delivery. The breakfast club offers a Bloody Mary kit with (\$50) and without vodka (\$20). If you're in the mood for bubbles, you can order a mimosa package (\$30) that includes two bottles of champagne and freshly squeezed juice. *Multiple locations, kanelabreakfastclub.com*

#### Kumiko

If you're looking to switch up your typical cocktail order, take a stroll through the massive Kumiko menu available for pickup and delivery. Just a heads-up, each offering has a limited quantity and may be sold out. You can pair your spirits with Japanese fare or just sip at your own leisure for an elevated night in. *630 W. Lake, 312-285-2912, barkumiko.com*

#### La Luna

The taco shop offers up a variety of margaritas, palomas, and spiked agua de jamaica as both single and pitcher servings. Since having just one marg is rare, spring for the pitcher (\$25-\$32.50). You can also swap your tired egnog for some of La Luna's spiced horchata. *1726 S. Racine, 312-248-8940, lalunachicago.com*

#### Lena Brava

The West Loop hot spot offers canned cocktails and margarita kits for both pickup and delivery. Canned cocktails serve one to two people, depending on your pour, and range from \$12-\$14. The kits, however, serve 12 and range from \$60-\$65. *900 W. Randolph, 312-733-1975, lenabrava.com*

#### Lost Lake

Four days a week, Lost Lake offers up grab 'n go cocktails from the storefront's pickup window. The menu rotates each week and is available on the bar's Instagram stories. Check out Instagram (@lostlakelovesyou) story highlights for each week's menu. The tropical cocktail bar also has private casks for delivery or pickup ranging from \$55-\$250. *3154 W. Diversey, lostlakechicago.com, @lostlakelovesyou on Instagram*

#### Maplewood Brewery & Distillery

While there's plenty of merch to choose from, the brewery is also slinging four-packs, eats, as well as cocktail packages. Each cocktail package is \$50 and includes a 750ml bottle of liquor, a 4-pack mixer, a Maplewood highball glass, and a cocktail recipe card. *2717 N. Maplewood, 773-270-1061, maplewoodbrew.com*

#### Mi Tocaya Antojeria

Seasonal and signature 7-ounce cocktails are on hand for \$16. Need a heavier pour? You can grab a 32-ounce growler filled with your choice of tequila or mezcal for \$48. Mi Tocaya also has a selection of brews to choose from for \$5 and under. Available for pickup and delivery Wednesday through Saturday. *2800 W. Logan, 872-315-3847, mitocaya.com*

#### Three Dots and a Dash

The tiki bar invites you to escape the cold weather and enter into more tropical vibes with signature bottled cocktails and kits with sips including mai tais, hurricanes, and pain-killers. Bottled cocktails range from \$14-\$15, while the kits will run you \$35-\$65. You can even add a mai tai glass to your order for \$15 to really set the mood. Available for pickup and delivery through DoorDash. *435 N. Clark, 312-610-4220, threedotschicago.com*

#### Virtue

The Hyde Park staple offers a lineup of pickup beverages including vino, brews, cocktails, and even a martini kit for 12. The limited cocktail selection includes a margarita (\$24), old fashioned (\$24), and Patience is a Virtue, made with vodka, Creme Yvette, and rhubarb bitters (\$26), all of which serve two. *1462 E. 53rd, 773-947-8831, virtuerestaurant.com*

@j\_rimensnyder

**VOCALO**



What has college this year  
been like for you?

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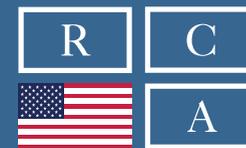
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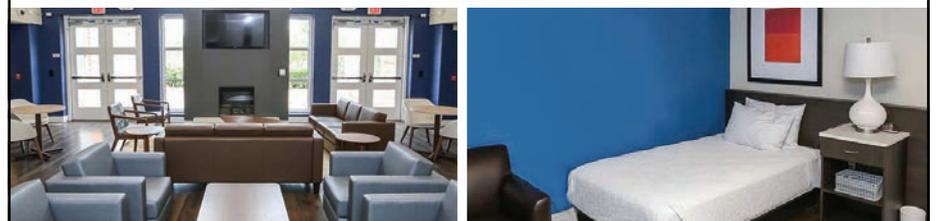
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Shrimp and leek wontons, fat egg noodles, and micro greens, with scallion chili oil in chicken broth  COURTESY DARLENE PHAN

## FOOD FEATURE

# The power of the Snack Collective pivot

Three Vietnamese American chefs do it their way and offer a boost to their friends.

By **MIKE SULA**

I used to struggle to keep up with the number of restaurants that opened each week in Chicago. It was thrilling but exhausting, and, putting aside the expense of opening a brick and mortar, it was downright amazing given how difficult the city made the process.

The pandemic put a stop to that obviously, but the city continues to make things impossible, shutting down indoor dining for a second time since March just weeks ago. And yet I continue to be amazed at the creative ways food professionals keep feeding people. It seems like every day I come across some

furloughed chef, bartender, or server who's slipped the shackles of the conventional restaurant industry and found a way to do something wholly original and desirable. It's almost too much to keep up with, but it's well worth trying, because this is a new generation of hospitality workers who are going to emerge from the pandemic and reshape the food scene in Chicago.

Joey Pham, Lorraine Nguyen, and Darlene Phan each individually had a jump on this in early October when they joined forces and formed Snack Collective, a weekly pop-up at

the Ukrainian Village plant shop InFlorEscence. "We were just spitballing," says Pham, who has a long history in Chicago underground dining but since April has been selling dazzling cakes under the Instagram handle @flavorsupreme. "What do we want to see right now in this pandemic, when the hope of getting a job is not really possible or attainable?"

Part of the answer was the Vietnamese food each grew up eating. "We get to make things we miss, or can't find, or things that we only get from family events," says Darlene Phan (@banh\_chanh\_99), a savory chef who's cooked all over the country. Phan has since pivoted to pastry, often employing French technique with southeast Asian flavors, such as her *pandan* or *ube* knots that sell out each time they're offered.

"I brought my own experience as a Vietnamese American and presented lesser-known Vietnamese dishes to restaurants I've worked for," says Pham. "But since the people above me weren't familiar with them or didn't understand, they didn't really see the potential. We have a sense of freedom with Snack Collective where we can bring that to the forefront and we can familiarize people with things that we know as comfort."

Over the weeks, that's meant things like Pham's shrimp and leek wonton soup with scallion chili oil, or Phan's *bánh chuối*, a banana and coconut milk bread pudding that she spices, sugars, and sears like a French *pain perdu*. "If you were to go up to Argyle now you can probably find it, but you'd probably have to look pretty hard," she says. "That's something I've always had in mind, but I never had a chance to make it."

The Snack Collective, with Phan's partner C.J. Campos helping out, drops a new menu each Wednesday. Usually there's a noodle soup, such as *bún bò Huế*, or *bo ko*; a cocktail like a Manhattan riff inspired by the sweet tamarind drink *nuóc á*, and pastries, like Vietnamese egg coffee or pumpkin mochi.

The collective was selling out regularly at the pop-ups, but when COVID-19 started to resurge in late October, they pivoted to a delivery model, though the plant shop still serves as a pickup point. And they've used their growing platform to bring friends along for the ride, collaborating with Mom's, and nascent alternative-economy producers such

as chai maker Freeman House, and Can Sa Bakery, which makes cannabis-infused pastries.

"We saw a second wave of people getting furloughed only weeks ago and lots of people trying to figure out how to survive," says Nguyen. "A lot of them are really great at creating these products but they haven't had the chance to put themselves out there. Part of us doing this is to support them so that we can share their projects and also give them a place to start and feel like the community supports them."

One of those people given a boost by the Snack Collective was bartender Roshelley Mayen, who sells bottled milk punch cocktails under the handle @juanitasbebidas. Milk punch is a centuries-old preservation technique that calls for curdling, clarifying, and straining fat solids from milk. Traditionally it was mixed with whiskey or brandy for a classic cocktail that had some shelf life, but it's infinitely variable and sustainable, using juices that might otherwise spoil if they sat around unused behind the bar.

"The beauty of the milk punch is that it kind of mellows out the harshness of the alcohol," says Mayen, who's bartended all over the city, most recently at Proxi and Sepia. "Even when I use tequila, which can have a pretty abrasive flavor, it really mellows it out. You pick up on the nuances. It's soothing and relaxing, and you get a really great velvety mouthfeel."

Mayen showed up at an early Snack Collective pop-up at InFlorEscence, where she was able to evangelize these pleasures to potential customers mask-to-mask. "Milk in a cocktail sounds disgusting, but it's really quite fantastic," she says. "I was able to talk to people about it and explain it." Now Mayen is doing her own weekly milk punch menus for pickup in Logan Square, featuring things like the Cayenne Workout Plan, a milk punch with tequila, ginger, cayenne, and brown sugar syrup, or a vegan version like the Met Gala, with bourbon, sherry, apple cider, chai syrup, and clarified oat and almond milk.

She eventually wants to open an agave-based brick-and-mortar bar—"because there's just not a lot of agave bars owned by Latin or Hispanic people"—but she wants Juanita's Bebidas to go big: "My goal is for Juanita's is to be like Goya or La Preferida." 

 @MikeSula

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## POETRY CORNER

### Photosynthesis and other life lessons

By Jackson C. Santy

I'm walking down the aisle of the frozen food section; my line of sight locked on the frost tinted windows of tasty tundra as I look for my two best friends Ben, and Jerry.

My stomach, aching for the rich delicacy my tongue, tantalized by anticipation of half-baked heaven.

And then he approaches.

Eyes that invade my entire body, a scowl that turns sweetness into sour, a map of wrinkles that today I wish I could navigate to find who hurt him. He asks me what I am, and I say nothing.

Lurching towards me I glare down towards linoleum.

He tells me that God wouldn't make something like me.

My stomach still aches, but my desire for sweetness has subsided, my tongue stays limp and even when I am out of the frozen food section-- I still feel cold.

Years pass and I still yearn for the meaning of my existence.

I try to seek solace within the covers of my other identities, but masculinity has a height requirement.

I spend half my life writing to him.

Half my life throwing pain onto pages, painting stanzas into self-portrait.

I find myself for the first time in twenty years writing an open letter:

I am not a dwarf;  
I am a person with dwarfism.

I do not suffer from dwarfism;  
because to suffer is to experience something unpleasant.

I do not suffer from dwarfism;  
I suffer from the maltreatment imposed upon me because of my dwarfism.

And that pain is not pinpointed to my genetic makeup, it is deeper than my scalpel-drawn scars.

The pain that I experience is from the ignorance of others.

It is from the tourist who follows me down the street; incessantly demanding that I stop for a picture, needlessly inquiring the sizes of things she cannot see from staring me down deadpan on the train-platform.

It is the club goer who told me: "I've always wanted to do a midget."

It is from the six men who have assaulted me.

This letter cannot allow you to fully understand my personal experience— that is why it's personal.

My experience remains my own;  
but my oppression is shared.

I was one of the many who was born in the dirt; but when you throw your s\*\*\* on us it only makes the soil grow stronger.

When you rip out our blossoms; they will grow back and remind us that we can still create beauty.

So when you push me down;  
you push us all down.

When you try to bury us;  
you forget that we are the seeds.

Jackson is a poet and essayist with a professional background in Student Success Coaching. As both a writer and youth advocate, his work hopes to echo and uplift our unique capacities for resilience. Jackson resides in Chicago with his partner, and is currently pursuing a Master's in Social Work to become certified as an Attachment-Based Family Therapist. For more stories and poems, follow him on @TheGreatSantyni on Instagram.

Poem curated by Nikki Patin: Featured in *The Guardian*, *Chicago Tribune*, HBO's *Def Poetry Jam* and on international television and radio, writer, producer, designer and survivor Nikki Patin has been advocating, performing and educating for 20 years. She has performed at the National Black Theater in Harlem, Brooklyn Museum, the Goodman Theater, EXPO Chicago and many other spaces throughout the US, New Zealand and Australia. Nikki Patin holds an MFA in Creative Non-Fiction from the University of Southern Maine. Patin is the Community Engagement Director for the Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation and the founder and Executive Producer of Surviving the Mic, a survivor-led organization that crafts brave and affirming space for survivors of sexual trauma. Her work can be found at [nikkipatin.com](http://nikkipatin.com).

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# NEWS & POLITICS



Michael Madigan is the closest state Democrats have to Mitch McConnell.   
ILLINOIS HOUSE;  
U.S. SENATE

## POLITICS

### Nice or nasty

Michael Joseph Madigan can play it either way.

By **BEN JORAVSKY**

If I were a state House Dem, I like to think I'd join the crew urging Michael Madigan to step down as speaker—what with the Commonwealth Edison scandal endangering the Democratic Party.

But then, really when you think about it, there's no way Madigan would let a goody two-shoes like me get elected state rep—even if I were foolish enough to give it a try.

Think about it—I'd be running in a north-side district against one of Madigan's caucus members. And the big guy's very protective of his caucus members.

Right from the start, Madigan would dispatch Michael Kasper—his favorite election lawyer—to have me booted from the ballot for some infraction of a Byzantine rule.

And even if I miraculously survived Kasper's challenge, Madigan would order some aide to dig through my past, looking for dirt to use against me.

Man, they'd be reading columns going back to the 90s to find an incendiary passage or two, which they'd put in a flyer and mail to every voter in my district, depicting me as the second coming of Lenin.

And then all those nice, *Tribune*-reading, Lori-loving centrists in my north-side district would say—*Oh my, gosh, this guy's a commie. I'm scared—I'm very scared.*

And they'd run out to vote against me.

But if I somehow managed to prevail? If somehow I actually won, the next day bright and early my cell phone would ring and on the line would be—yes, you guessed it—Michael Joseph Madigan himself.

And he'd be as sweet as Tupelo honey . . .

*Ben, how ya' doin'? Congratulations on the win. How's your family? What can I do for ya'? Any committee you're interested in sitting on? Have an egg roll. Have a spare rib. Have a kumquat—have two!*

Point is—there's more than two ways for the man they call the Mad Dog to skin a cat. He can keep you out. Or welcome you in.

And that's why most Democratic state reps are unwilling to break ranks with the speaker, even with his ComEd patronage scandal looming large.

One, they remember all the nice things he's done for them. So, they feel loyal.

And, two, they know how tough he can be.

So, they're a little scared. It's why so many legislators these days have been quoting Omar in *The Wire*—"You come at the king, you best not miss."

Which usually gets butchered in the retelling into something like—*Ugh, you better not miss the king if you shoot at him.*

So, I'd like to believe I'd do the right thing and stand up to the Mad Dog. But who knows how brave any of us would be?

And I don't blame the Dems. I can make the argument that it's better to keep Madigan than get rid of him—ComEd scandal and all.

For better or worse, he's the closest Democrats have to a Mitch McConnell. And you don't see Republicans getting rid of Mitch.

And by that I don't mean Madigan's a right-wing racist who's trying to bankrupt the government by giving tax breaks to the richest of the rich—like McConnell.

No, I mean he's a master of the legislative process who can beat the Republicans at their own games.

And that's why Bruce Rauner, Ken Griffin, the *Tribune*, and all the rest of the Ayn Rand crowd in this state hate Madigan so much. Because he beats them year after year.

As far as I can tell, the main thing that really matters to Madigan is holding on to power. And that means making sure his caucus members get reelected.

He has no bedrock ideology. As Rich Miller points out, Madigan's moved steadily left over the years to accommodate the needs of his caucus members on everything from gay marriage to legalized reefer to union rights.

In fact, I'd go so far as to say that Madigan is the reason Bruce Rauner didn't bust the unions in this state the way former Governor Scott Walker did in Wisconsin.

It certainly wasn't Mayor Rahm or even Senate president John Cullerton who led the fight to save the unions. Man, they'd have sold out the unions in a heartbeat—especially Rahm.

But Madigan didn't budge. No matter how many downtown Republicans hired his law firm to win them property tax breaks.

So, yes, it's payback time, and the Rauner crowd is coming after him, salivating over every little detail of the Commonwealth Edison case. Even though President Trump himself did far worse. And they didn't say boo about him. Well, we all know Republicans are phonies.

Just thinking about who's against Madigan is almost enough to make me support him.

But there's this. All those years of pounding at Madigan have taken their toll. Rauner and Griffin have successfully turned him into a caricature of himself.

In fact, it might be their greatest triumph. They've turned the Democrat's strength into a weakness.

And it seems to be working. As in the case of Thomas Kilbride, the downstate supreme court justice who lost his retention battle because the Republicans effectively put Madigan's head on his body.

Was that fair? No. Was it accurate? No. But I can't cry too much about it. Madigan would do it to them in a heartbeat. Hell, Madigan has done it to them. Putting Trump's head on Republican bodies.

At the moment, Illinois is blue. But it wasn't always this way. As recently as 1988, George Bush won the state.

It could go back to red. The only thing working against the Republicans is that they're so batshit crazy—like Rudy Giuliani leaking hairspray(?) down his sweaty face—it's hard for people outside the MAGA cult to support them.

My wish is that Madigan would step down and turn things over to someone like state representative Chris Welch. Then Madigan could be the advisor—think Tex Winter whispering sage advice into Phil Jackson's ears.

But I don't see that happening. So, this show will probably play into a showdown early next year.

Oh, my beloved Democrats. As always, you make things difficult for yourselves. 

 @bennyjshow

DANIEL ZENDER



## INFRASTRUCTURE

## Weapons against protesters

When election and racial justice protests rocked the city, the mayor used raised bridges and shut down public transportation as crowd control measures, which harmed the city's workers.

By **MAYA DUKMASOVA**

*This story was originally published in [The Appeal](#).*

**M**inutes before the polls closed on election night in Chicago, massive city sanitation vehicles moved into position outside Trump Tower. Then, the Wabash Avenue bridge—between the president's namesake building on the north bank of the Chicago River and the Loop central business district on the south—reared up, preventing pedestrians and traffic from crossing.

“Very medieval,” Steven Thrasher, a professor of journalism at Northwestern University, observed on Twitter. Trump Tower, which has been the gathering place for protests since the 2016 election, was suddenly “like a castle protected by the lords pulling up a drawbridge.” Days later bridges were raised again as Chicago residents celebrated

Joe Biden's projected victory in the presidential election.

Bridges raised above the river bisecting downtown have become a common sight in Chicago since late May, when protests over the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis began. It first happened on May 30, as night fell on the protests amid clouds of tear gas, the drone of helicopters, and the shouts of thousands. People who wanted to make their way out of downtown were confronted with dark walls of concrete, steel, and asphalt reaching skyward, severing movement across some of the city's main thoroughfares. All but two of the bridges separating the Loop from the Magnificent Mile and other busy commercial neighborhoods to the north were raised.

Typically, the city's river bridges are only raised to allow high-masted boats to pass in and out of Lake Michigan. But that night, for apparently the first time since

1855, the bridges became weapons in Mayor Lori Lightfoot's aggressive crowd-control arsenal, which also included strategic public transportation shutdowns and highway exit closures to prevent access to downtown. With scarcely a few minutes' notice—in the form of cell phone emergency alerts—the city announced a 9 PM curfew while simultaneously making it nearly impossible for people who'd gathered in the Loop to leave.

The pretext for these actions was public safety. “What started out as a peaceful protest has now devolved into criminal conduct,” Lightfoot said at a May 30 press conference an hour before the curfew. “We want to give people ample opportunity to clear the streets. We're talking about 35 minutes. I think we're giving them ample notice.” She said the curfew would help officers “be aggressive in arresting” people engaged in “criminal acts.”

But those who were stranded in the Loop

decried Lightfoot's use of municipal infrastructure, calling it a kettling tactic that makes it easier for police officers to make arrests indiscriminately. Many of the nearly two dozen bridges that span the moat of the Chicago River around the Loop remained raised or closed for days. The city would continue to raise bridges, shut down transit stops, and even discontinue bike-sharing services in the vicinity of smaller protests throughout the summer, and in the wake of protests and looting in Chicago's most prosperous commercial corridors in early August. Lightfoot's bridge raising and choking of public transit has become so routine that the satirical news outlet *The Onion* recently declared Lightfoot was unveiling a plan “to replace Chicago's public transit system with police.”

**A**s Chicago residents and civic organizations documented the effects of these shutdowns, it became clear that they have had serious ramifications on people's work commutes, health-care routines, and personal finances. The shutdowns left many feeling that Mayor Lightfoot was more concerned about protecting downtown businesses and some of the city's wealthiest residents than the police violence that brought people out to the streets. Similar curfews and transit interruptions have become a fact of life in other cities as a wave of demonstrations for racial justice has swept the country.

Robert Alexander, a criminal defense attorney who works in the Loop and lives in South Shore, on the city's south side, had been commuting to his office on the bus despite the COVID-19 pandemic. He often works weekends, so he was in the Loop on that Saturday in May. But when he checked the bus schedule he saw that his usual routes weren't going farther north than 35th Street, nearly four miles away. The trains weren't running either. “Then I got the notification that the curfew was happening at 9,” Alexander told *The Appeal*. “This was 8:58. Then I started freaking out.”

He could hear glass breaking on the street; the windows of Walgreens nearby had been smashed and the sprinklers were blasting inside the shop. When he opened ridesharing

# NEWS & POLITICS

apps, no cars were available. He decided he'd try walking the several miles to 35th Street, but when he emerged from his office and onto the street he "saw all these police cars going around and groups of officers walking around, yelling at people. Then I saw groups of white guys with bats walking around and I was like, 'You know what I'm gonna go back to the office.' . . . I'm not gonna lie, I was terrified."

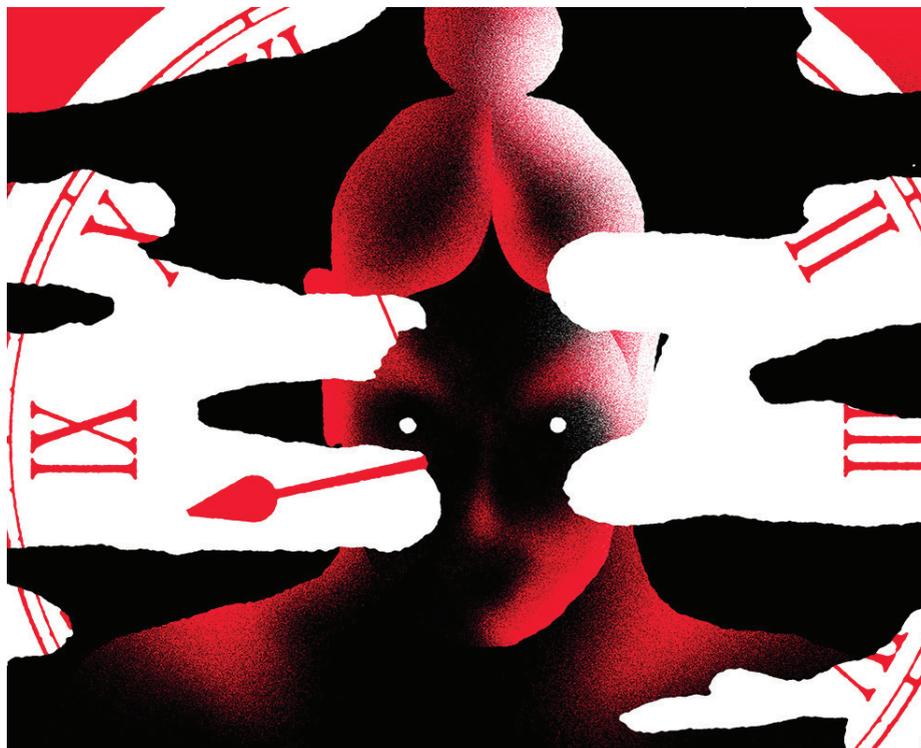
Alexander, who is Black, thought it would be safer for him to spend the night on the couch in the office even though his building's call box had been smashed and he worried that someone might break in. He doesn't remember which mode of transport he took to get home the next day. The road closures and transit interruptions continued into Monday and Tuesday of the following week, but Alexander had to get to his office, where all his clients' documents are stored, despite the longer and more complicated commutes. "I have incarcerated clients and I was trying to work on motions to try to get them out and away from the pandemic," he said. "There were police officers, the streets and sanitation trucks, the National Guard were blocking certain exits from the highway." One day, his rideshare driver got lost making detours around closed streets. "We tried to pull over and ask a police officer for help, and she just screamed at us to keep moving and wouldn't answer our questions."

Kyle Lucas, who works at a hotel in the River North neighborhood and lives on the far north side, was also stranded the night of May 30. At one point in the evening, Lucas, who is also cofounder of transit advocacy group Better Streets Chicago, stepped outside and witnessed people panicking, crowds of cops, and a squad car in flames. "I remember people just desperately trying to get home," Lucas told *The Appeal*. "They were scared." At every turn, the city's response to peaceful protests and civil unrest disappointed Lucas. "It's definitely eroded my trust in the city, in the reliability of the transportation system, it's eroded my views on the mayor and her commitment to enacting real change," he said. "I think a lot of people saw the bridges being raised as if to protect the rich and the wealthy and the property downtown in light of people marching and protesting because of massive inequities and injustices in our city, particularly toward Black people. I think it was a very visual reminder for a lot of people of that disparity and I absolutely believe it escalated tensions

and made people more angry."

Over the next several days and throughout the summer as the city continued to limit transit service in response to protests and looting, Lucas, who was able to bike to work, watched some of his coworkers from farther-flung neighborhoods become consumed by the mental and financial strain.

One of them was Robyn Oliver, a security guard who lives in the Roseland neighborhood on the far south side, 14 miles away



from the hotel near the Ohio and State Street intersection.

"You couldn't even imagine the hell I had to go through to get to downtown," Oliver told *The Appeal*. Normally her commute can take as long as two hours because she works the night shift when bus and el train service is more sporadic. But on May 30, as she was on her way to work, the train only made it as far north as 63rd Street. "They stopped the el, there was no shuttle buses, no nothing, so I was just stuck there. . . . I was scared because I didn't know the neighborhood." Oliver—who regularly deals with harassment from young people who mistake her for a police officer because of her security guard uniform—said she ended up throwing her uniform jacket in the garbage that night after seeing people ransack a gas station. Ultimately she reached

her supervisor who drove out to pick her up. For the next several weeks she was going to work hours earlier than usual, losing out on sleep. "I don't start till 11 and I start showing up at 5," she said "I had to show up early just to get there because they lifted the bridges and once darkness hits you're on your own." Rideshares weren't a viable option because it would have cost her nearly \$60 one way.

"I would never vote for Lightfoot again and I am gay," Oliver said. (Lightfoot is Chicago's

neer at the Cook County Jail. His commute along the city's highways required passing a downtown interchange, which was blocked by huge sanitation vehicles. The city had again blockaded downtown as a rash of looting broke out after police shot a Black man in the Englewood neighborhood. Public transit routes were also interrupted, and the Chicago River bridges were raised once again.

Gerardi was nervous about clocking in for his shift on time. His bosses are strict about lateness and racking up an infraction over something like an unforeseen traffic disruption would perhaps prevent him from taking time off during a real emergency. He didn't blame the looters as he sat in stalled traffic for more than 45 minutes, though. "By early August I almost felt used to it, this is the thing Chicago does now, block off downtown to keep looters out of the Mag Mile, to keep protesters out of the Loop," he said. "A bunch of people running around are not the ones who closed off the exit ramp that made my commute bad that night."

He said that although he didn't think "breaking windows and setting things on fire" was the right way to get justice, "at the same time [the city] using that as a reason to completely dismiss anger—that's wrong, too. The fact that this happened means that something is wrong. . . . People were reacting to the same damn thing that keeps happening over and over. All the city seems to know to do about it is short-term damage control and wait until the whole thing goes away." He imagines the thinking at City Hall to be "How can we make everyone feel safe until it goes away?" I don't think it's an exaggeration to say that what they mean is 'How can we make white people feel safe?'"

As Gerardi struggled to get to work, Cal Montgomery, who lives in Hyde Park on the south side, was preparing to be discharged from Northwestern Memorial Hospital just off the Magnificent Mile. He heard that hospital staff was having trouble getting to and from work, and social workers, who are supposed to work with patients in person on discharge plans, were suddenly only available by phone. "That's an access problem. Because a lot of [disabled people] have trouble on the phone," Montgomery told *The Appeal*. "They were actually talking about holding my discharge because of concerns about whether I'd be able to get home." Ultimately, he was released but had to cross a line of police at a still-operating river bridge to take the train that goes to his neighborhood.

Their menacing looks surprised him. “It was clear they were waiting around for some kind of problem.”

**W**hen The Appeal contacted Lightfoot’s office for comment, a spokesperson said in an e-mail that the mayor had “addressed this multiple times in the past” and referred The Appeal to statements she made about the shutdowns in prior press conferences. During an October 30 press conference, Lightfoot was asked whether she would commit to not shutting down public transit in case of unrest after the election. As she has in the past, Lightfoot defended the practice by citing a need to protect transit workers who “felt threatened.” She said that during the unrest in May and June “we had people trying to take over buses . . . we had people trying to take over trains.” She said the transit employees’ union asked the city to protect their workers. (The union confirmed that Lightfoot’s statement was true.) “We know that in this city there are workers who really depend upon the transit authority to get to

and from their place of business, but we also have to balance that against any security risk,” Lightfoot said. “If it’s necessary [to shut down transit] I’m not going to hesitate.”

In August, the ACLU of Illinois, which is a party in the litigation that led to federal oversight of the Chicago Police Department, filed a letter with federal court in Chicago arguing that the city’s imposition of a curfew, interruption of transit, and blockading of downtown areas “chilled speech” and had a disparate racial impact.

The restrictions “had a devastating impact on Chicagoans’ freedom of movement,” the letter stated. “People faced unnecessary hurdles, including increased police contacts, in traveling to and from protests, jobs, health care, and their homes during night hours. These hurdles had a disparate impact on the basis of race because of the outsized representation of people of color among essential workers.”

In addition to the prolonged bridge raises, road closures, and transit disruptions in response to large protests and civil unrest

between May and August, the Active Transportation Alliance, a group that advocates for mass transit and improvements to walking and biking infrastructure in Chicago, has documented smaller disruptions in conjunction with more local demonstrations. In July, the Chicago Transit Authority shut down el stops and sanitation vehicles were rolled out to block streets as GoodKids MadCity, a youth-led community organization advocating for racial justice, staged a small party protest in front of the police department’s south side headquarters. On August 22, the CTA shut down el stations on the near west side as students organized a protest against police at the city’s elite Whitney Young High School. In September, trains weren’t stopping in the vicinity of a demonstration in the city’s south side in honor of Breonna Taylor.

In June, Active Transportation Alliance also launched a survey to solicit Chicagoans’ feedback about the effect of the transit disruptions on their lives. They received more than 60 responses: health-care workers said they were unable to reach patients,

caretakers struggled to connect with elderly relatives, and people were unable to take care of essential needs such as grocery shopping. The group also routed more than 700 complaints about transit and bike-share disruptions to city officials.

It’s unclear whether legal action can be brought against the city for its use of infrastructure to control protests, but Active Transportation Alliance is exploring its options. “I put in a call as a resident of Chicago to the Federal Transit Administration Office of Civil Rights to see if there were grounds on which to file a complaint,” the group’s advocacy manager, Julia Gerasimenko, wrote in an e-mail to The Appeal. “I heard back that under the umbrella of an ‘emergency’ the agencies and government officials can pretty much do whatever they please if they can justify the emergency status. They felt that a complaint process with the Office for People with Disabilities would be a process more likely [to result] in a favorable outcome.” 

 @mdoukmas

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All photos are from the Drag March for Change in June 2020, a Black, queer-led protest down Halsted Street, Boystown's main drag. © VERN HESTER



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WHOSE TOWN?

‘WE’RE NOT ASKING FOR ANY MORE THAN WHAT WE ARE ALREADY DESERVED’

Boystown, the enclave billed as a place where LGBTQ+ people of all stripes are safe to be themselves, faces a racial reckoning decades in the making.

By ADAM M. RHODES

The north-side LGBTQ+ enclave Boystown is known for many things: its promenade of popular gay bars, a rotating roster of talented drag performers, and for what many say is a decades-long underbelly of white supremacy that persists to this day.

Last year, a Confederate flag vest was found at local vintage costume and clothing store Beatnix; that same week, a leaked e-mail showed that the owner of Progress Bar had tried to ban rap music, a plan many



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said was aimed at keeping Black patrons out of the establishment. And multiple business owners in the community have been accused of underpaying Black and Brown employees, making racist comments, and favoring white, male, and athletic employees over others.

Amid ongoing, historic uprisings for racial equity across the globe, the ways that white residents and business owners in Boystown ensure its stark segregation mirror methods used by their predecessors decades ago in the same neighborhood.

Jason Orne, author of *Boystown: Sex and Community in Chicago*, says the significant racial divide here and in other LGBTQ+ enclaves exemplifies what he calls a “Disneyland kind of gayness” that focuses on affluent white gay men instead of the entire spectrum of the community.

People pushing for change want the neighborhood to be a safe, diverse, and inclusive haven for all LGBTQ+ people as residents, visitors, customers, workers, and performers. But after decades of systemic and rampant

racism in the community, some people of color have found safety outside of Boystown.

Boystown-focused activists are also pushing the neighborhood to be more inclusive, and that effort includes a recent petition to rename Boystown to better reflect the LGBTQ+ community’s diversity. That petition has been met with criticism that organizers are trying to take away a community that critics say has been “for the boys.”

### Revisionist history

They are absolutely profoundly misremembering [the history],” says *Reader* publisher Tracy Baim, author of *Out and Proud in Chicago: An Overview of the City’s Gay Community*. “But on top of that, they are also playing into the whole stereotype of sexism in the gay community.” Women were instrumental in establishing Boystown as a safe space for members of the LGBTQ+ community, Baim says. And people of color have always been central to advancing LGBTQ+ rights.

The first known gay community center in Chicago was a project of the local chapter of landmark lesbian civil and political rights group the Daughters of Bilitis. And the city’s first feminist bookstore and a related women’s center opened in the early 1970s—in a space now occupied by an Allstate insurance branch, just steps away from where the popular gay bar Sidetrack now sits. The center eventually was renamed the Lesbian Feminist Center, and relocated to a space that’s barely a block away from what is now Center on Halsted, which opened in Boystown in 2007.

Lakeview, the neighborhood that houses Boystown, is predominantly white and affluent, but that wasn’t always the case. In 1980, the neighborhood’s Latinx population was more than 18,300, and fell to just more than 8,100 between 2014 and 2018, according to demographic data from consulting firm Rob Paral & Associates. The Black population fell from roughly 6,500 in 1980 to 3,600 between 2014 and 2018. During that same period, the

white population steadily increased.

That same data shows that the median income of Lakeview has also nearly doubled since the 1970s. According to the data, which has been converted to 2018 monetary figures, the median household income in Lakeview in 1970 was nearly \$48,000, but between 2014 and 2018, it had increased to almost \$88,000.

Boystown caters to roughly 146,000 adults in the city who identify as LGBTQ+, according to city data from 2018. For scale, according to demographic data released in June, the entire population of the Lakeview community area between 2014 and 2018 was 100,547; the data also states that of those more than 100,500 Lakeview residents, roughly 78 percent are white.

Of course, even in the 1970s, Black and Brown people were met with racism in the burgeoning gay enclave. Black lesbian activist Pat McCombs led a period of activism against local lesbian bar CK’s, which later became Augie & CK’s, over more stringent ID policies that only applied to Black and Brown patrons. McCombs also spoke of what she perceived as a limit to the number of Black people allowed in the bar.

“It was like they had to have a certain quota,” McCombs says. “It couldn’t be too many of us in there at one time.”

McCombs says she formed the Black Lesbian Discrimination Investigation Committee to confront the racism in the community, and as part of her efforts, she reported the bar to the state liquor commission. According to *Out and Proud in Chicago*, the bar narrowly dodged losing its license after the owner agreed to hold everyone to the same standard and to publicly post the bar’s ID requirements.

But as McCombs recognized, similar tactics are used today.

### Different bars, the same discrimination

Jaee Rice, a Black queer DJ, is all too familiar with those tactics. Rice says they and their wife, who is also Black, have been forced to open tabs to buy drinks and have faced what they called “oppressive dress codes” and higher scrutiny of their IDs.

As a performer, Rice says Boystown club managers and promoters are reluctant to hire them because of the crowd they think

Rice will attract. And when they do get hired in the neighborhood, Rice says they face coded language and thinly veiled racism, including an insistence that they not play hip-hop. Progress Bar owner Justin Romme eventually reversed his plans to ban rap music after protests. Romme was not immediately available when contacted by the *Reader* on multiple occasions.

“Right off the bat, the treatment that we got at Boystown was extremely oppressive,” Rice says. “If it wasn’t from the establishments, then it was from the people that actually went to Boystown.”

Black and Brown performers, entertainers, and hospitality staff have been among the most vocal about the racism they face in Boystown.

Performers Jo Mama and Lucy Stoole co-chair the Chicago Black Drag Council, which was established this summer following protests for racial equity in Boystown. At a virtual town hall discussion in late June, the council took white performers, show runners, and bar owners to task for actions that have made it hard for their colleagues of color to make a living in Boystown.

“I think that a lot of decisions are being made in this community based on race, and a lot of people have been able to get away with it for a very long time,” Stoole told the *Reader*. “And now with everything that’s happening, a light is being shown on all of this stuff. So everyone’s taking a closer look at who’s actually in charge, and who’s doing what, and why they’re doing it.”

One of the most significant impacts of the town hall was the meteoric fall of Chicago drag darling T Rex, who previously hosted the popular Drag Matinee event at Berlin Nightclub. Town hall speakers repeatedly blasted T Rex for using her power at Berlin to discriminate and blacklist performers of color. Shea Couleé, who appeared on season nine of *RuPaul’s Drag Race* and won season five of *RuPaul’s Drag Race All Stars*, took T Rex to task for one incident in particular in which T Rex made a racist joke about whipping Couleé as part of a performance of the Britney Spears song “I’m A Slave 4 U” for Black History Month.

On social media during and after the town hall, many also said T Rex seemed uninterested and apathetic until it came time to discuss issues that would cut into her personal profits, like sharing hosting duties with Black and Brown performers. After the town hall, Berlin and Roscoe’s Tavern severed ties with

T Rex.

Black and Brown performers detailed incidents and an atmosphere of hostility at nearly all of Boystown’s biggest bars.

Armand Fields, who performs as Cleo Pockalipps, won the Miss Roscoe’s 2018 drag pageant but told the *Reader* that their opportunities in Boystown were stifled even afterward. “I just felt like if you weren’t a *Drag Race* girl, you really didn’t have much of an opportunity to do much other stuff, you know?”

In June, roughly a week before the town hall, Black LGBTQ+ leaders in Chicago organized the Drag March for Change, a Black, queer-led march up Halsted in Boystown to

**“A LOT OF DECISIONS ARE BEING MADE IN THIS COMMUNITY BASED ON RACE, AND A LOT OF PEOPLE HAVE BEEN ABLE TO GET AWAY WITH IT FOR A VERY LONG TIME.”**

—Lucy Stoole

protest national and local racial inequality. The Chicago Black Drag Council was established after the march, which drew thousands of participants to the queer enclave.

Despite the strides the Black Drag Council is making in holding the community to account, the pushback against its work has been racist and vitriolic. In a particularly disturbing response to the council’s efforts, a YouTube account with the name “Gays Sick Of BS” uploaded a video on October 24, 2020, in which the faces of the Black Drag Council’s leaders are superimposed on the faces

of Nazi leadership in a scene from the 2004 film *Downfall*. In the clip titled “Mein Lucy,” Stoole’s face is placed on Hitler’s body.

## Nothing new in the neighborhood

But, as many activists and Boystown patrons have said, racist incidents are not isolated to the neighborhood’s bars and represent an attitude toward people of color in the community.

Jamie Frazier, local activist and lead pastor of Lighthouse Church of Chicago, a United Church of Christ congregation in Lincoln Park, says the recent examples of racism

Back Boystown” was home to racist, vitriolic posts that blamed the stabbings on “black a-holes who live in other neighborhoods” and “the blacks tearing the neighborhood apart.” Orne’s book also details a heated July 2011 community policing meeting following the stabbings. At the meeting, Orne wrote, many white residents blamed LGBTQ+ youth of color for crime in the neighborhood, while some youth said they felt scapegoated for the attacks.

At the time, Bonsai Bermudez lived in Boystown and worked at the Broadway Youth Center, a space for LGBTQ+ youth facing housing insecurity. “There was so much harm happening to them throughout that time, like police brutality or literal harassment, both from cops and also from neighbors,” Bermudez says. Bermudez, who was born and raised in Puerto Rico, is now the executive and artistic director of Boystown-based Youth Empowerment Performance Project, which also serves LGBTQ+ youth experiencing homelessness.

Bermudez says that around the time of the Take Back Boystown movement, he broke up multiple fights between youth of color and white community members and would have to protect the youth center at times from irate white people. “Many times, I had to be shielding the main doors to deal with community members that just wanted to come and fight with young people, you know, and many times the escalation was so huge that I also feared for my own physical safety.”

Even today, some say local parking rules are another example of how those in power enforce the stark segregation of the community. On a portion of Halsted Street, Boystown’s main thoroughfare, parking is prohibited between midnight and 4 AM on Saturdays, Sundays, and Mondays between April 1 and September 30.

Critics of the parking rules have said the ban reinforces a stark racial divide in the area by putting a limit on how long visitors, often Black and Brown LGBTQ+ people who drive to the area, can stay. “When you have that no parking rule after midnight, you are essentially telling Black and Brown people that you need to get out of Boystown before midnight,” Frazier says.

A former representative for 44th Ward alderman Tom Tunney told the media in the past that the parking rules were designed “to improve vehicular and pedestrian safety on Halsted and to discourage public drinking and loitering.”



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Alderman Tunney's office did not respond to multiple interview requests.

And at the shop Beatnix, Dennis Byrd, a Black man, says he was with a group shopping for a party in May 2019 when a friend, Dan Shade, who is white, called him over in hushed tones. Nestled among the leather vests and pants was a bright red vest emblazoned with the white stars and blue stripes of the Confederate flag.

Byrd says he had always seen Beatnix as a welcoming and inclusive space, pointing to the LGBTQ+ and transgender pride flags that routinely hang in its windows among mannequins donning ostentatious and oftentimes gender-bending costumes. When he and Shade complained about the vest to Beatnix owner Keith Bucceri, who is white, he says Bucceri became angry, called him "just another Jussie Smollett," and threatened to call the police.

"When folks call the police on you, they know exactly what they are doing," Byrd says. "They've seen it in the news, and they

are consciously making a decision to participate and to abuse their right to call the police to put fear in the minds of Black people."

In the aftermath of the Beatnix incident, Byrd says former workers told him they were instructed to profile Black patrons and follow them around the store. Fields, the drag performer, used to work at Beatnix and confirmed that, and says Bucceri also made disparaging remarks about transgender women.

"I was like, 'It doesn't feel right working here,' and so I left," Fields says.

Fields says when he visited Beatnix in 2017, Bucceri chased Black youth out of the store, ordered employees to call the police, and again used racist slurs against them. "I was standing right there, and it took so much strength in me not to say something or do something," Fields says. "I was just like, 'You know what? I'm just gonna walk out.' And I just walked out and never came back."

Stoole, of the Chicago Black Drag Council, says Bucceri used the N-word during a confrontation with them at the western-themed

gay bar Charlie's in Boystown in July 2019. Stoole wrote in a Facebook post that Bucceri drunkenly confronted them and threatened to "call the police on [Stoole's] Black ass" after accusing Stoole of talking negatively about Beatnix.

Bucceri and managers at Beatnix did not respond to multiple interview requests.

### Safety beyond Boystown

In light of these longstanding issues, many people of color have sought safe, inclusive, and intersectional spaces outside of the Boystown LGBTQ+ enclave.

LaSaia Wade, executive director of south-side LGBTQ+ center Brave Space Alliance and a Black transgender woman, says a large part of her work involves educating LGBTQ+ people of color about safe spaces outside of Boystown, including Jeffery Pub, which Wade says is "the oldest-running gay club on the south side," and Club Escape in the South Shore neighborhood. Wade says she

is focused on supporting new communities rather than trying to dismantle the racism in Boystown.

"That, for me, is very much so a waste of my time, when we know two or three days later, they're going to be back doing the same thing," Wade says of the racism in the community.

Elijah McKinnon, development director at Reunion Chicago, said the decision to create an intersectional space outside of Boystown was an intentional choice. Reunion is a Humboldt Park gallery, event space, and project incubator that focuses in particular on LGBTQ+ people of color. "It was really important for us to really just create this space that operated as an opportunity for LGBTQ+ people in communities of color to come together and create freely without the barriers to access," McKinnon says.

Unlike white-led LGBTQ+ organizations focused solely on issues such as marriage equality or employment protections, organizations like south side-based Affinity Community Services do that work while also fighting for racial equity for their members. In Affinity's case, they're advocating for Black LGBTQ+ people, women in particular.

LGBTQ+ people of color who seek out spaces like Boystown where it's safe to be queer must also contend with the fact that those same spaces aren't safe for nonwhite people, says Aisha Davis, the vice president on Affinity Community Services' board of directors. "We still want to have that sense of community and camaraderie. It just means that there's this level of vigilance that we almost maintain when we're trying to make sure that we're not going to face some other form of discrimination."

"I remember moving here and hearing about Boystown and Andersonville, and how safe it is and how you can go there, you can go into any place and feel confident that it is a space that is going to be friendly to all queer folks, and then going and frequenting them and not feeling it," Davis says.

### Where do we go from here?

For activists who have set their sights on changing Boystown, their efforts have slowly begun to bear fruit. One recent win

# NEWS & POLITICS

came when several LGBTQ+ organizations cut ties with Walsh Security, a firm owned by a Chicago police officer with a history of racist brutality.

In late November 2013, officer Thomas Walsh assaulted a Black security guard at the Lucky Horseshoe Lounge and repeatedly used racist slurs against the man during an altercation at the bar, according to a March 2015 report by the Independent Police Review Authority.

After highly publicized activism, Center on Halsted announced in late January 2020 that it had terminated its contract with Walsh Security and had engaged Quantum Security, a Black-owned firm with a history of working with LGBTQ+ organizations, as its new security provider.

In a June 12 e-mail obtained by the *Reader*, Northalsted Business Alliance board president Ramesh Ariyanayakam said the board had agreed not to renew any security contracts with Walsh Security going forward. This marks a significant departure from the alliance's commitment to Walsh just months prior. In mid-March, Jennifer Gordon, a representative for the alliance, said that the Boystown business group planned to tap Walsh Security as its security provider this summer.

The Northalsted Business Alliance is a powerful group of local business owners led by an 11-member board currently made up mostly of white men. The lone woman on the board, Dr. Robin Gay-Stafford of Howard Brown Health, is also the only Black person on the board and one of only two people of color.

To help combat the notion that Boystown is just “for the boys,” a recent petition called on the alliance to stop promoting the name Boystown in favor of a more inclusive moniker. “As we all grow and reconsider our roles in perpetuating bigotry, we ask that this board reflect on the growing number of incidents in our LGBTQ spaces,” the petition states. “One form of bigotry perpetuates others.”

The petition's authors, Devlyn Camp and Jen Freitag, who are both white, say stickers advertising their movement were all defaced soon after they were put up around the neighborhood; and at one point, Camp says that a woman carrying groceries called Camp a “tranny cunt” in front of a photographer taking their photo for an article about the petition.

After the petition garnered national

media attention, the Northalsted Business Alliance collected survey responses about a potential name change. After an eight-week period, along with 3,060 comments and 1,350 suggestions for new names the group says it received, the alliance released the results online. Some 80 percent of survey respondents said they did not feel unwelcome by the Boystown name, but the alliance agreed to stop using it in marketing materials nonetheless, though they noted that it would ultimately be up to the city to officially change the name of the neighborhood.

Camp and Freitag say they want the alliance to go further in their efforts. Both said they felt the board's gesture was hollow, and say that businesses are still permitted to use the name on their own marketing materials. They want the neighborhood to be renamed Legacy Walk, in honor of the LGBTQ+ history project known as The Legacy Project that was inducted into the Chicago LGBT Hall of Fame this year.

The history project includes names and biographies of a number of groundbreaking and influential queer people of color, including James Baldwin, Marsha P. Johnson, Antonia Pantoja, and Sylvia Rivera, among many others.

Many have also said that the alliance's choice to use the name “Northalsted” for the neighborhood moving forward is merely a marketing ploy to advertise the business alliance and increase its profits.

## Diversity training to nowhere

Freitag also expressed concern about the alliance board's willingness to change given what she says she witnessed at an early February diversity training for the board and some members. Freitag, who is a general manager at the Chicago Diner, says the alliance planned to hold two trainings, but after the first training on gender went south, the remaining training sessions were abruptly canceled and haven't been rescheduled. “I cannot explain to you how horrifying that meeting was, to the point that afterwards, I went up to the two people hosting it and I apologized,” Freitag says.

Gordon, of the alliance, says the trainings were canceled due to the pandemic and pushed back on allegations that they were called off for any other reason. But according to Freitag and e-mails obtained by the *Reader*, the trainings were canceled more than a month before the city's stay-at-home orders

went into effect.

Jes Scheinpflug, director of operations and outreach at Praxis Group, which facilitated the board training, also rejected Gordon's claimed reasoning for canceling the remaining trainings. “Praxis Group has never been fired before so we were baffled by the quick change of plans,” Scheinpflug said in an e-mail to the *Reader*. “We are aware that our communities—the LGBTQ2IA+ community and communities of color—have been calling for accountability from cis- and white-led businesses/organizations in Boystown for many years. We were excited to work with them to address long-standing issues of racism, transphobia, sexism and fatphobia.”

In a more than two-hour-long recording of the diversity training provided anonymously to the *Reader*, one participant repeatedly misgenders Caitlyn Jenner, and another participant laments about the difficulty of changing employees' personal information in a payroll system, namely names and gender markers. According to legal experts consulted by the *Reader*, not changing personal information of transgender employees could violate city, county, and state human rights laws, as all three prohibit discrimination based on sex and gender identity.

Lake Alen, the alliance's acting executive director, can be heard criticizing the word “cisgender,” which refers to people whose gender identity matches their biological sex. “So I don't like using the term cis because it feels like an attack,” Alen is overheard saying. “And people use cis as an attack by saying, ‘Oh, you're a white male.’ It's an attack. And I guess there's a lot of like, ‘OK, you have privilege, you should understand your privilege.’ But it's being used as an attack.”

Alen owns the Chicago Male Salon and is also treasurer at the alliance. Other training participants expressed concerns about their ability to express discomfort in their bars and clubs without being labeled as racist, transphobic, or misogynistic. “So at what point does making someone else feel more comfortable have to make me feel uncomfortable?” Alen asked.

Many have also said that it will be difficult to push the alliance to do anything meaningful to address the issues plaguing the neighborhood considering serious, repeated allegations of racism, misogyny, and transphobia leveled against the organization and some of its board members.

Brave Space Alliance withdrew from a protest march sponsored by the Northalsted

Business Alliance in late June after BSA says it was “being tokenized at the event, and deployed for clout by the organizers.” The event was later canceled, with proceeds donated to BSA and an alternative, trans-led protest. That alternative protest, known as Pride Without Prejudice/Reclaim Pride, took place during the last weekend in June, when LGBTQ+ pride is typically celebrated.

Around that same time, alliance board secretary Mark Liberson, who owns Hydrate Nightclub and Replay Beer & Bourbon, was accused on social media of a number of racist behaviors, including intentionally mispronouncing names of Black and Brown employees, underpaying employees, and removing hip-hop and R&B music from jukeboxes. Liberson's response to the allegations, also posted on social media, failed to meaningfully address any but one—that he had a habit of not remembering names of the people of color working for him. He says it was due to a neurocognitive disorder impacting his memory.

Neither Liberson nor Alen responded to multiple interview requests from the *Reader*.

## Looking to the future

For Boystown to be a true haven for the queer community, many say the neighborhood needs to not only be more inclusive, but to be more than just an affluent promenade of bars and restaurants fueled by profits and not community.

“What would it mean to actually ask you to stand up for the folks who look and identify like Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera?” Davis says. “There's more to this than just parties and bars. This is about making sure that every person and especially the most marginalized people in this community feel welcome in a space that's supposed to be for all of us.”

As the neighborhood continues to reckon with the rampant racism in its midst, Black activists say they aren't asking for much of business owners, residents, or elected officials—or anything that their white counterparts don't enjoy with sometimes reckless abandon.

“We just want—just as everybody in the rest of the world wants—a level playing field,” Stooles said. “We're not asking for any more than what we are already deserved.”

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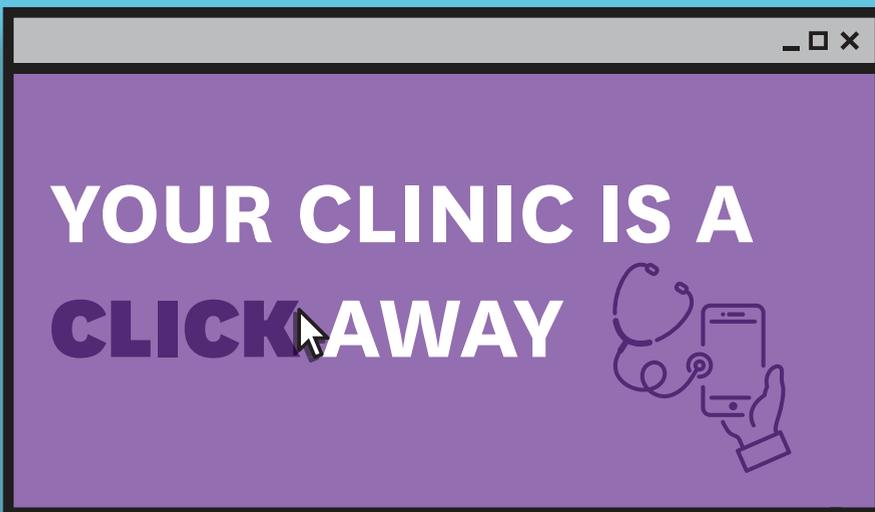
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COVID-19 public service announcement from Cure Violence Global  COURTESY CURE VIOLENCE GLOBAL

Violence is currently ranked as the ninth best nonprofit in the world by Swiss-based NGO Advisor, in a field of 500. I wondered what Slutkin would say about the pandemic we're living through; here's an edited version of what he told me last weekend.

**Deanna Isaacs: You've said that bending the curve is the wrong goal?**

**Gary Slutkin:** The public messaging about this particular epidemic has been disastrous beyond the fact that there are different messages coming from the administration and the scientific community. The two main messages that were put forward early on that I think were both troublesome were bending the curve and opening up. Bending of the curve is halftime. The right goal is to stop the transmission and completely contain it. Go all the way down to near zero. This is a simple virus in a certain way, because it's [effectively] human to human only. It's not in the water, it's not in mosquitoes. All you had to do is separate people.

**Can't we pick up the virus from surfaces?**

It turns out that's a pretty small part of the whole thing. I think handwashing is really important, but we're talking about that more than we're talking about not gathering. And how this has been spread has been in restaurants and bars where people have been gathering, and now going to each other's houses—whether they wash their hands or not. You wouldn't do that if you understood that you can get this from anybody, you can't tell who has it, it's highly contagious, and you can't be around people you haven't been around.

Another whole problem is that America doesn't have experience with epidemics like this. We got way behind and never fully caught up. If you look at just what is being called the first wave, the curve didn't get brought all the way down. America quit and the curve just stayed with what the population accepted as a certain amount of daily deaths, rather than pushing it all the way down with a few more weeks of effort.

**But some cities have handled it better than others?**

In San Francisco they just went up to a positivity rate of 2.2 percent. And they've shut down their indoor dining. Same thing for New York—they're now at a positivity rate of 2.7 percent, they shut down indoor dining. Chicago's at 15 percent, and now they're shutting down their indoor dining. Once the curve starts to move it moves faster and faster; you have to jump on things, because once you're behind, you get more and more behind.

**So what should Chicago be doing?**

There needs to be better messaging and outreach. I'm driving on the expressway and I'm seeing, "Coming to Chicago from a COVID hot zone? Quarantine for 14 days." This is really not appropriate messaging, because it would make you feel that there isn't COVID here when there's something like 2,300 [reported] new positive cases a day, which means really about 12,000 new cases a day, and if people are infectious for five days, for example, you've got something like 70,000 people who are infectious at any moment. It's pretty much uncontrolled transmission in Chicago right now; the virus has jumped out of the box. The thing that should be all over the city is "Stay with your own household only for Thanksgiving. It is a substantial risk to share an indoor space with anybody who is not already living with you."

**The most important thing right now?**

It's a matter of prioritization. This virus is flying so fast in so much of the country that despite people feeling that they want to be with family and friends, the families would be better off to not take the chance. The regrets are too great. You've got a lot of people in ICUs who did everything perfectly except they just wanted to do this one thing. It's a common story. 

## CULTURE

# Keep your distance

Bending the COVID curve's not enough.

By **DEANNA ISAACS**

Since long before any of us heard of COVID-19 (and before most of us heard of Anthony Fauci or Emily Landon), Chicago's been home to a widely recognized infectious disease expert. He's Gary Slutkin, the former University of Illinois epidemiologist best known for taking a look at the rampant killing on our streets and recognizing it, literally, as a plague.

Slutkin, a graduate of the University of Chicago medical school, returned to Chicago in the 1990s after tackling outbreaks of tuberculosis in San Francisco, tuberculosis and cholera in Somalia, and AIDS in more than 25 countries for the World Health Organization.

In 1995 he founded CeaseFire as a UIC project that would apply public health disease control techniques to urban violence. Its success—averaging about 40 to 70 percent reductions—was featured in a 2011 Kartemquin documentary, *The Interrupters*.

CeaseFire, now an independent nonprofit called Cure Violence Global, separated from UIC in 2019. (A year earlier, an employee filed a lawsuit claiming, among other charges, sexual harassment by a senior administrator, and an office culture that permitted it. Slutkin says the lawsuit was not a factor in the decision to separate from UIC, which he maintains had been in the works for several years.) Cure

# ARTS & CULTURE



## 'TIS THE SEASON

### Chicago keeps holiday tradition alive

From digital events to socially distanced pop-ups, things in 2020 can still be merry and bright.

By **EMMA OXNEVAD**

While typically a time of year associated with relaxation and any number of festive activities, the holiday season in Chicago will look different this year due to COVID-19.

Amid surging cases at both a city and state level, both residents and potential tourists seeking holiday-themed recreation will have to adapt their plans to abide by city restrictions to mitigate the spread of the virus.

Chicago's Christkindlmarket, a staple of the city's holiday festivities, has opted to go virtual, marking the first time in 24 years the famed German market will not be available to Chicagoans.

Kate Bleeker, director of expansion and marketing development for German American Events, says that this "was not a decision that was made lightly at all" and cites a high number of overseas vendors as a contributing factor, in addition to protecting the health of patrons and staff.

"One of the main things we are considering is really trying to keep that Christkindlmarket family together [and] keep the feel of the market going," she says. "And not sort of exclude those vendors that wouldn't be able to come over, because they're really something that is the heart of the market."

Bleeker says that the response to the virtual

market—which includes popular items like mugs, ornaments, and hot chocolate, among others—has been "overwhelming."

"We're just so grateful to be part of this community and have this event that really resonates with people," she says.

Pop-up holiday bars, another sign of the season in Chicago, have also had to adapt their business models to meet city restrictions, which currently forbid indoor service at bars and restaurants.

Avondale bar DMen Tap, who also serve as vendors at Christkindlmarket, have adapted their Krampus holiday pop-up—traditionally involving themed games, and a cage for the titular creature—from an indoor setting to utilizing their Dönerman food truck outdoors. Co-owner Shawn Podgurski says that he wants customers to enjoy themselves while at the pop-up, while also hoping to avoid lingering crowds.

"We're really going to make this safe, we're going to mark off six-foot markers on the street and we're going to have a bouncer out there to let people know they gotta go, you gotta go," he says. "We want to make this sweet and nice and it's gonna be hard this year. But if we can do it and do it safe, we want to do it."

Logan Square bar Lost Lake, which has been operating to-go only throughout the pan-

This year Daley Plaza will be empty, but Christkindlmarket will live on.  DOUGLAS RAHDEN/WIKICOMMONS

demically, is currently hosting its pop-up Jingle Bell Square through its side bar. Co-owner Shelby Allison says that the bar will allow up to two people at a time to enter the location, with masks required from both patrons and staff. From there, guests can purchase bottled cocktails.

"Everyone's experience should be just a few minutes, but they'll have that, like, fleeting moment where they are in the bar surrounded by hot pink tinsel and sparkly lights," Allison says. "That way we can keep everyone's interaction masked, maintain a six-foot distance and under ten minutes at the very most."

In spite of the challenges presented by adapting a pop-up bar to meet COVID restrictions, Podgurski says he hopes that doing so can help raise spirits in a year that has left many feeling "fucking miserable."

Allison reiterated this sentiment, saying that while pop-ups have not helped to supplement the financial losses caused by the pandemic, they are ultimately a worthy endeavor in keeping the spirit of the season alive.

"Even if we can just kind of do this little charade that we like, went out and had a Christmas cocktail somewhere, even though we're grabbing-and-going and going straight home and enjoying it, you know, at home," she says, "it's an important thing to do."

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic producing a year unlike any other, Chicagoans are remaining faithful to the holiday season by counting their blessings.

"Nothing will be normal again, and not that normal was great, to begin with," Podgurski says. "Maybe we took a lot of things for granted in life and now that they've [been] taken away from us, we're all going to look forward in our Donerman family to the things that we missed this year, in 2020."

While 2020 has presented a seemingly never-ending series of unprecedented challenges, Bleeker remains hopeful that come 2021, Chicagoans will be able to celebrate the holidays free of restrictions.

"I know we're all really heartbroken over it, and it was probably the hardest decision that any of us have ever had to make, [but] we know that it was the right decision," Bleeker says. "But we're really just looking forward to next year." 

 @emmaoxnevad

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Em Kettner, *The Suppliant (2)*, 2020. Cotton woven around glazed porcelain ■ COURTESY GOLDFINCH

## VISUAL ARTS

## Em Kettner creates elaborate casings for her sacred sculptures

These little performative objects exemplify disability and protection.

By S. NICOLE LANE

Garfield Park-based gallery Goldfinch opened “Play the Fool,” a solo show with works by Em Kettner in late October. I travel to the gallery earlier last week to examine the works that sit, live, and perform on the shelves and walls. With the recent stay-at-home advisory in place, the entire exhibition is also viewable on the Goldfinch website with extensive documentation. Kettner’s charms and cabinet curiosities can be seen as characters in a larger story or narrative that we have yet to finish. In an interview with Goldfinch curator Elizabeth Lalley, Kettner explains that she’s always been interested in votive objects carried by “pilgrims, saints, and children; those used in healing or transformation ceremonies.” In “Play the Fool,” the sacred characters do have a supernatural quality to them, especially those who have the face of a human, but take on the shape of a bed, thin cone, or twisted pretzel.

In tarot card readings, “the fool” represents new beginnings and a belief in the future. In myth, Kettner explains, the fool delivers advice or holds power over certain events. Through humor, these figures detail stories, events, and performance. Since Kettner’s work surrounds the theme of disability, this exhibition title

also refers to disabled folks playing the role of “court jesters, circus sideshow attractions, and even gods of mischief and laughter” where they “were at once celebrated and isolated for their anomalous behaviors.” The names of the sculptures—*The Guardian*, *The Mirror*, and *The Sycophant*—are all similar names to tarot cards. The pieces in the show, along with their names, resemble a carny family traveling to their next destination. As a viewer, I stop and smile at each piece, taking on the role as the outsider—the looming public gawking at their tiny comedic stances and carnival-style woven costumes. Many of the weavings are in diamond- or square-shaped patterns, synonymous with circus troupes and traveling performers. Several of the characters in the show wear cone-shaped hats with a ball on the very tip. These woven costumes are bound together with cotton and wool. Underneath the material threads are the individual porcelain pieces that are only held together by their outer layer. One work can be made up of several pieces—the weavings work as glue and hold them together to create one whole character.

Kettner tells Lally, “I embellish what is strange or broken so that the sculptures flaunt their sinewy limbs with panache, diverting

attention toward their brightly woven costumes. There’s power in embracing your own smallness and fragility, and insisting others delight in these conditions as well.” And Kettner’s pieces are, in fact, very small. I circle the gallery twice and notice various details that I didn’t notice before. Kettner describes her work as “accessible and deceptively simple.” Crouching down is required for many of these works. That’s when you can see the weaving of the thread and the intricate detail put into the costumes.

A small tongue licks the shelf on the wall in *The Pilgrim*. Breasts protrude from a costume. A little pair of buttocks pops out from the backside of pants. They perform as they hang from the walls and sit on the shelves. Their sexuality reveals itself on my second go-around. It’s only after you look long enough that you realize these characters are more than their elongated and silly outer shells.

Kettner, who lives with a rare form of muscular dystrophy, reimagines the disabled body in her works. As someone who relies on other people for a physical support system, these miniature sculptures depict those moments of support. Kettner typically needs someone to aid in her standing up, and her sculptures

imitate these additional limbs in her everyday life. “I have four extra limbs working in tandem with mine,” says Kettner. And these works mimic the “moments of expansion, mutualism, and dependence.”

In conjunction with “Play the Fool,” the gallery also opened a painting show in the back gallery by Oregon-based artist Howard Fonda. “the message or the messenger” features large-scale paintings with vivid brushstrokes, vibrant colors, and narrative scenes. The markings on Fonda’s paintings work well in conjunction with Gallery 1 and Kettner’s colorful use of weaving and paint. These two exhibitions support one another although they differ in medium and in size. In a way, I feel as if Fonda’s works are enlarged scenes of Kettner’s sculptures. They could live inside of each other’s magnificent worlds.

It’s difficult to imagine that Kettner doesn’t work with a miniature loom. But readers, she does not. She creates the porcelain figures and then wraps them with cotton and wool thread. Working with a domestic craft, Kettner’s weaving works as a crutch for many of these pieces. Without her thread to keep them in place, they would simply fall apart and lay in several separate, functionless pieces. Kettner stitches them together and gives them a new purpose, a functional life, similar to folks who may need an aid or need assistance. The weavings are casts or casings that protect, honor, and serve the fragile works.

When Lalley asks Kettner if these figures all exist in the same story, Kettner says that they do but that the “story is still unfolding.” She goes on to explain that some of her characters in the show are created at various times in their journey. Like medieval paintings repeat figures, Kettner’s work may repeat characters as they grow and change through time.

Like small tokens or relics, the figures come to life individually and as a whole. I feel like I’ve caught these souvenirs in the act. They are all frozen in mid-action, the orgy of cacophonous sound is silent for a brief moment. I imagine when the gallerist turns off the lights for the evening, they all dance with one another, celebrating and carrying on as if we were never there. ■

Twitter @snicolelane



Out on a Whim's *Improvvised Dungeons & Dragons* at Otherworld Theatre TIFFANY KEANE SCHAEFER

## PUBLIC CONTROVERSY

# Otherworld tilts on its axis

Social media allegations rock the fantasy/sci-fi theater.

By **KERRY REID**

Since its founding in 2012, Otherworld Theatre has been a haven for theater fans who also love gaming, sci-fi, and fantasy. But over the past two months, a wave of allegations involving Otherworld, the resident company Out on a Whim (creators of the long-running hit *Improvvised Dungeons & Dragons*), and Moonrise, Otherworld's LARP gaming division, have hit social media outlets.

The range of allegations feels familiar to anyone who has followed other controversies in Chicago theater, from the stories that took down now-defunct Profiles Theatre a few

years ago, to the allegations that caused Stage 773 founder Brian Posen to resign in 2017, to the wave of complaints this summer about the management of Pride Films and Plays (now PrideArts) under founder David Zak, who also resigned after multiple allegations went public on social media.

The allegations include poor management in both the Otherworld home venue on North Clark and at off-site Moonrise events that created what detractors claim were unsafe environments, and conflicts over material and shows created under Otherworld's roof,

including disputes over ownership of the intellectual property. Additionally, there were harassment allegations involving Out on a Whim.

It's difficult to give full context to all of the stories that have come out in the past couple of months in an article of this length. But after conducting many hours of interviews and reading through dozens of pages of community-generated documents, open letters, and social media posts, it appears clear that even companies such as Otherworld that profess to follow the Chicago Theatre Standards from Not In Our House (created in part as a response to the Profiles controversy) can be accused of failing to provide environments deemed safe and supportive by artists and staff. It also raises questions about the contractual relationships and responsibilities for theaters that, like Otherworld, house several related-but-kind-of-different ensembles under their roofs. And as always, it also points to the glaring lack of consistent HR standards and oversights in the mostly all-volunteer world of Chicago non-Equity theater.

For their part, Otherworld's board of directors announced October 23 on the company

social media feeds that they have hired the New York-based HR firm of Peale Piper to enable them to “conduct a thorough review and bring healing and accountability to the community.” In the meantime, founder and artistic director Tiffany Keane Schaefer and her husband, board member and director of development Dylan Schaefer, have temporarily stepped down from their positions.

## Out on a Whim

The long-form improv troupe Out on a Whim (OoaW) didn't start out as a house favorite at Otherworld; the company's *Improvvised Dungeons & Dragons*, cocreated by Katie Ruppert and John Doychich, first began performing at Second City as a “coached ensemble” show sprung from a Second City Training Center class. But by summer of 2018, Otherworld ceased being itinerant and moved into the 3914 North Clark space—a two-venue theater that originally was home to now-defunct Live Bait Theater (founder Sharon Evans and her husband, John Ragir, are still landlords for the building) and has subsequently sheltered Artistic Home, Teatro Luna, and the now-gone Public House Theatre. Out on a Whim's signature show, as well as other OoaW offerings, became fixtures once Otherworld moved in. Doychich is no longer associated with Out on a Whim; Ruppert remains as artistic director, and she also was named managing director at Otherworld in May of 2019—a sign of how closely linked the two organizations had become. (Ruppert, like the Schaefers, has temporarily stepped down from her managing director position while the HR review is active.)

But though the new home gave Out on a Whim stability, cracks soon developed in the ensemble's foundation.

In a public letter signed by former Out on a Whim members Natalie Marye, Rebecca Shrom, Tommy Spears, and McKenzie Wilkes, released on Facebook by Spears on September 27, the four alleged that castmate Bayley Pokorny had engaged in behaviors that included “excessive prying into the personal lives of castmates, dishonesty and manipulation about castmates' reputations, inciting conflict among the cast, encouraging multiple female castmates in relationships to end their relationships, and implying that cast members' personal lives could be made public, in



Medusa Undone at Otherworld STEVEN TOWNSHEND

up to me and flirting with me,” Shrom said. Spears interjected, “He had also been doing that during your electroshock therapy.” Shrom later added, “I don’t remember the beginnings of what Bayley did and said to me. People would tell me about how he interacted with me, and I wouldn’t understand. He would even sometimes give me gifts and reference conversations I had no recollection of. I could barely remember people’s names and performances.”

According to Shrom, “One thing that Bayley did to me and every other woman in the show was trying to get them to break up with her boyfriend.” (Another former ensemble member, who requested anonymity, also maintained that she had that experience with Pokorny, and private texts between castmates provided by Shrom show that other women in the cast were raising questions about his behavior.) In the interview, Spears noted that he too received uncomfortable questions about his relationships from Pokorny.

In an interview, Pokorny said that he had a meeting with Ruppert a few days after the ensemble meeting on April 17. “She very sternly and very firmly told me that there were a few people that lodged complaints against me.” He noted that Ruppert told him that the only complaint that she felt violated the Chicago Theatre Standards was “inappropriate questioning . . . that I had asked an inappropriate question at a nonshow-related event that happened at the theater.” The Chicago Theatre Standards specifies “unwelcome inquiries or comments about a person’s sex life or sexual preference outside the boundaries of consent or production content” as an element of harassment in the theatrical workplace.

Pokorny added, “I felt terrible that a question I’d asked had offended someone, and that they did not feel comfortable telling me personally. I also felt confused, because the culture of the show was very close, and many of the people in the show that I have spent time with have made pointed sexual remarks or inquiries to me personally or about me to one another, including those currently making allegations.”

Pokorny also said that he asked Ruppert if it were possible for him to apologize to the people who had come forward, but Ruppert told him that the people lodging complaints specifically did not want mediation, and they did not want Pokorny fired. They simply wanted the behavior to be altered. He denied allegations that he had threatened to make cast mem-

bers’ private lives public, adding, “It bears mentioning that the behavior of inappropriate questioning did not continue.”

The public letter, however, claims that “By the end of May, Ms. Ruppert made it clear to those who had come forward that neither she nor any of the management had spoken to Mr. Pokorny at all, nor made any attempt to address this behavior. When one of the cast members who had come forward said that she was not comfortable working with Mr. Pokorny, Ms. Ruppert told her that this would affect her future casting.”

In an interview, Ruppert confirmed that she had a private meeting with Pokorny. “He was extremely receptive, he immediately corrected his behavior, and we’ve never had another problem.”

## Counter moves

**D**espite this claim, by the end of the summer of 2019, Ruppert confirmed that “six or seven” members of the OoaW ensemble left. One of those leaving, former marketing director Anna Elizabeth Johnson, sent a resignation e-mail that was, without her knowledge, forwarded to Otherworld management. Sara Robinson, then the operations director at Otherworld (she resigned this past August, before the current controversies became public), reached out to Johnson about her experiences. Johnson shared her response to Robinson with me, which reads in part:

“I was on the receiving end of behavior that demeaned, threatened, intimidated, and offended me, resulting in a hostile environment. Largely these stemmed from my leading of a partial-cast meeting regarding the group’s concerns about a fellow cast member’s personal and professional behavior. I led the meeting as many of the group were afraid of punitive measures from management for speaking out. Following the meeting, management requested a one-on-one meeting.”

Johnson’s e-mail goes on to state that, during that meeting, she “endured multiple impugnations of my character, such as being called a ‘liar,’ a ‘manipulative person,’ and a ‘Littlefinger’ with ‘targets on people’s backs.’ When I protested these attacks on my character I was told: ‘If I think you’re a liar and you say you aren’t a liar, why would I believe you?’”

How much did Otherworld know about what was happening with OoaW? According to Spears and Shrom, the company members who lodged complaints were told not to contact

addition to other professional concerns.” The letter noted that both *Out on a Whim* and *Otherworld* had made a point of saying that they followed the Chicago Theatre Standards.

The writers of the letter had first thought about going public with their complaints back in the fall of 2019. Eventually, they sought the advice of Lawyers for the Creative Arts.

The letter further noted that the ensemble requested a meeting with OoaW management—Ruppert, director Joshua Messick, and improv coach Michael Coyne—to discuss their issues with Pokorny. An agenda the ensemble members created for that meeting, which took place on April 17, 2019, and at which Pokorny wasn’t present, also noted onstage behaviors by Pokorny deemed problematic (especially in an improvised show). These included “Physically preventing castmates from speaking/going out/other actions” and “Interrupting/talking over castmates in-show.” The agenda noted that ensemble members had brought up these issues with Pokorny and with management earlier without seeing any change in

behavior.

In the September public letter, the former OoaW ensemble members claimed that, at that meeting, “management representatives responded negatively to those who came forward,” and noted that “Ms. Ruppert said that if management were to ‘bring the hammer down’ on Mr. Pokorny, they would have to do the same to all cast members, despite there being no known complaints of a similar nature toward anyone else.” The management team did agree to open an investigation.

In an interview, Shrom and Spears went into greater detail about what they said happened with Pokorny. Shrom joined OoaW in early 2018 as the *Improvised Dungeons & Dragons* show was in development. (Spears and Pokorny joined later that year.) Shrom, who had a boyfriend at the time, was also receiving electroconvulsive therapy for depression, which, she says, left her with “severe confusion and severe memory loss.”

“Just when I was coming out of the fog of the treatment, I remember Bayley coming

Otherworld. In an interview, Tiffany Schaefer said that Ruppert asked her for advice about how to handle the complaints against Pokorny. “To me, it seemed like a show-mance gone wrong,” said Schaefer. Schaefer said she was brought into another cast meeting with Out on a Whim in July 2019. “Otherworld at that point in time was acting more like a guide, as a facilitator or a mediator rather than someone who was, quote unquote, enforcing rules or enforcing boundaries.”

But given the mass exodus of OoaW ensemble members in late summer and early autumn of 2019, it seems clear that the “concern resolution path” suggested by the Chicago Theatre Standards, whether initiated by Out on a Whim or Otherworld, failed to address the concerns of many OoaW members. The CTS defines the goal of the CRP as “to provide a documented communication pathway to address issues in a production or within an organization. The CRP seeks to inform participants what to do and who to address with serious issues, and dispel the fear of reprisal for reporting issues of safety, harassment, or other serious concerns.”

The larger question, which isn’t just an issue for Otherworld, is: How much responsibility do theaters who rent to other companies or bring them in as resident troupes have to enforce the Chicago Theatre Standards or other in-house procedures with those organizations?

In an e-mail, former Otherworld company member Nathan Pease, who left in December 2019, said that he’d offered to “workshop the standards” at the beginning of the rehearsal process for every show at Otherworld, only to be rebuffed. He further noted that Out on a Whim management also deflected his offers to meet with Ruppert, Messick, and Coyne to “go over the standards and discuss how it could be applied specifically to their improv programming.”

Former operations director Robinson (who is married to Pease) said in a separate e-mail, “No one at Otherworld who has been in a position of ‘HR’ has proper training in it. At best it is a title to make Otherworld look like they have their act together. ‘HR’ was information gathering. And when the allegations and issues are with your superiors whom everything has to go through, where is the agency then when you have no one to turn to?”

Tiffany Schaefer noted that Robinson was in charge of HR for Otherworld, and said that the concern resolution paths were explained to everyone involved with Otherworld, Out on a Whim, and Moonrise. “None of these concerns

that have been brought up have used this concern resolution path,” said Schaefer. “And that includes Nathan.” She added that, if Pease felt his attempts to go over the Chicago Theatre Standards were rebuffed, “he should have used the concern resolution path and gone to the board.”

## Moonrise shots fired

**R**ight after the public letter from the former Out on a Whim members hit social media, complaints about Moonrise LARP Games, a program run by Otherworld separate from the theater productions, also became public. Moonrise, which according to Dylan Schaefer accounts for between 30-40 percent of Otherworld’s (pre-COVID) revenues, conducts offsite LARPs around the midwest, including at the Stronghold Camp and Retreat Center (which features an actual castle) in Oregon, Illinois. Fees for those participating in the weekend LARPs can be as high as \$550, and include lodging and meals.

A detailed Google document entitled “Otherworld Theatre & Moonrise LARP Information” was put together by former Moonrise LARPer Jordan Rae Piper [who goes by Rae] and Meredith White, who made a series of TikToks incorporated into the document detailing her experiences that, according to Piper, provided the impetus for creating the crowdsourced document. It contains multiple allegations from many individuals who participated in Moonrise events. These range from mold in rooms where players were staying, to insufficient meal planning, to active abuse of players in an attempt to, as Piper claimed in the document, “‘break’ a character during a scene with no previous consent . . . direction was to ‘keep yelling until she is crying and begging for forgiveness.’ I refused, and changed the small plot scene live, but was shunned for it the rest of the game.” Piper also claimed that accommodations she requested as a person with PTSD (the result of an assault that occurred in a past LARP event) were not honored.

But some Moonrise participants raise questions about the fact that Piper and other people involved in the Google doc are now running their own LARP company. In an e-mail, Bryce Read, who identifies himself as a “paid NPC [non-player character] for three Moonrise Games events,” suggested that the fact that Piper has her own LARP company,



Tiffany Keane Schaefer © INDIE GRANT PRODUCTIONS, LLC

Piper Peculiar Productions, represents a conflict of interest.

However, Piper noted that Tiffany Schaefer “was fully aware [of Piper Peculiar] and she was super supportive of it. And I told her that, you know, I didn’t want to be in competition, that I wanted to create LARPs that were for smaller audiences, like the most that I ever want to have at a group of 25 people. And Tiffany had told me that she wants to continue making big, you know, like 50, 60, 70 people.” Piper also noted that she had provided input and ideas for Schaefer as Moonrise was just starting out. “She wanted to have breakfast with me and sat me down and basically asked me every question about LARPs,” said Piper.

Tiffany Schaefer noted that part of the work Otherworld will be doing with the outside HR consultant has led to the creation of an internal document that claims to counter some of the allegations in the Google doc, encompassing correspondence and contracts from Moonrise over the past three years.

In response to Piper’s allegations about the “breaking” of a character, Tiffany Schaefer

said, “To be honest, I don’t remember saying it—but if I did, I sincerely apologize. It is never my intention to ‘break characters.’”

Territorial issues have seemingly been a part of Moonrise’s story since before the Google doc was released, however. Steven Townshend, whose background is in theater and game design, said that he was invited by Tiffany Schaefer in 2016 to start designing LARPs. “She pitched it to me as a for-profit company that she wanted to make a job for people.” Townshend shared text messages from Tiffany Schaefer in which she stated that her goal for the LARP enterprise was to “make this a job.”

That changed once Otherworld moved into the Clark Street space. Tiffany Schaefer noted that “Moonrise started as a separate thing, because it was my first go at LARP and I wasn’t sure if it was going to be successful. I wasn’t sure if it was going to make any money.” But once the move happened, Schaefer said she realized that she didn’t want to manage two separate companies. “[Moonrise] was getting pretty lucrative at that point and we were just taking over our space, so it just kind of made



sense to merge these two.” (Dylan Schaefer said that currently, nobody in Otherworld management receives a salary, and the money raised through Moonrise and other Otherworld productions has gone into overhead costs.)

But around the time of the Moonrise and Otherworld merger is when Townshend, who at one time was listed as “co-creator and head of game mechanics,” felt pushed out. In an e-mail, he said, “I did not believe that I had to insist on a written contract, a decision I now regret. Without delegation or oversight, the experience suffered; paying participants complained.”

Townshend maintained that he spent several months in 2018 asking for written agreement from Tiffany Schaefer about what his role would be with Moonrise. “She refused. We attempted a mediation. My sole requirement was communication. I assisted with the next event, but communication didn’t come: new games were announced; websites were launched; quality degraded; nothing changed. I quietly left the community.” Townshend maintained that Moonrise and Otherworld did not properly credit him for the creative work he did in developing the LARPs.

In a joint e-mail from both Schaefer, they

claimed Townshend was credited for his work on the four chapters of the *Chronicles of the Realm* LARP, but also said, “Steven had no involvement with other subsequent games, for which the structure and design have been altered based on industry and Player feedback.”

An intellectual property dispute also arose with Crescent Moon Nerdesque, a pop culture burlesque troupe that ran in-house weekly for nearly a year at Otherworld. Cocreator Grace DeSant (who performs under Foxie la Fleur) said that, in October 2019, Otherworld management, who had decided to pull the plug on the show, presented her and her creative partner Nicole Keating-Ketch with a contract requiring them to pay back a box office “deficit” of \$3,800 in order to continue using the show’s name to perform elsewhere.

According to DeSant, despite assertions that Crescent Moon was part of Otherworld, they were never given regular access to box office records or offered a formal contractual arrangement before the October 2019 contract (which she and Keating-Ketch declined to sign). “We were never included in company-wide production discussions, or told relevant information that pertains to us or affected the show,” said DeSant, who outlined the conflicts she had with Otherworld in a pub-

Steven Townshend  DISTANT ERA

lic Facebook post on October 13.

The Schaefer provided documentation indicating that Crescent Moon did participate in at least one production meeting and did receive some expense and revenue reports. Tiffany Schaefer also noted, “Grace and Nicole understood that if they did not want to agree to the transfer of rights agreement, that they would need to rebrand the show.”

## What next?

Otherworld hopes that the HR review process will be completed in the next several weeks; an earlier attempt to collect information in-house fell apart when Ali Keirn, the now-former Otherworld staffer charged with going through the records and seeking additional stories, quit via a public Facebook post.

During the course of reporting this piece, I also heard from several people (a few of whom wished to remain off the record) in addition to Read who support Otherworld and Moonrise and who question the veracity and the motives of those who have gone public with complaints.

But it is clear that, whether or not Otherworld believes, as they have stated, that they had a concern resolution pathway available, there was a breakdown in communication and in addressing conflicts that caused many people to share their negative experiences in highly public ways.

Several people I spoke with suggested that day-to-day management problems developed once Otherworld took over the Clark Street space and was focused on filling two theaters and paying rent—observations that have echoes of those I heard when reporting on the problems with safety and hygiene at Pride Arts Center. Complaints about dirty dressing rooms and rehearsal spaces cropped up frequently, among other issues.

Not all of these issues are unique to Otherworld, as anyone who has heard stories over the years about the dark side of the “get it done, no matter what” ethos of Chicago storefront theater can attest. And they are not magically erased through bringing out the Chicago Theatre Standards at the beginning of every rehearsal process.

I spoke with Laura Fisher, cofounder of Not in Our House, for insights into what companies using the Chicago Theatre Standards can do to move CTS from good intentions into practice.

“The Chicago Theatre Standards was written, in part, because workplace laws often don’t apply in small companies. Low-paid participants may not count as employees in the eyes of state law,” said Fisher, “so companies that adopt the CTS express a commitment to self-regulation. While the idea is to adopt the entire document, no document can be a ‘one size fits all.’ The CTS has protocols for auditions, intimacy content, dressing rooms, etc., but if a show is outdoors, there might not be dressing rooms. In such a case, the onus is on the company to disclose parts of the CTS they can’t deliver. Many resentments and conflicts can be prevented by simply telling people the truth about what to expect.”

When it comes to sexual harassment, Fisher said, “The CTS has a variety of prevention and reporting protocols designed to help companies have a plan should something happen. Retaliation, asking people to stay quiet, turning a blind eye—those approaches aren’t going to cut it, particularly if you’ve touted adoption of a document whose primary interest is to prevent and respond to such and similar harm.”

Sarah Marmor, an employment attorney who serves as the board vice president at Lawyers for the Creative Arts, represents one of the authors of the Out on a Whim public letter and also represented several of the women who were part of the Profiles story. Marmor noted that non-Equity theaters in particular can be in murky territory when it comes to workplace standards and that they’re not likely to “fit into the paradigm of an office situation. Because no office I’ve ever worked in required kissing scenes.” She also noted that boards can be a force for change and responsibility when problems arise in small arts organizations. “The board is not automatically responsible for everything bad that happens. But you should always have members of the board, other senior people, or other members of the community that are associated in a major way with the organization on your list of people to think about talking to.”

The loose nature of the theater work environment, especially in the storefront scene, is what makes it perhaps even more imperative than ever that, as companies eventually emerge from the COVID shutdown, clear and cogent standards of behavior, written contracts, and an impartial pathway to resolve conflicts around perceived violations exist. 

 @kerryreid



NOW PLAYING

RR *Belushi*

The new Showtime documentary *Belushi*, directed by R.J. Cutler, charts the rise and fall of the beloved comedian John Belushi using exclusively archival footage, interviews from soon after his death, and personal letters, many between him and his wife Judy. This deeply moving look at an American comedy legend features dozens of insightful audio interviews from famous colleagues, friends, and family. The usual documentary fare is there, his comedic genius manifesting in childhood, immigrant family, his early career, rise to fame at Second City and *Saturday Night Live*, his meteoric film and music career, and devastating demise. There are the well-worn stories of rivalry with Chevy, his outlandish behavior on and off set, and his voracious appetite for cocaine. "John didn't have a limit," his late friend Carrie Fisher recalls, saying that without a support group and coping skills, John was at the mercy of his disease known as addiction. Cutler only briefly touches on Belushi's need to always be boss and the calls of sexism from his female *SNL* colleagues, many whose work was sidelined to highlight his own and other male castmates'. Personal letters provide great insight into Belushi's struggles with addiction, as well as his love and desire for greater connection with his wife. While the audio recordings are rough and uneven in quality, they are enhanced with delightful caricature-style animation. Even though Cutler takes creative license, occasionally using animation and intertitles to insert unnecessary commentary for dramatic effect, the impact of the never-heard-before audio is astounding. —**JOSH FLANDERS** 108 min. *Showtime*

RR *Coded Bias*

*Coded Bias* is a must-see exploration of how technology is growing increasingly more invasive and at what cost. As much a cautionary tale as it is a call to action, Shalini Kantayya's film follows MIT Media Lab researcher Joy Buolamwini's discovery that there are inherent gender and racial biases within facial recognition programs used by law enforcement. Busting the myth that artificial intelligence is neutral, Buolamwini comes to a concerning conclusion that explains the negative effect this has and will continue to have if not

Monsoon

corrected. The film affirms that "intelligence without ethics is not intelligence at all," illustrated when technology inaccurately identifies someone as a criminal, resulting in unlawful searches or worse. As a result of being created almost exclusively by white men, this technology is presently unregulated by the federal government and continues to make damaging decisions that directly and disproportionately affect women and people of color daily. —**BECCA JAMES** 90 min. *Music Box Theatre Virtual Cinema*

RR *Dolly Parton's Christmas on the Square*

Only Dolly Parton, the pre-eminent country music star of our generation, could bring our divided country together in an over-the-top mind-bogglingly improbable holiday special that can only be described as *A Christmas Carol* meets *Touched By an Angel* as adapted by a fabulous campy frustrated high school theater teacher. It's horribly magnificent. What's the plot? It doesn't matter, because Debbie Allen choreographed a corps of dancing men (!), and Dolly is covered in sequins and floating on a glowing CGI cloud as the Ghost of Christmas (!), haunting a pitch-perfect Christine Baranski's character Regina Fuller into being a better person. Apparently Fuller wants to sell the town square to a mall blah, blah, but that's not important because she's in love with Carl (a heartwarming Treat Williams), but keeps messing it up! Meanwhile, Fuller gets to sing a belty duet with her sassy best Black friend Margeline (Jennifer Lewis), and just when you realize she might be a broad stereotype, an adorable child (Selah Kimbro Jones as Violet) makes you cry through the power of song. There's some nonsense about a lamp, an IVF storyline, a dark left turn in the plot, not too much religion, and overall it's just a lovely hot mess, perfect for the whole family to watch, while sipping a mug of eggnog with an extra shot of rum. —**SHERI FLANDERS** 98 min. *Netflix*

*Happiest Season*

*Happiest Season*, director and cowriter Clea DuVall's semi-autobiographical film, is the latest installment in the holiday romantic comedy catalogue. And like all holiday comedies, this one is ripe with family conflict. Harper (Mackenzie Davis) brings her girlfriend Abby (Kristen Stewart) home to her conservative family for

the holidays, but Harper isn't out to her family—they think Abby is her roommate—so the two must pretend to be straight. What follows are ridiculous situations in which the family proves they are not as put together as they may seem on the surface. Yet, instead of making us despise the family, the film instead tries to get us to understand them, baggage and all. It's ultimately with this that Abby and Harper are able to find their happily ever after, but this is not an idea that lends itself to a lot of queer individuals, especially those from other marginalized backgrounds. Though a big step in representation in a traditionally straight genre, *Happiest Season* proves that representation isn't always great progress. —**MARISSA DE LA CERDA** 102 min. *Hulu*

RR *Hillbilly Elegy*

Much ink has been spilled over the 2016 memoir *Hillbilly Elegy* written by conservative voice J.D. Vance, who tells the story of his family's Appalachian roots and their subsequent move to middle America, and concludes with his opinions on national economic policy for poor white America. The film immediately dispenses with politics, realizing that exploiting the struggles of his drug-addicted single mother is a salacious silver-screen-ready, white variation on the Black "Welfare Queen" poverty-porn narrative that reliably brings in the big-bucks from upper-middle-class America. Overall *Elegy* is a fairly entertaining if somewhat predictable romp; Glenn Close (in a metric-ton of unrealistic old-lady makeup) is the gem of this film as Mamaw, a take-no-prisoners matriarch who single-handedly tries to save her family with off-color jokes and a pack of menthols. A likeable Gabriel Basso plays the older Vance, painfully coming to terms with realizing that he cannot save his family. In a meaty role for someone so young, Owen Asztalos does an excellent job as young Vance, posturing pained and petulant through some tough depictions of child neglect and physical abuse. Somewhat miscast, Amy Adams plays the trashy single mother Bev, who fights through and brightens a script that is little more than a series of obligatory tragic "bad mom" scenes pasted together with a dab of an emotional arc. While one cannot quibble with the reality of Vance's personal recollection, director Ron Howard's decision to not take more creative license with the narrative gives the film the feeling of a jello mold that hasn't fully set. —**SHERI FLANDERS** 116 min. *Netflix*

RR *Ludo*

Anurag Basu's ambitious and wide-ranging epic *Ludo* has it all. A caper to take down a resurfaced sex tape? Check. An ex-con reconnecting with his daughter? Check. Ventriloquism? Check. A gangster boss and a suitcase of money that somehow ties it all together? Check. There's clearly a lot going on in *Ludo*—which takes its name and visual inspiration from the popular board game—but it is thoroughly entertaining from start to finish. Over the course of its extensive runtime, *Ludo*

follows four different relationships and how they intersect with one another without ever feeling long-winded or bloated. The joy of *Ludo* is all the more heightened by its eclectic cast, rhythmic pacing, and lively editing sensibilities—and hopefully signals a sustainable future for Netflix's recent foray into producing Indian films. —**CODY CORRALL** 150 min. *Netflix*

RR *Monsoon*

A gorgeous, unyielding, slow burn, in this travelogue love story Henry Golding plays Kit, a gay Vietnamese-British animator returning to Vietnam for the first time since his departure at the age of six. Kit is no longer able to speak Vietnamese, doesn't recognize what ought to be familiar scenery, and is unmoored from his remaining family members. A sense of heady disorientation floods the film, as director and writer Hong Khaou etches a painstakingly detailed sketch of intimate bewilderment, muted grief, a reaching hope, never quite grasped. Lush cinematography intersperses quiet, domestic tableaux with the hectic buzz of city streets, all coming together around Golding's standout performance, leaving behind his flashy Prince Charming typecast for a more subtle roil of emotions. —**NINA LI COOMES** 85 min. *Music Box Virtual Cinema*

RR *The Mystery of D.B. Cooper*

Who was D.B. Cooper? After watching this engaging documentary by nonfiction filmmaker John Dower, it might be more fitting to ask: who wasn't D.B. Cooper? Cooper's 1971 hijacking of a Boeing 727 en route from Portland to Seattle—the only unsolved case of air piracy in the history of commercial aviation—has captured people's hearts and minds for decades, so much so that the sunglasses-clad culprit is regarded as a sort-of folk hero. The documentary recounts what happened during the hijacking, with reenactments based on passenger and crew member testimony (several of whom are interviewed in the film), and considers a few key suspects, plus a theory that Cooper died after parachuting from 10,000 feet into the Central Oregon woods on a dark, cold, rainy night. I love unresolved mysteries, but I've long been bored by this case; Dower's documentary, though not a towering achievement of the form, rectified that, as he focuses on the people—from relatives of credible suspects to writers and amateur sleuths—for whom D.B. Cooper has become a preoccupation, if not an obsession. It's astounding that there are several people whom one could reasonably suspect of being the elusive Cooper, with many more falsely claiming also to be him. Each suspect featured left compelling evidence, and a few have a stranger-than-fiction appeal that borders on uncanny. Indeed, there's a strange poignancy to Dower's probings; several involved tear up either over memories of the incident or their sheer commitment to Cooper's legacy. One can't help but get a little misty-eyed with them. —**KATHLEEN SACHS** 85 min. *HBO* **FI**



The Schlitz sign that hangs outside Danny's Tavern; one of the bar's business cards (with a map on the back) from the early 90s; longtime Danny's managers Kevin Stacy and Ken Kordich in 1998. PHOTOS COURTESY KIM AMBRIZ AND KEVIN STACY; BUSINESS CARD COURTESY TERRY ALEXANDER

## A eulogy for Danny's Tavern

For decades, this cozy candlelit bar in Bucktown nurtured a devoted and welcoming community of music lovers—but it couldn't survive the pandemic.

By **JACOB ARNOLD**

**D**anny's Tavern, the intimate, candlelit, apartment-shaped bar that's been a fixture of Chicago nightlife for 34 years, is permanently closed. It'd been shuttered due to the pandemic since March 18, and its owners told staff in early October that it wouldn't be opening again. Rumors of the closure started circulating on social media midway through last month, and Block Club confirmed the bad news on November 5.

The Bucktown bar was best known for its popular soul, Smiths, and disco nights, but over the years it also hosted obscure electronic music, poetry readings, art installations, live jazz, and much more. Danny's was an odd

space in an unlikely spot—its location at 1951 W. Dickens was on a largely residential block—but its cheap, untrendy drinks and eclectic music reliably attracted large, diverse audiences. It was that rare kind of place that people fell in love with at first sight, where regulars became staff and stayed on for decades.

The bar's namesake, aspiring power-pop musician Danny Cimaglio, opened Danny's in 1986 after he and his wife, Barbara, pooled resources with two other couples. It was nearly called Pete & Danny's Truck Stop, because plumber and bartender Peter Nelson was among the investors.

Bucktown was still a working-class neighborhood, populated largely by first-generation

immigrant families. The tavern in a two-flat that became Danny's had previously been a bakery and then a reputed bookie joint. Bartender Angie Hebda lived upstairs for a time. The downstairs space, the rear of which had previously been an apartment, had small tables and a dartboard.

In 1990, Terry Alexander and Michael Noone, two friends of Nelson's who tended bar at other establishments, closed a deal to buy Danny's. They managed it themselves for the first few years, and would soon begin its transformation from a jukebox bar into a showcase for curated music.

"Prior to us buying it, Danny's had a rockabilly culture and motif to it—a real Elvis Pres-

ley kind of bar," Noone recalls. Since rockabilly wasn't their scene, Alexander and Noone invited artists to redecorate its rooms, among them photographer and performance artist Sheree Rose, mixed-media artists Ike Hobbs and Martin Giese, and painters Dave Rodman and Tom Billings.

"In the front room, where the bar was, we would have an artist feature his or her work for a couple of months at a time," Noone says. "The back rooms were permanent installations that we'd switch out every couple of years." The bathroom, off what would become the dance floor, still had a working tub and shower, which one artist filled with papier-mâché sculptures under plexiglass.



Danny's staffers and DJs: in back, Desmond Taylor (blue shirt); last row, Stephen Sowley, Courtland Green, Kate Ruggeri, and Jeff Parker; front row, Ross Winston, Hans Ballard (black shirt), Josh McCowan, and Kevin Stacy. COURTESY ROSS WINSTON

"It was kind of the wild, wild west back then," Alexander says. "We went upstairs and made that part of the bar. We also went to the backyard. We had bands play on the garage roof. We also had what we called a 'cafe' out front." Alexander and Noone distributed business cards with a map to Danny's on the reverse, since the neighborhood was hardly a hub for nightlife.

At first Alexander provided the bar's music. "Michael and I put every penny we had into the bar," he explains. "I didn't have an apartment—I was actually staying there. So we bartended, we cleaned, we stocked the beer, and back then we had cassettes. We spent an hour a day cueing up the songs we thought we would be playing that night. So Danny's started not as turntables—it was cassettes. Rock, soul, grunge, or funk; De La Soul to Sisters of Mercy to My Life With the Thrill Kill Kult to the Velvet Underground."

A backup singer for My Life With the Thrill Kill Kult got a job working the bar at Danny's, which helped it become a hangout for Wax Trax! artists. They mingled with neighborhood regulars and assorted other weirdos. "We would have these old Romanians that lived on the block come in, we'd have bikers—the Outlaws used to hang out there. We'd have

a lot of people from Berlin [nightclub] that would come down there," Noone remembers. "It was amazing how many different people from different backgrounds would be in that bar at the same time."

As CDs became widely available, bartender Eric Puls would haul in an empty Pabst Blue Ribbon case he'd filled with them, which Noone called "the box of love." Puls hosted a radio show called *Totally Wired* on WCBR-FM in Arlington Heights, and he played indie rock from labels such as Drag City, Feel Good All Over, Siltbreeze, Sub Pop, and Matador. He knew he was doing his job well when patrons would interrupt him to ask what was playing.

**I**n 1992, Alexander and Noone worked with chef Scott Harris to launch the original Mia Francesca, and by 1997 they were busy enough opening other restaurants that they decided to hire new managers for Danny's: New York City transplants Kevin Stacy and Ken Kordich, who'd worked with them at two of those new restaurants, Okno and Soul Kitchen. Alexander's efforts in the restaurant world would eventually lead to his current role as partner at One Off Hospitality, founded in 2011 and now including the likes of Avec, Big Star, the Violet Hour, and the Publican Group.

"They asked Kenny and I to remake the bar," Stacy recalls. "They knew that we both had lived in the East Village in the late 80s, the early 90s, and spent a lot of time around bars."

Stacy and Kordich painted the walls plain colors and dimmed the lighting, relying heavily on tabletop tea lights. They raised the ceiling above the dance floor and knocked down interior walls to open up the space. "At that time, all of those little rooms used to have just one door," Stacy explains. "If you were in a room with somebody, you kind of owned that room, so we wanted to try to get that notion out of it."

Finally and most significantly for this new era of Danny's, Stacy and Kordich replaced the consumer-level stereo Alexander had been using. They hung PA speakers and installed proper DJ equipment, including a pair of Technics 1200 turntables and a Pioneer mixer. Since space was at a premium, DJs had to mix facing the bar, their backs to the dance floor.

"[Stacy] was very invested in the sound of the place, the way that the music resonated through the space," recalls guitarist and composer Jeff Parker, one of the earliest DJs at Danny's. "He didn't want it to be too loud in the bar area, but then louder on the dance floor. He wanted it to bump—a nice bumping system like you had in a club. But not too crazy, 'cause it couldn't be, because of the neighbors."

Chicago's restrictions on Public Place of Amusement licenses meant Danny's could never get one—so it could never charge a cover. To help make the night worthwhile for DJs, the managers worked out an arrangement where bartenders gave DJs 10 percent of the tip pool. After Stacy and Kordich opened the renovated Danny's in 1997, the first DJ they hired was Courtland Green, aka Supreme Court, who was working at Reckless Records.

At first Stacy and his future wife, Kim Ambriz (who also worked at Reckless), spun on Saturdays, and Green spun on Sundays. All the Danny's DJs played eclectic fare, including salsa, soul, hip-hop, and punk.

The first Danny's night dedicated explicitly to dancing was its legendary soul party, which started in April 1998, during a visit by Stacy's friend Warren Lee, cofounder of the Empire State Soul Club in New York. Before Lee returned home, he and Green spun together on a Sunday night, and they blew right past the bar's legal operating hours.

"We were having such a good time that we weren't paying attention to the time, and 2 AM rolls around, and all of a sudden the bar is filled with floodlights from the cops, from

their cars," Green recalls. "I was in my young 20s, and I remember checking for my ID, which I did not have—so I literally just bolted out the back door!"

Green, who'd previously spun soul parties in Kansas City, promptly asked Stacy to let him create a monthly Wednesday funk and soul night. He enlisted Scott Craig and Mark Henning, and they were soon joined by another friend of Green's, legendary record collector Dante Carfagna. The night started out without a formal title, but after a couple years they named it Sheer Magic. Jamie Hodge and Shaun Pauling also joined the crew.

"Mostly, at first, it was just people that worked at Reckless coming down and dancing. It slowly built word of mouth, as things do, and it got busier and busier—and then *Rolling Stone* did a feature on it," Stacy remembers. "That was the first time that a line ever existed at Danny's."

"Those nights were the first ones where I was really leveled by the capabilities of that bar," says Stephen Sowley, who worked the door and bartended at Danny's from 2005 till '18. "It was about bringing people together."

Carfagna helped build the night's reputation with his crate-digging skills—Sheer Magic was where he first publicly played several 45s that would be later canonized as lost classics when he included them on compilations for the Numero Group and Chocolate Industries.

Two soul nights in particular stood out. "The Sheer Magic set the month after James Brown passed away [in December 2006], that was one of the heaviest nights ever in terms of their DJing," Sowley recalls. "They just went for broke that night, and it was just heavy, heavy funk. That was so powerful to me."

DJ Shadow also played two secret sets at Danny's. The second was February 2, 2012, the day after *Soul Train* founder Don Cornelius passed away. "That night was wild too," Sowley says. "The people that were there really got into it and started doing the *Soul Train* dance line and cheering each other on with their moves. I just thought that was so heartwarming." The Danny's soul monthly wrapped its run in November 2015, after 17 years.

**I**n the late 90s, Danny's was also home to dub nights DJed by Richard Smith, aka Rik Shaw of Deadly Dragon Sound System, and by Dave Bramble, aka the Great Silence. The two of them played alternating Fridays, both of which Courtland Green describes as "just phenomenal, killer reggae."

Green also says record collector Tony Janda, aka Big Tony, who started spinning at Danny's in the early 2000s, deserves props as one of the bar's best DJs. Janda played funk, soul, and hip-hop, and he was one of the few turntablists to scratch records at Danny's. He died in 2012.

Danny's attracted a lot of characters, and among the most unusual was DJ Shoulders, aka DJ LeDeuce, aka Adam Gruel. He wore jumpsuits with shoulder pads, humped the turntables, and manipulated records with his feet. Jen Kienzler, aka DJ Quick Paw, created a short film of his antics in 2006.

"His sets were really just free, where if a record skips, he would make it skip more," Sowley recalls. "Or he would get so hyped, he'd start trying to climb on the rack that held all of the amplifiers. There was a whole performative aspect to his sets that was entertaining and bizarre."

Stacy insisted that any DJs he hired spin vinyl, and in the late 90s, before the Discogs marketplace existed, that narrowed the field to music nerds. "Most nonclub bars weren't doing that," explains DJ and Reckless Records manager Melissa Grubbs. "In a given evening, you could start the night and hear a jazz set and finish it with a full-blown floor-shaking dance party with DJs that blended rare soul into salsa and classic hip-hop cuts."

Visual artist, educator, vocalist, and musician Damon Locks started DJing at Danny's in 2003, spinning soul, hip-hop, and dancehall. At the time he was working at Hi-Fi Records, and Danny's DJs would call the shop, asking him to hold new Timbaland- and Neptunes-produced Missy Elliott singles. For about a decade, Locks spun a night called Eternally Yours with his Eternals bandmate Wayne Montana (who encouraged Stacy to add a bass cabinet to the Danny's sound system).

One of the most influential Danny's nights was Play. Graphic designer Bob Davies was DJing at Okno, spinning ambient, noise, jungle, and IDM, and Ken Kordich, who was bartending there at the time, offered him Monday nights at Danny's. Play became a monthly residency by March 1998 and ran for ten years, providing a weekly showcase for experimental electronic-music DJs and live performances—and its flyers frequently showcased cutting-edge print design.

The core group of DJs and performers initially consisted of Davies, his old friend and bandmate Brian Kelly, and Alex Horn (aka video artist Nanodust). Kelly stepped away after about a year, and Horn's role dwindled, since he was consistently busy

elsewhere; Davies brought in Ray Rodriguez, aka DJ Ray\_Rod, the dance buyer at the Quaker Goes Deaf.

Visiting artists at Play weren't just from Chicago—they also came from both U.S. coasts and as far away as Europe, and included Mr. Scruff, Oval, Mystic Bill, Casino Versus Japan, Signaldrift, String Theory, Derrick Carter (who insisted on spinning for free), and Pulse-programming (whose lineup included future Danny's staffer Marc Hellner).

all-cassette night of his own. "I would show up with two huge cases of cassettes, and we'd have four tape decks we'd put over the turntables," he says. "It was always a mess, but it was always super fun."

H.O.T.H. generally happened the first Tuesday of every month. "The night focused on music that really wasn't being played in a lot of clubs or anywhere else when it started," Wanzer explains. "A lot of European, early industrial minimal synth [tracks] like Dutch

underground electronic music," Wanzer says. "It would be nice to give new and upcoming people a chance to do whatever they wanted. Some of them were underage, but I'd sneak them in, because they wouldn't be able to play any other real venues."

One memorable night featured a live performance by Wanzer's friend Marc Arcuri, aka Orphan Schlitz. "I remember him setting up everything on this little janky table we had, and two minutes into his set, the table just collapsed, and all of his gear fell everywhere," Wanzer says. "But he just kept going."

Other artists who played H.O.T.H. included DJ Carlos Souffront, BMG (aka Ectomorph), Gatekeeper, and Chandeliers. "Danny's was the only spot for that night. I could never do H.O.T.H. anywhere else," Wanzer says.

Danny's didn't exclusively cater to record collectors and music nerds, of course—it was also well-known for its Smiths Night. Bobby Burg (from the Love of Everything and Joan of Arc) started it in 2006 with his friend Ben Vida (from Town and Country and also Joan of Arc), inspired by a similar series in New York. They were soon joined by Joe Proulx and later by Brian Case of Disappears. The night ran for ten years, an impressive achievement given that the Smiths released only four studio albums. "That one was instantly popular. That was a big night," Stacy recalls. "Definitely Danny's will be associated forever with that."

At Danny's, you could dance to soul music one night and hear experimental jazz the next. Jeff Parker and Joshua Abrams both began DJing at Danny's around 2000. "I started spinning there because Kevin knew that I collected records," Parker says. "At first I was doing more of a lounge kind of vibe. I'd play something that people could dance to, and they would start to dance, and then I would kind of get scared and I'd take it back to loungey listening music. But then after a while, I decided to just try and make people dance when I DJed, and I got really good at it."

At one point Stacy and Kordich weren't speaking (not an ideal situation for the co-managers of a bar), but both were booking Parker. "Sometimes I'd play at Danny's twice a week for a whole month, 'cause one guy didn't know that the other guy was booking me," Parker says, laughing.

Parker and Abrams played a monthly night called the Love Boat with Green and fellow Reckless alum Chris Johnson, spinning sweet soul and steppers cuts. They also participated



The DJs (left) and dancers at the famous Danny's soul night, Sheer Magic, in 1999

PHOTOS COURTESY KIM AMBRIZ AND KEVIN STACY

"You'd go there just knowing that it was going to be really creative and new, and in Chicago in the late 90s and early 2000s, there really wasn't that much cool stuff," Hellner says. "Really there was nothing else like it in the midwest, where you'd go and see guys with laptops making crazy music."

Edgy electronic music also dominated one of Danny's longest-running monthlies, Beau Wanzer's Hot on the Heels, launched in 2006 and still going strong when the pandemic shut down the bar. Wanzer's first night at Danny's was the Weekend Records and Soap night in 2003, which he followed with a short-lived

electro, noise, punk, some techno, some house, but pretty much the weirdest stuff I could find that was still somewhat danceable. I just played whatever I wanted."

Over the course of 14 years, H.O.T.H. featured around 240 performances, some live and some DJed. Wanzer describes his typical audience as "an amalgamation of Art Institute freaks, old punks, noise heads, house techno heads, just the whole gamut of weirdos, outcasts." To him, Danny's always felt like a DIY space.

"I always thought it was important, especially, to focus on the fringes of Chicago

in the Peace Party, a series of benefits for various nonprofits held the first Monday of every month and run by Naomi Walker and Jocelyn Brown. “That was eclectic, just dance music, kind of soul-centric,” Parker recalls. “Everybody who was playing there had pretty broad taste. It could go from Brazilian music, West African sound, some Latin salsa.”

Drummer John Herndon, Parker’s bandmate in Tortoise and Isotope 217, DJed at Danny’s as well. “Johnny used to murder that place,” Parker says. “He’d play everything. He had psychedelic stuff and Miles Davis records from the 70s and Journey and Foghat and ZZ Top and club/house music, drum ‘n’ bass, dub. Everything would just be perfectly blended, and then everything would sound like a remix. I never heard anybody do anything like him at that place.”

Herndon also put together a live band called Soft Pow, which grew out of a DJ night of the same name; it featured Parker on guitar, Josh Berman on cornet, Jason Adasiewicz on vibraphone, and Anton Hatwich on bass. “We were playing a lot of classic jazz, hard-bop stuff,” says Parker. “Kind of obscure stuff like some tunes by Elmo Hope.”

Though live bands rarely played Danny’s, jazz artists booked there over the years included saxophonist David Boykin (leading ensembles with flutist Nicole Mitchell), drummer Isaiah Spencer, and of course Joshua Abrams, who gave one of his first solo performances on *gumbri* (a type of West African lute) under the name Reminder. Postrock minimalist quartet Town and Country (Ben Vida, Jim Dorling, Joshua Abrams, and Liz Payne) played live at Danny’s as well.

In the early 2000s, Parker and Abrams DJed together on the eve of John Coltrane’s birthday. “The dance floor was packed all night,” Parker says. “We stopped the music, got on the microphone, and announced to the crowd that it was John Coltrane’s birthday. Everybody cheered, and we played the whole album *A Love Supreme*, and the place freaked out. The people went apeshit. It was amazing!”

Abrams’s tenure at Danny’s helped shape his relationship with his audience. “For me as a musician, I found it so valuable to work as a DJ and just learn a little bit of how the music was affecting people,” he says. “When you’re playing records, it’s a different sort of process. You have more time to understand how it’s affecting the environment.”

The influence on Parker’s sound was even more direct. The last cut on his most recent album, *Suite for Max Brown*, was inspired by

a specific DJ blend he’d created at Danny’s: *A Love Supreme* layered over a Nobukazu Takemura cut that uses electronic drums. “They were both synced up and in tempo, and I was probably able to keep it in sync for ten minutes,” Parker says. “I was like, ‘Man, I wish I could make some music like that.’”

International Anthem cofounder and A&R director Scottie McNiece, who founded music-programming service Uncanned Music in 2012, recorded the raw material for Makaya McCraven’s 2017 album *Highly Rare* live at Danny’s a week after the 2016 presidential election. The drummer and his group had just returned from a European tour, and Belgian DJ Lefto was in town filming a TV series. The gig came together at the last moment, with the live band supporting Lefto’s DJ sets.

“For me and a lot of people I know, we always remember that as the night that we pierced through the fog of the post-election blues,” McNiece explains. “The whole place was completely packed, Sunday night, and Makaya played with Junius Paul and Nick Mazzarella and Ben LaMar Gay. Everybody was really cutting loose. It felt like a cathartic release. You could just really feel it—it just had this energy.”

With a constellation of candles on its tables and not a television in sight, Danny’s could feel like a bar from another era. But cultural changes affected it anyway. When the smoking ban went into effect in 2008, the bar surprisingly got busier—though Stacy had to field neighbors’ complaints about patrons congregating outside. Similarly, when cell phones became widespread, Stacy had to rein in customers who stepped out to make calls: to remind them not to wander under residents’ windows, he duct-taped squares on the sidewalk to indicate imaginary phone booths. Once texting became the norm, the problem disappeared. One thing Danny’s stubbornly resisted doing throughout Stacy’s tenure, though, was establishing a social-media presence.

“Outside of the fact that we were using electronic instruments to play music, Danny’s could have been a bar in the 1800s,” says bartender Hans Ballard. “Everything else about it was the simplest elements of a bar: good music, good people, good fun.”

In 2005, Kordich moved away. Hellner served as assistant manager for the next four years, and began booking new niche series on what had been slow weeknights, accurately predicting their potential to draw crowds.

They included the aforementioned H.O.T.H., Italo and European disco monthly Night Moves, and Chances Dances spin-off party Off Chances, which awarded grants to LGBTQ+ artists. This final era of Danny’s was more open to disco and house, including the popular Disco Unusual night by DJ and model Lono Brazil.

DJ Jamie Hayes spun at Danny’s the third Thursday of each month from 2006 till 2018, as well as on many weekends. For the last half of that stretch, she teamed up with Tanja Buhler for a monthly Friday night known as Party Line. Hayes, a fashion designer who’d worked at Hi-Fi Records, played a wide range of music, including soul, hip-hop, funk, Latin, Brazilian, disco, and house.

The atmosphere at Danny’s seemed designed for spontaneous dance parties. “It had that house type of feel, but also it was super dark, so people felt more free to hit a dance floor,” Hayes says. “I often started my own dance floor, because I just loved dancing and music. That’s another wonderful part of Danny’s—that the DJ booth wasn’t really separated from the crowd, so I could go out and dance, and people would get excited about that, that the DJ was feeling their own music and not too cool for school.”

“It was probably one of the best places I’ve ever DJed. The sound system was the best; the tables were always perfect,” says Buhler. “Kevin would always carry in your records. He was a total gentleman, one of the classiest owners. He was the heart and soul of that place.”

Buhler spun once or twice a month, playing disco, house, and techno on Fridays or Saturdays. Sunday or Mondays, she would bring out deeper cuts that other DJs would appreciate, playing relatively experimental electronic-music artists such as Floating Points and Sound Stream. “I would always bring way more than I ended up playing,” she admits. “I think I got a little bit made fun of for it.” One night a young couple requested Kate Bush, but the bar had to close early, so Buhler lent them the record to play at home.

Kevin Stacy’s careful guidance of the music at Danny’s helped set its vibe for 21 years, but in September 2018, he parted ways with the bar. Longtime bartender Ross Winston became general manager, and Green took over booking DJs.

“The curation that Kevin did for all those years is what made the space so amazing to me,” Damon Locks says. “Hand-picking the

DJs, and offering it to people for benefits, picking the staff, and having a very creative and open space that could be safe for people—it was great!”

Danny’s drew an audience that took art and music seriously, but it didn’t feel exclusive or cliquish. Many of the bar’s regulars over the years were involved in the service industry or the music scene, and nights such as Off Chances catered to a queer crowd. The DJs were all over the map, and so were their fans. “We did our best as a staff to make everybody feel welcome,” Sowley explains. “Kevin left a note in the [money] tin that just said, ‘Be nice and make friends.’”

As Bucktown gentrified over the decades, Danny’s remained a funky neighborhood joint with cheap drinks and reliably interesting music. “Musically, we didn’t really compromise,” Green says. “There was a huge freedom in playing at Danny’s, and if somebody was bothering you or asking for too many requests, it was, ‘There’s people waiting outside, so you can go to another bar. This dance floor and the music we play here is sacred to us.’”

In 2015, the bar’s landlords threatened Danny’s with eviction, but the community rallied with a huge show of support that convinced them to reconsider. Alexander says that he and Noone have been trying to buy the building for ten years or so, but in 2020, even owning it might not have helped—there were factors in play more serious than landlords balking at lease renewal. Under normal circumstances, the fact that Danny’s was small and mostly windowless helped it feel cozy, but during a pandemic it meant the bar never had a way to stay open safely.

“To have any restaurant or any bar be closed for a year, I don’t know if you can survive,” Alexander says. He explains that even before the pandemic, Danny’s wasn’t breaking even, so that he and Noone had to divert their own money into the business. “Honestly, Michael and I kept Danny’s afloat for many, many years. It was a labor of love. But it just gets to a point where you’re so far underwater that—you hate to do it, but there was nothing we could really do.”

Once again, the Danny’s community has responded with an outpouring of love—the testimonies collected here barely scratch the surface. “That sucks that it’s closing, because it’s by far my favorite bar in the whole world,” says Jeff Parker. With a laugh, he adds, “And I’ve been to a lot of bars.” 

 @gridface



## CHICAGOANS OF NOTE

# Nick Acosta, publisher of *New Morality Zine*

I started my zine when I moved to Chicago. . . . I thought, “What is something I can do by myself yet still contribute?”

As told to LEOR GALIL

*Nick Acosta, 35, began publishing New Morality Zine in 2014 to document hardcore punk in Chicago and beyond; two years ago, he made it a label too. NMZ has put out four releases in the past month, including A Hell Like No Other by local band Si Dios Quiere, Thank You for Being Here Pt. I by Oklahoma shoegazers Cursetheknife, and its 29th and most recent, a demo by Oklahoma posthardcore act G.I. Bill.*

I grew up in Colorado; I lived south of Denver by about 45, 50 minutes. I lived in a pretty rural [area]—we lived on five acres. We

didn't have cable television; we barely got regular channels. [I] commuted to school, and my parents commuted to work downtown. It was always 45-minute, hour-long drives either way, so we were always listening to music a ton. In high school, everything I wanted to do was always far away from me. We didn't live in the hub—I think that's why music became something I was interested in, 'cause I could do that by myself.

I went to an all-boys Jesuit school. I had my group of friends. There were two or three people who were into punk; somehow we would

STEPHANIE FARMER

start trading recommendations. Some of the punk music lent its way, to, like, “Oh, I like this band called Terror.” It was during the age of Napster, so I was like, “I will go home and I will log on Napster and, like, download this Nora record for five hours.”

I actually went from Colorado to Seattle, New York, and then Chicago. I don't feel like I was part of any given scene until I was in Seattle, and then I delved headfirst into the quote-unquote scene.

I “claimed straight edge” my senior year of high school. I don't remember the show I went to, but some girl had offered me a cigarette, and I was like, “Oh no, I don't smoke.” She was like, “What are you, straight edge?” I was like, “Yes.” I had very little understanding of what that meant at the time.

When I got to college, I met another friend that was going to school with me that said she was straight edge—she was from Colorado, coincidentally—so then we started going to shows together, and I met more people. When I was living in Seattle, hardcore was big—it was the big northwest sound. You had bands like Blue Monday, Go It Alone, the Answer; it was a very strong local scene.

I went to college at Seattle University, so right in the hub of Capitol Hill, which at this point is so different.

I started my zine when I moved to Chicago. It was three years into living here—I'm going on my ninth year, tenth year here. I tried to start a band the year prior with some friends, but they all ended up moving away. I thought, “What is something I can do by myself yet still contribute?” I felt still very new in Chicago—I felt like this was a good way to keep active but also become more involved in the scene in Chicago.

It was fun to be able to go to a show and bring zines with me. I would try as much as I could to message a promoter and be like, “Hey, would you mind if I come with some zines?” Often they're like, “That's totally fine.” People started to know me a little bit from the zine. Chicago is a unique place; there's a lot of people doing things at a smaller scale, so I never felt like, “Oh, he stood out because he does this.” It's weird now to think people might only know me from doing a zine or a label.

My wife would say I'm verbose—she's al-

ways a good editor. I went into doing the zine based off some of the zines I was interested in. There was a zine from New York called *Rumpshaker* by Eric [Weiss]. He did a great job of including really different band interviews, and also a lot of personal essays; I remember he wrote a very vivid article about what it meant for him to have OCD. Another zine from New York that's older is *Anti-Matter*—I remember reading the anthology my first year in New York and just being fascinated by how in-depth and intentional Norman Brannon is with his questions, so those are things I tried to emulate when I was doing the zine as much as possible. A diversity of perspectives—asking a wide range of bands, getting personal stories that were not necessarily tied just to hardcore, but from people within hardcore.

I feel bad. I haven't done a [full] issue of the zine—with, like, interviews—for almost two and a half years. I've transitioned more to focusing more on the label side of it. So I'm looking to get back to it.

Looking to the forefathers, I was like, “A lot of these zines went on to doing labels, so I could also do it.” I wanted to make sure if I was gonna do a label, could I find bands to work with within the wide umbrella of hardcore, but also have some nuance—or something that's slightly different that makes them appealing to a different listener.

I'm working with a band called Si Dios Quiere; they're from the Pilsen neighborhood, Little Village, some of them I think might have lived in Humboldt Park or currently live in Humboldt. I knew Louie Flores, the bass player—he's one of the first people I met going to shows. And Ruben Garza Jr., who's the singer—I remember going to one show he hosted in Little Village, outside in the patio space of somebody's backyard. Predominantly the people that were in attendance were Brown, and that was cool for me, because I don't think I've always felt as included—or at least represented—in hardcore. So that's another big reason why I'm super amped about this specific release.

I did Chicago hardcore shirts, and somebody that was helping me with the design, he was like, “Do you want to put ‘NMZ’ on it?” I was like, “That's kinda weird—it's self-aggrandizing to put my own label on it.” I feel like it's more for the people than it is repping a brand. Sometimes I feel weird about it. At this point, I feel like I've contributed slightly, and I'm always hoping to do more. **✎**

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## MUSIC

## PICK OF THE WEEK

## Judson Claiborne confront humanity's downfall with beautiful songs on *When a Man Loves an Omen*



ALYCE HENSON

**JUDSON CLAIBORNE, *WHEN A MAN LOVES AN OMEN***  
 La Société Expéditionnaire  
[judsonclaiborne.com](http://judsonclaiborne.com)

**WHEN HUMANITY'S SHIP GOES DOWN** due to a global pandemic, vulture capitalism, and corrupt politics, the band picking and singing the final notes will be Chicago's Judson Claiborne. So this month—when we're grappling with the messy aftermath of an election while watching COVID-19 cases skyrocket before our eyes—feels like the perfect time for Christopher Salveter, the group's auteur, to release this collection of finely wrought songs that confront apocalyptic anxiety with beautiful melodies that make sticking around feel like a better option. *When a Man Loves an Omen*, Salveter's first release in six years, is a lovely baroque folk EP filled with light: the deep bends of Julian Rogai's double bass, the ever-present banjo of Josh Lantzy, and the pulsing percussion of Jamie Topper create a lush and comforting bed that's difficult to leave. Salveter is also a subversive songwriter, though, and works pretty melodies into songs with harrowing themes: the waltzing "Twenty Dollar Quartet" features the lost voices and obsessions of Sun Records royalty such as Elvis Presley and Jerry Lee Lewis, while "Conditionals" makes the horrors of climate change personal ("If all of the signs are gonna be ignored," Salveter sings, "Then who of our kind is gonna mind the store"). With its echoing guitars, "I Want My Undeveloped Prefrontal Cortex Back" yearns for more primitive times. Like Califone and Andrew Bird, Salveter is ultimately a minimalist folkie, in full command of his music's enchanting darkness and the beauty that can be found within such sparse instrumentation. *When a Man Loves an Omen* largely serves as a showcase for the harmony singing of Salveter and his bandmates, but the piano instrumental "Alive in Time" is nonetheless a standout, its melody rolling over whispers of electronics. The elegant fingerpicking of "The Trimmergrant" creates an atmosphere of mystery regarding the disappearance of migrant workers hired to trim marijuana at night in northern California: "No marijuana grows unprotected," Salveter sings. The song could easily serve as the opening theme to the next installment of *True Detective*, but it's also a haunting world of its own making. —**MARK GUARINO**



Richard H. Kirk of Cabaret Voltaire © COURTESY THE ARTIST

**WILLIAM BASINSKI, *LAMENTATIONS***  
 Temporary Residence  
[williambasinski.bandcamp.com/album/lamentations](http://williambasinski.bandcamp.com/album/lamentations)

William Basinski has thrown himself headlong into the kind of "productive quarantine" that seems like a myth to most of us, and the spoils are abundant. Since March, when states across the U.S. began issuing stay-at-home orders, he has unveiled a collaboration with sound artist Richard Chartier and a new project called Sparkle Division. The New York-based composer and musician is best known for the four-volume audio experiment *The Disintegration Loops*, which he created in summer 2001 by recording the deterioration of tape loops he'd made in the early 80s. Dedicated to the victims of the 9/11 attacks (he finished the work the day the towers fell) and released in four installments across 2002 and '03, *The Disintegration Loops* made such an impact that in 2012 it was inducted into the National September 11 Memorial & Museum. Since then, Basinski has continued his deep explorations of the realms of sound, and this month the concept-driven composer released *Lamentations*, which draws from more than four decades' worth of tape loops and sound sketches plucked from his archives. The passage of time isn't just a palpable part of this music—it's an integral collaborator in its creation. "Tear Vial" thrums in an aqueous haze through nearly five minutes of slowly oscillating piano chords, and "O, My Daughter, O, My Sorrow" (a tribute to performance artist Marina Abramović) dissolves Svetlana Spajić's interpretation of Serbian folk song "Ko Pokida Sa Grla Djerdane" to make a surreal hymn. *Lamentations* isn't all serious and somber, though—the chopped-up singing that stumbles and restarts throughout "Please, This Shit Has Got to Stop" makes it sound almost whimsical. While many of Basinski's contemporaries aim to create music that's crystalline and timeless, he documents decay—a fizzling loop, an oxidized tape, even the dwindling nature of life. *Lamentations* shares its name with a book from the Old Testament, readings from which

are used to mourn the ravaging of the First and Second Temples in Jerusalem, but the music on the album doesn't care to answer the question of whether it's a memorial or a reprieve from this stressful time. For Basinski, it's possibility—not hope—that springs eternal. —**SHANNON NICO SHREIBAK**

**CABARET VOLTAIRE, *SHADOW OF FEAR***  
 Mute  
[mute.ffm.to/CV-SOF](http://mute.ffm.to/CV-SOF)

In this hellish age, true celebrations feel few and far between, but the first new Cabaret Voltaire album in 26 years is definitely cause for rejoicing. Its title, *Shadow of Fear*, sticks to this UK group's usual dystopian vibe; they kicked off the 1980 album *The Voice of America* by addressing the messed-up state of the U.S. on "The Voice of America/Damage Is Done." Formed in 1973 as an experimental electronic trio in Sheffield, Cabaret Voltaire predate the punk and industrial movements, and their music influenced both—their use of wildly distorted and processed guitars, drum machines, samples, and electronics even led to uncomprehending audiences pelting them with debris (much like their American counterparts Suicide). In 1978 Cabaret Voltaire signed to Rough Trade, where their releases included the scuzzy, futuristic garage-rock single "Nag Nag Nag" and the sublimely droney and trancey LPs *Three Mantras* (1980) and *Red Mecca* (1981). In 1981 keyboardist Chris Watson departed (he'd soon join the amazing Hafler Trio), and the band became the duo of multi-instrumentalist Richard H. Kirk and vocalist and multi-instrumentalist Stephen Mallinder, who moved in a more commercial electronics-driven direction. Kirk launched a solo career in the 80s, and he and Mallinder continued to make albums as Cabaret Voltaire until 1994, when they put out *The Conversation*. By the end of that decade, Kirk had started hinting about resurrecting the band, and in 2014 he finally did it—as the sole member.

Though Kirk remains the entirety of Cabaret Voltaire on *Shadow of Fear*, the album delivers the



Ilsa © MAIRE O'SULLIVAN

goods that longtime fans crave. It also adds new elements: Kirk has grown even more enthralled with the early-70s German kosmische sound (Cluster, Ash Ra Tempel, Tangerine Dream), judging by these songs. Opener “Be Free” starts with Cabaret Voltaire’s trademark garbled samples, oscillator sweeps, blasts of static, and slowly building layers of programmed percussion. “The Power (of Their Knowledge)” features dubby cosmic synth, what sounds like a sputtering and out-of-control beatbox, and what might be a touch of Kirk’s hyperdistorted guitar (an often underrated contribution of his). The relatively conventional “Night of the Jackal” and “Universal Energy” could work on a sweaty, black-draped dance floor (let’s never take those for granted again), while the cut-up, abstract “Microscopic Flesh Fragment” and the unstoppable thumper “Vasto” best illustrate Kirk’s love of the German underground. As delightfully weird as *Shadow of Fear* gets, though, nothing on it can prepare you for the closer, a take on Marvin Gaye’s “What’s Goin’ On” that’s one of the strangest and most radical covers I’ve ever heard (and I’m including Cabaret Voltaire’s doomy, proto-electro 1979 version of the Seeds’ “No Escape”). It took me a second to realize that the song was turned inside out, reduced to stark programmed beats, 80s-style synth horns and gurgles, and a bizarrely pitched vocal sample à la the Residents. (Also . . . is that some modulated wah-wah guitar from Kirk? Pinch me!) It’s an oddly drawn-out and grandiose finale to a darkly mind-bending album, which feels especially welcome in this surreal-as-fuck year. As Kirk recently put it in a press statement: “Surrealism has always been really important to Cabaret Voltaire . . . and that’s still present too.” —STEVE KRAKOW

### ILSA, *PREYER*

Relapse  
[ilsa.bandcamp.com/album/preyer](http://ilsa.bandcamp.com/album/preyer)

Even if you buy into the idea that musicians should stay out of politics, how do you overlook the politics baked into everything around you? Take the COVID-19 pandemic: What’s more destructive, the

virus or the leaders who don’t even try to get it under control? *Preyer*, the new album from D.C. six-piece Ilsa, was born in lockdown, and they use it to take the piss out of the corruption, inhumanity, and lust for power that helped drive society to this particular brink. With a caustic blend of death metal, doom, sludge, and crust punk, Ilsa reframe the story of Sean Sellers, the only person the U.S. has put to death for crimes committed under age 17 since reinstating the death penalty in 1976, as an indictment of what they see as a toxic Christian nationalist state; at his trial in 1986, he claimed he’d been an active satanist and possessed by a demon when he shot and killed his mother and stepfather (though by then he’d converted to Christianity in jail). Ilsa set the scene with opener “Epigraph,” which accompanies slowly building doom metal with testimony from Sellers about the night in 1985 when he murdered a convenience store clerk. Sellers appealed for clemency, citing his conversion and a diagnosis of dissociative identity disorder, but he was executed in 1999. Sellers’s crimes were unquestionably heinous, but it’s essential to question a system that justifies applying the death penalty to a teenager who may have had a severe mental health disorder. We have to look at those who benefit from such a system and why—elected officials, for example, who campaign on religious principles, only to vote against funding for public health and social services and accept donations from for-profit prisons. (As vocalist Orian sings on the anti-Christofascist groover “Shibboleth”: “Faith’s distortion is noxious / Contrary to liberty.”) In that sense, Ilsa speak heavy truths to power just as successfully as they lay down colossally heavy riffs. —JAMIE LUDWIG

### JESU, *TERMINUS*

Avalanche  
[jesu.bandcamp.com/album/terminus](http://jesu.bandcamp.com/album/terminus)

UK guitarist and composer Justin Broadrick is best known as a founding member of the industrial metal assault that is Godflesh. But capturing purely annihilatory noise in that pounding maelstrom is not his only musical interest. He formed Jesu in 2003 to



Justin Broadrick of Jesu © COURTESY THE ARTIST

focus on postpunk, goth, and the bleaker, lonelier shores of shoegaze, and characteristically, his latest album under that name, *Terminus* (Avalanche), is an exercise in nonmetal darkness that provides chiming soundscapes for a gray and empty existence. Broadrick conceived Jesu partially as an avenue to explore his own take on pop songwriting, and there are a lot of hooks drifting around in the growling murk of these songs. “When I Was Small” has a bottom-scraping stoner-sludge heaviness that grounds Broadrick’s strained, echo-laden, every-dude vocals as he delivers lyrics (“I tried to see both sides / But I failed / I failed to be the one”) that feel like a good summation of the album’s thematic obsessions with mope and trudge and sadness. “Disintegrating Wings” is positively pretty, with crystal tones fluttering about until they come apart against huge distorted guitar chords. Jesu isn’t all about pounding you into paste (so in that sense it’s gentler than Godflesh), but the sweeter voice of *Terminus* is nonetheless intent on luring you into its own nightmarish abyss. —NOAH BERLATSKY

### ROB MAZUREK EXPLODING STAR ORCHESTRA, *DIMENSIONAL STARDUST*

International Anthem / Nonesuch  
[intlanthem.bandcamp.com/album/dimensional-stardust](http://intlanthem.bandcamp.com/album/dimensional-stardust)

*Dimensional Stardust* is a splendid sonic antidote for the spirit-damping insults of a year that can’t end soon enough—growth and transcendence are programmed into the album’s DNA. The Exploding Star Orchestra’s leader, multi-instrumentalist Rob Mazurek, started out playing idiomatically correct hard bop in Chicago’s jazz bars in the 1980s. These days he lives in Marfa, Texas, and he’s as likely to spend his days jamming electronic noise, painting abstract canvases, or designing metal and light installations as he is to play music that operates within the jazz continuum. He first convened the orchestra in 2005 to realize a commission honoring the new concert pavilion in Millennium Park, and the ensemble has since become his most ambitious musical project. Its most recent iterations have

incorporated performers from Mazurek’s other collaborations—many of whom are bandleaders in their own right—to bring to life the vibrant, pan-stylistic arrangements that the group uses to frame its fiery instrumental solos and the cosmic orations of vocalist Damon Locks. But on *Dimensional Stardust*, the multilayered arrangements are more foreground than frame. Shimmering flute and vibraphone patterns wheel like the stars in a clear desert sky over bubbling electronics, repetitive string figures, and contrapuntal brass and keyboard. While the album credits three drummers—Chad Taylor, Mikel Patrick Avery, and John Herndon—they lay out much of the time, which makes the entrance of each new groove that much more galvanizing. Locks sounds like a future-testament prophet, hurling bullhorn-distorted verses from the periphery while the polychromatic music transitions between eerie abstractions and buoyant melodies. “Autumn Pleiades” resolves the album on a beatific note, like the closing credits of a sci-fi epic scored by Alice Coltrane. —BILL MEYER

### AYA NAKAMURA, *AYA*

Warner  
[ayanakamura.lnk.to/ayala](http://ayanakamura.lnk.to/ayala)

French-Malian singer Aya Nakamura expresses an effortless but firm candor in her lyrics (she sings in French) that’s cleanly mirrored in her music. Her breakout single, 2018’s “Djadja,” was a relentless kiss-off; its unwavering dancehall beat and bubbling synth percussion provided the perfect backdrop to Nakamura’s exhausted yet ferocious vocals. This synchronicity permeates her third LP, *Aya* (Warner). On opener “Plus Jamais” she sings, “I gave you my heart, I’ll never do it again,” then follows that confession with a spacious arrangement of pitch-shifted vocals, a soft synth wail, and a tumbling beat. On the forthright “Doudou” she calls out a lover while expressing a desire for more affection and honesty, and the song creates a fitting musical middle ground for exploring such mixed feelings: despite its shimmering steel-pan melodies and occasional burst of horn, it’s never quite



Sam Smith © ALASDAIR MCLELLAN

boisterous. Fewer than half of the 15 tracks on *Aya* break the three-minute mark, and this brevity is crucial—it allows Nakamura's emotions to come across undiluted, so that every song arrives like a pure shot of whatever feeling she's eager to announce. Among the most potent is "Sentiments Grandisants," where Nakamura sings amid gleefully fluttering arpeggiated percussion about the giddiness of having a crush. "Nirvana" is similarly sweet but more sensual; her voice drips with conviction and passion as the song's nocturnal instrumental underlines her gratitude for her lover. Her previous album was titled *Nakamura*, and her choice of *Aya* here is fitting: it's still all about her, but this more intimate portrait helps you feel like you're on a first-name basis. —JOSHUA MINSOO KIM

### SAM SMITH, *LOVE GOES*

Capitol  
capitolrecords.com/home-slide/sam-smith-hdys

It seems crazy to me that the new *Love Goes* is only Sam Smith's third album. The UK singer-songwriter made their debut in 2014 with the international breakout *In the Lonely Hour*, but it feels like they've been a go-to modern torch singer for much longer. Perhaps that's partly due to the strange passage of time during quarantine, where a month can simultaneously feel like a decade and like five minutes. *Love Goes* doesn't make it much easier to tell how long it's been, since on first listen it's not a clear leap forward from Smith's previous records; its moods and sounds are similar to those on *In the Lonely Hour*, and its lyrics feel like reexamina-

tions of relationships introduced there. But closer attention reveals that Smith's perspective on the tangled web of love has evolved over the past six years—the themes haven't changed, but the takes have matured. Their lush voice commands attention, even through the forest of dance-pop production on "Diamonds," which Smith created with Swedish songwriter-producers Shellback and Oscar Görres, aka OzGo (separately and together, the two of them have made music for the likes of Britney Spears and Pink). "Diamonds" isn't an outlier here: every song inhabits that familiar contemporary pop space where mournful heartbreak mixes with gentle dance beats. The guest artists on *Love Goes* also help center the album in 2020: Nigerian singer Burna Boy brings welcome flavors of reggae and R&B to the otherwise straightforward pop of "My Oasis," and UK singer-songwriter Labrinth enhances the title track's majesty with vocal harmonies and symphonic production. Smith skillfully evokes the defensiveness and sadness of the devastated on the album's minimalist but anthemic opener, "Young": "I've done nothing wrong / I'm young," they sing, their voice shadowed by synth harmonies that match the exact rhythm of their syllables. And on "Another One," Smith begins with pointed mockery of an ex ("Oh congratulations / You found the one") and continues with a raw piece of passive-aggressive advice ("I don't want him to hurt like me / Just please treat him like he's someone"). You can't be so irredeemably cynical that Smith's heartbreaks won't resonate at least a little with your own experiences—and whether it's 2014, 2020, or 2022, you better believe a bunch of us will be out here listening through the tears. —SALEM COLLO-JULIN

### TANK & THE BANGAS, *FRIEND GOALS*

Self-released  
shop.tankandthebangas.com/collections/friend-goals

When New Orleans band Tank & the Bangas invited their friends and family to help them cover Hal David and Burt Bacharach's pop classic "What the World Needs Now Is Love" in January, they embraced the song's earnest call for kindness, sprinkled in spoken word urging people to come together in peace, and wrapped up with an a cappella solo from Harmony Ball (the young niece of lead singer Tarriona "Tank" Ball), whose childlike sincerity could stir up hope in the bleakest pessimist. In June, the group released that single in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement and the Equal Justice Initiative, and on their new six-track EP, *Friend Goals* (Verve Forecast), they echo the song's longing for connection and authenticity. Though the band wrote most of the material on *Friend Goals* separately and collaborated via Zoom before recording in various home studios, it's not the lo-fi affair you might expect from such a setup. Since forming in 2011, Tank & the Bangas (the current core lineup is Ball, saxophonist and flutist Albert Allenback, drummer Joshua Johnson, and keyboardist Norman Spence) have combined funk, neosoul, R&B, and more, and on *Friend Goals* they continue to serve up a stew of styles and vibes. Ball has a broad range as a singer

too: earlier this year she collaborated with Fantastic Negrito on his album *Have You Lost Your Mind Yet?* and released acoustic covers of Nirvana's "Smells Like Teen Spirit" and Norah Jones's "Don't Know Why," and on the new EP she alternates between singing in her deep, velvety alto and rapping that draws on her background in slam poetry (sometimes she even lets out a joyous whoop). The jazzy, danceable "Fluff," which features rapper Duckwrth, feels like a cool breeze and evokes early-80s Quincy Jones with its keys, horns, and bass line. The flute intro to "Self Care" leads the way into the wacky world of isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic; Ball joins several guests (longtime contributor Anjelika "Jelly" Joseph, R&B singer Jaime Woods, and rapper Orleans Big) to address how prolonged self-quarantine can test anyone's mental health but also provide time for people to focus on themselves. "Mr. Insta," a collaboration with Alabama-born rapper Chika, examines the duality of social media for artists who can harness their platforms to grow their fan bases but may struggle with tying their self-worth to the number of likes on a post. And on the laid-back title track, which features New Orleans rapper and singer Pell, Ball expresses the human need for companionship: "Everybody want somebody they can kick it with. . . . Trust me, everybody need a good friend." In a time of necessary and prolonged isolation, that sentiment rings especially true. —KIRSTEN LAMBERT

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## GOSSIP WOLF

A furry ear to the ground of the local music scene

**GOSSIP WOLF HAS** known **Sullivan Davis** since he started working at dearly departed local record store Logan Hardware almost a decade ago. When Davis replaced **Seth Dodson** as the **Hideout's** talent buyer in 2015, this wolf was sure that the storied dive's bookings were in good hands—and all the amazing shows since then have more than justified that confidence! Alas, all good things come to an end. In a bittersweet Instagram post last week, Davis announced that he'll be leaving his job at the Hideout in a few weeks. "I'll miss my community a lot," he wrote. "Don't you think I'm going anywhere like LA or something truly horrible." Hideout co-owner **Tim Tuten** isn't sure who'll fill that position next or when, but time will tell. "We hope the best for Sully!" he says. "The Hideout doesn't know when we will reopen. But in the meantime, our longtime 'residencies' will continue virtually, and our awesome staff is pitching in with our online programming." Good luck whatever you do, Sully!

The **Chicago Independent Venue League**, which represents the Empty Bottle, Metro, Sleeping Village, the Promontory, Schubas, and many others, formed in 2018 to oppose the Lincoln Yards development and its cozy relationship with Live Nation. This year, to mitigate the brutal effects of pandemic closures, CIVL has teamed up with the **Giving Back Fund** to found the **CIVL SAVE Emergency Relief Fund**, which benefits staff, artists, and venues. This week CIVL launches the virtual concert series **CIVLization** to promote the fund, with 15 artists filmed at 15 of the spots we've all been missing since March. On Friday, November 27, at 8 PM, you can watch **ESSO** at **Subterranean**, **Dos Santos** at the **Hideout**, and **Half Gringa** at **Tonic Room** for free at [civlchicago.com](http://civlchicago.com), where you can also donate to SAVE. Further shows will be announced via CIVL's website and social media. —**J.R. NELSON**

Got a tip? Tweet @Gossip\_Wolf or e-mail [gossipwolf@chicagoreader.com](mailto:gossipwolf@chicagoreader.com).

WOLF BY KEITH HERZIK

CHICAGO SHOWS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT IN THE WEEKS TO COME

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### NEW

**All Good Things** 12/5, 8 PM, livestream at [allgoodthingsmerch.com](http://allgoodthingsmerch.com)

**Jimmie Allen** 12/17, 8 PM, livestream at [mandolin.com](http://mandolin.com)

**Ben's Big Christmas Party featuring Ben Rector** 12/20, 7 PM, livestream at [benrectormusic.com](http://benrectormusic.com)

**Andrew Bird's Gezelligheid Concert** 12/13, 7 PM, livestream at [bit.ly/svbird](http://bit.ly/svbird)

**Bon Jovi** 11/27, 5 PM, livestream at [facebook.com/BonJovi](http://facebook.com/BonJovi)

**Chicago Soul Spectacular presents holiday favorites and more** 12/19, 12/6, and 1/2/2021, 6:30 and 9 PM, Ace Hotel, 17+

**CIVLization presents ESSO, Dos Santos, and Half Gringa** 11/27, 8 PM, livestream at [civlchicago.com](http://civlchicago.com)

**CSO Sessions Episode 8: Tower, Walker, Milhaud, and Tchaikovsky featuring musicians from the Chicago Symphony Orchestra** 12/3-1/1, livestream at [cso.org/tv](http://cso.org/tv)

**Digital Mirage Friendsgiving featuring Austin Millz, Benny Benassi, Jawns, and more** 11/27-11/28, 11 AM, livestream at [youtube.com/Proximity](http://youtube.com/Proximity)

**Elrow** 11/20/2021, 8 PM, Radius Chicago, 18+

**Damien Escobar** 11/7/2021, 5 and 8 PM, City Winery

**Factory 93 presents Hot Since 82** 11/28, 2 PM, livestream at [insomniac.com/livestream](http://insomniac.com/livestream)

**FitzGerald's 12 Streams of Christmas presents Song for Song with James McMurtry & Pat MacDonald** 12/23, 8 PM, livestream at [facebook.com/fitzgeraldsnightclub](http://facebook.com/fitzgeraldsnightclub)

**Frankie & the Witch Fingers** 12/5, 7 PM, livestream at [levitation-austin.com](http://levitation-austin.com)

**Howard Hewett** 12/19, 5:30 PM, livestream at [citywinery.com](http://citywinery.com)

**Insomniac Thursdays featuring Jstjr, Arty** 11/26, 11 PM, livestream at [twitch.tv/insomniac](http://twitch.tv/insomniac)

**Colin James** 12/3, 2 and 8 PM, livestream at [universe.com](http://universe.com)

**Jazz Foundation of America presents Bird Calls featuring Miguel Zenón, Kenny Barron, and more** 12/10, 7 PM, livestream at [fans.live](http://fans.live)

**Kiss 2020 Goodbye Live Tour from the Atlantis Dubai** 12/31, 11 AM, livestream at [tixr.com](http://tixr.com)

**Listeso String Quartet** 4/8/2021, 6:30 and 8:30 PM, Artifact Events, 17+

**Little Rootie Tootie** 12/12, 8 PM, livestream at [youtube.com/constellationchicago](http://youtube.com/constellationchicago)

**Jon McLaughlin** 12/21, 7 PM, livestream at [citywinery.com](http://citywinery.com)

**Chrisette Michele** 12/13, 5 PM, livestream at [citywinery.com](http://citywinery.com)

**Miz Cracker** 2/14/2021, 8 PM, Metro

**Maren Morris** 12/4, 8 PM, livestream at [stream.fans.live](http://stream.fans.live)

**Marissa Nadler** 12/11, 8 PM, livestream at [lpr.tv/sleeping-village](http://lpr.tv/sleeping-village)

**No Joy's No Bummer All Summer Virtual Beach Party featuring Sadi3 and more** 12/5, 7 PM, livestream at [go.seated.com](http://go.seated.com)

**Passenger** 11/3/2021, 7:30 PM, Thalia Hall

**Mike Phillips** 12/5, 7 PM, livestream at [citywinery.com](http://citywinery.com)

**RBD** 12/26, 10 AM, livestream at [seroparecer.world](http://seroparecer.world)

**Tom Rush** 9/29/2021, 8 PM, City Winery

**Samia** 12/3, 8 PM, livestream at [lpr.tv/sleeping-village](http://lpr.tv/sleeping-village)

**Songs of Good Cheer: An At-Home Holiday Caroling Party with the Chicago Tribune's Mary Schmich and Eric Zorn** 12/18, 7 PM, hosted by the Old Town School of Folk Music. Access provided after ticket purchase.

**Lindsey Stirling Home for the Holidays Special** 12/12, 2 and 7 PM, livestream at [onlocationlive.com](http://onlocationlive.com)

**George Strait, Chris Stapleton, Brothers Osborne** 8/7/2021, 5 PM, Notre Dame Stadium, Notre Dame

**Struggle Jennings, Brianna Harness, Nuke Bushner** 12/18, 7:30 PM, the Forge, Joliet

**Sunflower Bean** 12/5, 8 PM, 311 12/11 and 1/11/2021, 7 PM, livestream at [311streams.system.com](http://311streams.system.com)

**Trans-Siberian Orchestra** 12/18, 7 PM, livestream at [tsolivestream.com](http://tsolivestream.com)

**Molly Tuttle** 12/3, 7 PM; 12/17, 7 PM, livestream at [mandolin.com](http://mandolin.com)

**Yundabar** 12/18, 8 PM, livestream at [lpr.tv/sleeping-village](http://lpr.tv/sleeping-village)

**Max Weinberg's Jukebox** 9/23/2021, 8 PM, City Winery

**Wiggleworms Holiday Sing-along presented by Gallagher Way** 12/5, 10 AM; 12/13, 4 PM, livestream at [oldtown-school.org/concerts](http://oldtown-school.org/concerts)

**Mars Williams presents An Aylor Xmas Vol. 4 featuring Mars Williams, Josh Ber-**

**man, Jim Baker, Krzysztof Pabian, Brian Sandstrom, Steve Hunt, Peter Maunu** 12/18-12/19, 8 PM, livestream at [youtube.com/constellation-chicago](http://youtube.com/constellation-chicago)

**FREE**

# EARLY WARNINGS

### UPDATED

**Cybertronic Spree** 11/7/2021, 8 PM, Lincoln Hall, rescheduled, 18+

**Kurt Elling Sings Christmas** 12/5, 5 and 8 PM; 12/6, 4 and 7 PM, City Winery, canceled

**Griffin House** 12/3-12/4, 7:30 PM, City Winery, canceled

**Charles Lloyd's Kindred Spirits** 12/5, 7:30 PM, Logan Center for the Arts, canceled

**Magnetic Fields** 11/16/2021-11/19/2021, 8 PM, City Winery, rescheduled

**Metropolis String Quartet perform the Beatles and Vivaldi** 12/6, 12/12, 12/20, and 12/27, 5, 7 and 9 PM, Salvage One, 12/6 sold out; dates added, 17+

**Zoofunkyou, Desmond Jones, King of Mars** 12/19, 8:30 PM, Schubas, canceled

### UPCOMING

**Michael Brown** 12/4, 7 PM, livestream at [uchicago.edu](http://uchicago.edu)

**David Broza and friends present the Not Exactly Christmas Show** 12/23, 7 PM, livestream at [citywinery.com](http://citywinery.com)

**Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center** 12/17, 7:30 PM, livestream at [harristheaterchicago.org](http://harristheaterchicago.org)

**Anthony David** 12/26, 6 PM, livestream at [citywinery.com](http://citywinery.com)

**John Doe Folk Trio** 12/16, 8 PM, livestream at [oldtownschool.org](http://oldtownschool.org)

**FitzGerald's 12 Streams of Christmas presents Honky Tonk Christmas featuring Big Sadie, Lawrence Peters** 12/20, 3 PM, livestream at [facebook.com/fitzgeraldsnightclub](http://facebook.com/fitzgeraldsnightclub)

**FitzGerald's 12 Streams of Christmas presents Song for Song: Jon Langford & Bonnie "Prince" Billy** 12/2, 8 PM, livestream at [facebook.com/fitzgeraldsnightclub](http://facebook.com/fitzgeraldsnightclub)

**FitzGerald's 12 Streams of Christmas presents the Western Elstons** 12/15, 8 PM, Livestream at [facebook.com/fitzgeraldsnightclub](http://facebook.com/fitzgeraldsnightclub)

**Freedom From and Freedom To featuring Angel Bat Dawid, Johanna Brock, Olivia Harris, Ramah Malebranche, Janice Misurell-Mitchell, Luc Mosley, Ugochi Nwaogwugwu, Julian Otis, Cameron Pfiffner, Jeffrey Thomas, and more** 12/5-12/6, 7 PM, [twitch.tv/elasticartschicago](http://twitch.tv/elasticartschicago)

**Liam Gallagher** 12/5, 7 PM, livestream at [universe.com](http://universe.com)

**Gorillaz present Song Machine Live** 12/12, 6 PM, livestream at

Never miss a show again. Sign up for the newsletter at [chicagoreader.com/early](http://chicagoreader.com/early)

**gorillaz.com**  
**Gray Sound presents Damon Locks** 12/8, 7:30 PM, livestream at [graycenter.uchicago.edu](http://graycenter.uchicago.edu)

**Patty Griffin** 12/5, 7 PM, livestream at [mandolin.com](http://mandolin.com)

**The Hold Steady** 12/3-12/4, 8 PM; 12/5, 4 PM, livestream at [stream.fans.live](http://stream.fans.live)

**A Holiday Concert with Alfrida Burke & Rodrick Dixon with the Jo Ann Daugherty Trio** 12/4, 6 PM, livestream at [auditoriumtheatre.org](http://auditoriumtheatre.org)

**Jayhawks** 1/10/2021, 3 PM, livestream at [mandolin.com](http://mandolin.com)

**John Henry's Friends benefit for Keswell School featuring Steve Earle & the Dukes, Emmylou Harris, Graham Nash, Jackson Browne, Lucinda Williams, Jason Isbell & Amanda Shires, Josh Ritter, Matt Savage, Shawn Colvin, Masters of War**

**Haynes** 12/13, 6:30 PM, livestream at [luck.stream](http://luck.stream)

**Anne Leilehua Lanzilotti, Andrew Yee** 12/4, 2 PM, livestream at [annelanzilotti.bandcamp.com](http://annelanzilotti.bandcamp.com)

**Lawrence Arms War on X-Mas 6: Holiday Special** 12/11, 7 PM, livestream at [lawrencearmsdealer.com](http://lawrencearmsdealer.com)

**Lu's Jukebox with Lucinda Williams, episode four** 12/3, 7 PM, livestream at [mandolin.com](http://mandolin.com)

**M. Ward album-release show** 12/11, 8 PM, livestream at [go.seated.com](http://go.seated.com)

**Oso Oso** 12/6, 8 PM, livestream at [lpr.tv/sleeping-village](http://lpr.tv/sleeping-village)

**Parquet Courts** 12/10, 9 PM, livestream at [noonchorus.com](http://noonchorus.com)

**Pasión Latina featuring Ana María Martínez, René Barbera, David Portillo, Mario Rojas, Richard Ollarsaba, Denis Vélez, Ricardó José Rivera, Craig Terry, and more** 12/13, 6 PM, livestream at [youtube.com/lyricoperachicago](http://youtube.com/lyricoperachicago)

**Saturday Night Livestream with DJ Alan King** 12/5, 8 PM, livestream at [twitch.tv/djalanking](http://twitch.tv/djalanking)

**Taiko Legacy 17 featuring Tsukasa Taiko** 12/20, livestream at [ess.org](http://ess.org)

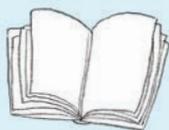
**Waco Brothers Xmas Show** 12/19, 8 PM, livestream at [audiotree.tv](http://audiotree.tv)

**Johanna Warren** 12/20, 7 PM, livestream at [noonchorus.com/johanna-warren](http://noonchorus.com/johanna-warren)

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## CHICAGO READER SOMMELIER SERIES



**MARCELLO CANCELLI**  
Area Wine Director, Boka Restaurant Group

One of the veteran sommeliers in the Chicago scene, Marcello Cancelli was first introduced to fine wines in an incredibly romantic way. Cancelli recalls finishing up his shift each night at Jean Claude Bistro in the late 90s, to gather around a table with fellow servers and the late legendary chef Jean-Claude Poilevey smoking cigarettes, sipping wine and talking life, politics, and whatever came to mind. These intimate evenings would spark Cancelli's passion for fine wine and send him on his path to becoming a sommelier. In the years leading up to this experience, Cancelli emigrated from Brazil to pursue a career in theater. To make ends meet, he became a waiter at Jean Claude Bistro and the rest would prove to be history. The self-taught sommelier took his nose for notes to four-star restaurant Carlos', to become the restaurant's sommelier and command a Wine Spectator Grand Award-winning wine list of over 2,000 selections. Over the years, Cancelli has become a decorated professional in his field, creating original beverage programs as well as developing award-winning wine lists for every restaurant he's touched throughout his career. The Certified Sommelier by the Court of Master Sommeliers cherishes the rich relationship between generations of families cultivating vineyards to create a wine that makes its way to a cellar and finally to be carefully chosen by a sommelier for a guest to treasure sip by sip. Recently, Cancelli was promoted to Area Wine Director for the Boka Group, overseeing the wine programs at Swift & Sons, Momotaro, Bellemore, and Cira. Boasting nearly three decades of experience, Cancelli still finds himself as enamored with wine as ever before, and he doesn't see curtain call happening any time soon.



**OLIVIA NOREN**  
Food & Beverage Manager at Sofitel Group

Chicago native Olivia Noren likens being a sommelier to a mind reader. Guests loosely describe a desired flavor profile, and the sommelier then translates that abstract idea into the perfect bottle of wine from the restaurant's extensive selection. But it's not clairvoyance; it's taken years of experience and study for Noren to develop these powers. The Lincoln Park High School graduate was first introduced to fine dining on a school trip to Charlie Trotter's, as a reward for hard work in the classroom. It wasn't until Noren moved to New York City in 2008 that she would get a behind-the-scenes look at how Michelin-starred restaurants operate, working as a food runner. Noren quickly found herself falling in love with the art of food and drink in the big apple, and she began working her way through the ranks from food runner to server to bartender. In 2013, Noren began studying to be a sommelier while bartending at Montmartre. It was there that she crossed paths with seasoned wine director Keri Levens, who quickly became a mentor. Within the next few years, Noren shifted from managing a 200-bottle selection to a 15,000-bottle collection and constructing menu pairings at Le Bernardin, a Michelin 3-star restaurant. Noren returned to Chicago in 2017 as an Assistant Sommelier at Sepia before transitioning to being the Beverage Director & Consultant at Michelin-star Japanese fine dining restaurant Yügen. Presently, Noren holds the title of Food & Beverage Manager at luxury hotel Sofitel Chicago Magnificent Mile.

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# The Chicago Reader BOOK CLUB

## Mikki Kendall

*Hood Feminism: Notes From the Women That a Movement Forgot*

### Book Club Month:

October 20

### Author Talk:

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)  
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## Precious Brady-Davis

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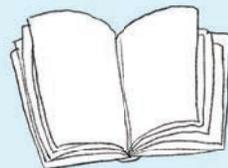
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## Book Club Month

December 20

## Author Talk

12/17/2020



**Riva Lehrer**  
Author

Riva Lehrer is an artist, writer, and curator whose work focuses on issues of physical identity and the socially challenged body. She is best known for representations of people with impairments, and those whose sexuality or gender identity have long been stigmatized. A longtime faculty member of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Riva is currently an instructor in medical humanities at Northwestern University.



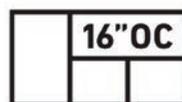
**Heidi Stevens**  
Moderator

Heidi Stevens writes a daily column for the Chicago Tribune, where she has worked since 1998. Her nationally syndicated columns reach more than a million print and online readers each day, appearing in newspapers across the country. She's a frequent guest on local and national TV and radio stations, where she's called upon to discuss current events, pop culture, and issues around gender, race, and relationships. Heidi was awarded the Anne Keegan Award for Distinguished Journalism in 2018 by the Chicago Headline Club, the nation's largest chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists.

She earned a journalism degree from Eastern Illinois University in 1996 and lives in Chicago's Logan Square neighborhood with her husband and kids.

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## SAVAGE LOVE

### Should I spam the creep who's sexually harassing my friend?

Think before unleashing an army of "Scam Likely" calls on a pervert.

By DAN SAVAGE

**Q:** My boyfriend and I were friends for a couple of years (we're both 30-year-old gay men), then I stopped traveling around the world and pursued him. We've been boyfriends for a year and a half now. We were both happy and we had sex on a regular basis during the first year. I'm more into anal (as a top) but we mainly did oral because he isn't into anal. We tried a few times early on but every time I mention it now he doesn't seem keen, so I've left it alone. Six months ago he started having trouble "getting it up" even for oral. After it happened a couple of times he basically said, "I'm sorry it's because I think people aren't attracted to me." After that happened I started to lose my interest in sex between us and now we rarely have it. Even if he did offer to try anal, I don't even think that would motivate me to have sex with him. Apart from that we get on great but I feel as though I'm starting to see him more as a friend. I've been thinking about breaking up for the last three months but I would feel terrible for a few reasons: his previous boyfriend broke up with him without giving him a reason, which he struggled to come to terms with, and he's very self-conscious about his weight. So I can't tell him the reason I want to break up—I don't find

him attractive anymore—because that might erode his mental health. (He is seeing a therapist.) If sex was great between us I would be happy to remain boyfriends since everything else is working out and I'm fairly certain he's happy with our relationship as it is, which makes it even harder to end it. Advice? —**PROMISING RELATIONSHIP IS SEXLESS OR NEARLY SO**

**A:** A sexless relationship may be fine for your boyfriend—it may be what he wants—but it's not fine for you, PRISONS, and it's not what you want. And a guy who's too insecure about his own attractiveness to get it up for a guy who's attracted to him is unlikely to be secure enough for an open relationship, which means staying with him and getting sex elsewhere isn't a workable option. So unless you're prepared to spend the next 50 years of your life in a sexless relationship to avoid hurting your boyfriend's feelings, PRISONS, you're going to have to end it. But instead of saying, "It's over because I'm not attracted to you anymore," say, "It's over because we clearly aren't attracted to each other." He might claim he's still attracted to you, PRISONS, and that might even be true, but if he's too insecure to have sex with you—if his insecurities are such huge stumbling blocks—then he's

not in good enough working order to be in a sexually exclusive relationship. You should, of course, be as considerate as possible about his insecurities when you end things, PRISONS, but you don't have an obligation to stay with him forever because of them. He has an obligation to work on them with his therapist before entering into a new relationship.

**Q:** A friend just shared on Facebook that she has been accosted by some dude—a stranger to her—over the phone. Sexually explicit stuff. She hung up and blocked him but he kept leaving her messages and sending her texts somehow. She just learned how to permanently block his number, which she has done. I have this dude's phone number and it traces to Phoenix, Arizona. My question: Is there some service somewhere where I could share his phone number and an army of allies would call him? Or telemarket to him? Or otherwise accost him until it becomes so inconvenient that he has to get a new number? I don't want him to be sexually harassed. I am not the kind of person who would invite sexual harassment on anyone. I just want him harassed to the point where he can no longer use the number he currently has to sexually harass anyone

else. I get scam calls all the time about winning another free vacation at a Marriott Hotel. (I don't know why I'm still paying rent with all the vacations I'm supposed to have won.) Is there a way I can sign him up for endless calls for free vacations? Can you or your readers think of some other suitably annoying/debilitating fate for his number? I'd love to write to my friend in support and solidarity and inform her of the annoyances about to rain down on this dude's number! —**SEXUAL HARASSMENT UNLEASHES TOTALLY UNRELENTING PHONE PROMOTIONS**

**A:** I'm sorry your friend was harassed by some asshole with a phone, SHUTUPP, but the counterstrike you're considering could backfire on your friend. I mean, let's say you got this asshole to change his number—let's say your campaign of targeted nonsexual harassment was a success—then what happens? Well, then the asshole gets a new number. He'll still be an asshole with a phone, most likely the same phone, just with a different phone number. And since his new number won't be the one your friend blocked, SHUTUPP, and since he'll still have your friend's phone number, he'll be able to resume harassing your friend and any other woman who'd blocked his old number. As unsatisfying as it might seem, your friend's best course of action here is the one she already took—blocking the fuck out of this asshole—and your best course of action would be to express sympathy and solidarity without doing anything that might make things worse.

**Q:** My marriage of ten years recently fell apart. My ex, who is a piece of shit, told

me she would have to leave or I would have to leave. I moved out but continued to pay her bills and rent for a year on top of my own expenses. We both agreed not to see other people until we either reconciled or divorced. On more than one occasion she convinced me that we might be close to reconciling. She basically led me on. Unfortunately, she was shacking up with a "Dom" who was old enough to be her father and this was going on long before we separated. When I confronted her she told me she did it because you said sometimes cheating can save a relationship. She tried to get me to agree to having poly relationship with them but the trust was gone. I know she was just saying things to cover her ass and I moved on. Now I am looking for your advice on what steps to take, please. —**YOUR FAN THE QUIET MOUSE**

**A:** I've said cheating is sometimes "the least worst option" for all involved. But to say something isn't always the worst option isn't exactly a ringing endorsement. And I've said it's foolish to define cheating as unforgivable considering how common cheating is. But to say something is forgivable is not to say it isn't wrong. Quite the opposite, in fact, as non-wrongs do not require forgiveness. And, yes, I've said that cheating can sometimes save a relationship. For example, a person in an otherwise loving, low-conflict relationship that has become sexless might, after exhausting all other options (difficult conversations, couples counseling, etc.), cheat in order to "stay married and stay sane." It's not ideal, of course, but it may make it possible for

the cheater to remain in a relationship that neither the cheater nor the cheatee wants to end. That's not what your wife did. She lied, she cheated, and only floated the idea of an ethically nonmonogamous relationship after she got caught being nonethically nonmonogamous. While this has been known to work—there are couples out there that were able to create functional and healthy open relationships in the wake of messy and painful affairs—it's not the kind of cheating that typically saves relationships. This kind of cheating, the kind your wife engaged in, more often than not destroys relationships.

Sorry—I'm issuing clarifications, not answering your question. You asked about next steps. I don't have to tell you to give yourself permission to be angry, as you sound pretty in touch with your anger, so I'll just tell you to feel the shit out of your feelings. Ask your friends to let you freely vent for the next few months. After three months they're allowed to gently change the subject when you start in on your ex; after six months they're allowed to insist you talk about something else; after a year they're allowed to block your calls if you can't get through a conversation without rehashing your divorce for the millionth time. You should also eat a lot of ice cream while getting enough exercise to neutralize its effects, YFTQM, and remind yourself every day that an ex who treated you like shit is no excuse for treating your next like shit. **FI**

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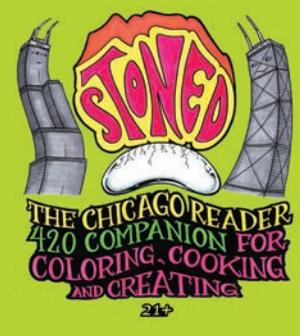
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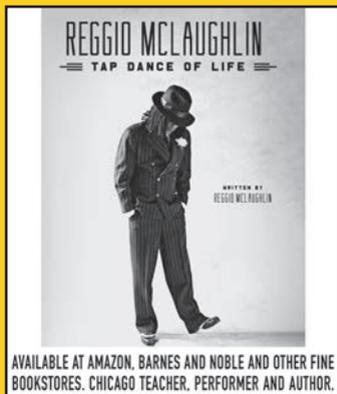
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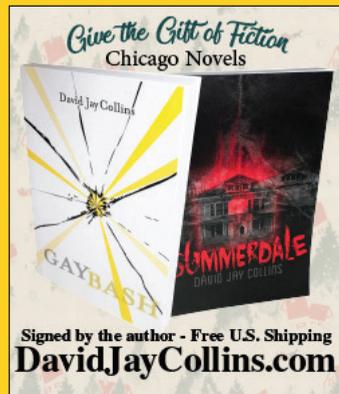
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If you listed Madden Park or Ida B. Wells Homes on your Housing Choice Survey as a place you would like to live, please read the information listed below

The Draft Tenant Selection Plan (TSP), Lease, and other documents for Oakwood Shores, a mixed-income community is available for review. The developer, The Community Builders Inc., Granite Development and UJIMA is working with CHA and the Oakwood Shores Working Group to develop a Draft TSP and Lease for use at the private development known as Oakwood Shores. The units within this development designated for CHA will be used as replacement public housing units for former Madden Park and Ida B. Wells Homes residents that have not selected their permanent housing as first priority. Oakwood Shores Phase development will be located in the area bounded by East 37th Place to the north, South Ellis Ave to the east, East Pershing Road to the south and South Vincennes to the west in Chicago.

**The 30-day public comment period will be held for CHA to receive written comments starting on November 17 – December 16, 2020.** Due to COVID-19, CHA has suspended all in person public meetings and instead, CHA will livestream one public comment hearing. The date and time of the public comment livestream hearing is as follows:

Wed, Dec 2, 10:00 am: [www.thecha.org/livestream](http://www.thecha.org/livestream)

We ask that comments pertaining to Oakwood Shores be submitted electronically to [commentontheplan@thecha.org](mailto:commentontheplan@thecha.org) at least 48-hours prior to the comment hearing. Comments will be read live during the time outlined above. Comments received after the hearing will be added to the comment grid.

If you require translation services, please read the attached notice or check with your property manager for more details.

A summary and the full Oakwood Shores TSP & Lease will be available on CHA's website at [www.thecha.org](http://www.thecha.org) beginning Nov 17 until Dec 16, 2020. You may also mail or fax comments for the Draft Oakwood Shores TSP. **All comments must be received by 5:00 pm on December 16, 2020.**

### Mail, E-mail or Fax comments to:

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Attention: Draft Oakwood Shores TSP & Lease  
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# FoodCultura:

## The art and anthropology of food and cuisine

### ANTH 25320

by Stephan Palmié

#### Gentle Reader,

The insert that you just pulled from the *Chicago Reader* is the first of three planned issues of *The Chicago FoodCultura Clarion* distributed in a limited edition of 3000 copies across Chicagoland. Lucky you to have gotten a hold of one!

The *Clarion* grew out of a collaboration between the Barcelona/Miami-based multidisciplinary artist Antoni Miralda and the University of Chicago anthropologist Stephan Palmié. If anthropology and contemporary art have one thing in common, it is the goal to deliberately de-familiarize taken-for-granted ways of being in the world. Anthropologists do so by means of ethnographic comparison, artists by means of aesthetic provocation. Both aim to open up new forms of understanding of the complexities and diversity of human social life, and to encourage critique of the complacency with which many of us take our own lifeways for the way things simply are, or ought to be. Both art and anthropology seek to provide food for thought.

Under the auspices of the University of Chicago's Richard L. Gray Center for Arts and Inquiry, and with the help of a generous grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, Miralda and Palmié developed a year-long project centered on an experimental course entitled "FOODCULTURA: The Art and Anthropology of Food and Cuisine" that they held at the University of Chicago in the happier days of the fall of 2019. In the course of that autumn, groups of our students fanned out to do ethnographic research on Chicago's fascinatingly diverse culinary worlds to eventually present collective projects straddling the divide between the arts and the social sciences.

Themes pursued by our students included live butchery and nostalgia, cakes and Bauhaus architecture, the limits of the concept of "taco," home food and elevated cuisine, offends for Chicago's Día de los Muertos celebrations, fried chicken in Chicago as a palimpsest, food chains and individual consumption, restaurant groups and Instagram, and then some. The format of the final presentations ranged from conventional academic papers, poster sessions, photography and video, non-fiction narrative, even a couple of well-thought out meals designed to highlight the groups' research questions and findings (such as a "traif-style" kosher bacon cheese burger as a clever riff on kosher-style food, or a menu of elevated versions of immigrant comfort foods).

We had planned to conclude this collaboration with a one and a half-day symposium to be held at the Chicago Cultural Center, alongside a pop-up show centered on a Chicago version of Miralda's ongoing *Sabores y Lenguas/Tastes and Tongues* project. But then the pandemic struck, making hash of our plans to introduce our project to the wider audience that we had hoped to reach in Chicago's aptly named People's Palace.

Enter *The Chicago FoodCultura Clarion*: a medium for open-ended discussion among artists, anthropologists, historians, food writers, practitioners of the culinary arts, and our students. Though Miralda and Palmié's brainchild, the *Clarion* is very much a collaborative effort of its editorial team consisting of Peter Engler, Eric May, Antoni Miralda, Stephan Palmié, Paige Resnick, and Richard Zhao. Together with our authors we have ventured to cook up a rich and succulent pot-pourri for you, dear reader, which we hope will be – like all good soups and stews – more than the sum of its parts.

In this first of three issues of *The Clarion* you will find essays and images on Southwest Signs's grocery store art, Chicago's tamaros and their history, Greek immigrants in Chicago's candy industry, an essay by Michelin-starred chef Philip Foss on high cuisine and fine dining under pandemic conditions, food still life photography by Laura Letinsky, a Chicago Tongue centerfold by Miralda, a visual hors d'oeuvre of student projects that will be featured more fully in the next two issues of *The Clarion*, and then some. We hope we have whetted your appetite for more to come in our next edition to be released early in the coming year.

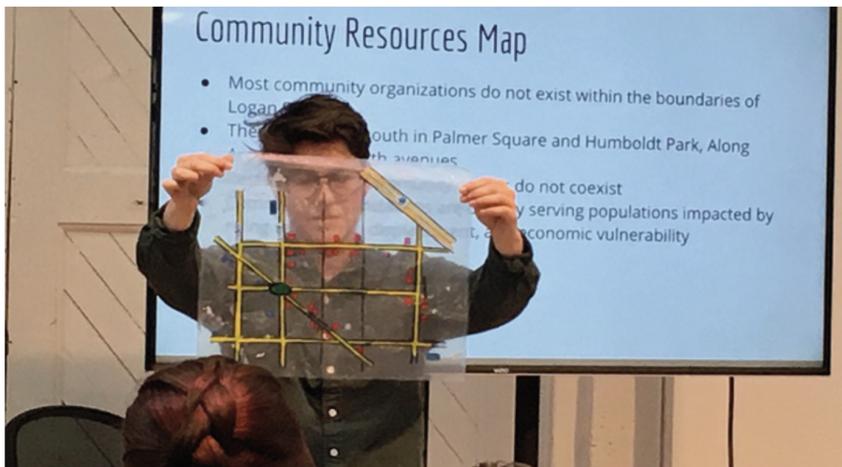
Our thanks for their support of the project go to Zach Cahill and Mike Schuh at the



Kosher Food Ways (Palmié and Miralda carrying the "traif-style" bacon cheeseburger)



Food Chains



Food & Community Responsibility

Gray Center, Chris Skrable at the University of Chicago's Chicago Studies Program, culinary historians Bruce Kraig, Catherine Lambrecht, and Dominic Paeyga, food critic extraordinaire Mike Sula, the *Chicago Reader's* publisher Tracy Bain.

Thanks of a different order go to our extraordinary student food sleuths Rachel Abrams, Hanna Batlan, Eli Bec, Irina Bercu, Mahesh

Bhide, Casey Breen-Edelstein, Nora Burkhardt, Yoon-Jee Choi, Jordan Cooper, Molly Donohue, Alana Ferguson, Sofia Franzon, Zhen Fu, Ayelet Goldman, Noah Goodman, Madeleine Johnson, Rahul Kukreja, Anant Matai, Hunter Morgan, Maya Osman-Krinsky, Lina Palancares, Paige Resnick, Liz Rice, Cleo Schoepflein, Michael Shen, Daniel Simantob, Logan Smith, Isabelle Sohn, Maisie Watson, Nick Wilkins, Evan Williams, Sam Winnikow,

Nancy Xue, Richard Zhao, and Wendy Zheng. Remains to express our gratitude to our graduate ethnographic expert facilitators Hazel Çorak, Alice Diaz Chauvigné, Vanessa Mukhebi, Will Ockendon, Valentina Sarmiento Cruz, and Zach Sheldom, who shepherded the projects to their successful conclusion.



What makes a Taco

The Roesser's Bakery Bauhaus Cake Project



The Plant

Día de los Muertos



Cotton Candy/Inflatable Sculpture

The Camara Eats First

Chef Phillip Foss pouring sub-zero vanilla-infused cream



M&K Live Poultry

Home-cooking



Fried Chicken as a palimpsest

#### Highlights from dinner discussion

- How does the presentation of food affect our perception and expectation?
- What differentiates elevated cuisine vs. high cuisine?
- How is culture/familiarity incorporated into food?
- How does space and service affect our experience of dining?



Elevated home-cooking

#### Clarion Editorial Team

**Paige Resnick** is a nonfiction writer, an amateur yet confident cook, and a very good eater. She grew up in Cleveland, Ohio, lives in Chicago, Illinois, and has a strong Midwestern accent. She writes about food, culture, and her perplexing childhood.

**Richard Zhao** is a fourth year student studying Economics at the University of Chicago. Originally from Beijing, China and having lived in D.C. and Chicago for 8 years, Richard is passionate about food, cuisine, and the rich culture behind them. In the future, Richard hopes to make a difference in the food and beverage world.

**Miralda** is an artist whose work since the 1960s has evolved around the object, food, processions, and participatory interventions in public spaces.

**Stephan Palmié** is Professor of Anthropology at the University of Chicago. He works on Afro-Cuban ritual traditions, and likes to think with food.

# PARDON ME, EAT MY FRIENDS



by Magnus Fiskesjö

The Thanksgiving turkey pardoning that takes place at the White House every November is an illustration of a certain idea of power: Sovereign is he who decides on the exception: who lives and who dies.

The U.S. president makes an exception for one turkey, letting it live. This opens for roasting and eating millions and millions of pre-frozen turkeys. In this sense, the president also acts as a first-fruit sacrifice mediator, who gives one bird back to the gods, with thanks, so that his people can stay in their grace.

It would seem so, from the annual Thanksgiving Proclamation which is issued just days before, ever since Lincoln.

But it's for show, of course: For starters, it isn't the president that picks out which turkey will live. That's up to the turkey farmers' association, which rotates the honor annually, between different farms in the US, and has a vested interest in the business gimmick of the Rose Garden ceremony. They give the "National Turkey" special treatment, play music for it and carry it around so it won't be too jittery.

Then they fly it to Washington D.C. in First Class, so that it's ready on the Big Day, usually the Tuesday or Wednesday before Thanksgiving Thursday. The President awkwardly waves his hand over it, and declares it formally pardoned. There's usually a few jokes about the turkey, and its back-up friend, a second turkey which is also given a name in an internet contest. It's kept in an "undisclosed location" (their hotel?) in case something goes wrong.

This is clearly a highly important national ritual, which only the president can perform — Bill Clinton was running late once and had to be rushed to his plane in Tokyo so he could make it back to D.C. in time! (and no VP will do).

The ritual elevates two birds to the human level, and shows them the mercy to go with it. Yet when the cameras stop rolling and the photo-op school kids go home, the twin national turkeys are both sent off to a retirement home. They will die there shortly, as today's turkey's are engineered to pack so much meat that their legs can't carry them for very long.

I know of only one case where a pardoner picked their turkey. This was Sarah Palin, in 2008. Shortly after losing to Barack Obama and Joe Biden, she decided to hold her own turkey pardoning ceremony. She went out to a turkey farm in Alaska, waded out in a sea of turkeys waiting to be slaughtered, picked one out, and later declared it pardoned in a makeshift ceremony.

Her attempt to usurp the presidential glow of merciful turkey-pardoning is mostly remembered for how the TV cameras kept rolling while the gruesome slaughter of the other turkeys continued apace, right behind her press conference podium.

Note how Palin helped highlight the intensely political nature of the pardoning. Ever since the pardoning gimmick was first launched, in Alabama in the 1940s, the show has been played up as a mirror of the actual pardoning power over people on death row, which is vested in the governors and indeed in presidents, too. Presidents also launch wars, which is about the same thing.

That exalted power over life, death, and guilt is at the core of the spectacle of sovereignty, and that was obviously what Palin desired. Obama, not so much; like a few other presidents he seemed to wonder why the heck he had to waste time on this weird spectacle. Trump simply likes to be on TV.

Why, then, is this so incredibly important — and a silly joke at the same time? One explanation must be the inertia of tradition: once in motion, it can't be stopped. We must have cranberry sauce, and we must have the turkey pardoned first — this even if the pardoning show is not very ancient at all. It only dates

to when George H.W. Bush suddenly decided to pardon, and not eat, the turkey that had been sent to the White House as a promotional Thanksgiving gift. (He didn't eat the broccoli the veggie farmers sent either. He declared that "I'm the President," and had it sent to the D.C. soup kitchens).

One powerful reason for sticking with the ceremony must be the mesmerizing force of the ritual's play on the real pardoning power placed in the hands of presidents (and governors, but no VPs or lieutenants). Bush himself may have been inspired by the Iran-Contra scandal, and how he pardoned the key people involved. And under his son, Bush the younger, the "joke" was that Saddam Hussein would not be pardoned, but would "roast in the oven."

Another explanation for the mystery lies in how the pardoning anchors the whole Thanksgiving ritual and holiday, which has three components: the president's Proclamation of the holiday (since Lincoln), then the Turkey Pardoning, and the Dinner. The crescendo is still the Dinner, which is framed and reinforced by the first two parts, as an important national event.

The Dinner itself actually goes back to the formal creation of Thanksgiving by Sarah Josepha Hale, the author and activist who was its main architect and chief lobbyist. After the American Civil War, she convinced Lincoln. As Amy Kaplan has shown in her

work on American "Manifest Domesticity," the gendered roles which Hale assigned, of cooking and carving and table seating, was all meant as the core bedrock of a post-bellum re-united nation, which she hoped would be purified, and conquer the world (her original nation-building design also included finishing off the Indians and expelling all former slaves).

The other powerful strand in the national mythology is the fiction of the thankfulness and servitude of the Indians at a mythic First Thanksgiving. This was actually invented only later, fueled by both guilt and nostalgia. Early American settlers were unapologetic about ethnic cleansing and stealing the land; later, the nostalgic, self-serving story of a shared meal developed just as the settler's descendants were working hard to bury the memory of the genocidal King Philip's War and other conflicts that cleansed most of the country of its native inhabitants.

Today, the Plymouth story of a meal shared on equal terms has become a set piece in the contemporary striving for inclusivity and mutual respect. In the many children's books I have seen, it dominates. "Everybody brought something — a poduck," is the message. Only very few children's books or films tell the stark truth about what really happened. And we have James Loewen's marvelous American classic, *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, which dismantles the Plymouth myth.

There is a long-running competition over this mythic beginning. Even if thanksgiving dinners have of course been eaten on this continent for many millennia, there are ever new places rising to claim to have hosted the First Thanksgiving Dinner, supposedly taking place in the sixteenth or seventeenth century. "In Virginia we ate pigs for the first Thanksgiving!" and "No, it happened in Florida!" These places are of course envious of Plymouth and its tourist fame, and want to place themselves at the beginning of the story. But the story started long before their time.

Thanksgiving dinner really can happen anywhere. Just because it's been captured and framed in a particular way, doesn't mean it can't be liberated from that trap. Let's reset the table.

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Magnus Fiskesjö studied anthropology at the University of Chicago and now teaches at Cornell. He is the author of *The Thanksgiving Turkey Pardon, the Death of Teddy's Bear, and the Sovereign Exception of Guantánamo* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm, 2003; free download at <http://www.pricklyparadigm.com/titles.html>, Pamphlet no.11), and the follow-up piece on Obama's and Palin's turkeys, "The Reluctant Sovereign: New Adventures of the US Presidential Thanksgiving Turkey," *Anthropology Today* 26.5 (2010), 13-18.

## Saint Stomak

On the 16th of October, 2009, the Foundation *FoodCultura* celebrated *Sant Stomak*, the patron saint of metabolic equilibrium, agro-biodiversity, master of conviviality, with the idea of participating in the global discussion of food and the contradictions surrounding it (hunger versus obesity, the undernourishment of processed food, tourism versus diaspora...). In consonance with the anniversary of World Food Day, established by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) to raise awareness of the challenge of feeding the world, *FoodCultura* contributes to this goal through its unique perspective which contemplates art and anthropology, taking into account the vast complex of beliefs, values, customs, techniques and representations related to food.

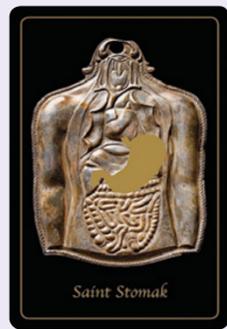
A language that is particular to art allows *FoodCultura* to focus on these reflections through the exploration and combination of symbols and material objects. In 2015, Antoni Miralda, director and co-founder of *FoodCultura* along with Montse Guillén, designed a reliquary with the collaboration of the architects Flores & Prats in the form of a wooden cabinet with gold leafing, inspired by a brass Neapolitan ex-voto which the artist found in the archives of the MUECM in Marseille. This was the first of many representations of *Sant Stomak* that would spread its cult throughout the world.

This cabinet-reliquary was installed in stand #437 of *La Boqueria* of Barcelona, the oldest food market in Europe. *FoodCultura* transformed the stand into an interactive art center (2015-2018) in which numerous artistic projects related to food were exhibited. Many of the exhibits and performances were the result of *in situ* investigations that explored the relationships of art with food with the idea of connecting *La Boqueria* with other cultural centers and artistic events (MACBA, ACVIC, Massana, EINA, Loop, La Place, and others). Art was placed in a food market and a food market was placed in art, all under the vigil of *Sant Stomak* who would receive in its belly the prayers and offerings of curious visitors and cus-

tomers as one more aspect of the market's life. On each 16th of October, a special event was organized to celebrate its saint's day. Now the saint is back in Poblenou, the headquarters of *Fundación FoodCultura* in Barcelona, presiding over the vast Sant Stomak library and welcoming interested visitors. It continues to be honored each year on its day.

In 2019, Alicia Rios, a frequent collaborator at *FoodCultura*, organized the saint's day in Cádiz with a new image of the saint. A newspaper created for the occasion, *FoodCultura Cádiz News*, published the programme of activities that was handed out at the entrance next to the "Reticula Stomakalis". The celebration lasted two days in tribute to the Cadiz festive nature of its population and included interactive rituals, projections of stomach imagery, a poetic digestive concert, and a menu of the saint's specialties: tongue, viscera empanadas, chocolate "sausages" from *Saint Caganer* ("Pooper" in Catalan), seasonal pharmaceuticals, and wine. The enthused people of Cádiz venerated the saint with songs and verses thus extending its cult to Andalusia.

*Sant Stomak* manifested itself this year in its third incarnation in Ferrán Adrià's El Bulli Foundation. Miralda and Adrià chose the restaurant's pantry as the ideal place for Miralda's intervention, baptizing the space as the *Capella Robost* ("Pantry Chapel" in Catalan). Miralda resorted to the original Neapolitan ex-voto, but this time it is monumental, made of wood with glass shelves, gold leafing, curved spoons as handles and LED lighting. This year's celebration in *elBulli1846* included the ritual of the gastric juice (the late Juli Soler's favorite sherry, who created the restaurant along with Ferrán Adrià). The liquid was consumed ceremoniously with a medicinal teaspoon not only lubricating the ceremony, but also emphasizing the healing aspect of food so essential within the concepts of *FoodCultura*. One can think of *FoodCultura* as a vehicle dedicated to the healing of society through cultural as well as physical nourishment. It is no coincidence that the text accompanying the image that was distributed along with the gastric juice in the *Capella Robost* reads: "*Sant Stomak*, be our pharmacy." Our hope is that, in better days to come, the good saint will find its worshippers in Chicago, too.



**Saint Stomak**  
Patron saint of metabolic equilibrium  
Of agro-biodiversity  
Master of conviviality  
Be our guide in the world of food and its nutrients.  
Make us meditate on the contradictions  
Surrounding food in today's society.  
Agro-Culture devoured by consumerism,  
Artificial nature and the diesel of deforestation.  
Protect us from  
Food insecurity,  
Fast food and obesity.  
Teach us to respect the flavour of memory  
Through knowledge and taste.  
Be our pharmacy.

Image: Elveto, Naples, MUECM, Marseille collection  
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Celebration of *Sant Stomak* on World Food Day  
Barcelona, October 16th, 2014  
Equipe *FoodCultura* Barcelona [www.foodcultura.org](http://www.foodcultura.org)

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

# Sweet Home Chicago: The story of Greek American candy makers

EXHIBIT AT THE NATIONAL HELLENIC MUSEUM, CHICAGO, 2016

by David Sutton

In an article titled "The Pioneers of Confection in America," Steve Frangos notes the "commanding presence [of Greek Americans] in the confectionary industry, dishing up tons of sinfully sweet treats from behind the counters of their candy stores and ice cream parlors" (Frangos 2004, 1). More recently, Frangos has lamented the lack of scholarly interest in the question of why Greek Americans were so central to the confectionary life of the United States. He suggests, speculatively, that something about Greek American *taste* may have led them into not just the sweet business, but into restaurants, coffee shops, and blended tobacco production in the U.S. (Frangos 2016). He is suggesting here, I believe, that the culture of Greek foodways—or what I refer to in my own work as the "robust food culture" of Greece, in which *taste matters* on a day-to-day level, may have contributed to this central occupation for Greek Americans. This may have developed, Frangos notes elsewhere, out of the felt need of early Greek male migrants to develop cooking skills, which some later turned to business ends: "A point brought up in every family story is that each man learned to cook Greek food and bake bread" (Frangos 2003).

percent of Chicagoans were born abroad or were children of immigrants."

The eight panels appended to the exhibit by the Hellenic National Museum focused on Greek American immigrant confectioners, though with a geographical scope broader than Chicago, extending to the wider Midwest region. These panels tended to touch on themes of family connections and family histories, occasionally broadening into larger community issues.

A panel entitled "The Stefanos Brothers" describes the three brothers who came to the United States from Messina in the 1930s and who went on to "ma[k]e confectionary history in Chicago." The panel briefly tells



Legend has it that Leo Stefanos created his own ice-cream bars in 1956, after a scare, watching his son Michael (pictured here) run after an ice-cream truck.

How does this apply to the confectionary business? Consider the centrality of sweet shops (*zacharoplasteia*) in Greek communities as both places to purchase a tray of *galaktoboureko*, or other gifts to bring to celebrate a name day, and social spaces themselves, which, until recently, were explicitly marked as family and mixed-gender spaces in opposition to the all-male coffee shops. Then there are the spoon sweets, made from anything from quince to carrots, which many women offer as part of home hospitality (see Cowan 1991), and which has become an attractive alternative to buying sweets during the current economic crisis for some women on Kalymnos (where I conduct my ethnographic research). Others recall a pre-World War II Kalymnos, when itinerant candy makers would pass through neighborhoods selling all sorts of sweet treats from their carts.

It is this terrain of Greek American confectionary that was the focus of a recent (autumn 2016) exhibit presented at the National Hellenic Museum in Chicago entitled "Sweet Home Chicago: The History of America's Candy Capital." This was part of a larger exhibit developed by the Elmhurst History Museum on the culture of candy in Chicago, with no particular attention to Greek Americans. The National Hellenic Museum adapted the exhibit by adding an additional eight panel displays focusing on the role of Greek Americans in sweet shops and the candy business in the United States.

The tone of the overall Chicago exhibit was, not surprisingly, nostalgic, meant, no doubt, to capture the way that childhood memories can be encapsulated in candy; the stress is on telling the history of candy making in Chicago while presenting photographs and objects that will, perhaps for many, act as a Proustian madeleine in unlocking "the vast structure of recollection" (cited in Sutton 2001, 84). Thus one panel on "Serving Unique Audiences" presents a section including images of Willy Wonka products marketed to children, licorice as a medicinal "adult" candy, and the popularity of chocolate bars for school fundraisers. The same panel also includes information about vitamin-infused candy as evidence of Americans' enthusiasm for vitamin supplements earlier in the twentieth century, as well as an image of Charlie Chaplin, from the film *The Gold Rush*, eating his boot, which was made of licorice and provided by the American Licorice Company. Another panel highlights the role of immigrants in Chicago candy making with several pictures and objects from candy makers such as Bunte Bros. and Boves-Allegretti, and accompanying text noting that "Gustav A. Bunte, born in Germany, was one of dozens of immigrants who opened confectionary businesses in Chicago. By 1890, 79

the story of Dove Candies, Joy Candies, and Cupid Candies (a few objects including candy molds are included in a nearby display case). Leo Stefanos opened Dove Candies.

He was the inventor of the ubiquitous Dove Bar of ice cream covered with bittersweet chocolate, was "practically an overnight success." The eventual sale of Dove by the inventor's son to M&M/Mars Inc. is presented as a further success, "making it possible for people all over the world to enjoy his father's creation." Another Stefanos brother, Polychronos, or "Paul," brought with him, presumably from his home village, recipes for fudge and caramel and named them "Turks," (one of the few references to intercommunal relations, even, in this case, based on the stereotype of Turkish dark skin). He opened Cupid Candies, which flourished in different Chicago neighborhoods before becoming newly relevant in later decades as they contracted to produce Marshall Field's famous "Frango Mints" line.

The theme of entrepreneurial business success repeats through a number of panels. [I] For example, the panel entitled "Gayety's Candies" highlights the fact that United Airlines chose it from among 45 international competitors to produce chocolate truffles for their premium service flights. This frames the



James Papageorge with his nephew (left).

Elias "Lee" Flessor (Top right).

Elias "Lee" Flessor (1984) (Bottom right).

humble beginnings of Gayety's (named after a local movie theater), once again a story of early twentieth century migration (from Aleppo in Tripoli) and family continuity, as Gayety's built its business around proximity to Chicago's South Side steel mills. Even after the steel mills closed, Gayety's revived its business in suburban Lansing, playing on



nostalgia for the old-fashioned ice cream parlor: "with its comfortable booths, traditional ice cream tables and picture gallery, Gayety's continues to be the place where everyone is treated like royalty."

One panel departs from the Midwest: "Chocolat Moderne" describes a "New York Greek revival." Joan Coukos grew up in New York, the daughter of immigrants from Lesbos. She recounts memories of her favorite foods both eaten at home with her family and on trips to Greece. But it was on a trip to Belgium where she began to learn the art of chocolate making. After twenty years in banking, she opened Chocolat Moderne, a high-end, artisanal chocolate shop to much critical acclaim. In Coukos's case, the connection with tradition is more emblematic than direct, though she does feature a "Greek revival" chocolate line, decorated with Ancient Greek vases and geometrical patterns and made with "authentic Greek ingredients." Chocolat Moderne seems to



represent the ethnicity of choice, described in the following quotation from Coukos herself: "I wanted to look to my own roots and [I] realized that many new, upscale, trailblazing Greek restaurants were opening, with chefs who were being recognized by the restaurant world at large, not just as artists within their ethnic cuisines." This is also the one panel that focuses on the role of a female entrepreneur in the confectionary world, which raises questions about the association of sweetness itself with femininity. Not to deny that Greek men may love their sweets! But sweetness, itself, is gender marked in Greece—and elsewhere—as Cowan has persuasively shown in her ethnography set in northern Greece in which she argues that by ingesting sweet substances, "Sohiojan girls and women literally produce themselves as properly feminine persons. Consuming sweets, they do what they 'should' (observe the etiquette of guest-host relations) as well as what they 'want' (since they are thought 'naturally' to desire sweets), a conflation of moral propriety and desire that obscures the coercive aspects of such consumption" (184).

Aside from the question of taste, as noted by Steve Frangos as well, it would be interesting in the future to consider the relation-

ship of Greek American confectioners to the tradition of sweet consumption in Greece itself. "Sweet Home Chicago" makes clear that Greek American confectioners have not been working in a so-called ethnic ghetto of food traditions defined by Greekness, but have rather, from the beginning, in one way or another, developed their professions in a recognizable American context of soda fountains, candy, and ice cream. A more complex picture, however, could no doubt be portrayed in more explicitly drawing out some of the Greek ingredients, tastes, and social practices that tie the sweets to identity and the reproduction of cultural life.

In viewing this exhibit, I found it hard not to look wistfully across Halsted Street to the Pan-Hellenic Pastry Shop, with its offerings of *kourabiedes*, *galaktoboureko* and *baktlava*, and to wonder why it was not included in the exhibit. It, too, was founded by immigrant siblings who learned their craft without explicit professional training: "It's just something that's done by tradition. You grow up learning about these things" notes founder Louis Manolakos (Cantrell 1991). Perhaps it is because this story only stretches back to the 1950s, when Louis first attempted to open a pastry shop in Montreal. He found his Greek customers lacking money to spend to support his business, unfortunately, so, in 1973, he moved it to Halsted Street. The Pan-Hellenic Pastry Shop's menu offers a lovely mix of identifiable Greek sweets alongside other bakery classics such as Black Forest Cake, as well as the owner's own creations such as Louie's cookies: a chocolate and walnut meringue combination with fudge in the middle.[I] Any consideration of Greek sweets also must include *koliva*, the Greek funeral food (made from boiled wheatberries, nuts, almonds, pomegranate seeds, and other ingredients covered with a layer of sugar) and served at memorial services for the dead and on All Souls Day. With *koliva* we see how sweets play a central role in the identity and memory of the community (Sutton 2003), not to mention how they are gender linked: on Kalymnos, for example, they're invoked by wives as threats to their husbands: "Watch out or I won't make *koliva* in your memory after you die!" One wonders whether bakeries such as these, or even more "Americanized" ones portrayed in this exhibit, provide *koliva* for memorial ceremonies (*mnimosina*) in the United States. As much as we learn from "Sweet Home Chicago," it would be interesting to know what impact tastes for *koliva*, *melomakarona*, or *kadaifi*—and their corresponding social spaces and cultural practices—might have on the ongoing reproduction of a sense of what it means to be Greek American in the twenty-first century.

This essay was originally published in *Ergon Online Journal of Greek American Arts and Letters* <https://ergon.science.com/>. A complete version of the essay including a discussion of all 8 panels can be found there. Thanks to Yiorgos Anagnostou for permission to reprint here.

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- \_\_\_\_\_. 2003. "Koliva." *Slow: The Magazine of the Slow Food Movement* 7: 104-107.
- [I] For a discussion of the narrative of entrepreneurial success among Greek Americans, see Anagnostou 2003. "Entrepreneurial genius" is the phrase used in a short description of the exhibit which appeared in the Greek American newspaper *The Greek Reporter* (Kolasa-Sikiriadi 2016).
- [II] <https://dccc.com/places/pan-hellenic-pastry-shop-chicago-us/>. Note that the shop closed in May of 2017, but the owners hope to reopen in a new location and offering an expanded menu in May of 2017. See: <https://www.dnainfo.com/chicago/2017/05/31/greektown/pan-hellenic-bakery-closes-greektown-louie-manalokos-helena-james-athens-greek-american-taste/>



# BEWARE THE IDES OF MARCH

by Phillip Foss

I'm not well versed in Shakespeare, but the Soothsayer's premonition to Julius Caesar to "Beware the Ides of March," was on my mind as I walked out to the garage to procure liquid nitrogen. It was mid-menu on March 15th at my Chicago based, Michelin-starred restaurant, EL Ideas. This service would be the final one for our foreseeable future, as earlier that day our state's restaurants had been mandated to close on account of Covid-19. As I had done almost every service over the last decade, I took a drag of weed from my vape pen as the snake-like, metal hose loudly screeched liquid nitrogen from the five-foot tall, cylindrical dewar. Smoke billowed from my lips and steam from the nitrogen as the almost 300 degree below zero liquid met our much warmer atmosphere.

The liquid nitrogen is used to make the ice cream for our signature redux of the Wendy's classic: dipping French fries into a Frostee, inspired by my two daughters. The concoction is an interactive tableside explosion of hot and cold combustion, and the course had become ubiquitous with our dining experience. Small cubes of thrice fried French fries stay miraculously crispy under a hot potato leek soup, and along with the ice cream, all the basic elements of the hot and cold and sweet and salty original version remain.

The feeling of the extreme hot and extreme cold meeting in the mouth for the first time is a sensation unlike any other. You half expect your mouth to be either burned by the hot soup or frozen by the ice cream, but instead, one balances the other to the perfect temperature. If you know what you're doing, you can even make steam come out of your nose like a fire breathing dragon. To add a visceral shock to the experience, when the guest submerges their spoon in the glass and the sub zero ice cream collides with piping-hot soup, steam erupts from the glass with the fury of a geyser, and the whole room fills with a fajita-like, CRACK! Surprise and smiles inevitably wash over the faces of even our most stoic guests, and no matter how bad a day I may have had, looking back at the room as I walk away from the table almost always improves my mood.

So I wasn't blind to the difficulty I'd have serving this course for what felt like the final time. But I wasn't yet ready at that moment in the garage, so instead my mind went down a darker alleyway. As the liquid was dispensing and the weed sidetracked my thoughts away from the sadness of closing, I began to think of what it would take to protect my wife, kids, business, and home if things got totally out of hand.

Back in pre-pandemic times, my fellow chefs and I had been joking about what we would do in the case of a zombie apocalypse. The thought was that we'd rendezvous at the restaurant and then travel up to Michigan, hitting up a cache of guns one of our chefs knew of. I'd never shot a gun before in my life, but having them seemed like an important step in protecting my family if things really went haywire. So this playful exchange felt real as I walked back from the garage and into the kitchen.

As I began dispensing the ice cream base into the liquid nitrogen, I casually asked one of the chefs if he was still game to get the guns.

He stopped in his tracks, looked me in the eyes, as if *he* were the chef and *I* the *commis*, and said, "Chef, what do you need a gun for?"

"To protect my family," I replied, defensively and immediately. I felt the weight of the implication, but said nothing more as we were now carrying the course out to the dining room.

Once each guest had a glass in front of them, I stood at the partition that divides the dining room from the kitchen, and explained the course for what felt like the final time.

"This course in front of you is inspired by my two daughters..." I began.

My voice cracked and I gagged on the next words, engulfed by my somber reality. I looked back at the chefs in the kitchen to see if someone could throw me a lifeline, but looking to chefs for emotional understanding in the middle of a service is like asking a hungry pit bull to let go of a bone, so all I received were incredulous looks.

I turned back to the room, and without air in my lungs, managed to hastily whimper out the rest of the description.

"Super crunchy French fries at the bottom of the glass... hot potato-leek soup over the top... and liquid nitrogen poached vanilla ice cream on top of that."

I mimicked the motion and told the guests to dip their spoons to the bottom of the glass.

The guests obeyed, and the steam and sound filled the room as it had so many times before. It felt like a knife lodging deep in my back as I walked away from the room, not bothering or caring to look back for the smiling faces. But as the show must always go on in a restaurant, I composed myself the best I could as the other chefs were putting away the ingredients and getting ready for the next course. I calmly walked over to the young chef I was speaking with before.

"On second thought, maybe we don't need any guns around here."



Illustration by Timothy Foss

"I think that's a really good decision, Chef!" The betrayal of Covid had only begun.

Having just self-published a culinary graphic novel in late 2019 with my cousin, comic artist Timothy Foss, I had been publishing some freelance writing as an abstract means of marketing the book. I had just switched gears from writing on the dismal state of self help amongst chefs to making some dire predictions about what the arrival of Covid might do to the restaurant industry. What seemed most obvious at the time was that those of us who'd turned our noses up at doing takeout food were about to be served up a big ol' slice of humble pie... in a to go container. Like it or not, we would need to trade in our Michelin starred plate-ups on fine porcelain for soup hall-style rationing in cardboard boxes.

Nearly a decade ago, EL Ideas came to life in the commissary kitchen I had been renting for a food truck called the Meatyballs Mobile. So when Covid shut down the restaurant, returning to driving meatballs around town seemed logical. It emboldened me to know that I had already gone from low end cooking to high end once, so big deal if I have to go back. Besides, if there was ever a time that the world needed 'Meatyballs,' it was now. My two chefs and I took Monday off to recharge, and on Tuesday we met back at the restaurant. With only a little over 24 hours to close our restaurant, one of the unsung early challenges of the lockdown was that many of us were left with large and perishable inventories in our refrigerators. Hoping as much of it would find its way into bellies as possible, I instructed the chefs to come up with possibilities for an opening menu, and to freeze, preserve, or donate the rest. While they took care of that, I went to Restaurant Depot to buy to go containers for the truck.

As soon as I had paid for the supplies and pulled back out onto Division Street, I realized there was an inherent problem with my idea: people would surely congregate around the truck for their orders, and this would put myself and others at risk for getting sick. I arrived back at the restaurant deflated; this new thing called 'curbside takeout' would be our only means to generate revenue. Dylan Edwards, the chef who performed my mini-intervention during our last service, informed me after the shift that he was leaving to spend the lockdown with his family.

After the realization that the food truck would not be seeing the road, I went into an emotional cubby hole as a shell shocked soldier

might. The battle plans had gone to hell and I felt clueless. Our first menus were prepared mostly by Chef Josh Mutchnick, and I served more as his sous chef than the other way around. My wife and partner, Akiko Moorman, was not only deep into her second term in the nursing program at Rush University, now she was also taxed with restructuring the reservation and financial models for our business. Our dining room manager, Bill Talbott, now had to figure out the complicated logistics for doing takeout. If not for their support and others, I likely would have closed up shop immediately. As our guests pay before they dine with us, watching the bank account hemorrhage from tens of thousands of dollars in refunds added to the suffering.

But having a very small business allowed us to pivot quickly, and I am proud to say we didn't miss a single day of service or lay off a single employee. I felt a sort of survivor's guilt as I watched the pleas of my friends, colleagues, and suppliers posting gofundme pages for their teams and businesses, but what could I really do with that other than deal with it in therapy?

Long ago, my father shared a useful anecdote that breathes new life into the 'ready, aim, fire' mantra. Unlike firing a gun, when launching a business, it is more wise to have a 'ready, fire, aim' approach. The success of EL was not because I envisioned what it became, but more because I listened to what it wanted to become. The same rang true for curbside dining.

We had long been charging \$155/person for our tasting menu, so we were truly clueless on how to value our new to-go style cooking. We randomly priced our first curbside takeout menu at \$42 for three courses. And though we did okay, the entire team agreed we'd increase sales if we lowered our price. So after a good deal of back and forth and some hurt egos, we finally agreed that we would instead charge \$24 for two courses.

Business increased dramatically, and in juxtaposition to most everyone else I knew, I found myself working much more once the lockdown began. Side by side with the fear and trepidation within, a more courageous inner voice told me it was better to work harder and make less than to not work at all and make nothing.

Though our Michelin starred yacht may have capsized, the liferaft of takeout business appeared to be enough to keep us

afloat. Cooking big batch food in army pans brought me on a nostalgic trip back to my food truck days, and it also felt good to not have to perfectly dice all of my vegetables. At its height, we were serving about 160 guests on a weekend night. And though we were immensely relieved to be approved for the PPP (Payroll Protection Program), more restaurants were about to get into the takeout game. With their arrival on the scene, sales decreased dramatically.

And while the waves of returning competition may have wet the deck of our curbside liferaft, the murder of George Floyd hit with the force of a tsunami. Sales disappeared, but silly things like restaurants didn't matter anymore. A day of reckoning felt like it had arrived for centuries of injustice, and I did my best to listen.

Adding to the deafening roar of public outrage and helplessness, Abe Conlon, a very good friend and James Beard Award winning chef/owner of Fat Rice here in Chicago, wound up closing his restaurant after some accusations of racism came down on him through social media. His ex-wife and business partner, Adrienne Lo, who is also a very good friend of ours, was taken down with him. Finding a place of balance between not simply dismissing the allegations together with genuine compassion for our friends, only tightened the already suffocating emotional tightrope. On a personal level, the closeness of the matter resulted in a more in depth effort to learn from their experience.

My hometown of Milwaukee is one of the most segregated in the country. Just like my mom before me, I was a child of a family that moved out to the suburbs when African-Americans moved in. I'm embarrassed to say that even as a young adult, I couldn't understand how NWA and Ice Cube could feel so much anger toward those who've sworn an oath *'to serve and protect'*. I would soon develop an appreciation for the musical genre, and the Rodney King tragedy began the long process of becoming more aware. Still, my restaurant has been guilty of the cultural appropriation of hip hop music since day one.

EL is located on a nondescript, dead end street in a little-known part of Chicago, and our setting is about as urban as fine dining gets. We're not far at all from downtown, but to dine with us is the only reason most of our guests would ever venture into our part of town. Playing off of this vibe, we became well known for playing loud hip-hop during the dining experience. So filtering through our many playlists during prep days was sobering. And even though I've concluded that almost every song in our popular songbook has been appropriated from Black music in one way or another, I had to draw the line somewhere. To make sure guests were always served fresh ingredients, I used to tell an impressionable rhyme to young cooks, *'when in doubt, throw it out.'* This became the mantra for which songs to remove from the playlist.

So while chaos rippled through the streets around us, sales dropped to only a single handful of takeout orders per night. But as much bigger things were at play, it would've been hard for me to care less about business. And though it was a very sad time, there was something cathartic about being powerless.

Up until this point, I had been highly proactive in publishing articles and connecting with our client base on social media and our email blast. I would write personal and heartfelt snippets about what we were going through, and how we were going to keep changing and persevere. Now, very much on account of the social media nightmare our friends went through, feelings of fear and trepidation overtook my marketing sensibilities, and I went into a state of depression and a prolonged period of silence.

About a month later, another colleague and friend - Ryan McCaskey of Michelin two-star Acadia - had a much different, yet equally damning set of circumstances drag him into the tar and feather pit as well. He's actually facing legal allegations, and his restaurant has yet to reopen.

Though we should be well aware by now of white privilege and how that oppression has benefitted so many of us, there is also a very real *'chef privilege'* my colleagues and I have also known. There is no excuse for acting poorly, and we are all a product of our choices, not our circumstances. Still, it's a real conundrum that those of us who cook good food have been given a free pass for acting like assholes for so long. As I've learned from years of therapy, hours of daily meditation, and satirizing my own out of control ego by writing the aforementioned graphic novel, learning to be okay with not being okay is way more daunting of a task than it sounds. Adding to the challenge, most of us who make careers and thrive in the chaos of kitchens, found ourselves there in the first place because we were a legitimate mess as kids.

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Guest Artist:

Laura Letinsky

Silver sparks dull on the wrinkly belly of an overripe apricot's skin molting visually into the mottled edge of the tablecloth. Eliding the lens' single point perspective with contradicting spatial cues, I aim to unsettle the picture's authority. Not the usual temptation of a cornucopia awaiting consumption, my still life photographs are of what is left over just as the photograph itself is always after. My subject is this resist - what is held on to, and what can't be gotten rid of?

Seeing isn't flat except for in rare, sometimes unfortunate conditions such as for Cyclops. Also unlike a picture, seeing is not still. We are bodies perambulating alongside other bodies, buildings, and things. Seeing is not touching but is from the same part of the brain. Yet, knowing through experience is not to be trusted; "Seeing touching tasting are in the deceived," wrote St. Thomas Aquinas. Seeing is apprehension both in the sense of taking in as well as its anxieties and, the photograph, like Lot's wife who can't resist looking back, or the recipient of Medusa's gaze, a sight transfixed.



Truth was in God's whisperings but with Catholicism's Latin falling on illiterate ears, the turn to the visual was necessary even as it was suspect. Picturing, like sight itself, is not neutral or natural. Don't look now. Don't look away. Who you lookin' at? In love and all I've got is a photograph. Photographs are the apotheosis of a long trajectory of image-making to seduce and cajole. From biblical doctrine to how to make food/bodies/home that look good on Instagram, images tell us, sell us, how to see, how to be.

Mama told me not to look into the eyes of the sun. Even when the moon is blocking out almost all but a tiny sliver of the sun it's still bright enough to carve out pieces of your retina but too small to cause pain.



# Word on the Street: The hand-lettered art of Southwest Signs

An interview with Chuck Wilmarth by Eric May



Alberto Aguilar "Traducción/ Translation", 2020

The fine folks at Southwest Signs, a 58 year old shop in Chicago's Clearing neighborhood, specialize in hand painted paper signs. Over the past ten years, I've developed a warm relationship with owners, Carol and Dan Kamba, and Carol's brother, Chuck Wilmarth, who does most of the painting. We speak a shared language of streets and neighborhoods: Kedzie, Pulaski, Beverly, Morgan Park, in appropriate Sout' Side Chicago accents, of course. I grew up on the Southwest side and have memories of gazing out the car window at the calligraphic rhythm of hand painted signage, cruising down Cicero and Harlem Avenues.

I started to pay closer attention to the artform of these signs as I developed my art practice, which explores the culture, celebration, and politics of food. I tried my hand at painting a few signs myself, but I had a really hard time with the spacing and now I know I didn't have the right brushes. My friend, Southwest Side artist Alberto Aguilar, was making dazzling artworks in the style of hand painted signs with bi-lingual puns and abstract splashes of color. It turned out that he was outsourcing the work to a sign shop on 63rd street and he was generous enough to share their number. I was thrilled to find a master to paint the lettering for my projects.

Chuck Wilmarth has been painting in what is referred to as the "Chicago style" of hand lettering for nearly four decades. The style is fluid and lyrical, though bold and eye-catching, with a neat and organized layout. If you ever have the pleasure of watching Chuck paint, his technique flows from his brush with finesse and confidence. Although he is shy to admit as much, Chuck truly is an artist.

Eric May: How did you get your start? How and when did you learn how to hand letter?

Chuck Wilmarth: Well it was in 1971, I was a senior in high school. We had a family friend who had a sign shop. I needed some cash, being a senior. I was just like a gofer, cleaning up and doing this and that. And they asked if I wanted to learn how to paint a sign. It was Mr. Petrizzo and Don Miller, they were the two [owners]. At that time, it was hand lettered stuff and also silk screening. They had me learning silk screening first and then we went on to lettering. I had never thought I would do this. I liked a couple things about it - I liked that everyday was something different and I liked the thought of creating something. And I just liked the atmosphere in the sign shop - we're goofing around, talking. People would come in and

talk to us as we're working. Like sitting in a barbershop, Bob always said. I don't think of myself as artistic, I think of myself mainly doing letters. As I started progressing, I just tried to pay attention to what they were doing - these are guys that were painting so long and were so good. And they each had their different style. Don was a real artist - he also painted beautiful paintings, still does. Bob was mainly a letterer.

EM: When did the shop, Southwest Signs, open?

CW: Well at that time when I was working for them, they called it Sign Center. And then Don moved out of state and Bob moved the shop over to, was it 65th and Kedzie?

Dan Kamba: No, we still were working out of his garage for a while.

CW: And then he changed the name to Southwest Signs, because we were on the Southwest Side of Chicago. He had a converted garage that he turned into a sign shop. But that was too small and we were getting more accounts so we moved to 65th and Kedzie and we were officially Southwest Signs.

DK: That was 32 years ago.

CW: I think it was longer than that.

EM: So when I started to get interested in producing these signs for my artwork, there was a grocery on Western in the Bucktown area that had the signs and I got the number for their guy. He was a nice guy who worked out of his van, cranking them out. His style was quick, he had a touch, but they weren't as neat and refined as yours. I see a lot of that

of these guys who do it from their garage or their van, I can tell they're not using sign painter brushes, they're using foam brushes or something like that. At our old shop, other sign painters would come in and we'd talk shop. Because of the economy back then, nobody was afraid that someone was gonna take someone else's store. It was a lot of collaboration and a style did evolve back then. The style here in Chicago is the color scheme first - the basic purple, bright red. And black, we used to do a lot of black lettering and that was mainly for the Greeks and the Italians who had the grocery stores. But when other nationalities started having grocery stores, or the younger generations, they didn't want black lettering. You know the purple and the red and that chrome yellow look. When I first started, we never used fluorescent colors. Until finally we just realized, to keep up with the different nationalities that like brighter signs, we started incorporating that. And then what's prominent on the sign - you know if I'm doing a sign for government-inspected assorted pork chops, I know the thing that I'm gonna make big is the pork chops. I've seen new sign painters, they'll highlight words that I wouldn't have highlighted - they only put "US government inspected" because the city requires you to put that. And also the little flourishments, I had to learn about that. I used to see signs with little stars or something, you take a brush and do an asterisk thing. I learned working with Don, we used to work on upright boards - the easels were at a slight angle but everything was upright. And the consistency of the paint was different. Don would always drip and he'd always hide it with a little flourishment, a little star or something. Bob would say you could always tell Don's signs because they had stars. If I dripped on a sign, I would some-

ALL THE LETTERING OF THE CHICAGO FOODCULTURA CLARION HAS BEEN DONE BY CHUCK WILMARTH

DK: It's dropped way down because all the mom and pop grocery stores have basically disappeared. You know the larger grocery stores are not into that. If they're independent we still do them, but corporations, we don't do so much.

CW: Do you know Pete's Produce? I did Pete's Produce when they started, they were a little fruit stand on North Avenue in a converted gas station. And now they're big. I do grocery stores. We do a lot of real estate - if they don't need a permanent sign: for lease, for rent, for sale signs, I do a lot of that. And a lot of fast food restaurants.

EM: I know you do digital printing too, would you say that the printing is replacing the painted signs?

CW: To a big degree, yeah.

DK: What happens here is a dilemma - you can hand letter just about anything, however the cost at a certain point becomes cheaper to print than it is to hand letter. You're talking about labor costs. If Chuck is going to hand letter a menu board with a hundred items, that's going to take him days to do, but I can design it and print it in an hour. The printing comes in cheaper than doing it by hand. It's a labor cost.

EM: I've noticed there's younger creative types who like handcrafted stuff, so it seems like there's a new appreciation for the work you do. I was introduced to you by Alberto, who's an artist, but I've noticed lately a few



Eric May "Hot Mix: An Exploration of South Side Foodways", Ground Floor exhibition at Hyde Park Art Center, 2012



Alberto Aguilar "Call to Awareness", 2016

quicker, messier style around town. I'm wondering if you could talk about your style and the Chicago style of sign painting.

CW: I remember both Don and Bob would tell me with paper signs there is the quick lettering, but the key was layout and readability. Sometimes guys get so sloppy or wacky with their letters that it's not really quickly readable. So they taught me a technique where you crisp up your letters. I'd do a sign and they'd say, "Yeah, but look at the edge here, you want to sharpen that up a little bit." The problem today is that a lot

times redo it. Don wouldn't, he'd just keep going like a madman. That's the Chicago look. Other cities, I've seen signs from New York on Pinterest and the lettering is a little more script type. And I don't do that too much. They always put the main item on an angle - they'll put "pork chops" going that way. That's their style.

EM: Are most of your clients grocery stores?

CW: It used to be, I'd say, about 80% when I first started, now it's much less. What would you say 20%? 10%?

folks I know who are art world-adjacent, but are actually more in food and hospitality, businesses like Marz Brewing and Michael and Penny at The Storehouse [in Galien, Michigan]. I wonder if those folks saw your work through Alberto and me. And I know that you've worked with other creative clients out of state. Is that kind of business growing?

CW: I would say yeah, in a way, it's growing - it's not that they give us big jobs but they're happy to have a source for hand-lettered things

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ConstructLab "How Together" Chicago Architectural Biennial, Chicago Cultural Center, 2019. Photo credit: Peter Engler



Chuck Wilmarth painting in the shop

# TAMALE GUYS

by Peter Engler

For some twenty years, until Chicago's bars were closed because of the COVID-19 pandemic, drinkers in the gentrified neighborhoods of Ukrainian Village, Wicker Park, and Bucktown eagerly anticipated the late-night visits of Claudio Velez. Carrying his trademark red Igloo cooler and softly calling out, "Tamales, tamales," he was almost universally known as the Tamale Guy. At some taverns, his arrival was greeted with cheers from drinkers looking for sustenance without having to leave their barstools. Most of his customers probably didn't realize the Tamale Guy was carrying on a nocturnal Chicago tradition over a century old. Perhaps surprisingly, the story of tamales in Chicago begins in the 1890s, well before the city had a sizable Mexican population.



Claudio "Tamale Guy" Velez in action at the Map Room in September 2006. PHOTO CREDIT: Oscar Arriola



Claudio "Tamale Guy" Velez in action at the Map Room in September 2006. PHOTO CREDIT: Oscar Arriola

tamales, but selling home-made tamales has long been a common route for the city's new arrivals to get started in business, even to this day. For well over a century, vendors of tamales have been a common sight on the streets and in the taverns of Chicago.

Claudio Velez got his start apprenticing to an older tamalero in Acapulco and came to Chicago in the late 1990s where he resumed the business he knew. Tamaleros have long been fixtures in diverse Chicago neighborhoods, but Claudio was among the first to effectively target bars catering to a young and affluent non-Hispanic clientele. This was greatly facilitated by the emerging social media platforms. In the early days of Twitter, I remember thinking the TamaleTracker was one of the few worthwhile uses of the new medium. Even without his direct involvement, the Tamale Guy became something of a social media star in Chicago.

Year after year he continued his business, enlisting more family members to make tamales during the day, while he followed and expanded his route at night. This suddenly came to a halt in mid-March 2020 when Governor Pritzker mandated closing all Illinois bars and restaurants because of the escalating coronavirus crisis. With his usual workplaces gone, Claudio turned to home delivery and selling at pop-up events. Some of these pop-ups in the West Loop led to a series of anonymous complaints which in turn led to a number of cease-and-desist orders from the city, in part because he was operating without proper licenses.

Word of the Tamale Guy's plight spread on social media leading one of his admirers to set up a GoFundMe page which attracted nearly \$35,000 in donations, over three times the initial goal. This outpouring of support allowed Claudio to think more seriously about opening a restaurant, long a goal of his. He had been considering opening in one of the western suburbs with a large Mexican population (and with lower rents), but now turned his sights to more expensive neighborhoods where his usual customers are. Wasting no time, he and his new partners, Pierre and Kristin Vega, settled on a recently-closed restaurant in Ukrainian Village. Tamale Guy Chicago opened on August 13 and quickly sold out of their first batches. Claudio realizing his life's dream was a truly heartwarming story, so welcome amid the year's steady stream of dismal news for Chicago restaurants.

Within two weeks of opening, however, Claudio was stricken with a serious case of COVID-19 and required hospitalization. Another GoFundMe campaign was established to help with his medical expenses and the restaurant closed for precautionary quarantine. The restaurant has reopened and Claudio is recuperating. One can only hope it won't be too long before he makes a full recovery and puts in occasional late-night appearances at Chicago's taverns, just as generations of tamaleros before him.

TAMALES AND TAMALEROS IN CHICAGO, FROM 1893 TO 2020

## TAMALES DE GUAJOLOTE DEL DÍA DE ACCIÓN DE GRACIAS

### INGREDIENTES

#### Para la masa

- Medio kilo de manteca de cerdo
- 3 tazas de masa de maíz nixtamalizado
- 2 tazas de caldo de pollo
- Un poco más de agua fría
- 2 cucharaditas de sal
- 2 cucharaditas de polvo para hornear

#### Para el relleno

- 2 tazas de sobras del pavo asado de Thanksgiving
- 4 tazas de caldo de pollo o agua
- 1 taza de pasta de mole (salsa artesanal mexicana que mezcla varios chiles, chocolate, frutos secos y otros ingredientes)

#### Para armar el tamal

- 20 Hojas de maíz (deberán tenerse cuando menos 30 hojas por las que vengan rotas)

#### Tiempos

- Toma 1 hora la preparación de los tamales.
- 4 horas la cocción y
- 1 hora de reposo antes de servirlos

### INSTRUCCIONES

1. Remoje las hojas de maíz en agua fría y déjelas reposar en el agua mientras prepara la masa y el relleno.
2. En un bowl grande, bata la manteca hasta que quede muy esponjosa. Verifique si la manteca está lista tomando una cucharadita pequeña de manteca y colócala dentro de un bowl con agua; si la bolita flota a la superficie es que ya está lista, si no flota, continúe batiendo y haga nuevamente esta prueba.
3. Agregue la masa de maíz nixtamalizado en pequeñas porciones, poco a poco, hasta que se mezcle con la manteca esponjosa.
4. Agregue el caldo de pollo poco a poco hasta que se integre bien, si es necesario, agregue un poquito más de agua.
5. Agregue la sal y el polvo de hornear y mezcle bien hasta que esté esponjoso

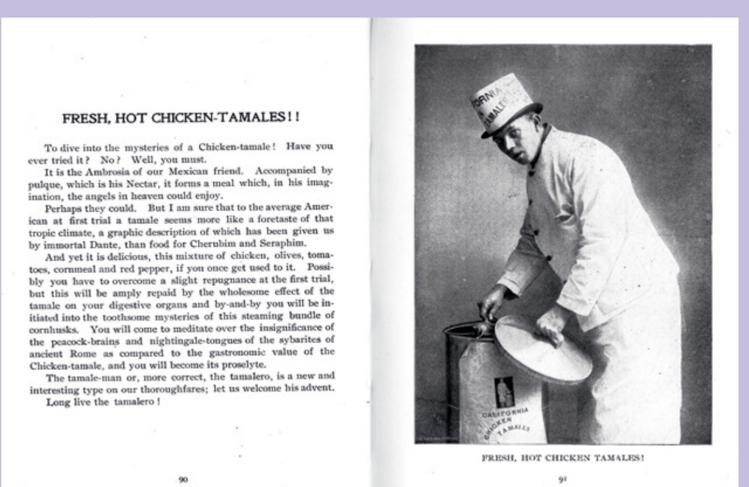
#### Para el relleno

7. Vacía la pasta de mole en una olla y déjala calentarse unos minutos
8. Agregue el caldo de pollo (o agua) poco a poco incorporando la pasta y el caldo hasta que se haya homogenizado toda la pasta con todo el caldo y se forme una salsa espesa
9. Agregue las sobras del pavo asado de Thanksgiving en trozos

#### Para armar los tamales

10. Retire las hojas de maíz del agua y escúrralas
11. Extienda un par de cucharadas de masa sobre un par de hojas de maíz, aproximadamente 1/4 o 1/2 pulgada de grosor, a formar una coma de masa
12. Coloque una cucharada del pavo con mole en el centro de la masa
13. Coloque otra cucharada de masa para cubrir el pavo
14. Doble las puntas y lados de las hojas de maíz hacia el centro hasta formar un paquetito bien cerrado
15. Coloque los tamales en una vaporera, verticalmente, cuidando que los paquetitos queden con las puntas de las hojas de tamal hacia arriba (OJO: nunca se ponen en horizontal porque no se cocerán).
16. Póngalos a cocer al vapor, a fuego medio, durante cuatro horas, rellenando cada tanto el agua de la vaporera con agua caliente.
17. Pruebe el tamal pasadas las 4 horas para ver si ya está cocido. Deje cocer un poco más si la masa aún le sabe a crudo.
18. Deje reposar una hora después de sacarlos del fuego
19. Desmenuce el tamal y disfrútelo. La salsa de arándanos, típica de Thanksgiving puede ser un complemento.

Mexicans from the Southwest and Mexico (the latter two migrations surged around 1916). These groups, all facing serious employment discrimination, likely found selling tamales preferable to many other job opportunities. Early on, Chicago's large-scale industrial food producers began canning and marketing



A vendor from the Chicken Tamale Company who came from San Francisco to Chicago for the World's Columbian Exposition in 1893. Photo and text from Street Types of Great American Cities (1896) by Sigmund Krausz, a Chicago photographer. "I was compelled for weeks and months to haunt the crowded thoroughfares, the fashionable avenues and the dingy alleys for such characters as seemed to suit my purpose; and when I had found them, persuasion, appeals to their vanity and very frequently pecuniary considerations had to be resorted to in order to induce them to visit a studio in the garb and equipments of their daily vocation."



## BEWARE THE IDEAS OF MARCH

(continued from p.8)

I became a chef in large part because it was a way for a troubled guy with low self esteem to feel accepted. Kitchens gave me a longed for sense of belonging. I then became a good chef by having my ego crushed by chefs who not only yelled and hurled belittling insults, but also plates of food that did not meet their exacting standards. I recall becoming a sous chef at Le Cirque in the mid-nineties and how much I looked forward to unleashing my anger and belittling the next wave of young culinarians. It's been a sad circle of chef life, and society itself has also served the role of enabler by exalting raging egomaniacs like Gordon Ramsey, and depressed geniuses like my hero, Anthony Bourdain. Not that many of us will be left with restaurants by the time Covid's said and done, but real change, as is the case with Black Lives Matters, Me Too, and LGBTQ rights, takes a long time and will be riddled with confounding failures along the way.

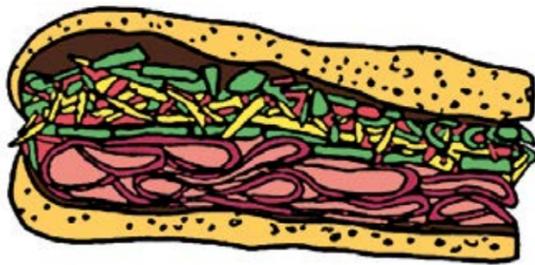
The collective suffering of watching wildfires, hurricanes, and politics raging out of control this year has done nothing but add to the overwhelm. Dwarfing it all, however, this summer my wife and I became full-time parents to my 11 and 13 year old girls. And though it'd be quite generous to say the circumstances were less than ideal and the challenges in front of us formidable, parenting my kids every day of the week has filled me with needed resolve and an immense sense of purpose.

Long ago I realized that cooking and serving others has been like a bridge over life's raging river of sadness and anger. And though more confounding than ever before, this remains true today. Whether it was on a food truck, in a Michelin-starred restaurant, or doing curbside takeout, being appreciated for cooking food well has always felt good when I've felt my worst. As with being a good father, being a good chef fills me with purpose.

My last chef left on his own volition in late July, so there's nobody left to playfully banter about the zombie apocalypse or state of the world while I do my prepwork. And though I am still making a lot less and working a lot harder than before, we're reopened (for now) and are once again serving our Fries and Frostee. And though there aren't nearly as many faces sitting in the seats as before, I'm once again turning around to see the smiles and surprise that washes over the faces when the hot and the cold meet in the milkshake glass. In fact, I appreciate the smiles much more than ever before. Apparently it took the ongoing tragedy of Covid along with an unusual intervention with a young chef - to gain this new perspective.

The Soothsayer's foreboding about the Ides of March played itself out in both the murder of Julius Caesar, and it's reincarnated itself once again in 2020. The election will be over by the time this is read, and I'd be shocked if our restaurant ambitions won't be kicked back to the curbside by then too. I recall hearing from somewhere that if there was one thing we humans have learned from history, it's that we don't learn from our history. So in an attempt to thwart that undeniable aspect of our species, this time we're not going to allow ourselves to be backstabbed by Covid once again. Akiko recently shared an epiphany about launching a new barbecue concept called Boxcar Barbecue. I for one am a believer in visions.

## Taking your SANDWHICH on the go?



1 Lay sandwich diagonally on the top left corner of the paper. Wrap that corner over the sandwich. Roll sandwich and paper diagonally towards the center.

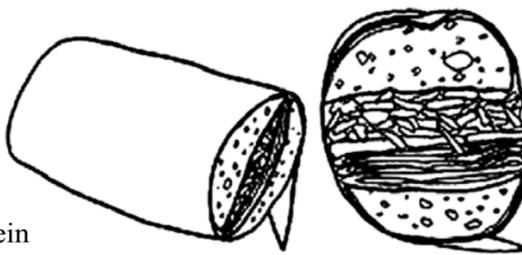


2 Fold the two adjacent ends of the paper over the sandwich towards the center.



3 Continue rolling the sandwich towards the final corner, and use a small piece of tape to secure it in place.

4



Cut sandwich in half crosswise and enjoy!

CS

by Cleo Schoeplein

## Word on the Street: The hand-lettered art of Southwest Signs

(continued from p.10)

**DK:** You know what our dilemma is, Eric, is they're ordering stuff for art, but the problem is when we do paper signs for grocery stores they are done in quantity - so it's hard to price them. And they get a little more specific on what they want, so it creates a dilemma for us - do we charge them triple the price we charge a grocery store with the time involved and what they're using it for? Take for instance, in San Francisco, a designer, they ordered signs from us and we charged them grocery store prices and it was like \$20 a sign and then we saw on the internet they were charging \$150 a sign.

**CW:** And that's the problem, with small businesses, I never want to cheat somebody. And not really appreciating myself as an artist, I have a grocery store mentality with signs and prices. I remember when Marz came in he goes, "You guys aren't charging enough."

**EM:** I think you could triple the prices for the hipsters, easy!

**CW:** The thing with artists like Alberto, they have a vision. Now it's my responsibility, am I getting their vision right? I'm always worried. I send out something for Alberto or those German guys that came in with the production down at the Cultural Center. I was tense the whole time, I kept asking Carol did we get an email, was it okay, was it bad? One thing I can't believe - in the last couple years, we've gotten so many requests, clients from New York, or California, Florida, where they say - I want a regular grocery store sign and I'm gonna frame it and put it up in my living room. Really? I don't know if I'd put that up in my living room! That's something I never thought in a million years would ever happen.

**EM:** That Cultural Center project was pretty large scale wasn't it? What was that experience like?

**CW:** Yeah, that was real big. I loved working with those guys, it was really neat. A couple of them came in from Germany and a friend from Italy came in and also Great Britain and Denmark. That was another case where I had to figure out - is this their vision? And then there was the issue of applying it - he gave me the specs on his design for the room and what he was going to build. In one way the lettering wasn't difficult, he kept to basic colors and I think it had a real impact. But the hard part for me was the different languages. Especially Arabic, although I was sort of proud of myself. I told him, "Listen, talk to somebody that speaks Arabic and give me feedback if I did it right." And he got back to me and said I did. There was Arabic, Portuguese, German, English and South African, Afrikaner. It was a daunting thing, you're dealing with people in another land and language, but it was sort of exciting - it is something I will always remember, I had a part in that.

**EM:** Wrapping up, to talk about some of the anxiety you feel about getting things right for folks. A lot of us come to you for your skill, how you do it. You're the maestro.

**CW:** I always respect creative types because I appreciate what they do. Maybe because what I do, on my end, it entails creativity. It's just that sometimes I don't have the self confidence I should have. Like Dan, he comes from a family of fantastic artists and Dan can draw something out so easy. But I really appreciate art. With Alberto, sometimes I shake my head, I don't know what I just did. There was something he did where he stretched it [the signs] out in this park area and I still didn't understand it, but I thought that's cool, that's actually cool!

CHICAGO FOODCULTURA CLARION 1  
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Editor in Chief: **Stephan Palmié**  
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### GUESTS

**David Sutton** is Professor of Anthropology at Southern Illinois University. He has conducted over 30 years of research on the island of Kalymnos, Greece, and continues to explore food and related topics in Greece and elsewhere.

**Phillip Foss** is the chef and co-owner of Michelin starred EL Ideas and the brand new concept, Boxcar Barbecue. In late 2019, he self-published *Life in EL*, a genre bending graphic novel with his cousin and comic artist, Timothy Foss.

**Timothy Foss** is an award-winning artist, illustrator, and author whose most recent project is the culinary graphic novel, *Life in EL*, that he wrote with his cousin, Chef Phillip Foss. Timothy lives in Minneapolis, Minnesota with his wife and two children, two cats, one dog, seven fish, and one-and-a-half cars.

**Laura Letinsky**, an artist and Professor in the Department of Visual Arts at the University of Chicago, works in photography, textiles, ceramics and words to explore aspects of the everyday and its portrayal through the still life, and its components.

**Eric May** is a Chicagoland-based parent, chef, and recovering artist. Eric is the founder and director of Roots & Culture, a nonprofit visual arts center in Chicago's Noble Square neighborhood.

**Peter Engler** worked at the University of Chicago carrying out basic research in mammalian genetics. A South Side resident for over forty years, he took an interest in the often-overlooked cuisine of the area. He has written and lectured on topics such as soul food, barbecue, and bean pie, as well local oddities such as the jim shoe, big baby, and mother in law.

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