

READER

The flu explainer Chicago didn't know it needed

By AIMEE ORTEGA 10



A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

I WAS RUNNING errands Saturday and distracted, so when I hit the Fullerton-Pulaski intersection it took me a moment to figure out what was going on. A man with a walker and several full shopping bags had apparently begun crossing the street a few feet outside of the crosswalk and then stopped. A man, in other words, with a host of complicated accoutrements was standing, for no discernible reason, in the middle of a chaotic intersection. Drivers often get aggressive at that corner. Some of the lanes are unmarked, so drivers tend to lose their sense of where a car might fit on the road. There's an occasional lag in a light change, and the horn-honking comes quick and voluminous. Yet there was a man, in the actual center of a turning lane on Fullerton. Just standing there.

My mind flashed on all the headlines I might read about this situation in all the cities I spend time in: New York. Phnom Penh. Vienna. Detroit. Tbilisi. The imagined headlines were gory and unkind, and in the made-up stories that ran beneath them the man always died a horrible violent death because he was standing, immobile, in a busy intersection.

Yet in front of me stood a man who wasn't moving because he had started crossing the street but then realized that he needed a moment to enjoy the sun on his face. The driver to my right noticed him, and pulled up alongside him and then turned, suddenly, stopping anyone from zipping too quickly down the only occasionally marked lane and hitting him. A driver headed in the opposite direction along Fullerton also pulled over, stalling in the center eastbound lane, creating an effective if temporary barrier to anyone taking the corner too quickly and failing to spot him. The turning driver in front of me could not move forward without running him over. So we all just waited.

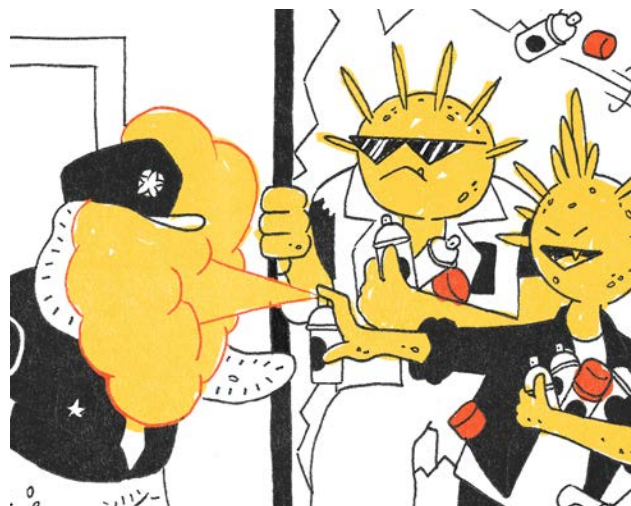
No one honked. No one yelled. No one crashed into anyone else. A couple moments passed. The sun shone. Then the man started moving again, continuing his path across the street. The eastbound driver eased away. The westbound driver straightened her vehicle and drove along. And when the intersection was clear, the driver in front of me turned south on Pulaski, and everyone went about their days as if nothing worthwhile had happened.

There will be no headlines for this story. But maybe there should be?

It reminded me of our cover story this week, a flu explainer for this amazing city by Aimee Ortega. Of course we have plenty of wrapping up to do this issue too, with year-end wrap-ups from Mike Sula, Ben Sachs, Leor Galil, and more. Another look back: We inadvertently left off an image credit in our last issue, when we featured a selection from Eduardo Kac's 1999 *Genesis* on our cover (courtesy Henrique Faria Fine Arts, New York).

And one note on the future: next week's flash fiction issue will cover two weeks, and will be really great, because it is written by you. It's a must-have! We don't want to tell you to start camping out by your neighborhood *Reader* boxes now, but we do promise to bring you hot chocolate if we spot you next to a tent holding an I LOVE FLASH FICTION sign.—ANNE ELIZABETH MOORE

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BY AIMEE ORTEGA 10

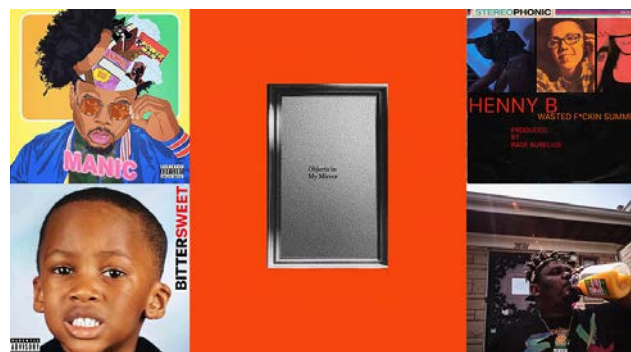


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ON THE COVER: ILLUSTRATION BY BOBBY SIMS. FOR MORE OF SIM'S WORK, GO TO WWW.BOBBSIMS.DESIGN.

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CITY LIFE

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SHOP WINDOW

Handmade for your feet

Designer Alexandria Wills keeps shoemaking alive.

"WHEN I MADE my first pair of shoes, it was strenuous. You had to hammer, and you're tired after that," says Alexandria Wills. "But then you put them on. They fit and they look great." Wills was hooked and wanted to salvage what she considers a lost art.

In April the Alexandria Wills Studio Showroom opened in a stretch of Fullerton Avenue in Logan Square near Black Oak tattoo studio, Burlington Bar, Park & Field restaurant, and Viking Ski Shop. Wills furnished her bright boutique with shoemaking equipment—hammers, swatches of leather, a large array of shoe lasts, and a sewing machine. On display are a collection of products made with non-toxic glue and the softest of leathers, sourced from a New York family-owned tannery that employs ethical practices. Signature pieces come in "hair-on-hide" leather, since the raw pattern makes each unique.

Shoes are usually made to order and range in price from \$150 to \$1,200. Besides footwear, Wills makes and sells fanny packs (\$50-\$65), bags (\$95-\$300), wallets (\$30-\$60), belts, keychains, jewelry, and even dog collars.

Twenty-three-year-old Wills learned how to create her own clothing from her grand-



mothers, both of whom had a knack for sewing. "It's always been natural for me to work with my hands," she says. While in high school she attended jewelry, sculpture, and ceramics classes—the latter in a South Korean boarding school far in the mountains. As a teenager Wills had a studio in the Flatiron Arts Building and sold her jewelry in craft shows all over Chicago. She then moved to New York to learn shoemaking. She bought equipment and produced hundreds and hundreds of shoes in a tiny apartment in Harlem. "I made plenty of shoes out on a fire escape," she remembers fondly.

After two years, Wills packed her belongings into a mini school bus and moved back to Chicago. "I realized that if I wanted to grow my business I needed a more affordable place," she says.

For \$350 customers can attend a shoemaking workshop at the studio. On a recent Saturday afternoon, anaesthesiologist and amateur cook Tristan Levey, 30, learned how to tailor a pair of shoes to fit his own feet. "I have high arches and I spend weeks breaking in shoes, which causes pain . . . It will be nice to avoid that," he says. "This is slow food for your feet."

—ISA GIALLORENZO

TRANSPORTATION

What a long, strange trip it's been

2018 was a big year for local transportation and 2019 should be even more eventful.

By JOHN GREENFIELD



The Lakeview Low-Line treatment at the Brown Line's Paulina station ■ JOHN GREENFIELD

Things in Washington, D.C., are nuttier than ever in the wake of the multiple Trump-related felony convictions earlier this month, but at least some reason prevailed this year in regards to federal transit policy.

Early on, the Trump administration announced its intention to eliminate federal funding for public transportation, and as of this summer the Federal Transit Administration was hoarding \$1.4 billion that Congress had appropriated for new transit projects. The stonewalling jeopardized 17 initiatives around the country, including plans to double-track the South Shore commuter line to create express service between Chicago and Michigan City, Indiana.

Thankfully it looks like Trump's war on transit is ending, since on November 28 the FTA announced it was releasing \$281 million to pay for five projects. More funding announcements are expected in January, when the Democrats gain control of the House.

With all the chaos in Washington, it's nice to live in a city where rational transportation policy has become more or less a given in recent years, and 2018 was no exception—plenty of good stuff happened for biking, walking, and transit this year.

That's not to say that there weren't some low points. Drivers had fatally struck six people on bikes on Chicago streets as of mid-December. In August cyclists were particularly shaken by the death of Angela Park, 39,

a spin instructor and triathlon coach who was run over by a truck driver in Greektown during the morning rush.

Fortunately, the city made significant progress on creating safer bike routes this year. The Chicago Department of Transportation installed 30 miles of new and upgraded bikeways, including 7.2 miles of “neighborhood greenway” side-street routes, 11 miles of buffered lanes and four miles of new or upgraded protected bike lanes. The bike-lane renovations included adding concrete curbs to protect riders on the popular Dearborn, Milwaukee, and Elston lanes.

Dockless bike-share debuted on the far south side in 2018, with most of the trips taking place in or near Beverly. The pilot ended in November, but locals gave it a thumbs-up, so hopefully dockless cycles will soon be deployed in a larger service area, perhaps the entire city.

Meanwhile, Car2go point-to-point car-sharing launched here in July, albeit in a limited area due to Not In My Back Yard resistance from some private car owners and aldermen. And dockless electric scooter companies jockeyed to set up shop here, lobbying in Springfield and doing demos at street fests.

The Divvy system weathered an existential crisis this summer, when many folks figured out how to steal bikes from stations. City emails the *Reader* obtained showed that the problem was due to a foolish decision to

move security hardware from the docks, but after our report came out, Divvy sped up the reinstallation of the parts, finishing in November, and the problem seems to be under control now. On the bright side, the system turned its highest-ever profit for the city this year, \$3.7 million.

Transportation-related equity concerns continued to be a major issue this year. This summer the Chicago Police Department admitted that officers have written exponentially more tickets for bike infractions in some communities of color compared to majority-white neighborhoods as a strategy to conduct searches for contraband.

And, in the wake of skyrocketing housing prices along the Bloomingdale Trail corridor, gentrification fueled by new parks and recreation amenities is a growing concern. Earlier this month, in advance of the construction of the Paseo trail in Little Village and Pilsen, City Council passed an ordinance doubling the amount of on-site affordable units required in new developments in the area. But some housing advocates say the law doesn't go far enough to prevent displacement.

There was progress on several transit station projects in 2018, including the completion of the \$203 million Wilson stop rehab, and major work on the \$280 million 95th Street Red Line station reconstruction, which is slated to wrap up by New Year's. Renovations of the Garfield Green and Jefferson Park stops are also moving along, and in April the

city broke ground on the new Damen Green Line station near the United Center.

On a smaller scale, I'm a fan of the colorful new canopy, freeform seating fixtures, planters, and mural that were recently installed at the Paulina Brown Line station as part of the Lakeview Low-Line project. This “place-making” initiative will eventually create a half-mile walkway under the tracks to the Southport stop.

But things aren't looking completely rosy for local transportation options. Due to the growing popularity of Uber and Lyft, Chicago-area public transportation ridership continued to slump this year—the Regional Transit Authority projected a 2.6 percent drop by the end of 2018 compared to 2017. The 31st Street bus narrowly escaped cancellation due to low ridership.

Meanwhile, the \$41 million Loop Link express bus corridor has resulted in only modest speed gains. The Active Transportation Alliance also put out bus service report cards for all 50 wards, and found that most parts of the city got mediocre or failing grades for speed and reliability. Clearly if we're going to stop the ridership bleeding, we need to implement robust time-saving features like camera-enforced bus lanes and prepaid boarding.

Several developments in recent weeks suggest next year is going to be a big one for transportation, especially as the mayoral race heats up and a more transit-friendly Democratic administration takes over in Springfield. In early December City Council moved to take over an abandoned rail line to create a transit route from the future Lincoln Yards development to the Loop.

Also this month, the CTA board approved contracts for construction of the \$2.1 billion Red and Purple Modernization project on the north side, and preliminary engineering for the \$2.3 billion Red Line extension on the south side. And, no longer seeking reelection, Mayor Rahm Emanuel recently called for taking the unpopular, but necessary, step of raising the state gas tax to fix Illinois' crumbling infrastructure and properly fund transit.

So buckle your seatbelts or strap on your bike helmets, folks. It looks like 2019 is going to be a wild ride. ■

John Greenfield edits the transportation news website [Streetsblog Chicago](#).
 @greenfieldjohn



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POLITICS

Trickle-down nonsense

Rahm's latest proposal would cut benefits to municipal employees to fund development projects.

By **BEN JORAVSKY**

Way back in the early clinic-and-school closing days of Rahm's mayoral reign, I had a friendly debate or two with a leftie I'll call Chris over whether our mayor truly believed all the trickle-down nonsense he was spewing, or whether he was only spewing it 'cause he thought it might advance his political career.

Not that one's necessarily better than the other.

Chris contended that Rahm was a true-believing neoliberal, who thought he was doing the world a favor by taking from the poor and middle class and giving to the rich.

I said, no, he's more of an opportunist, with his finger in the air, trying to figure which way the wind was blowing. And he'd switch to more

progressive economic views in a heartbeat, once he realized the times had changed.

Just as he's done with gay rights, immigration, and even the legalization of marijuana—if you recall, in 2014, Rahm declared he would always resist any attempt to legalize reefer.

Well, eight years later, I hate to say it, but—it looks as though Chris was right and I was wrong.

Certainly, the winds of change have moved most Democrats to the left on economic issues—even our billionaire governor-elect J.B. Pritzker advocates a progressive state income tax.

But Rahm? Well, his latest proposals would, if adopted, hit the poor and middle class of Chicago like a one-two combination from Mike Tyson.

Punch one—Mayor Rahm's proposing a constitutional amendment to eradicate the language in the state constitution that protects already retired pensioners from cuts. That way the city could cut millions and millions of dollars in benefits from thousands and thousands of retired cops, firefighters, teachers, and other former municipal employees.

Punch two—Mayor Rahm's rushing through the City Council an \$800 million (at least) TIF handout to help Sterling Bay underwrite its the Lincoln Yards development.

So basically he wants to take money from working- and middle-class retirees so he can shower it on upscale projects in rapidly gentrifying north side neighborhoods that probably don't need to be underwritten because—they're being built in rapidly gentrifying north side neighborhoods.

And don't kid yourself, people—that Lincoln Yards development will most definitely raise your property taxes. As I've explained before.

So when all is said and done, Rahm's not proposing to save you money in taxes. He's merely trying to spend more of that money on well-to-do developers by taking it from retirees.

OK, so Rahm doesn't come right out and say he's taking money from geezers so he can give it to gazillionaires. No, he's too tricky for that.

Instead, he acts as though he's this courageous reformer who's doing us all a big favor by going after fat-cat pensioners. Consider this quote from the first draft of his December 12 pension address to the City Council: "What kind of progressive, sustainable system guarantees retirees 3 percent annual compounded pay increase, when inflation has been at basically zero and current employees have at times been furloughed, laid off or received 1 percent raises? The mantle of progressivity must not just be more taxes on the wealthy, it must be more respect for our workers' paychecks."

That's rich. Protecting the well-to-do from higher taxes in the name of workers' paychecks. My advice to city workers—stay young forever so you never get old and have to retire.

Just so you know, state legislators more or less dealt with that 3 percent compound issue eight years ago when they passed—and then-governor Pat Quinn signed—a pension law that effectively created two tiers of pensioners.

Thanks to that law, employees who came on the workforce before 2011 get the 3 percent

compounded. And those who came on afterward get an uncompounded raise that's equal to half of the consumer price index for the year. Last year that would have been about a 1.5 percent increase.

Roughly a third of the city's workforce is in the second, less generous tier. And that number will rise through attrition as older workers retire and younger ones take their place.

As I said, this bill passed in 2010, a year before Rahm took office. For better or worse, he had nothing to do with it. And now here he is trying to pretend he's the only courageous politician in the state.

Now, I'm not going to say Rahm lied when he said we need a constitutional amendment to cut pensions, even though we don't need a constitutional amendment to cut pensions. As we saw in 2010.

Let's just say he was, oh, misleading the public by creating a non-existent boogiemanager, which he then knocked down. After which he congratulated himself for having the courage to tell the truth. Even though he wasn't telling the truth. And even though you know as well as I do that he wouldn't dare to propose snatching money from retirees if he were, in fact, actually running for reelection.

As opposed to heading off into the great blue yonder, where I wouldn't be surprised if he winds up as an investment banker—like he was before he went to Congress—using his contacts in government to win approval for deals like Lincoln Yards.

In fact, I wouldn't be surprised if Rahm winds up making a fortune giving speeches to various business associations where he tells them things like what he told the *Tribune* after his council speech: "To my friends in the progressive circles, don't just think you're going to tax the wealthy as a way to grow this economy. You're going to cut jobs doing that."

All right, folks, let's consider that in the context of his Lincoln Yards handout and his proposed pension cuts.

According to Rahm, it's an unsustainable waste to distribute tax dollars to thousands of retirees—many of whom live in the city. But it's job creation to give billions to a handful of developers and their unknown financial backers, wherever they live.

It doesn't get any more trickle-down than that. Just call him Rahmy Reagan. 🗑️

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ON CULTURE

'Tis the season

Tired of solicitations from big nonprofits? We have just the solution for you!

By **DEANNA ISAACS**

Ah, yes, the twinkling lights, the tinkling bells, the emails and the phone calls: 'tis the season to be hit up for donations. And hit up again. And again.

Like the holiday season itself, the annual big beg starts in the run-up to Thanksgiving.

How to deal with it if you don't have unlimited disposable funds? A dollar or five to everyone who asks is the solution of the truly generous. The real philanthropists among us are those riders on the el who reach into their own sometimes threadbare pockets and give to anyone desperate enough to work the cars.

I'm humbled by this when I see it, which, in this spectacular and screwed-up city, is amazingly often.

But let's say you're a little more stingy—er, discriminating—than that. One simple way to turn your despicable Scroogyness into rational and therefore acceptable behavior is to apply the handy-dandy executive pay test.

It works like this: if the nonprofit's top exec is making more in a year than you can hope to save over your lifetime, you, regretfully, and with the greatest respect for the cause, just say no.

That's what I did when I got the annual call from some nice undergrad at Northwestern University. I'm a Northwestern alum but, according to the *Chronicle of Higher Education's* latest listing, in 2016 NU president Morton Schapiro was paid \$1.6 million. That's down from the \$2.3 million he made in 2014, but not down enough to pass the executive pay test—at least, not as applied by this English major. I told the kid he might do better by dialing up graduates of NU's Kellogg School of Management. He told me I was underestimating the impact of small contributions.

He's right, of course: if I dig deep and give one hundred bucks, it'll only take 15,999 more people like me to cover Schapiro's salary in a down year.

You may be surprised to learn that those

big, prominent nonprofits soliciting your holiday donations, and maybe a place in your will, are very profitable for the administrators (and in some cases, the artists) in charge. How did that happen? Mostly because executive salaries are set by boards of directors, and these boards, especially at prestigious institutions, are comprised of the richest people those same administrators can round up, folks to whom a half-million dollars sounds like, if not pocket change, nothing more than a reasonable salary.

And in this brave new shame-free Trumpian world, it seems no one's embarrassed about taking a one-percenter salary out of donations wangled from the less fortunate.

Not that they broadcast their internal largess. Most organizations don't include financial details in the puff-piece annual reports they issue for public consumption. But nonprofit executive pay is public information and, thanks to groups like Guidestar and ProPublica, easy to access online.

It can also surface if employees are pissed off. When the Lyric Opera orchestra went on strike last fall amid belt-tightening by the organization, CEO (and also general director and president) Anthony Freud's compensation, which was \$781,000 in the fiscal year that ended June 30, 2016, became an issue. Lyric also paid its music director, Sir Andrew Davis, \$915,000 that year.

Meanwhile, over at the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, president Jeff Alexander made a little over half a million dollars in fiscal 2016, while internationally esteemed conductor, Riccardo Muti, who's listed as an independent contractor, was paid nearly \$1.5 million. (OK, in the classical world, Muti's the equivalent of, say, Cubs lefty pitcher Jon Lester. And next year Lester will make about \$25 million.)

A half-million was also the going rate in 2016 for MCA director Madeleine Grynsztejn, Goodman Theatre executive director Roche Schulfer, and Chicago Shakespeare



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NATHAN KEAY/MCA CHICAGO

Clockwise from top left: Sir Andrew Davis; Roche Schulfer; Madeleine Grynsztejn; Robert Falls

executive director Criss Henderson. Goodman artistic director Robert Falls made just under \$570,000, while Chicago Shakespeare artistic director Barbara Gaines received \$580,000. At the Art Institute in fiscal 2016 (which ended June 30, 2017), newly appointed president and director James Rondeau was paid \$593,895.

When "students and friends" recently pushed back against the announced sale of the Old Town School of Folk Music's longtime Lincoln Park home, the compensation of executive director Bau Graves became an issue. An online petition signed by thousands noted that,

"despite the lack of enrollment growth, and the School's financial difficulties . . . Graves's total compensation rose 52 percent from 2009 to 2016." Graves, who is currently on a leave of absence, was compensated \$254,871 in 2016.

Meanwhile, administrators at smaller organizations, especially arts organizations, are still scraping by, making financial sacrifices every day to do the work they believe in (hello, Theo Ubique, Project Onward). If they hit you up, fellow skinflints, you're on your own. 

 @Deannaisaacs

Costly Joint-Pain Injections Replaced By New \$2 Pill

New pill boosts the same lubricating joint fluid as expensive and painful injections - without using a needle. Users report dramatic relief from swelling, pain and stiffness without side effects and expense.

Health News Syndicate

HNS— A popular needle injection for people with joint pain is now available in an inexpensive nonprescription pill. The breakthrough came when researchers discovered a way to deliver the injected “relief molecule” through the digestive system.

Top US clinics have used these needle injections for years because they deliver powerful relief. Unfortunately, the shots are painful and expensive. They also only work on the joint being treated.

The new pill, called Synovia, delivers the same “relief molecule” as the injections. However, it has some impressive advantages. First, it’s inexpensive and nonprescription. Also, relief is delivered to every joint in the body because it enters the bloodstream through the digestive system.

This gives it the ability to reduce a much wider variety of pain. Users report greater flexibility and less stiffness in their knees. Hands and shoulders move pain-free for the first time in years. Even neck and lower back pain improve dramatically.

All this without spending over \$600 on needle injections and taking trips to the doctor every week.

The medical community is very excited about this new breakthrough. Dr. Jacob Moss says, “Synovia is a great option for those suffering from joint pain. Injections are usually a last resort

because of the pain and expense. However, Synovia should be taken at the first sign of discomfort.”

New Discovery

The needle injection procedure has been given to hundreds of thousands of patients over the last several years.

Doctors use the shots to boost a critical element of the joint called synovial fluid. This lubricating fluid is found between the cartilage and bones of every joint.

According to the firm’s head of R&D, Mike McNeill, “Researchers have been working for years to find a way to boost this fluid noninvasively. The problem was the molecule used in the injections was too large to absorb into the bloodstream.”

Top scientists conquered this obstacle by finding a smaller form of the same molecule. This new glucose form is easily absorbed by your stomach and intestines!

Now those who suffer from joint pain can get relief without painful injections. At less than \$2 per day, early users like Steve Young are impressed. He says, “I’ve tried more pills than I can count, without any luck. Synovia is different. My knees and hands haven’t felt this good in years!”

Impressive Clinical

Results

Leading clinics use injection therapy because it works. Recent clinical trials show the pill form also delivers major relief.

One example is a landmark

study out of Europe. In the study the active ingredient in Synovia was compared to a popular NSAID pain reliever. The goal was to see if it could reduce pain and swelling around the knee. The results were incredible!

After just 30 days, more than 8 out of 10 people who took Synovia’s active ingredient had NO swelling. However, only 2 out of 10 people who took the NSAID experienced reduced swelling.

The study also looked at cases of severe swelling. Amazingly, zero cases of severe swelling were detected in the group taking the active ingredient found in Synovia. This means it was 100% effective for the cases of severe swelling!

In contrast, 9 out of 10 people taking the NSAID still had severe swelling. McNeill points out, “The impressive thing about this study is the active ingredient wasn’t tested against a fake pill. It was up against one of the most popular NSAIDs people use every day. It’s easy to see why people in pain are excited to get relief without an injection.”

The New Way It Delivers Relief

Getting relief without injections has big advantages. The most obvious is avoiding being stuck by a large needle every week for 5 weeks.

Another downside of injections is the doctor can “miss”. The needle needs to be inserted into a precise spot in the joint to work. Otherwise, you risk the treatment being ineffective.

However, boosting your lubricating joint fluid by taking a pill delivers relief to all your joints, not just one.

There’s an additional reason the active ingredient in Synovia works so well – it nourishes the cartilage.

McNeill says, “This is vital because cartilage does not have blood vessels. The fluid in the joint serves two very important pain-relief roles: lubrication and



NO MORE NEEDLES: A popular needle injection pain-killer for joint pain is being replaced. The key molecule in these injections can now be delivered by taking a new low-cost pill called Synovia.

giving the cartilage the nutrients it needs.”

Approved By Leading Doctors

The new delivery system for this molecule has caught the attention of leading medical doctors.

“Needle injections for joint pain have been around for years because they work. Being able to get the same relief molecule through a pill is amazing. Injections may be a last resort, but I’d recommend Synovia at the first sign of pain,” said Dr. Marie Laguna.

Dr. Moss adds, “The research behind the active ingredient in Synovia is very exciting. This product is a great choice for those who haven’t had success with other joint pain treatments.”

110% Money Back Guarantee

Amazing feedback from users of Synovia has generated a wave of confidence at the company. So much so that they now offer Synovia with a 110% money back guarantee.

The company’s president, Michael Kenneth says, “We’ve seen how well it works. Now we want to remove any risk for those who might think Synovia sounds too

good to be true.”

Simply take the pill exactly as directed. You must enjoy fast acting relief. Otherwise, return the product as directed and you’ll receive 100% of your money back plus an extra 10%.

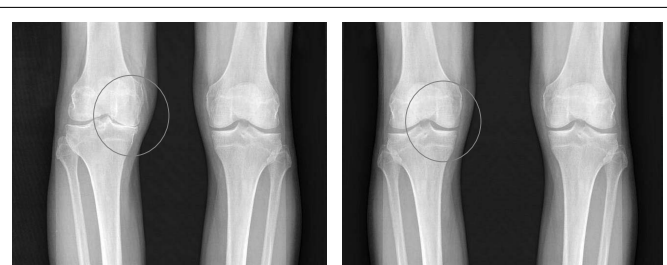
How To Get Synovia

Today marks the official release of Synovia in Illinois. As such, the company is offering a special discounted supply to everyone who calls within the next 48 hours.

A Regional Order Hotline has been set up for local readers to call. This is the only way to try Synovia with their “110% money back” guarantee.

Starting at 6:00 am today the order hotline will be open for 48 hours. All you have to do is call **TOLL FREE 1-888-748-4136** and provide the operator with the special discount approval code: SYN18. The company will do the rest.

Current supplies of Synovia are limited, and callers that don’t get through to the order hotline within the next 48 hours may have to pay more and wait until more inventory is produced. This could take as long as 6 weeks.



UNHEALTHY: No lubricating fluid or cartilage leads to painful bone-on-bone rubbing.

HEALTHY: Synovia’s active ingredients lubricate joints and nourish cartilage

THESE STATEMENTS HAVE NOT BEEN EVALUATED BY THE FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION. THIS PRODUCT IS NOT INTENDED TO DIAGNOSE, TREAT, CURE OR PREVENT ANY DISEASE. ALL DOCTORS MENTIONED ARE REMUNERATED FOR THEIR SERVICE. ALL CLINICAL STUDIES WERE INDEPENDENTLY CONDUCTED AND WERE NOT SPONSORED BY MAKERS OF SYNOVIA.

The Chicago flu explainer

Health is a civic undertaking.

By AIMEE ORTEGA

Illustrations BY BOBBY SIMS



You're hopefully not going to die of the flu this year. But the truth is that you could. During the 2017-2018 flu season, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported an estimated 80,000 deaths and 900,000 hospitalizations due to infection with the virus—a jump in severity over previous seasons. The last update the City of Chicago Department of Public Health released on May 25, 2018, reported 582 influenza-associated hospitalizations and 38 deaths for the entirety of the 2017-2018 flu season; this represents a 50 percent jump over the previous year's numbers, which had remained fairly consistent for about four years in a row. These numbers don't account for

individuals who get the flu but don't require hospitalization, which go untallied. As of November 30, the Chicago Influenza Surveillance Activity Report shows hospitalizations are up this year: six for the current season in comparison to the four that had been reported by this time last year on December 1, 2017.

Health is easy to take for granted. The experience of a burning throat, stuffy nose, lack of appetite, clogged ears, fatigue, fever, aching body, and chills is so dissonant from the normal ease of existence (normal for some of us, anyway) that it quickly becomes clear that something is wrong. An illness of some kind has taken root in the body. Adding insult to the injury of physical misery is the frustration of feeling helpless, weakened, and unable to control the process of getting better. In most illnesses, symptoms fade after two to five days, but sometimes the severity of the illness and unresolved symptoms necessitate treatment from health care professionals. The influenza virus, commonly referred to as the flu, can cause symptoms that last anywhere from three to seven days, but fatigue and cough can linger for up to two weeks. Declarations such as "Bundle up. You don't want to catch a cold," or "You'll get sick if you leave the house with wet hair" are often heard as temperatures begin to drop, but illness isn't caused by exposure to cold weather. Cold, dry environments often lead to cracks in the skin, which is the body's primary protective barrier. Being indoors in closer proximity to others than during other times of the year simply allows for more opportunities for transmission. A recent paper published by Dr. Ishanu Chattopadhyay, a research scientist at the University of Chicago, compiled large datasets about the different factors that trigger flu outbreaks and a decade's worth of influenza data to show that multiple factors, including geospatial patterns, travel, weather, and adaptation of the influenza virus, all contribute to the spread. Flu activity tends to start in November and peaks between December and February.

And that means we're just entering flu season in Chicago. Season's greetings!

The Virus and the City

Once the virus that causes the flu enters the body, it begins to multiply and cause damage to the respiratory system (nose, throat, and lungs). Children, pregnant women, adults over 65, and patients with compromised or weakened immune systems are all at risk of developing secondary complications from the flu, as damage done to

the body by the flu virus can lead to increased risk of additional illness, and in severe cases death. Infectious agents, and others that cause damage to cells, are referred to as pathogens. Viruses are one of five classes of pathogens, along with bacteria, protozoa, fungi, and prions. It can be hard to believe that a pathogen isn't innately bad when it's causing physical discomfort and damage to your body, but pathogens are simply doing what living things do—looking for a nutrient-rich environment that will allow them to survive and reproduce. The human body is the home some of these pathogens like best.

In a way, the body can be thought of as a city like Chicago. Just as a body has organs and tissues, a city has distinct neighborhoods. Within the organs and tissues are cells, and within our neighborhoods are people. Cells are the individual citizens of our bodies, and they contribute to the economy and the daily function of our collective system. Microorganisms can be thought of as people not originally from here, perhaps from Appleton or New York, who have moved to Chicago and adapted to the icy cold winters, chosen a sports team, familiarized themselves with widespread segregation and inequitable distribution of resources, and know all about the repeated history of fiscal mismanagement. Microorganisms, like people, have preferences and specific areas they prefer to make their homes, although they prefer the skin, mouth, large intestine, or vagina over, say, Logan Square. Those that can establish residence without causing infection or harm are considered normal flora, or microbiota. These organisms become part of the community and contribute to the overall health of the body in the same way that people who move to and establish residence in Chicago do.

So-called normal flora exist peacefully within the body, but when placed under the right conditions or brought to the right location, some members of the flora—called "opportunistic pathogens" or "facultative pathogens"—are capable of causing disease. If there's a disruption to the normal flora by use of an antibiotic, if the body's response to warding off illness has been compromised, or if the microorganisms manage to enter a part of the body that's normally sterile via an accident, injury, or other illness, the pathogens continue to grow and replicate without immediately being discovered, causing harm along the way. A common example of this occurs when patients take antibiotics to treat an infection, which kills off much of the normal flora, allowing for overgrowth by the opportu-

These pathogens may simply be trying to live, but the body is too and it works hard to prevent pathogens from gaining ground. Similarly, the residents of the city can fight back against gentrification.

nistic pathogen *Clostridium difficile*, or *C. diff*, which can cause severe diarrhea, inflammation of the colon, organ failure, or death.

In contrast to normal flora, pathogens consistently cause responses within the body that can lead to infection, illness, or disease. Pathogens can be compared to anything that causes harm to the city or the citizens that live here, whether that be other individuals, politicians, real estate developers, or gentrifiers. Dedicated pathogens (as opposed to opportunistic pathogens) don't require a compromised host and can cause disease in a healthy individual. Dedicated pathogens, like viruses, don't have their own cell replication machinery, so the only way they can replicate is by hijacking the cell replication machinery in the body's cells. Since these obligate pathogens can't multiply any other way than by infecting new hosts, most of them need to cause disease symptoms that help them move to a new host. For example, coughing, sneezing, and respiratory droplets carry the flu virus to people and exposed surfaces within a six-foot radius, enabling the virus to spread. Urban renewal projects like the elevated running and biking trail known as the 606, which cuts through Humboldt Park, or the planned Obama Presidential Center in Jackson Park are meant to revitalize neighborhoods but often displace residents and contribute to gentrification. Increased spread and transmission can occur when real estate developers looking to profit quickly come into gentrifying neighborhoods, build luxury condos, and then move on to the next profitable neighborhood.

Opportunistic pathogens, on the other hand, can live outside the human body and normally replicate in environmental reservoirs like water or soil, but they can cause disease if they encounter a host. For a pathogen to cause disease and then spread, it first has to get into or on the body, find the site that is most compatible to its growth, avoid elimination by the body, replicate using host cells, and then exit and get to a new host. These pathogens may simply be trying to live, but the body is too and it works hard to prevent pathogens from gaining ground. Similarly, the residents of the city can fight back against gentrification. On October 11, 2017, Chicago's Affordable Requirements Ordinance was amended to include pilot programs in two rapidly gentrifying areas of the city—the Milwaukee corridor and the near north/near west area, which includes several neighborhoods. Previously, developments that included 10 or more units were required to price 10 percent of them at affordable rates; alternatively, developers could pay an ➔

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“in-lieu fee” to the city’s Affordable Housing Opportunity Fund. The new pilot programs require 20 percent of units to be priced to accommodate low-to-moderate income residents and there is no “in-lieu fee” alternative. This disrupted plans by Omni Group, a Canadian development company, to build 1,000 residential units on Goose Island.

The Community Organizations of the Body

The word “immune” can be traced back to Latin and French roots meaning exempt from and privileged from attack. The immune system, and the protection it confers, offers exactly that. There are two branches of the immune system: innate immunity, comprising nonspecific responses, and adaptive immunity, which can learn to recognize and respond to a specific pathogen. Upon infection, these two branches work in conjunction with one another to clear pathogens. Overall there are three lines of defense, the first two by the innate response, and the third by the adaptive response.

One of the most important ways the body can protect itself is by initially preventing a pathogen from entering the body. Within the innate immune system, there are two levels of nonspecific responses that work to prevent entry of anything unrecognized, neutralize anything that may get in, and alert the adaptive immune system to mount a defense. The first line of defense of the innate immune response is a combination of both physical and chemical barriers that block pathogens from establishing residence. Pathogens need to get in the body, and different types of surfaces provide different routes of entry for different organisms. Some pathogens can gain entry by physical contact with the body’s external surfaces, or through wounds or insect bites. Similar challenges confront drivers around the city who are faced with potholes, poorly marked lanes, bridge closures, and seemingly endless construction. These add detours and frustration to the ease with which we navigate. We may not be pathogens, but the city doesn’t always make it easy for us to get around in it.

The body’s internal surfaces can be harder to reach, but they can be exposed to pathogens when air is inhaled into the respiratory system, when food or drink enters the gastrointestinal tract, and when sex partners make

physical contact, exposing the reproductive tract. Recent contamination of Romaine lettuce with a pathogenic strain of *E. coli* is an example of how foods can contain pathogens that can be introduced into the gastrointestinal tract where they can cause illness.

The skin is composed of epithelial cells covered by an outer thick layer of epidermis cells, which both shed—themselves and pathogens—and repair quickly to maintain this physical barrier. The cells sit tightly next to one another, making it hard for pathogens to penetrate past into deeper tissues of the body. Imagine an incredibly packed CTA train whose occupants collectively sigh when the conductor asks everyone to make a little bit more room. Internal surfaces are also composed of epithelial cells, but these secrete mucus that can trap microorganisms. Fine hairs called cilia work to move trapped organisms out of the body in the same way city street sweepers clean up accumulated garbage and debris. Wounds and burns are interruptions in the skin’s physical barrier that often allow pathogens to enter. When pathogens do enter the mucosal internal surfaces, however, there are still defense mechanisms. Hairs within the nose, vomiting, defecation, and urination are all methods the body uses to clear and expel pathogens. Hand washing is one of the most valuable tools we have to prevent pathogens from entering the body, and the CDC reports reduction of respiratory illness by 16 to 21 percent if hand washing is done correctly.

The body also uses chemical barriers that keep pathogens from growing. These include enzymes in tears and saliva that kill bacteria, stomach acid that inhibits bacterial growth, sebum on the skin that acts as a barrier, and the normal flora that can starve out pathogens by competing for nutrients.

But pathogens do often gain entry, and a main component of our immune system’s ability to clear harmful microorganisms comes from the ability to discern between self and nonself. The immune system can recognize cells, proteins, and other molecules that our body has made as “self,” and it also can recognize foreign proteins, particles, DNA, toxins, and chemicals from pathogens as “nonself” and can then target and induce an immune response against them. In Chicago, a city of 2.7 million, we don’t all agree on what’s harmful or nonself, but crimes, car accidents, and mass shootings are things we all recognize as harmful. Sometimes the body loses the ability to discern between self and nonself, which results in autoimmune diseases: the body attacks itself instead of protecting it. Similarly,

the Chicago Police Department is supposed to serve and keep the residents of the city safe, but improper police training and consistent lack of accountability around conduct have resulted in repeated violations of justice and abuse through illegal searches, excessive force, and racial profiling and biases, leading to harm and even death of the city’s residents.

If the first line of defense fails to keep the pathogen out of the body and the pathogen gets in, the second line of defense responds. At this stage, the body’s cells work to clear and neutralize an infection while recruiting help. The second line of defense can be compared to an ordinary person’s general awareness and social training instilled within us since childhood. If you’re at North Avenue beach on a hot summer day and you see a child who looks lost and is crying, most people would try and find the adult the child came with or alert an authority who has more capacity and training to deal with the situation. Now imagine an

organization devoted to ensuring the overall health of a community—No Cop Academy, for example, or Black Lives Matter Chicago—keeping a watchful eye on incursions into community vitality with no central command unit and no established funding sources, and you’re beginning to have a sense of how the innate immune system works.

Let’s get more detailed. Cells within both the innate and adaptive immune system use molecules called cytokines to talk and signal to one another. Where we would use phone calls or text messages to communicate across a distance, immune cells use cytokines. For example, an infected host cell will send out a chemokine—one type of cytokine—to alert the immune system that something’s wrong, to let the neighboring cells know, and to call, or text, for help. This type of signaling occurs frequently in the second and third lines of the immune response and results in quick response to threat or injury. For example, inflammation



and fever can be quickly activated by the second line of defense to protect the body.

Similarly, Chicago is divided into wards that are represented by aldermen who are elected to represent the interests of the ward's residents. During ward meetings, residents voice complaints and learn about benefits and city functions that exist within the ward. The Chicago City Council is made up of the aldermen, who have legislative powers and the ability to enact change. Cellular responses can be thought of as acts of legislation that are coming from certain types of white blood cells, or aldermen, that have the ability to respond to pathogens. Phagocytes are a class of white blood cell that circulate in the blood and can recognize, ingest, and destroy pathogens. Monocytes first circulate in the blood and then move into tissues of the body, like the lungs, gut, and connective tissues, where they mature into cells called macrophages. Macrophages and monocytes work similarly to phagocytes, but they can also activate cells that help get the adaptive immune response going. Community groups within wards like the Pilsen Land Use Committee (PLUC), composed of neighborhood representatives, use specific knowledge of their neighborhood to help combat gentrification. With the help of their current alderman Daniel Solis, who abides by an unwritten mandate that 21 percent of units in new developments meet affordable housing requirements, PLUC also has a say in zoning developments, which require their approval before Alderman Solis will move forward. (This might be a good moment to point out that aldermanic elections are coming up on February 26, 2019.)

Inflammation increases blood flow to areas of infection, which allows more white blood cells to arrive and respond to the signals sent by the macrophages. The Pride Parade, Air and Water Show, Bears games, and other large city events cause an influx of people to one area that stresses the area's capacity. Increased police presence, street closures, and additional buses or trains help the city respond to the crowd. In addition to fighting pathogens, the swelling and heat caused by inflammation can cause discomfort, and overwhelming responses in the case of infection or autoimmune disorders can lead to chronic pain.

Previously, it's been thought that children are more susceptible to the flu and other viral infections because they are not yet able to mount the thorough innate immune response that healthy adults are capable of. A paper published in April by researchers at Lurie Children's Hospital and Northwestern Univer-

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sity's Feinberg School of Medicine reported findings that overwhelming inflammatory and monocyte responses were responsible for increased lung damage in juvenile mice infected with the flu in comparison to adult mice. These components of the innate immune system help fight infection, but they also cause a lot of the symptoms experienced during infection and sometimes the response harms the body.

I was fascinated with these findings and reached out to lead author, Dr. Bria Coates, via email. "Our bodies do this very well with most pathogens," she wrote, "but in certain circumstances, being in the wrong place at the wrong time can lead to a dysregulated inflammatory response that is much more harmful than the infection itself." While further studies will need to check whether the same thing happens in humans, the data here indicates that adult immune systems are better equipped to respond to flu infections in a healthy manner.

As uncomfortable as symptoms of illness are, they are a sign that the body's immune system is working. In flu infections, it's often the overwhelming, unhealthy response of the body to the infection that causes intensity of symptoms in children and adults. I was impressed by Dr. Coates's ability to explain complicated concepts, which likely comes in handy in her work at the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit at Lurie Children's Hospital. I asked her why she loves studying the flu and the immune system, and she responded, "One of the most interesting and challenging things about studying influenza and the immune system is finding the balance that will control infection but not harm the host."

The general response that the innate immune system provides is not enough to clear most infections—sometimes the city's snow removal efforts don't actually let you get to work or school—and this is where the adaptive immune system comes in. The third line of defense works to mount a targeted response to a specific pathogen, which helps the innate immune system clear the infection and prevent disease. At the same time, the adaptive immune system develops a long-lasting memory of that specific pathogen, so the next time it shows up, it can be quickly targeted and blocked. This process is called natural active immunity. The third line of defense can be thought of as trained first responders—the police and fire departments, paramedics, social workers, crisis therapists, and doctors. These people have developed the skills to identify and deal with a variety of accidents, conflicts, or emergency situations through training, certification, and licensure pro-

grams. The ability to recognize erratic behavior or respond to alerts from the community helps first responders know where they need to be and what to anticipate. The two main first responders within the adaptive immune system are the T lymphocytes, or T cells, and B lymphocytes, or B cells.

The ability to recognize and respond to specific pathogens builds on the immune system's ability to distinguish between self and nonself. Cells within the adaptive immune system can recognize specific portions of the foreign cells, proteins, molecules, and DNA called antigens. If a B cell has a receptor on its surface that fits with the shape of an antigen on the surface of a pathogen, it will recognize the pathogen as nonself. After identifying nonself components, certain cell types within the adaptive and innate immune system, called antigen-presenting cells (APCs), process the nonself components down and separate the antigenic portion unique to the organism or virus encountered. Think of this as a nurse triaging a patient and identifying what's wrong, determining the course of action, and notifying the doctor who is able to resolve the situation. The antigen is the piece of information that the APCs present to the T cells, and this alerts the T cells to respond.

Once activated, T cells send signals that call for backup: the body clones many identical T cells that are made to specifically recognize, target, and destroy that unique antigen. This process can be compared to using X-rays and laboratory tests to confirm the presence of a malignant tumor, and the establishment of a multidisciplinary cancer team to collectively plan the best course of action, for example, surgery followed by chemotherapy. These T cells have been given the description of the pathogen and are only able to bind to antigens or pathogens whose fingerprint is an exact match for the one they're trying to find. This process is called cell-mediated immunity. Separately, that same signal that gets sent out by the T cell once it's activated stimulates and activates B cells to respond if they haven't already been activated by directly encountering the pathogen. B cells can be considered another component of the T-cell/cancer treatment team. In addition to the doctors and specialized care team, a supportive care team composed of counselors, nutritionists, and rehabilitation therapists works with patients to support long-term health. Activation of B cells results in the production of clone B cells, called plasma cells, that produce antibodies that will specifically bind to the antigen of the encountered pathogen and clear them ➔

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from the body. Analogously, your therapist may recognize certain patterns they guide you to focus on to help you respond to them in a different way so that those issues no longer affect you. It takes a few days for this response to occur, which is why the innate immune system's quicker initial response is so important. Additionally, after the infection has cleared, some of these activated B cells remain in circulation. If they encounter the antigen again in the future, the circulating B cells can produce antibodies and a specific response in one to two days. If you get emotionally triggered, you draw on the skills learned in therapy or reach back out to your therapist to get more help, and over time your capacity to handle hard issues increases as you heal. Similarly, the adaptive immune response and its encounter with pathogens leads to memory and immune protection.

To protect the body, a fully functioning immune system needs both the innate and adaptive immune systems. The immune system can be weakened or damaged by malnutrition, genetic inheritance, drugs, radiation exposure, infection with a number of viruses, cancer, and old age. This can result in more frequent infections, inability to clear infection, inability to respond to bacterial or viral infection, inability to make an immune memory response and deliver long-lasting protection, and death.

The immune responses described above show the natural process of how the body fights an infection and gains long-term protection in the process. Active immunity can also be induced artificially with vaccines. Vaccines can generate long-term protection without exposure to dangerous forms of the pathogen that can cause illness or disease. Vaccines are developed and delivered in a number of ways, but two common examples are live attenuated vaccines and inactivated vaccines. Live attenuated vaccines contain weakened versions of the pathogen. The weakened pathogen cannot replicate or cause disease, but it still has the same nonself components as the full-strength version of that pathogen, so the immune system can learn to recognize it and form a response before it comes into contact with the full-strength pathogen. This gives the body a jump start, saving the time the immune system would need to learn to recognize the pathogen. Inactivated vaccines, on the other hand, contain antigenic components of completely destroyed pathogens. There is no chance of getting sick from the pathogen delivered in an inactivated vaccine, but you still develop an immunity.

Both artificial and natural active immu-


nity require the immune system to function correctly in order for an immune response to develop because even with a vaccine, the components of the innate and adaptive immune systems need to respond to the antigenic components being delivered. For people who are immunodeficient or whose immune systems are still developing, passive forms of natural and artificial immunity exist, but they are short lasting, providing immediate protection only. The most common form of natural passive immunity is the delivery of maternal antibodies to a newborn through breast milk. Preformed antibodies can also be transfused to patients to work proactively to prevent illness when risk of infection is high. If you're immunocompromised or have never received a tetanus vaccine and you step on a rusty nail, there's a high risk of developing the life-threatening illness. Because of the time it takes for an immune response to develop, there's no immediate benefit to being given the tetanus vaccine at this moment. Instead, tetanus immune globulin (TIG), preformed antibodies to tetanus, are collected from people who have developed antibody protection and can be pooled together, and after transfusion provide immediate protection. There is also herd immunity. Those who are immunodeficient and unable to take vaccines can benefit

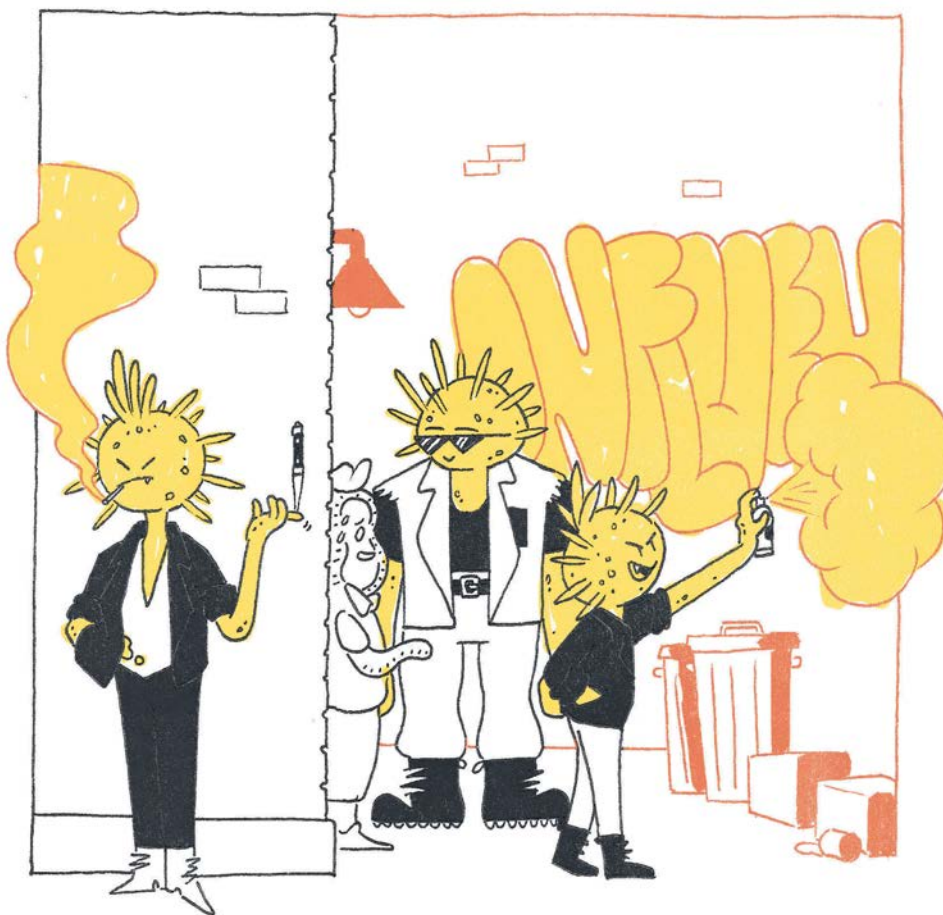
from others getting vaccinated. The more people have artificial active immunity from the flu vaccine, the fewer hosts are available for the virus; this means fewer people coughing and sneezing—fewer opportunities for transmission. When enough people are vaccinated within a community, a pathogen has no chance of establishing infection and this prevents members of the community who are immunocompromised or whose immune systems may be underdeveloped from getting sick. Herd immunity is essential to protecting the vulnerable members of our society, who are in danger when others do not get vaccinated against preventable diseases.

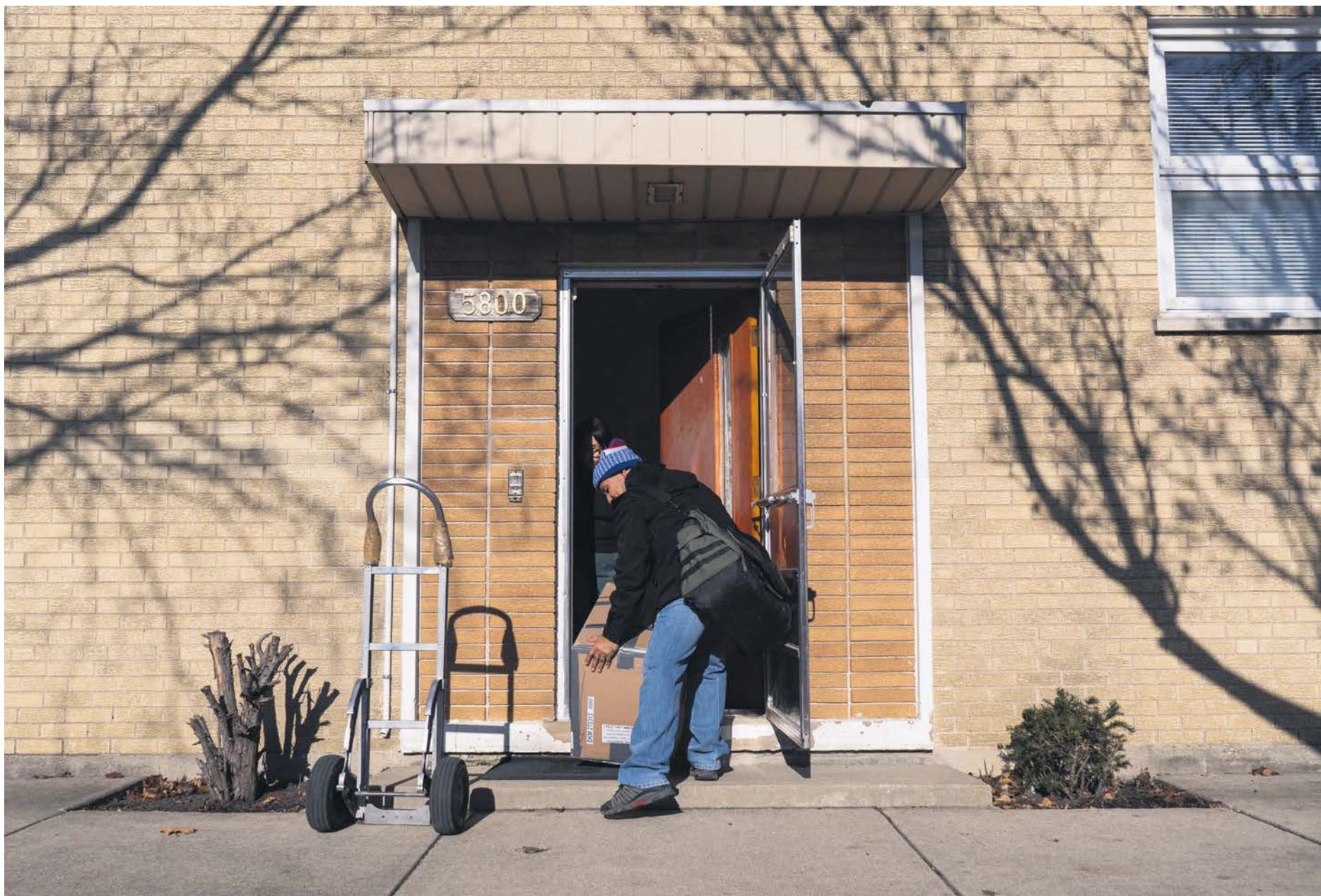
One challenge to the logic of flu vaccination stems from the fact that viruses frequently mutate to avoid recognition, to increase their ability to cause disease and transmission, or in response to selective pressures. A virus, for example, can pick up new pathogenic elements by exchanging genetic material with other strains it encounters. Most vaccines contain multiple strains of the flu for the body to respond to, but delivery of too many antigens at a time can cause weaker immune memory responses. Alternatively, you could develop a robust immune response but by the time the flu gets to you the antigens of the virus no longer match the antigens your body is prepared

to fight. Evidence shows, however, that even partial and weakened responses, in addition to cross-protective responses from previous years' flu immunizations, can provide protection that weakens the severity of infection. This means vaccinations tend to keep you healthier even when they "don't work"; they also keep your fellow Chicagoans healthier. Remember, hand washing is also an option!

The Chicago Department of Public Health offers walk-in immunization clinics to residents, as well as a mobile immunization CareVan that provides immunizations at no out-of-pocket cost to uninsured, underinsured children and those on Medicaid or CHIP up to 18 years of age. The locations of the clinics and the schedule of the CareVan can be found at the Chicago Department of Public Health website. The Department can also be reached at 312-747-9884, and for information about mobile services you can call the CareVan coordinator at 312-746-6181. To search for other locations offering walk-in flu shots through the city, visit <https://chicagoflushots.org>, where you'll find an interactive map that provides addresses, hours, and details for sites offering the shot.

We don't have control over the influenza virus, but we can control how we prepare for it. Why don't we all do what we can to keep ourselves and each other healthy? 





Mitch Villaseñor picks up a balikbayan box. Boxes will then be loaded onto a container, driven to California, and shipped to the Philippines.

The balikbayan tradition

Gift boxes sent back to the Philippines remind loved ones that they have not been forgotten.

Story and photos BY PAT NABONG

As a kid living in Laguna, a province in the Philippines, Janette Santos always looked forward to the large cardboard boxes that her aunt sent from Chicago. These boxes were big, sometimes even bigger than moving boxes, and typically arrived at her doorstep during the holidays. As she opened them, she caught a whiff of a familiar detergent smell that Filipinos who have received boxes from the U.S. describe as the scent of “imported goods” or of “America.” Packed to the brim with household supplies, small toys, chocolates, and canned goods, there was at least one item for every member of her immediate and extended family.

“[My aunt] makes sure at least once a year, everyone will receive something like at ➔



Jing Panlilio and her daughter Julianne check whether Julianne's dress still fits her. Jing usually sends her kids' old clothes back to her sister in the Philippines.

Panlilio's balikbayan box contains old clothes, canned goods from Aldi, and some books.

Janette Santos packs clothes into a balikbayan box.



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least a piece of chocolate,” said Santos, 56. “When it comes from [the U.S.], it’s different. . . . It’s the thought that it comes from the U.S. that [makes it feel] special.”

Almost every Filipino knows the tradition of sending *balikbayan* boxes, which translates to “coming back to your country.” Contents range from the everyday (like bath and cleaning supplies) to the oddball (like muriatic acid, cook-

ing oil, and tiles). The boxes also typically hold clothes from discount stores, cans of Vienna sausage, bags of chocolate, and small toys that people collect over several months. Once a box is full, a shipping company picks it up at the customer’s doorstep and leaves another empty box to fill up.

The balikbayan boxes that Santos received from her aunt left an impression on her. “I guess in America they have a lot of nice

things,” said Santos, who migrated to the U.S. in 1978. “I said, ‘Someday maybe we should go to America, then you will just get it anytime you want.’”

Now that Santos lives in Wilmette, she and her husband, Nate, send balikbayan boxes four times a year to their relatives, house helpers, Santos’s former high school, and their church. They ship dozens of books, used clothes, shoes, snacks, and anything lying around the

house that they no longer use.

“We have a lot of wasting here,” said Santos. “Somebody else’s waste is somebody else’s treasures. Over there, people are, you know, appreciative of things. Like for us they don’t like it anymore, and there they will really [be] so happy to get it.”

Nate and Janette Santos know that stores back home are filled with American products. But they know that the act of sending some-



A balikbayan box sits in Janette and Nate Santos's living room. Since collecting goods and filling up balikbayan boxes take time, balikbayan boxes are ever-present items in many Filipino households.



Worried that liquid might spill, Jing Panlilio tapes the caps of shampoo bottles before packing them into the balikbayan box. Some say that the process of packing a box is in itself an expression of love.

Victor Velasco rummages through Pamela Villa del Rey's balikbayan box. The two moved to the U.S. on a work assignment for the same company many years ago.

thing from the U.S. sends a different message.

"We Filipinos still didn't get rid of this colonial mentality," said Nate. The Philippines was colonized by the U.S. from 1898-1941 and 1944-1946. Many academics argue that it has left a mark in the Filipino psyche. "American product, it must be good."

Since no weight limit is imposed, most balikbayan boxes weigh 70 to 100 pounds, according to Forex Cargo, one of the

Filipino-owned balikbayan box shipping companies in Illinois that started as a money remittance service. Balikbayan box shipping companies charge a fixed price that ranges from \$60 to \$110 depending on which region in the Philippines it is being shipped to.

The tradition has its roots in Operation Balikbayan, a government program that was instituted in the 1970s by then-dictator Ferdinand Marcos after he declared martial law in

the Philippines. The program offered privileges to Filipinos overseas who were visiting the Philippines. During a time of political unrest, it aimed to convince Filipinos abroad to visit and "improve public opinion in the United States about the loss of democracy and the beginnings of martial law in the Philippines," according to research by Cristina Szanton Blanc in the *Philippine Sociological Review*. Those who came back to the Philippines were

allowed two tax-free boxes that contained personal effects and *pasalubong* (gifts from people coming home). From there, "special companies have set up businesses in the United States and in Europe to facilitate regular unaccompanied shipments to relatives in the Philippines," wrote Blanc.

Today, it is an entire industry. Forex Cargo alone sends 1,200 boxes every month, according to their estimates. During September ➔



When Mitch Villaseñor picks up full balikbayan boxes, he drops off empty boxes. Packing boxes is a continuous process.

Villaseñor carries a balikbayan box out of a house. The heaviest box he's carried weighed 400 pounds, he said.



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and October, their shipments double or triple, since delivery takes 45 to 60 days and people want their goods to arrive in time for Christmas.


The boxes are also a tradition that connects the Filipino diaspora: In 2013, over 10.2 million Filipinos lived and worked abroad and 3.5 million of them were in the U.S., according to the most recent available data from the Commission on Filipinos Overseas, a Philippines government agency.

To many Filipinos, it is their way of maintaining ties to relatives they haven't seen in years.

That was the case for Victor Velasco, who didn't see his family in the Philippines for almost nine years after moving to Chicago for work. The boxes brought a sense of pride that didn't come from receiving imported goods but from the "assurance that that person

[who] has been away for so long from too far has not forgotten you and [is] still connected to you," said Velasco, who now lives in Florida. "That's what connects us. . . . That's why it's called balikbayan. Go back. But it's the box [that goes back], not you."

More than anything, the balikbayan box is a reminder to people back home that they have not been forgotten.

"I think it's one form of showing your family that you love them," said Pamela Villa del Rey, now a resident of Skokie, who used to include cans of peaches, her mom's favorite, in her box before her mother passed away. "The main thing for me is I want them to experience and to taste things that we have here. . . . It's one way of reaching out and saying, you know, I'm here; I'm sending this to you just so you know that I remember you." 

 @pat_nabong

YEAR IN REVIEW

20 New(ish) Chicago restaurants that prove the party ain't over

Don't listen to nobody nobody sent—2018 was a good year.

By MIKE SULA



Clockwise from top left: sancocho; kipe and yuca bollitos; beef stew with Moros y Cristianos; Los Tres Golpes (the Three Strikes) with mangú; pollo guisado with white rice and maduros JAMIE RAMSAY

A mix of Filipino and Cuban cuisine at Bayan Ko SANDY NOTO

Top right: Monkfish with kohlrabi ribbons; middle left: Okinawan sweet potato with baby turnips and fromage blanc; bottom right: pork belly with salsify funnel cake NICK MURWAY

Last week while I was shimmying into my white and blue striped cheer skirt (four red stars emblazoned across its form-fitting spandex torso), about to start writing my annual year-end recap of how glorious the year in eating was, food writer John Kessler over at *Chicago Magazine* was dropping a big deuce on the city's restaurant scene. The former *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* restaurant critic, who's been a Chicagoan for some three years now, wrote a brutal five-point takedown of a once celebrated dining culture now wallowing in complacency and blinded by its own defensive, blinkered boosterism. Or so he says. Chicago doesn't know local from Sysco, he argued. Bloating restaurant groups are sucking the blood out of the scene and the national press only comes to the Beard Awards every May to gloat over how far we've sunk. So dispiriting on its face I almost wrote a year-end Worst Restaurants of 2018 list.

I do actually agree with a few of Kessler's points—Chicago has rested on its laurels a bit as an innovative food town, and yes, the street food situation, as always, is an embarrassment. But there's a lot in his piece to quibble with: God bless Paulina Meat Market, but there's nothing behind its cases more appropriate for Chicago hot dog construction than a natural casing Vienna Beef tubesteak. ➔



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But others have rebutted him point by point, so I'm going to sit that one out. Yet as I looked at the list of my favorite new places to eat from 2018 I realized that almost everything on it could serve as an exception to his arguments. (He allowed for a few of them himself.) Opinions are unreliable that way.

If there's an exception for every rule, there are a ton of them to deflate his idea that Chicago's "immigrant food," as he calls it, is somehow unexciting, and unembraced by the city. But just look at Morena's Kitchen, the tiny, four-year-old Belmont Cragin storefront that the city's food writers lost their collective minds over this year after a nudge by blogger Titus Ruscitti. There the magnetic Mirian Montes de Oca dishes out terrific Dominican granny food and pica pollo: "hot, salty nuggets of brittle-battered, citrus-bathed bird flesh," as I wrote in my review last February. "Served with crisp tostones and blazed with laser-guided splashes of house-made habanero hot sauce." After all that attention, Mirian is moving her operation to the now vacant, much larger corner space up the block—just waiting for city inspectors to sign off. (Maybe we should start a discussion about the city bureaucracy holding back restaurateurs, instead of blaming immigrants for not being "exciting" enough.)

I felt just as passionate about Astoria Café, in Irving Park, where the *komplet lepinja*, "a bun with everything in it," is the signature among a menu of powerfully restorative Balkan grub. I described it as "an enormous toasty Serbian bread bowl filled with a thick, bubbling scramble of egg, roast pork drippings, and *kaymak*, the tangy Balkan clotted cream that behaves like a seductive butter."

Kessler thinks Chinatown, and other dining enclaves, are "boring." But I dunno. Two of my favorite new places this year opened in Chinatown—if you extend its borders to Bridgeport (and who hasn't by now?) A Place By Damao is a smartly designed Halsted Street storefront opened by two twenty-something immigrants from Sichuan trafficking in what they call "Chengdu Famous Plates." Visceral, sometimes mind-numbing snacks like the innocuous sounding spicy bean curd sent me into trance: "Diaphanous clouds of tofu slip down the throat on a warm, red tide, the crunchy soybeans adding a reversal of texture, the cabbage's pungent punch and the onion's grassy bite adding another." In Chinatown proper, the great food incubator in the Richland Center mall basement has hatched another winner in



Kinmedai (golden-eye snapper) at Omakase
 JAMIE RAMSAY

Shan Shaan Taste, where veteran Chef Richard Zhou labors on *liangpi*, cold skin noodles Xi'an-style, "a dish of such stark textural contrasts and assertive, electric seasoning that you wonder why it's not in regular rotation all over Chinatown."

Exciting new Chinese food wasn't limited to Chinatown, as demonstrated by the Greentown opening of Sizzling Pot King, a rapidly expanding minichain specializing in Hunanese dry hot pot as well as other rare specialties of the province like housemade tofu and finely sectioned pickled green beans with ground pork.

Kessler dogged second generation Americans for failing to "transcend" the food of their families, but what about the fun mashup of Filipino and American bar food at Old Habits/Ludlow Liquors by Nick Jirasek, a chef who seems primed to take even bigger risks at the upcoming Young American. And then there's the postcolonial synergy of Bayan Ko, where Lawrence Letrero taps into the Pinoy food he grew up on, along with the Cuban food he married into. Look at Jennifer Kim at Andersonville's Passerotto, conjuring a seamless merger of the Korean food she was raised on with the Italian food she was trained in.

Even the white guys got into it, with Mark Steuer channeling his German heritage and his low country upbringing at Funkenhausen, a so-called Bavarian beer hall where I lost my head over a "smoked half chicken smothered



Wuhan hot-dry noodles at Sizzling Pot King
 MATT SCHWERIN



Lost Larson
 ALISHA SOMMER

in summer squash, crowder peas, and tomatoes in a silky but powerfully rich and tangy Alsatian Riesling sauce, which demonstrates that an uptight attitude about southern and/or German food closes one off to the possibility of embracing *gemütlichkeit*." Tim Graham at Twain found inspiration in his collection of Midwestern community cookbooks to create an irresistibly absurd Mississippian

cuisine like "a thick, hollowed-out baked russet potato shell—the crunchiest potato chip on the river—cradling a deposit of soft, squishy gnocchi loaded with bacon, smoked sour cream, and goey cheddar Mornay sauce."

Similarly, Frontier chef Brian Jupiter accomplished what he's been hinting at for years at Wicker Park's Ina Mae's Tavern, fully



Komplet lepinja with pršuta
at Astoria Café JAMIE RAMSAY

Sao Song NICK MURWAY

The Beefy Boy at Old Habits
 ANJALI PINTO



embracing the food of New Orleans, the city he was born, fed, and bred in.

Creative, independent chefs pursuing personal, idiosyncratic projects unfunded by corporate restaurant groups found homes and regulars in neighborhoods nowhere near the West Loop, like Portage Park, where Matt Saccaro's Italian-Jewish deli the Frunchroom featured a matzo ball soup "like a bowl of gravy or poultry demi-glace with Fresno peppers and parsley adorning the smoked thigh meat that hangs out among the kneidlach." Noble Square's old Italian enclave welcomed Tony Fiasche's Tempesta Market, "a landscape of sausage possibilities (sausagilities?), triggering sensory overload with exposed cross sections of fat- and pistachio-studded mortadella, dark mineral-rich slabs of Wagyu bresaola, or a sinister-looking orb of emulsified pork called 'Calabrian paté,' made with chicken liver, pork shoulder, hot and sweet chiles, and dates." At Andersonville's Lost Larson pastry chef Bobby Shaffer paid tribute to the neighborhood's Nordic past and restored the civilizing practice of the "fika, a respite with coffee or tea and some kind of life-affirming indulgence from the bakery." In West Town Sari Zernich Worsham and Scott Worsham summoned San Sebastian's "paradigmatic pinxto bar crawl" at Bar Biscay, a lysergic environment to snack on Chef Johnny Andres's assertive, American take on northern Spanish cuisine.

OK, it's not a restaurant, but former fine-dining pastry chef Dana Cree answered the call for "culty ice cream," that one former Chicago food writer issued by opening Pretty Cool Ice Cream, her kid-friendly Wonkaesque Popsicle Parlor for the People with disruptions like peach-buttermilk bars, peanut butter-banana-hemp doggy pops, and wild huckleberry bars made with Washington State fruit.

Even Lakeview, a fine-dining food desert, landed an oasis for ambition when Trotter's vet Debbie Gold came home to head up Tied House, the lovely modern annex to Schubas that replaced the tired Harmony Grill. I reckoned "if you ever ate at Trotter's you'll recognize the combination of impeccable technique and artful plating with surprising flavors and textures and occasional exotica that so many veterans of that kitchen carried out into the world."

Meanwhile, just on the edge of the West Loop "food court," Chef Sangtae Park drew first blood in what's ramping up to be a sushi knife fight, now with three more high-end omakase options to choose from. At Omakase Yume, Park "slices, molds, and paints his nigiri with the decisive fluidity of a croupier at a craps table." (I haven't yet made it to Kyoten, Takeya, and Mako.) And yes, the "scourge" known as the Boka Restaurant Group even scored big again amid this fray with Bellemore, where chef Jimmy Papadopoulos's food is definitely not like the other's, as evidenced by the lamb belly which I called "a frankly unlovely lump of luscious, braised ovine flesh plated with persimmon marmalade and a whipped feta sauce that dissolves into lamb jus."

Finally, say what you will about the homogenizing effect of those bloated restaurant groups. One thing they're good at is graduating the young blood that brings life to the scene. That's what happened with Andy Sisomboune, a Nico Osteria sous chef who launched the pop-up series Sao Song and seems destined to showcase his cheffy take on Lao party food and home cooking in a brick-and-mortar space.

It's part of the job of the restaurant critic to register disapproval and exhort chefs (and readers) to do better. (Kessler published a similarly controversial piece on his home base in 2011.) As it ever is, the number of dull, dreary, unimaginative restaurants far outstrips the truly great ones that have opened in the past year. But 2018 was no different in that there's a lot to be excited about. (For one thing, nothing on this list closed before I could include it, which usually happens every year).

A million hot Twitter takes later, I'm left with the naked fact that the national critics whispering in Kessler's ear about Chicago's faded glory haven't done the legwork that those of us in the local food media have done for years. If you missed out on any of these exciting new spots, you weren't paying attention. If they don't inspire you, you just don't care.

@MikeSula



Frankenstein
JOE MAZZA

YEAR IN REVIEW

Power hits

Ten shows from 2018 we won't soon forget.

Year-end superlatives are a bogus endeavor. Unless you've seen every last one of the roughly 200-plus productions that graced Chicago stages in 2018, you can't credibly decree which were the absolute best. And even if you did see every last show, comparing multimillion dollar musicals with cash-strapped off-Loop dramas is a ridiculous exercise in apples and oranges.

With that in mind, here are ten shows that had the greatest impact on the *Reader's* critics. Nobody can say if they were the best of the best of the best. But of the hundreds of shows we collectively covered, these, listed in alphabetical order, are the ones that hit the hardest. —CATEY SULLIVAN

CAROLINE, OR CHANGE, FIREBRAND THEATRE Director Lili-Anne Brown's take on Jeanine Tesori (music) and Tony Kushner's (book and lyrics) musical overflowed with wit, emotion, and powerhouse vocals. As Caroline, a character loosely based on the African-American housekeeper who helped raise Kushner, Rashada Dawan created a character with formidable might and intelligence and a spirit that refused to sink under the weight of a world where racism and economic injustice were as

common as household appliances. Speaking of which: singing washing machines can be a tough sell. But Brown's ensemble succeeded, making washers, dryers, and radios into sentient, gorgeously sonic beings. —CS

FRANKENSTEIN, REMY BUMPPO THEATRE COMPANY From the opening pantomimed vignettes of the monster's birth to his chilly arctic duel with his maker at the end, Remy Bumpo's *Frankenstein* made me completely forget Boris Karloff and made a 200-year-old cautionary tale seem relevant. It's a story about hubris and playing God told through stark, minimalist means. Greg Matthew Anderson and Nick Sandys swapped the roles of the creature and the doctor during the show's run, giving audiences a great reason to see this unforgettable production twice. —DMITRY SAMAROV

THE GOLDEN GIRLS: THE LOST EPISODES, VOLUME 2, HELL IN A HANDBAG PRODUCTIONS Let it stand as a testament to the kind of year this was, what sort of swill we had to wade through just to get out from under it, what kind of singleness of purpose it took just to let our hair down for one night and have fun even, that the show I recommended most to people in 2018

was a fake episode of *The Golden Girls* in an attic in Andersonville. —MAX MALLER

HELA, SIDESHOW THEATRE COMPANY Sideshow Theatre Company's world premiere staging of J. Nicole Brooks's *HeLa* gave Chicago the rare gift of seeing a great piece of theater at its inception. Using the heart-wrenching true story of Henrietta Lacks as its launching point, it goes beyond the stars and back. Its plaintive, funny consideration of race, science, and basic humanity in America is timeless. If you didn't feel something after seeing it you'd better check your pulse. —DS

KINGDOM, BROKEN NOSE THEATRE As episodic quirkiness increasingly replaces thoughtful plotting on American stages, Chicagoan Michael Allen Harris bucked the trend and showed just how vital and contemporary "old school" playwriting can be. His crucial two-hour family saga, set just beyond and a million miles from Walt Disney World, followed four members of an overburdened, multigenerational African-American family who all happen to be gay. Avoiding easy moralizing, Harris constructed complicated, messy family dilemmas exacerbated by the sort of pernicious social forces that traumatize entire communities, making the interpersonal positively epic. —JUSTIN HAYFORD

PHOEBE IN WINTER, FACILITY THEATRE Facility Theatre had a hell of a 2018. In the spring they turned composer David Lang's Pulitzer-winning choral work *The Little Match Girl Passion* into a lush, psychoactive performance piece as lyrical as it was grotesque. Then in the fall they slayed with Jen Silverman's intricate, mesmerizing postwar fable *Phoebe in Winter*, a sly assault on every outmoded theatrical



The Golden Girls: The Lost Episodes, Volume 2
RICK AGUILAR

and patriarchal norm you can imagine. Resident director Dado helmed both productions, leaving little doubt she'll lead this new and intrepid troupe to more great things in 2019. —JHAYFORD

RED BOWL AT THE JEFFS, THE SOUND A small-time theater company sits through the non-Equity Jeff Awards with "Nominee" ribbons pinned to their lapels, waiting to see if their ambitious Chekhov adaptation is going to be snubbed or not. Effectively a lovingly specific play-length inside joke aimed at Chicago theater, written by Beth Hyland and directed by Rebecca Willingham, this show from *The Sound* was one of the most charming, most intellectually self-aware things I saw all year. —MM

THE SAFE HOUSE, CITY LIT THEATRE Kristine Thatcher, a graceful writer with a fine ear for



Caroline or Change
MARISA KM



Second Skin © JOE MAZZA

ARTS & CULTURE

THEATER

A *Midsummer Night's Dream* for midwinter

Chicago Shakespeare's staging is the most impressive cotton candy you'll ingest this month.

By **CATEY SULLIVAN**

For the past 18 years, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* has been in heavy rotation at Chicago Shakespeare Theater. Counting the current main-stage production, there have been six *Midsummers* since 2000, a record that none of Shakespeare's other 36 (that we know of) plays comes close to approaching.

Director Joe Dowling's personal record is even more *Midsummer-y*: this is his tenth time directing Shakespeare's romance of mismatched lovers and meddling fairies. Whether Chicago needs yet another *Midsummer* is debatable. But there's no arguing that *Midsummer* enjoys preferential status in the House that Barbara Gaines Built.

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

Through 1/27/19: Wed 1 and 7:30 PM, Thu-Fri 8 PM, Sat 3 and 8 PM, Sun 2 and 6:30 PM, Tue 7:30 PM; no performance Tue 12/25 or 1/1, Chicago Shakespeare Theater, 800 E. Grand, 312-595-5600, chicagoshakes.com, \$20-\$88.

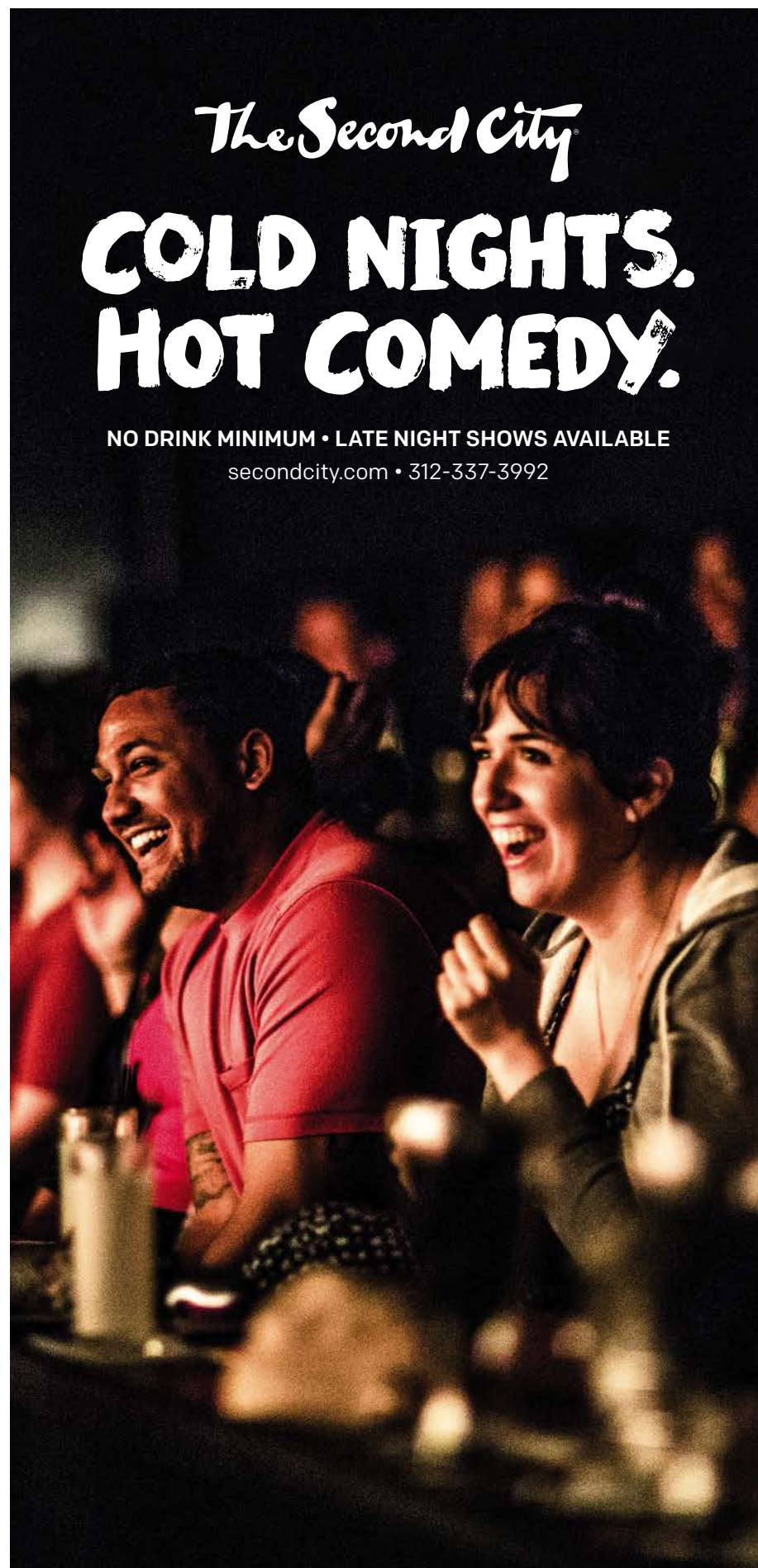
It's smart programming: Nobody in their right mind should promote *Coriolanus* or *Titus Andronicus* as the feel-good hit of the holiday season. Instead of battlefields and infanticide, *Midsummer* has saucy fairies and sassy ingénues. It has rambunctious girl fights, a slapstick play-within-the-play, and a triple-wedding happy ending.

Visually, Dowling's *Midsummer* plays up the comedy's strengths, leaning into the fantastical. You can practically smell the money that's been poured into Todd Rosenthal's extraordinary set and Fabio Toblini's lavish costume design. But when the sets and the costumes ➔

dialogue and a gift for subtle character development, premiered her heartfelt memory play about a steely but aging grandmother and her troubled daughter at City Lit Theatre in November. At once funny and moving, this bittersweet work looked the world straight in the eye, revealing in its too brief time on stage the terrible beauty and paradox of living, that life is at once painful and wonderful, terrifying and amazing, awful and too short. —**JACK HELBIG**

SECOND SKIN, WILDCLAW THEATRE Chicago playwright Kristin Idaszak uses the Celtic legend of the selkies, the souls of drowned humans who come back as half seal shapeshifters, as the inspiration for this evening of short, creepy tales. The beauty of Idaszak's writing, and of director Jess Hutchinson's pitch-perfect production, lay in the revelation that the mundane horrors of everyday life—loneliness, chronic illness, inevitable death—are at least as terrifying as specters that stalk us in the night. I was haunted long after the curtain fell on Idaszak's finely written and performed ghost stories. —**JHELBIG**

WITCH, WRITERS THEATRE Jen Silverman's drama centered on an accused witch in 17th century England, but it was as of-the-moment as tomorrow's headlines. In one brutally haunting passage, the titular (accused) witch speaks of being too bone-weary to speak up against injustice and lies. It's the underside of "nevertheless she persisted," and the setup for the indelible closing monologue about the insidious creep of hopelessness. Director Marti Lyons created a harrowing (and surprisingly funny) story of Puritan England, sliced with knives of contemporary urgency. —**CS**



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ARTS & CULTURE

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are more memorable than the characters or the story, you wind up with the theatrical version of cotton candy. And that's what happens here. This *Midsummer* is inarguably beautiful. The actors hit their marks, make the text accessible, and nail the timing. But they are working in the service of the design elements rather than the other way around. When it's done, you won't recall the show's substance so much as its surface.

The lights come up to reveal an Athenian court dominated by a massive marble (or marble-looking) wall that evokes Percy Shelley's "Ozymandias." Like the fallen monument of the poem, the great wall of Athens topples to insignificance as the regimented world of the court morphs into an enchanted forest. The engineering at play here is awe-inspiring. Our perspective shifts: we're looking at plant life as if through the eyes of insects, gazing up at flowers the size of houses sitting on stalks the size of redwoods. The effect is like a super-sized Hieronymus Bosch painting, heightened by Greg Hofmann and Jesse Klug's color-saturated lighting design.

Amid this riot of color, Toblini's costumes still manage to stand out. The fairy folk sport body-baring creations that look like they came straight off the Victoria's Secret runway. There's copious skin flashing between strategically placed feathers, chains, and harness-like contraptions, and there are more six-packs on display than in a frat house fridge during rush week (which I mention because the costumes so clearly intend to showcase this musculature). The four mortals lost in the woods appear to have lost most of their clothes: the girls wear colorless sports bras and briefs, while the boys are in boxers and T-shirts. The lack of clothing emphasizes the contrast between the regimented rules of the Athenian court and the wild chaos of the bewitched forest. The court is dominated by men in military dress, complete with buttons lined up as straight as parading soldiers. Once the characters reach the wild, clothes and inhibitions fly off.

The plot goes like this: Hermia (Melisa Soledad Pereyra) loves Lysander (Tyrone Phillips). Hermia's father, Egeus (William Dick), says she has to marry Demetrius (Eric Schabla). Demetrius loves Hermia. Helena (Cristina Panfilio) loves Demetrius. The four lovers flee to the forest to sort out their various romantic entanglements. Hijinks ensue, orchestrated by the rascally, feathery Puck (Sam Kebede); the leather-clad fairy king Oberon (Edward O'Ble-




A *Midsummer Night's Dream* © LIZ LAUREN

nis); and his wife, Titania (Alexandra Silber). Also in the forest we have a group of tradesmen rehearsing a play, led by the ridiculously funny T.R. Knight as Nick Bottom, a weaver who fancies himself a brilliant actor (and is transformed into an ass).

Bits of the text spark with contemporary relevance: Egeus's insistence that he can "dispose" of his daughter however he likes hits harder in the age of #MeToo. Oberon's use of drugs to bewitch his sleeping wife is more menacing than fanciful now that consent is a national conversation. And when Titania speaks of pelting rivers that have "overborne their continents," it's an eerie reminder of the urgent peril of global warming.

Composer/music director Keith Thomas's 1960s-inspired original music amplifies the contemporary edge that pops up intermittently in the dialogue. He's enhanced the plot's inherent quirkiness by incorporating pop chart-friendly song and dance numbers into the shenanigans, including a few classic C-A-minor-F-G7 chord progressions. (You know it: google "Heart and Soul.") Many of these ditties are performed by undulating fairies (expertly choreographed by Joe Chvala) who seem like the supernatural kin to the Ronettes. The music adds a layer of mirth.

In all, *Midsummer* sounds great. It looks great. It will hold your attention. There is, to paraphrase Tim Gunn, a lot of look here. But it's as substantial as pixie dust. Chicago Shakes has the means to go big with innovation and substance. *Midsummer* goes big, but mostly just on appearance. 

 @CateySullivan

HELLCAB

Through 12/30: Thu-Sat 8 PM, Sun 3:30 PM, Raven Theatre, 6157 N. Clark, 773-680-4596, weartheagency.org, \$5-\$20.



Hellcab @ VERONIKA REINERT

THEATER

Michael Shannon sat here

The holiday miracle that gave Agency Theatre Collective its *Hellcab* cab

By CATEY SULLIVAN

This is the story of a Chicago theater Christmas miracle. It's also the story of how the Agency Theatre Collective got the cab for its production of *Hellcab*, Will Kern's play about a cabbie on Christmas Eve.

"Finding that car was like looking for a needle in a haystack," says Agency company manager Tim Touhy.

The search started last year when Sommer Austin signed on to direct the Agency's 2017 production of *Hellcab*. Austin wasn't budging on vehicular veracity. "It had to be a cab you'd see on the streets in the early 1990s," she says, "so a Chevy Caprice from either the late 1980s or early 1990s. With a meter. And blinkers."

Austin wandered salvage yards and scoured Facebook Marketplace. Finally, during a long jag of insomniac web surfing, she struck gold, albeit in the form of a rusting chassis on dubious tires. There on a lot in Janesville, Wisconsin—roughly 110 miles northwest of Chicago—was the cab.

"It was perfect," Austin says. Well, almost. It wasn't drivable. It smelled like something—perhaps many somethings—had died in it. And the asking price was \$2,000—way over budget

for the tiny Agency. Touhy is still miffed about that. "They wouldn't move," he says. "Even when I explained we were a nonprofit."

But it wasn't just any cab. It was the cab from the 1998 movie version of *Hellcab*, called *Chicago Cab*. *Chicago Cab* played in just two theaters, but it featured a host of famous Chicagoans in their (mostly) pre-famous days: Michael Shannon (Crack Head), Tracy Letts (Sports Fan), Laurie Metcalf (Female Ad Exec), and John C. Reilly (Steve).

The Agency didn't do any fund-raising specifically for the cab, Touhy says. The show's \$20,000 budget—like that of the rest of the Agency season—comes from small grants, individual donations, and ticket sales. "We knew we'd be able to use it again this year," Touhy says of the cab. "It was a lot, but we were going to do *Hellcab* again, so at least it wasn't \$2,000 for something we'd only use once."

Then there was the problem of getting the cab's massive metal hulk up two narrow stairways and through three narrower doors onto the Den Theatre's postage-stamp second floor stage. (This year, the Agency's *Hellcab* is at the larger Raven Theatre.)

"We had no idea how it'd work," Touhy says. "It was a leap of faith."

The leap led him to a friend-of-a-friend-of-a-friend who said an auto-body shop in Niles might be willing to advise how to get a full-size sedan into the theater space. Enter Carol Himmel, director of the German-American Children's Choir, longtime patron of the arts, and owner of Erich's Lehigh Auto Body. "We like to help when we can, and these guys definitely needed help," Himmel says. "And they were so sweet the way they asked."

Himmel and her cohorts at Erich's literally cut the car in half, dismantled the halves, and hauled the pieces into the Den. When the 2017 show closed, they helped break it into parts again and moved it into storage, where it sat until this year's production rolled around.

For Touhy, the car is a metaphor.

"That whole cab is kind of like what 90 percent of the work is for storefront nonprofits. We take on these challenges without knowing how they'll work. Art is always a leap of faith. And a lot of work that most people won't see." 📌

📌 @CateySullivan

ARTS & CULTURE

THEATER

RR Elf-discovery
Barney the Elf spreads campy Christmas cheer.

Gay camp and heartwarming sincerity typically go together like oil and water, so I was delightfully surprised and touched by this fun little one-act holiday emulsion by Bryan Renaud and Emily Schmidt. In a queer twist on the 2003 Christmas family comedy *Elf*, Barney (Roy Samra), a lipstick-wearing, golden-voiced bundle of unconditional love, is exiled from the North Pole workshop to the streets of Chicago by Santa Jr. (Jaron Bellar), a tyrannical, Trump-like autocrat.

Between parodies of show tunes and Gloria Gaynor songs, Barney finds a job at a gay bar, where he meets and falls in love with Zooey (alternating Danika Bone't and Dixie Lynn Cartwright, aka Drew Nixon, who performed on opening night), a sardonic drag queen who takes pity on her fellow outsider. It's... one of the sweetest onstage relationships I've seen all year? Cartwright's onstage persona is wryly cynical, much like the character of Zooey, so scenes in which Zooey earnestly teaches her scared, naive new elf friend about the importance of self-love are genuinely moving. I wouldn't have expected to have tears in my eyes in a show with one-liners about bleached assholes, but here we are.

Director Michael D. Graham's production is easily one of the most polished stagings I've seen at Pride Films and Plays, and even if a lot of the jokes land in that awkward middle ground between theater intended for young audiences and theater *not at all* for young audiences, there's a lot to warm up to. —DAN JAKES **BARNEY THE ELF** Through 1/6/19: Wed-Fri 7:30 PM, Sat 3:30 and 7:30 PM, Sun 3:30 PM, Pride Arts Center, 4139 N. Broadway, 773-857-0222, pridefilmsandplays.com, \$15-\$30.

Bigger, longer, and uncut
The Full Monty is a less-than-auspicious inauguration of Theo Ubique's new space.

Two years ago, when the cabaret musical theater company Theo Ubique announced that it would be relocating a mile north from the No Exit Cafe in Rogers Park, its snug, hidden oasis-like home of 13 years, to Evanston, critics and fans alike poured one out for the beloved venue. Director Fred Anzevino and music director Jeremy Ramey's company was largely distinguished 🐾



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The Old Woman Broods © MICHAEL SHEPHERD JORDAN

➔ by its exceptional use of the tight space, which they filled with illustrious voices and ensembles that befitted a significantly larger room.

Now Theo Ubique inaugurates its new digs with *The Full Monty*, Terrence McNally and David Yazbek's 2000 Americanized adaptation of the 1997 British working-class comedy. It appears to be a work in progress: right now, the space feels like a peculiar mix of Windy City Playhouse chic with the limited functionality and cavernous industrial vibe of the old Viaduct Theatre.

These growing pains would be easier to overlook if this *Full Monty* about scruffy everydudes (gasp!) stripping were stronger in its own right; instead, many of the voices that carry Yazbek's forgettable pop musical score just aren't up to the usual standards established by Ubique's run over the years, and the sound setup of the live five-piece band has the unfortunate effect of sounding like a piped-in MIDI file.

There are plenty of legitimate observations to be made about the stifling, repressive macho culture that exists in conservative pockets of New York State, but *The Full Monty's* sexual politics aren't self-aware enough to make it feel like a period piece or relevant, contemporary commentary. I did, however, find some undeniable charm in the "Hot Metal" dancers, though some of that may just have been Stockholm syndrome: the show inexplicably clocks in around 2 hours and 45 minutes. —**DAN JAKES** *THE FULL MONTY* Through 1/27/19: Thu-Sat 7:30 PM, Sun 7 PM, Theo Ubique Cabaret Theatre, 721 Howard St., Evanston, 773-347-1109, theo-u.com, \$34-\$64.

RR Let nothing you dismay
House Theatre's no-dancing *Nutcracker*
finds light in wartime darkness.

Grief is a shadowy guest at many holiday tables. The House Theatre of Chicago's nonballet version of *The Nutcracker* transforms E. T. A. Hoffmann's 1816 tale "The Nutcracker and the Mouse King" into a moving imaginative story of loss and rebirth. Created by Phillip Klapperich, Jake Minton, Kevin O'Donnell, and director-choreographer Tommy Rapley, the show moves from high-spirited holiday hijinks to deep sadness, as a family

finds out at a Christmas Eve party that their son and brother has died in combat.

How do you keep going when the worst thing imaginable has happened? What holiday traditions can possibly provide a balm for broken hearts? Those questions haunt the heart of this piece. But fear not: it's also goofy, kinetic, tuneful (thanks to O'Donnell's score and a tight five-piece band), and sweet.

There's a fair degree of the "mythic journey nonsense" (as Amanda de la Guardia's grieving mother Martha describes it) that has always been the House's dramaturgical spine. But that journey (inspired by Rom Barkhordar's Uncle Drosselmeyer) proves exhilarating, as Clara (Haley Bolithon) and her toy friends—Rachel Shapiro's talking doll Phoebe, Johnny Arena's Gallic Monkey, and Ben Hertel's robot Hugo—join with Fritz (Desmond Gray), the reincarnation-in-nutcracker-form of Clara's dead brother, to battle rats and restore some semblance of Christmas cheer.

Squint and you'll see hints of the *Toy Story* franchise, as well as *A Christmas Carol*. But mostly what you'll find is a soul-stirring affirmation of the need to move toward the light in darkest times. —**KERRY REID** *THE NUTCRACKER* Through 12/30: Thu-Fri 7:30 PM, Sat 3 and 7:30 PM, Sun 2 PM. Additional performances Wed Dec. 19, 7 PM and Sun Dec. 23, 6 PM. Chopin Theatre, 1543 W. Division, 773-769-3832, thehouse theatre.com, \$40-\$50 (\$20 student and industry for all shows, based on availability).

RR Seasonal despair
The Old Woman Broods rejects decadent capitalism in favor of grotesque comedy and absurdism.

Like a George Grosz drawing come to life, Tadeusz Różewicz's 1969 satire about an old woman who wants to repopulate the world with her own progeny vacillates between over-the-top grotesque comedy, absurdism, and pitch-black existential despair.


Set in a purgatory-like cafe with plasticked-over windows populated by a cast of ghoulish, beat-up looking characters who seem anchored to this wretched spot for eternity, the narrative—such as it is—centers on the Old

Woman (Manuela Rentea, in a fiercely committed performance) and her quest to find a doctor who will allow her to once again give birth. In the meantime, a waiter—her only human contact—keeps trying to take her food order, then disappears to join the army or do a series of other similarly random tasks.

The outside world is referenced in broad strokes through allusions to climate change, war, and other insurmountable global issues, but all the actual drama plays out in the woman's mind, and everyone else on stage with her is probably a manifestation of its drift. Written in communist Poland within the tradition of the Theater of the Absurd, Różewicz's nightmarish vision is updated here with just enough contemporary references to strike a balance between the timely and the entirely out of time. There were many moments when I didn't know exactly what the Old Woman was talking about, but I never once doubted her deep desire for some sort of relief from suffering for both herself and the world in its entirety. It all makes poetic sense while dispensing with much narrative logic. Nicole Wiesner directed. —**DMITRY SAMAROV** *THE OLD WOMAN BROODS* Through 1/19/19: Thu-Sat 8 PM, Trap Door Theatre, 1655 W. Cortland, 773-384-0494, trapdoortheatre.com, \$20-\$25, two-for-one admission Thu.

RR A debate settled
Yippee Ki-Yay Merry Christmas confirms that *Die Hard* is indeed at heart a holiday movie.

The title says it all. Conceived and written by librettists Michael Shepherd Jordan and Alex Garday with composer Stephanie McCullough and first presented in 2014 as a holiday attraction at the trio's now-defunct MCL Chicago comedy theater, this is a song-and-dance send-up of the 1988 thriller *Die Hard*. That movie, which starred Bruce Willis as a wisecracking New York cop fighting international criminals in Los Angeles (in his bare feet, yet!), was not only a showcase for brutal fight scenes and spectacular special effects. It was also a sly satire of global capitalism in the Reagan era, with Willis's self-styled "cowboy" single-handedly defeating a gang of German terrorists who had mounted a hostile takeover of the still-under-construction-skyscraper American HQ of a Japanese investment firm.

The better you know *Die Hard*, the more you're likely to enjoy this stage spoof, which has fun with the original film's sociopolitical subtext, as well as its far-fetched plotting, over-the-top action, and comic-book character stereotyping. Even when the script and songs come up short, the actors' improvisational spontaneity and seemingly endless energy keep the audience laughing. The cast includes agile Bill Gordon as Bruce McClane, Caitlyn Cerza as his estranged wife Holly Generic, Jenna Steege as her coked-up coworker, Jin Kim as their ill-fated boss Nintendo Nakatomi, Terrance Lamonte Rogers Jr. as Bruce's Twinkie-eating policeman pal, Nate Curlott as an in-your-face FBI agent, Gary Fields as the dapper criminal leader Hans Olo (get it?), Erin Long as his psychotic sidekick Klaus, and Jonathan Allsop as a high-tech safecracker. —**ALBERT WILLIAMS** *YIPPEE KI-YAY MERRY CHRISTMAS: A DIE HARD MUSICAL PARODY* Through 1/12/19: Thu-Sat 8 PM, Sun 3 PM, Den Theatre, 1331 N. Milwaukee, 773-697-3830, yippeethemusical.com, \$45. 



Diagnosis: Boring

SMALL SCREEN

A gray speck in a technicolor world

Diagnosis: Boring uses surreal comedy to demonstrate the distortional logic of depression.

By **BRIANNA WELLEN**

Can someone die from being too boring? According to the new web-series *Diagnosis: Boring*, the answer is "yes." In the first episode of the Chicago-made show, a doctor tells Jess (Ana Silva) that she has "Super Boring as Shit" syndrome and only a few weeks to live. There's a possibility she'll survive if she takes antiboring meds and adjusts her habits to make herself more cool. ("You must start smoking cigarettes," her doctor says. "Parliaments, because they are the coolest.") For the rest of the series, with his assistance and also the help, and sometimes hindrance, of her friends, family, and a self-help guru, Jess searches for a cure that works for her.

Frank Spiro, the series's creator, came up with the idea after he went to a psychologist because he felt devastatingly bored. The therapist informed him that he was actually depressed—and that depression is not the same

as simply feeling sad. Mental health issues, he learned, affect a person's logic and, therefore, his or her view of the world. He decided to combine his background in comedy and love of surrealism to explore that concept in *Diagnosis: Boring*.

"When you're making a sketch for sketch comedy," Spiro says, "there are two different kinds of sketches that everyone always suggests: the sane character in an insane world and the insane character in a sane world. I think that feeling depressed and dealing with mental health issues makes you feel like a sane character in an insane world."

Absurdist elements appear in *Diagnosis: Boring* from the very first scene. On her way in to see the doctor, Jess tries to pick up a coin off the street and the words "Feel shame for trying to steal" appear out of nowhere on the sidewalk. While she's still wallowing in her shame and misery, she becomes part of an art exhibit viewed by a group of tourists walking by. And when her doctor gives her her diagnosis, he hands her a ticking "death clock," loudly symbolizing the necessity of change. This approach is a welcome variation on the purely autobiographical nature of many webseries and stories about depression. Not that it's completely without precedent; *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*, *Lady Dynamite*, and other TV shows have introduced fantastical, comedic approaches to mental health into mainstream media. But *Diagnosis: Boring* manages to be increasingly bizarre, darkly funny, and at times just plain old dark in its own way, grounded by its dynamic lead, Ana Silva.

"The whole idea is that Jess is a gray speck in a world full of color," Silva says. "The more vibrant and wonderful the world around her


is, her isolation becomes so apparent and her need to reach out for something, that desperation continues to build. I think without having that vibrancy around her, the juxtaposition wouldn't be great enough for the comedy to be played up."

Silva is no stranger to finding the funny in emotional topics. In fact, Silva and Spiro met while working on *Sad Clown*, an improv show at the Annoyance Theatre that was centered around mental illness. Last May, Spiro approached Silva with the pilot script of *Diagnosis: Boring*. She made sure to look at it closely before simply agreeing to be a part of a friend's project, even though he had written it with her in mind. What she read was a female-driven story that pushed for further creative conversations about mental health. That, she says, was something she was ecstatic to be a part of.

Another inducement to join the project was the diversity of the cast and crew. Silva is a member of Matt Damon Improv, one of the most highly regarded improv teams in the city—and which features exclusively women of color. (Sometimes a white guest, designated "Matt Damon" or "Lena Dunham," depending on gender, joins a set, but they can only repeat lines that have already been said in a scene by the team's main players.) *Diagnosis: Boring* deals with so many highly emotional issues that Silva felt it was important to build an environment where everyone felt comfortable.

"There's a lot of times when I'll walk into an improv class," she says, "and I'm the only person of color, let alone the only woman. It's one of those things where you have to feel that you belong in order to safely create the work that you want to be making."

Both Silva and Spiro turn to laughter in moments of distress. Silva fell into performing comedy during a dark period in her life. Spiro says he tends to find the worst moments of his life funny in the moment, then recounts them in his comedy as a way to process and cope with them. They both hope that *Diagnosis: Boring* can help others do the same.

"I think the world is already such a dark place, and there's so many dark things around us that comedy is one of those things we can hold onto to keep us sane," Silva says. "There must be a quote about that somewhere. Well, there is now." 

 @BriannaWellen



YEAR IN REVIEW

The top 10—well, 13—movies of 2018

At least according to Ben Sachs

By BEN SACHS

Many of my favorite movies that received their Chicago theatrical premieres in 2018 expanded my sense of cinema history. Whether they were rediscoveries from past eras (such as the first and seventh films on my list) or new films by old masters (such as the films to hold the fourth- and tenth-place rankings), these works reminded me of how expansive the art form has always been in terms of visual beauty and social insight. As usual, I'm particularly grateful to the city's independent programmers, who are responsible for bringing most of these movies to town. Keep up the good work, all of you.

1 *L'ENFANT SECRET* Philippe Garrel's masterwork—a dreamlike meditation on doomed romance, inspired by the French writer-director's relationship with pop singer Nico—premiered in France in 1982 but received its first Chicago screening only this year, as part of the Gene Siskel Film Center's

Garrel retrospective in May. It's one of those rare movies that exists in a category all its own, bridging narrative and nonnarrative cinema in ever-inventive ways. Indeed, it feels as though every shot is challenging what movies can do, how they can convey emotions, and the nature of thought. But despite being formally unusual, it's always emotionally accessible if not emotionally overwhelming.

2 *ZAMA* Lucrecia Martel's first movie in nearly a decade breaks new ground for Argentina's greatest filmmaker. It's her first literary adaptation, her first period piece, and her first film to center on a male protagonist. Yet this blackly funny—and ultimately haunting—examination of colonial history is thoroughly characteristic in its brilliant manipulation of physical space (every frame feels at once intimate and disorienting) and in its mysterious, arhythmic sense of narrative development.

3 *ASH IS PUREST WHITE AND BITTER MONEY (TIE)* Jia Zhang-ke and Wang Bing are mainland China's greatest working filmmakers, and these features find each director at the top of his game. Jia's *Ash* (which screened at the Chicago International Film Festival in October) moves fluidly from naturalism to melodrama to tell an epic story of a wayward, romantically frustrated woman over roughly 15 years. Wang's *Money* (which played at Facets Multimedia in the spring) is a hypnotic documentary about degradation, both personal and cultural, in a textile mill town; it confirms that Wang is perhaps the most important nonfiction filmmaker anywhere in the world.

4 *24 FRAMES AND THE ARBORETUM CYCLE (TIE)* Beautiful and enveloping experimental features by master artists, these films inspired reverence for nature and cinema simultaneously. The final feature by Iranian director Abbas Kiarostami, *24 Frames* (which

played at the Film Center in February) employed subtle cinematic trickery to make still photographs seem to come to life. In *The Arboretum Cycle* (which played at Northwestern University's Block Cinema in September), American avant-gardist Nathaniel Dorsky found transcendental beauty in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park and the nuances of 16-millimeter cinematography.

5 *GOOD MANNERS* Juliana Rojas and Marco Dutra's staggeringly original Brazilian fantasy (which premiered at the Chicago Latino Film Festival in March) depicts a convergence of lesbians, werewolves, and singing street beggars in São Paulo, but the most surprising thing about it is that it's all about love—the only other monster movie I can compare it to is James Whale's *The Bride of Frankenstein*. Also, every movie made in color should aspire to the vividness that Rojas and Dutra (working with the great cinematographer Rui Poças, who also shot *Zama*) achieve here.

6 *ROMA* If Alfonso Cuarón's *Children of Men* seemed to grow organically out of the social insights of *Y Tu Mamá También*, then this spellbinding autobiographical drama seems to expand upon the reflections on inner and outer space that Cuarón first explored in

ARTS & CULTURE



Gravity. This has plenty to say about class relations too, but what's most impressive about it is how the Mexican writer-director-cinematographer-editor transforms even his political observations into the stuff of big-screen spectacle.

7 *EIGHT HOURS DON'T MAKE A DAY* Who knew that Rainer Werner Fassbinder had ever been so cheerful? With this recently rediscovered TV miniseries (which first aired between 1972 and '73 and received its Chicago premiere at the Film Center in May), the trailblazing German writer-director delivered an upbeat (but still incisive) saga of a working-class Cologne family. It's unlike anything else in his monumental filmography—to watch it is to discover a side of Fassbinder you might never have known existed.

8 *THE COMMUTER AND THE HATE U GIVE (TIE)* My favorite American studio films of the year both ponder the same theme: how do we define ourselves morally in life-or-death situations? *The Commuter*, the best film to date by Spanish genre director Jaume Collet-Serra, took the issue to abstract extremes, employing Hitchcockian formal playfulness, while *The Hate U Give*, a deeply moving adaptation of Angie Thomas's young-adult novel, is grounded in keen observations of such topical sub-

jects as police brutality and racial segregation in American cities.

9 *THE THIRD MURDER* Japanese writer-director Hirokazu Kore-eda may have won the Palme d'Or this year for *Shoplifters*, but I prefer this 2017 legal drama, which played at the Film Center and Facets late this summer. The film showcases Kore-eda's skillful sense of characterization and ethical inquiry, asking viewers to think long and hard about the meaning of justice.

10 *RAINBOW: A PRIVATE AFFAIR* This year marked the passing of Vittorio Taviani, one half (with his brother Paolo) of the great Italian filmmaking duo behind *Padre Padrone* and *The Night of the Shooting Stars*. Sad as the news was, it was reassuring to know that he went out on such a strong note. This terse and visually breathtaking period drama (which played in the European Union Film Festival in March) about a WWII resistance fighter facing certain doom as he enters enemy territory is a commanding consideration of mortality and historical responsibility. It's one of the Tavianis' best.

RUNNERS-UP (IN ORDER OF PREFERENCE): *BISBEE '17*; *ARABY*; *PERSONAL PROBLEMS*; *NON-FICTION*; *THE WOMAN WHO LEFT*; *DIANE*;

MINDING THE GAP; *SCARRED HEARTS*; *SORRY TO BOTHER YOU* and *SUPPORT THE GIRLS* (tie); *THE MULE*; *RODIN*; *GOOD LUCK*; *CLAIRE'S CAMERA* and *THE DAY AFTER* (tie); *DON'T WORRY, HE WON'T GET FAR ON FOOT*; *JEANNETTE: THE CHILDHOOD OF JOAN OF ARC*

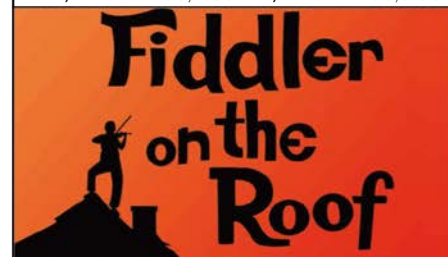
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THE MULE ★★★★★
Directed by Clint Eastwood. R, 116 min. In wide release.

Vox Lux ★★
Directed by Brady Corbet. R, 115 min. In wide release.



The Mule (left) and *Vox Lux*
CLAIRE FOLGER;
COURTESY OF NEON

MOVIES

American disillusionment

The Mule and *Vox Lux* present two very different responses to our nation's ills.

By **BEN SACHS**

Last week saw the release of two rather cynical American films, Brady Corbet's *Vox Lux* and Clint Eastwood's *The Mule*. The first addresses our culture's acclimation to random violence, while the second considers our nation's losing war on drugs. Neither film proposes solutions to the issues they raise, suggesting fatalistically that we're simply stuck with them. But where *Vox Lux* raises a sense of alarm over this conclusion, *The Mule*—a more complex and ultimately more provocative work—is disarmingly upbeat. Eastwood, directing a script by Nick Schenk, suggests that the country's social ills haven't fundamentally altered the American character; the people the movie depicts are still capable of being nice to one another and even doing good in spite of the dark cultural climate they inhabit. This position stands in sharp contrast to that of *Vox Lux*, which depicts both American society and individual Americans as irreversibly diseased. Corbet's film is bitter and angry and leaves a bad taste in your mouth, while Eastwood's gives you something to savor and chew on.

I'll say this for *Vox Lux*, though: Corbet excels at setting a mood. The actor-turned-director conjures up an air of discomfort at the start of

the film that becomes steadily more commanding as the narrative proceeds. *Vox Lux* begins with a brief introduction to Celeste (Raffey Cassidy), a 14-year-old girl growing up on Staten Island in 1999. Over footage of video-shot home movies, Willem Dafoe delivers Corbet's purplish narration in a stark tone, informing us that "at the beginning, [Celeste] was kind and full of grace." (His worried voice implies that she will lose these qualities over the course of the story.) From there, Corbet presents shots of an adolescent boy walking down a road in the middle of the night; this is the boy who will stage a massacre at Celeste's junior high, shooting her in the neck in the process of gunning down many of her classmates. In recovery, Celeste writes a song to work through her feelings about the massacre; she performs it at a church vigil for the victims, media outlets disseminate it, and the song becomes a nationwide hit. Some recording studio executives like what they hear, and in short time they're grooming Celeste to become a pop star.

In this development, Corbet issues a critique of culture industry cynicism, delineating the process by which a victim of gun violence is used to sell records. The director takes a cold, detached approach to Celeste's transfor-

mation, maintaining the ominous tone of the opening scenes as the teenage girl practices in a recording studio, works with a choreographer, and meets with industry professionals. (The tone is consistently enhanced by an immersive sound design and Scott Walker's eerie original score.) One isn't exactly surprised when Corbet jumps forward to 2017 and reveals that the 31-year-old Celeste (now played by Natalie Portman) has become a cynical, self-involved prima donna. This second chapter of the film opens with another scene of random violence: a massacre at an eastern European seaside resort by gunmen wearing masks made popular by one of Celeste's music videos. (Corbet films the attack in an extended Steadicam shot, a reflection of his refined aesthetic sensibility.) When Celeste holds a press conference to respond to the event, she speaks condescendingly of the gunmen before turning the attention to herself. She declares that she won't cancel the concert she has scheduled for that night, saying it's her responsibility to bring people joy. The film concludes at the concert, with Celeste giving an impressive performance despite being addled by drugs—a discomfiting triumph of pop escapism over real-world concerns.

The narrative of *Vox Lux* invites at least two responses. You can feel implicated in Corbet's cultural critique or share in his aestheticized detachment, with its suggestions of moral superiority. Or you can throw up your hands at the futility of it all. Celeste is clearly a lost soul, having grown desensitized from trauma, drugs, and years of pampering; the narrator even divulges near the end that she feels she's sold herself to the devil. Still, there's something commendable about Corbet's unwavering mean-spiritedness. Never do he and Portman try to render the grown-up Celeste sympathetic, and the film's portrayal of the music industry is so pessimistic that you can't ever question where the filmmaker stands.

Where *Vox Lux* is undone by its self-righteousness, *The Mule* thrives in teasing ambiguity. Based on a true story, Eastwood's film centers on Earl Stone, a 90-year-old World War II vet who improbably becomes the top drug runner for a Mexican cartel. Like the protagonist of Eastwood's *Gran Torino* (which was also scripted by Schenk), Earl is stubborn, casually bigoted, and hoping to make up for a lifetime of regrets. After paying off the mortgage on his house, he uses the money he makes from drug smuggling to buy the affection of his estranged family members and fix up the local VFW hall. One comes to regard Earl as inherently well-intentioned even though he shows no moral compunction about breaking the law; the filmmakers luxuriate in this irony, testing audience sympathy throughout. Eastwood's affecting performance as Earl distracts from the immoral decisions the character makes—one shares in Earl's willed ignorance of the cartel's brutality, excusing it on the

★★★★ EXCELLENT ★★★ GOOD ★★ AVERAGE ★ POOR ● WORTHLESS

ARTS & CULTURE

grounds that he uses his dirty money to perform such nice acts.

As always, Eastwood's directorial style is plainspoken and elegant in the tradition of such old Hollywood masters as John Ford and Howard Hawks. He presents the complexities of Schenk's script with a straight face, allowing them to simmer until they become unavoidable. *The Mule* ironically suggests that it might take criminal wrongdoing to fix pervasive social ills, as Earl uses his loot to repair his broken family bonds as well as a crumbling social institution that his community can no longer support. And for most of the running time, Eastwood and Schenk inspire plenty of good cheer with this premise. Earl's friendly relationships with the people he meets (even testy cartel members) provide a source of unaccountably genial humor, while his attempts to patch things up with his daughter and ex-wife make for warm (though characteristically underplayed) drama. It's only in the final half hour that the film's darkness catches up with you, when the cartel's brutality becomes too severe to ignore and Earl must face the consequences of his crimes. Yet the film manages to conclude on an optimistic note, suggesting that Earl will never suffer too much for what he's done.

For decades now, Eastwood has been one of the great interrogators of American social mores, using cinema to question the myths of artistic infallibility (*Bird*; *White Hunter, Black Heart*), the government's promise to act in our best interests (*Flags of Our Fathers*, *J. Edgar*), the glory of technological progress (*Sully*), and the valor of machismo (pretty much everything from *White Hunter* on). With *The Mule*, he questions the moral rectitude of the war on drugs, presenting drug running as an unlikely panacea to a broken society. This premise speaks to how entrenched the illegal drug trade is in American life, not to mention the failure of various social institutions. Yet Eastwood ameliorates the film's cynicism with unflagging sympathy for its characters, and in doing so advances a winning sense of community. The moral conflict of *The Mule* feels far more constructive than the easy alienation of *Vox Lux*—it encourages us to wrestle with our thoughts and find new insights. **A**

MOVIES

Aquaman

The DC oceanic superhero has been around since 1941, and, like many other vintage comic-book characters, has enjoyed several makeovers. But none is more striking than his filmic embodiment by Jason Momoa, who, after his cameo in *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* (2016) and supporting part in *Justice League* (2017), here makes you forget that Aquaman was ever a clean-cut towhead. The burly tattooed star brings a pleasing mix of congeniality and ferocity to the lead role in this occasionally sluggish origin story, which owes much to DC's *The New 52* reboot in 2011 by writer Geoff Johns. Still, director James Wan borrows liberally from elsewhere in the canon: Amber Heard is a dead ringer for the 1964 comics version of Princess Mera, and Yahya Abdul-Mateen II has the pirate Black Manta down to a T (although a little of this villain's backstory would have been helpful). Veteran cinematographer Don Burgess's widescreen images beguile, and Bill Brzeski's production design impresses mightily, but next time, someone please give Momoa and company some memorable dialogue. With Nicole Kidman, Temuera Morrison, Patrick Wilson, and Willem Dafoe. —**ANDREA GRONVALL** PG-13, 143 min. 600 N. Michigan, ArcLight, Block 37, Crestwood 18, Century 12 and CineArts 6, Chatham 14, Cicero Showplace 14, City North 14, New 400, River East 21, Rosemont 18, Showplace ICON, Webster Place 11

Moynihan

Political nonconformist Daniel Patrick Moynihan is the subject of this mostly conventional documentary, which considers the late senator, ambassador, and sociologist's enduring influence on American public life. A bold New York Democrat who grew up during the Great Depression and continually reached across race, class, and political party lines, Moynihan was a colorful figure whose story warrants a stylized, even outré depiction. It is unfortunate, then, that codirectors Joseph Dorman and Toby Perl Freilich deliver a staid yet informative run-down of Moynihan's political maneuvers, skimming the details of the man's personal life to focus on the impact and prescience of his often unpopular exhortations. Though they succeed in rousing interest and delivering a few gut punches, the filmmakers struggle to justify their choice of a visual medium for their narrative—as opposed to, say, a podcast series. Jeffrey Wright narrates. —**LEAH PICKETT** 102 min. Fri 12/21, 2 and 6 PM; Sat 12/22, 2 PM; Sun 12/23, 5:30 PM; Wed 12/26, 6 PM; and Thu 12/27, 8 PM. Gene Siskel Film Center



Second Act

Once Upon a Deadpool

When our favorite irreverent pansexual super-antihero (Ryan Reynolds) announces near the top of *Deadpool 2* that the mayhem on screen is actually a family film, in a way he's right: without the obligatory creation story baggage of the 2016 original, the sequel zips along as the motormouth assassin tries to clean up his act (sort of) and finds family where he wasn't looking. But you couldn't call the sequel "family friendly"—until now, in this recut holiday special version, in which director David Leitch (*Atomic Blonde*) has substantially reduced the gore and profanity, and upped the inside jokes by stealing a page from Rob Reiner and William Goldman. In a new framing device and cutaway scenes, Fred Savage, playing himself, is ensconced in the recreated bedroom set he occupied as a child star over 30 years ago in *The Princess Bride*, having been abducted by Deadpool (who terms it "involuntary location enhancement") so that the smart aleck can regale Fred with a storybook reprise of *Deadpool 2*. The obvious bleeps of profanity actually make this version even smuttier, and Savage's digs at Deadpool not being really Marvel—"You're Fox Marvel"—lead to a witty meta exchange about 20th Century Fox and its sale to Disney. There are additional new scenes where the protagonist visits a zoo and a park, but the best is saved for last, so stay for the short, poignant sequence at the very end of the closing credits. —**ANDREA GRONVALL** PG-13, 118 min. Block 37, Crestwood 18, Century 12 and CineArts 6, Showplace ICON

Second Act

Jennifer Lopez stars in yet another film unworthy of her radiance, this time as a woman from Queens who quits her job at a supermarket to work as a consultant in the tony Manhattan office of a consumer goods corporation. It is a rags-to-riches story with an implausible case of mistaken identity as its hinge, meaning that the protagonist lies to almost everyone she meets for the majority of the movie to keep up the ruse. This sours what is presented as the character's core belief, and the movie's thrust—that street smarts should be as valuable as book smarts—because the movie's ostensible definition of street smarts is experience meets cleverness propelled by dishonesty. A tidy conclusion further muddies the message, as if to say: so long as you eventually confess to your wrongdoings, you'll be forgiven, and you'll still get what you want. With Leah Remini, Vanessa Hudgens, and Milo Ventimiglia. —**LEAH PICKETT** PG-13, 105 min. ArcLight, Century 12 and CineArts 6, Rosemont 18, Showplace ICON **A**

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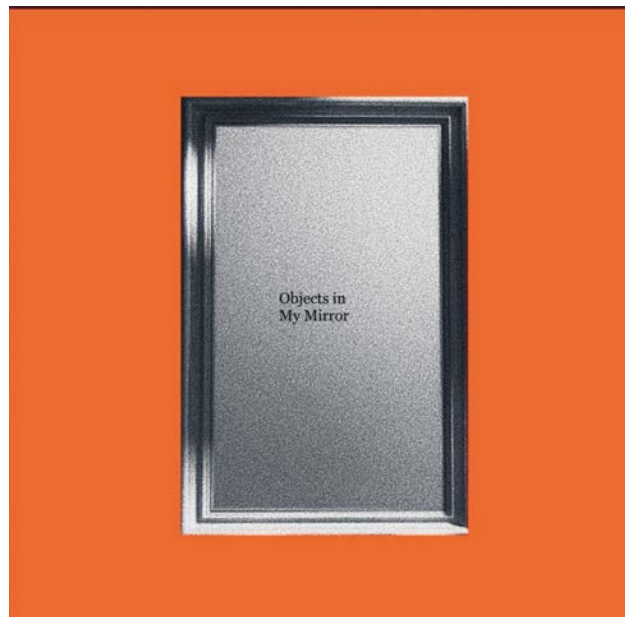
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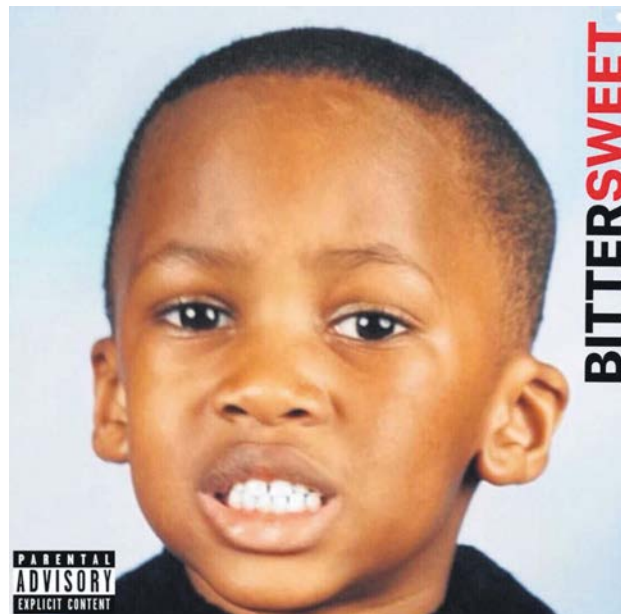


Counterclockwise from upper right: cover art for Henny B & Rage Aurelius, Armanii Day, Morocco Brown, Swade, and WemmyMo



The best overlooked Chicago hip-hop of

2018



The city's hip-hop scene overflows with such variety and abundance that it's impossible to show enough love to every great release—but that's no reason not to try.

By **LEOR GALIL**

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Two of 2018's biggest rap singles came out last year. "Mo Bamba," a burbling, combustible anthem that Harlem rapper Sheck Wes made for his childhood friend, Orlando Magic center Mohamed Bamba, originally dropped in June 2017; earlier this month, the song reached number six on the *Billboard* Hot 100. "Lucid Dreams," a corrosive heartbreak song that Chicagoland rapper Juice Wrld built on a tender guitar melody swiped from Sting's "Shape of My Heart," also debuted online in June 2017; in October it peaked at number two on the Hot 100.

Juice Wrld, born Jarad Higgins and raised mostly in Chicago's south suburbs, is the biggest local breakout artist this year—the last time somebody blew up like that around these parts was 2012, when Chief Keef ushered in drill's mainstream crossover. Higgins, 20, was largely unknown a year ago. Prior to this year, Juice Wrld had only played a couple shows and done one noteworthy interview (with local hip-hop site Elevator), and most of the material he'd uploaded to Soundcloud didn't get any traction. At some point this past winter, though, the EP *Juice Wrld 9 9 9* (which includes "Lucid Dreams"), self-released in June 2017, came to the attention of DJ Victoriouz, a scene staple who'd hosted Keef's breakthrough mixtape, 2012's *Back From the Dead*.

Through Victoriouz, Juice Wrld got his music in the ear of Chicago drill heavyweight Lil Bibby. He joined the roster of Bibby's label, Grade A Productions, and in March he signed a deal with Interscope (reportedly worth \$3 million) about a week after Lyrical Lemonade released the Cole Bennett video for Juice's breakout single, "All Girls Are the Same." His debut album, *May's Goodbye & Good Rid-*

dance, peaked at number four on the *Billboard* 200. He outdid it in October when he dropped a collaboration with Future, *Wrld on Drugs*, that debuted at number two.

A brief *Vulture* review of *Wrld on Drugs* declared, "One of the biggest new stars in rap is a teenager from Chicago who sounds like he's from Atlanta." But Juice Wrld's sound is more URL than IRL, rooted less in a specific regional scene than in a style that developed online, and Soundcloud rappers who'd succeeded before him helped his blend of trap percussion and third-wave emo go down smoothly. (Benny Blanco's recent single "Roses," which features vocals from Juice Wrld and Panic! at the Disco's Brendon Urie, hangs together better than the Auto-Tune gloop of *Wrld on Drugs*.) Inasmuch as a rapper can be of the Internet, Juice Wrld is; "Lucid Dreams" was the year's most played song on the entire Soundcloud platform.

The dominant narrative foisted on Chicago hip-hop—a subcultural battle between drill and a hard-to-pin down "alternative" community nurtured by poetry open mikes and usually exemplified by Chance the Rapper—doesn't have any room for Juice Wrld. Of course, the actual output of the local rap scene in 2018 demolished this narrative at every turn, and thankfully it's now being invoked mostly because of its inadequacy: a Pitchfork review of Chris Crack's *Being Woke Ain't Fun*, a *RedEye* profile of Cupcakke, and a *New York Times* story about Valee all positioned their subjects outside this spurious dichotomy.

Valee, Cupcakke, and Juice Wrld are among the many artists who've proved, over and over again throughout the past six years, that Chicago hip-hop is more than Keef and Chance. I defy anyone to find a single template that explains Queen Key's vivacious, vitriolic *Eat* →

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continued from 33

My Pussy, Sen Morimoto's madcap *Cannonball*, Saba's elegiac *Care for Me*, Roy Kinsey's immersive *Blackie*, Noname's intimate *Room 25*, and G Herbo's boisterous *Swervo* all coming out in one year.

So many Chicagoans released great hip-hop in 2018 that (as usual) not all of it got the attention it deserved. This is an excellent problem to have, of course, and since 2013 I've made an annual "best overlooked Chicago hip-hop" list to help address it. But defining "overlooked" remains a challenge, not least because the easiest kind of attention to track—that is, media coverage—is such a small part of the reception for a given release. I could easily argue that FBG Duck's "Slide" is overlooked because the mainstream press has barely noticed it—but it's also become a Chicago radio staple and racked up nearly 40 million YouTube views. Something similar could be said of Famous Dex: his April 2018 studio debut, *Dex Meets Dexter*, hit number 12 on the *Billboard* 200, but the *New York Times* and Pitchfork mentioned him only in the context of Spotify's short-lived "hateful conduct" policy, noting that his music wasn't removed from the company's playlists despite a video leaked in 2016 that he admits shows him assaulting his girlfriend.

Because I needed a filter, though, I invented one. Its most important component concerns the *Reader's* coverage: if we published anything at all about a local rapper, whether a 4,000-word profile or a paragraph-long concert preview, that rapper didn't count as overlooked. I also didn't include anyone who performed at a widely publicized festival (Navarro at Red Bull Music Festival Chicago), headlined a record-release show at a midsize or larger club (Pseudo Slang at Sleeping Village), or appeared in a mural on the side of a building (UG Vavy, who's painted on East Room).

Local rappers continue to release material in all seasons, even when music writers hibernate, and I had to skip some great releases because they came out in mid-December, after I'd already spent weeks whittling a list of dozens down to five—among them were David Ashley's *Draco* and Defcee's *A Mixtape as God Intended, Vol 1*. Plus there's the possibility one of them will become a hit—I can't argue that something has been overlooked before everybody has had a chance to look at it.

In case it needs saying, I'm not trying to be comprehensive by choosing five releases. I hope this roundup encourages people to keep exploring and listening to Chicago rap they haven't yet heard.

ARMANII DAY

OBJECTS IN MY MIRROR

Armanii Day opens the August mixtape *Objects in My Mirror* by saying, "The songs aren't long, and I still live with my mom." Her performances throughout are similarly endearing and unexpected. On "Im Rambling" she's mixed her vocals low enough against the instrumental that it sounds like she's wandering through a fog, occasionally drowned out by a stuttering sample of Anita Baker's "Caught Up in the Rapture"; when the backing track drops out and she delivers a smart, high-speed rap, the song's drowsy ambience instantly falls away. She's loose and playful throughout *Objects in My Mirror* in a way that feels like a throwback to the days before "mixtape" became interchangeable with "studio album." It's more fun than a lot of rap studio albums too.



HENNY B & RAGE AURELIUS

WASTED F*CKIN SUMMER

I bent the rules a little to include this EP from Angeline "Henny B" Gil. I wrote about a Labor Day show that several of Henny's friends—including Vic Spencer, Nasim Williams, Mic Terror, Freddie Old Soul, Gzus Piece, and Sisi Dior—hosted in her honor after she died in March. In September, her collaborators released two posthumous EPs: *Moments*, credited to Nasim Williams and Henny B, and *Wasted F*ckin Summer* with Virginia producer Rage Aurelius. The instrumentals on the latter alternate between golden-age boom-bap and glammy boogie, with Henny's nonchalant cool as the unifying thread. Only on the track "Champion" does she shed that relaxed poise,

listing her frustrations and regrets and contemplating her own death—and even then, she takes some consolation from the music she's created.

MOROCCO BROWN

MANIC

Morocco Brown came up in 2016 under the management of rapper Taylor Bennett, though they parted ways a year or so ago. In August, he self-released *Manic*, a focused debut EP built on effervescent synths and minimal percussion, which sometimes sounds like flurries of hand drumming and sometimes sounds like a trap beat submerged in the mix. Brown occasionally seems frazzled—most notably on the single "Mania," originally released in late 2017—but even his most anxious outbursts feel tightly controlled. On the sweet, pop-forward track "Rubicon," he stretches out the occasional syllable, almost as if he's singing, and in those moments you can really hear his latent star quality.



SWADE

HAVE A NICE DAY

Even though Swade grew up in Florida, he calls Chicago home, and you can feel it on February's ornate and unfortunately brief EP *Have a Nice Day*. Anxious, juke-inspired percussion kicks off the triumphant-sounding opener, "Run It Up," and flamboyant horns gussy up the closing track, "Window Seat"—Swade seems to be taking cues from more famous local rappers who've borrowed from footwork

music or beefed up their live sets with brass. He raps so confidently that it seems he's guided by a craftsman's muscle memory, and there's little doubt that those more famous rappers are part of his intended audience. The stubborn grit in his voice when he opens up about his absent father on "Post Mortem" helps make his fight for a better tomorrow feel tangible—something I needed this year.



WEMMYMO

BITTERSWEET

Uptown MC WemmyMo started his career two years ago at the Harold Washington Library, when he made his public debut as a rapper at SocialWorks's OpenMike Chicago, the high school performance series founded and hosted by Chance the Rapper. As WemmyMo told *Illnoize Radio* earlier this year, he got such encouraging feedback from the likes of Social Experiment bandleader Peter Cottontale that he booked studio time that week and recorded his first song, "Misunderstood." It's especially impressive to consider how recently WemmyMo got started when you hear his refined technique on the June release *Bittersweet*, which came out around the time he graduated from Lincoln Park High School. With his youthful energy, he seems to be hurrying its easygoing, soul-influenced tracks along—and even in his relaxed moments, such as the slow half-singing on the tranquil "Holy Vibes," he still manages to convey an irresistible euphoria. 🎧

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01.25 BILLY STRINGS

01.26 GNASH
 MALLRAT / GUARDIN

01.31 STORY OF THE YEAR
 WORLD WAR ME

02.01 MIKE STUD

02.02 DOROTHY
 SPIRIT ANIMAL

02.07 BRASSTRACKS
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02.15 BLEEP BLOP

02.16 DAVID AUGUST
 REACT PRESENTS

02.23 CHERRY GLAZER
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 THUTMOSE / KEY!
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PICK OF THE WEEK

Shemekia Copeland takes on a wealth of social issues on the hard-driving *America's Child*

MIKE WHITE

SHEMEKIA COPELAND, KEVIN BURT

Wed 12/26 and Thu 12/27, 8 PM, City Winery, 1200 W. Randolph, \$38-\$48.

WHEN SHEMEKIA COPELAND exploded onto the blues scene in 1998 with *Turn the Heat Up* (Alligator), the reaction was immediate: adjectives like “sizzling,” “storming,” and “incendiary” began following the 19-year-old singer around like starstruck groupies; some reviewers even dragged relics like the dreaded “red-hot blues mama” out of storage to describe her. Overheated as some of the encomiums may have been, most captured who she was as an artist pretty well, but some of them missed the mark: within the intensity Copeland poured into virtually every song, she seemed to be singing from the depths of hard-won experience, delivering “grown folks’ music” before she was even out of her teens. In the years since, she has further expanded her thematic and emotional range by delving into such hot-button themes as religious hypocrisy (“Sounds Like the Devil,” “Somebody Else’s Jesus”), domestic violence (“Ain’t Gonna Be Your Tattoo”), and date rape (“Crossbone Beach”). On this year’s *America’s Child*, she augments her usual hard-driving, roots-rich ensemble with such guests as John Prine, Rhiannon Giddens, Steve Cropper, and Emmylou Harris. Throughout the record, she summons a persona that’s both righteous and welcoming: “Ain’t Got Time for Hate,” “Americans,” and “I’m Not Like Everybody Else” are celebrations of free will, diversity, and tolerance. On “One I Love” her protagonist is a woman in an unspecified unconventional relationship taking on the haters, and—as if to remind some of her less-than-woke listeners where her music really comes from and what it really means—“In the Blood of the Blues” is a jubilant, unabashedly militant proclamation of its vital role in the living heritage of the African diaspora. —DAVID WHITEIS

FRIDAY 21

BONAVENTURE *Hieroglyphic Being, Mister Wallace, and Ariel Zetina open. 10 PM, Smart Bar, 3730 N. Clark, \$18, \$15 before midnight, \$10 in advance. 21+*

Swiss-Congolese producer Soraya Lutangu, who records and performs as Bonaventure, makes music that sounds like a late-night Internet-surfing session fueled by sugar and adrenaline. “I really don’t have any agenda or strategy when it comes to composing music. I definitely get inspired by my surrounding, not even in the glamorous sense of the term—literally the everyday life,” she told the site Pan African Music in November. “Most of the time, I find another idea while I am trying to remember the initial idea so it is really like constantly surprising myself.” Her debut EP for celebrated oultre electronic label Planet Mu, November’s *Mentor*, stutters, shivers, and shakes as Lutangu pieces together shards of the dreamy Angolan dance genre *kizomba*, the minimalist Ivory Coast pop sound *coupé-decalé*, and the anxious energy of gabber and hardstyle. Her vision comes out celestial—as if the sounds on *Mentor* not only span our globe, but other planets as well—and though these tracks contain plenty of unexpected twists and turns, Lutangu always provides a pulse that any listener can easily latch onto. —LEOR GALIL

CONTAINER *Plattenbau and Mukqs open. 9 PM, Empty Bottle, 1035 N. Western, \$10, \$8 in advance. 21+*

Ren Schofield has been making deranged sounds for years in projects such as noise-rock outfit Gang Wizard and challenging electronic collective Form a Log. With his solo project, Container, the Providence musician is able to fuse all of his past artistic identities into one. Existing at the crossroads of techno and noise, Container is a simple, streamlined project in which Schofield lays out four-on-the-floor electronic beats and pairs them with twisted, circuit-bent synth pulses and washes. On this summer’s LP (the fourth Container full-length to be titled as such, all of which have been released by Spectrum Spools), Schofield’s frill-less, fried compositions are completely mind-bending despite their minimalism; the topsy-turvy, off-kilter sounds that accent the grooves provide an all-out weirdness, and a beyond-harsh power-electronics lean creeps into every song. It’s the type of dance music that’s equally at home played in a club or at a warehouse noise show. —LUCA CIMARUSTI

HAMID DRAKE & MICHAEL ZERANG See also Saturday and Sunday. 6 AM, Links Hall at Constellation, 3111 N. Western, \$29.

Hamid Drake and Michael Zerang played their first sunrise percussion concert in 1990. Timed to coincide with the winter solstice, the performance was an open-invite, nonpreachy spiritual gesture to welcome all their friends who felt out of place attending more conventional holiday-oriented festivities. Twenty-eight years later, much of the country feels like it could use a reminder about the merits

of inclusion, but this event has become a tradition unto itself; many people return annually to observe the beginning of the year’s shortest day by listening to two master drummers match rhythms and sounds played on percussion instruments that come from all around the world. Since Drake and Zerang are both internationally celebrated improvisers, you can count on each concert to be a unique musical event. But you can also be sure that they’ll all start the same way: with the musicians joining the audience in a room lit only by candles, ranging freely amongst their collected instruments until the dawn light streams in. This year Drake and Zerang will play duos on three successive mornings, starting with the solstice and running through the weekend. The two of them will also join other musicians on Friday and Saturday nights. The first night they will help bassist and bandleader Tatsu Aoki celebrate his 60th trip around the globe (see page 37 for more). The second night Zerang will reconvene the unconventional string quartet Silt, which first played with him at May Chapel in October, and Drake will play a set with the free-rock trio Mako Sica. —BILL MEYER

JOSEFINA *Will Phalen and Gunshy open. 9 PM, Sleeping Village, 3734 W. Belmont, \$10. 21+*

Josefina Asconapé was born in Buenos Aires and began her career performing jazz standards and chansons in Paris. Now based in Chicago, she’s developed a style that fits neatly into the local indie-pop scene, with touches of country and folk thrown into the mix. On “Run, Cowboy, Run,” from this year’s *Starry Dome* (Mirasol), Asconapé dabbles in enjoyably low-key western myth-making, with an inevitable shoot-out that results in humiliation but no death; her sweet vocals contrast charmingly with the music’s ominously spacious Morricone flourish-



Josefina JIM TUERK



L.A. VanGogh BRIA WILLIAMS

es. “Chevy ’73” is a big-road anthem whose atmosphere is reminiscent of “Ghost Riders in the Sky,” with Joe Darnaby playing reverb-heavy surf guitar and Alex Hall hitting the drums like a whipcrack, while Asconapé sings with an improbable southern lilt. “I’ll Soon Be Walking” is perhaps the best song on the record. A lovely, coffeehouse country take on Motown, the song contains big beats, girl-group backing vocals, twangy guitar, and millennial laments such as “I keep moving on and rambling / These random roommates are like gambling.” Not every track is so successful; the nostalgic rock romance of “Starry Dome” heads into uncomfortably cloying Billy Joel territory with overdetermined lyrics about dancing by the Chicago lake-side beneath the starry sky. But for the most part, the album will resonate with fans of hooky, intimate songwriting. —NOAH BERLATSKY

L.A. VANGOGH *Femdot* headlines; *L.A. VanGogh and Shawnee Dez* open. 7:30 PM, Lincoln Hall, 2424 N. Lincoln, \$15, \$10 in advance.

On “Goldmember’s Alchemy” Chicago rapper-singer L.A. VanGogh extols the value of labor, with lines arguing that the only way to attain riches yourself is to put in the work. And with his new *Everything Is Subjective: Episode 2* (Private Stock), he makes sure to show you how. L.A. has long since proved himself to be one of the most gifted vocalists in Chicago hip-hop, veering so smoothly between singing and rapping that he seems to evaporate the barriers between those forms. *Episode 2* adds another section to his resumé, as his words nimbly tiptoe, pirouette, and glide atop suave keys and gently clacking percussion. On

“Cause . . .” his lyrical romantic gestures and come-ons help get the job done, but the tender touch of his golden voice on the hook does all the heavy lifting. —LEOR GALIL

MIYUMI PROJECT WITH HAMID DRAKE & MICHAEL ZERANG 8:30 PM, Constellation, 3111 N. Western, \$15. 18+

No matter where you’re from, turning 60 feels significant, but in Japan they have a name for it. *Kanreki* signifies the start of a new cycle of life with your troubles and responsibilities forgotten. Celebrants often wear red—a color associated with youth—and traditionally they retire from adult household responsibility. Tatsu Aoki, who was born in Tokyo and moved to Chicago in 1977, put off his *kanreki* until he turned 61 this year, and he still shows no signs of slowing the pace of his busy lifestyle. The educator, musician, and filmmaker released two new albums this year, both of which feature him playing bass with a flexibly configured group called the Miyumi Project. *Raw and Alive Volume II* (Asian Improv) is a double live album by the full ensemble, which layers free-flowing woodwind solos over traditional taiko drum rhythms, while *Reduction Ensemble* (Asian Improv) is a quartet recording closer to the pancultural jazz of early-80s groups such as Codona or Griot Galaxy. Aoki’s *kanreki* is the theme of tonight’s concert, which is part of the annual winter solstice celebration organized by drummers Hamid Drake and Michael Zerang. In the first set Aoki, who also plays a traditional Japanese stringed instrument called the *shamisen*, will improvise with his hosts. During the second, Drake and Zerang will join Aoki in a lineup of the Miyumi Project that includes his frequent collaborators Mwata Bowden and Edward Wilkerson Jr. on reeds, as well as Aoki’s children Eigen, Kioto, and Miyumi (the ensemble’s namesake) on taiko drums. —BILL MEYER

SATURDAY 22

HAMID DRAKE & MICHAEL ZERANG See Friday, 6 AM, Links Hall at Constellation, 3111 N. Western, \$29.

SOLO SAM Freddie Gibbs headlines; DJ RTST and Solo Sam open. 8 PM, Park West, 322 W. Armitage, \$25.

Solo Sam started his rap career while playing NCAA Division 1 football for Valparaiso University, and the arts have long been in his DNA. His father, Ghanaian painter Samuel Akainyah, moved to Chicago in 1975 to attend the School of the Art Institute, and Solo Sam has followed in his footsteps to become a multidisciplinary artist. He’s a glassblower by trade who specializes in cold working, a technique that involves shaping glass after it’s cooled; I’ve yet to see his glasswork, but if it’s anything like his music, it must be top-of-the-line. This summer he self-released *Itis*, an all-too-brief EP buoyed by his adroit rapping. On “Breezin’ & Coolin’” he subtly shifts the swing in his rapid delivery from one ➔

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JAN 17

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MUSIC

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Macabre
 © MICHELLE MARGAUX

continued from 37
 cluster of verses to the next, and in the process he injects adrenaline into the song and alters the mood of the carefree instrumental. In the song's video, Sam rides through Chicago's residential streets on a moped, hits a battery of tennis balls served by something that looks like the ED-209 enforcement droid from the original *Robocop*, and takes the form of a centaur. Just like in the song, his expert touches and personable character make everything in the video make sense, no matter how surreal. —LEOR GALIL

MACABRE *Part of Holiday of Horrors. Jungle Rot, Disinter, and Inner Decay open. 6:30 PM, Reggie's Rock Club, 2105 S. State, \$20, \$15 in advance. 17+*

As saccharine as holiday-themed foo-foo can get, there's always a dark current beneath the tinsel—consider the tradition of Christmas ghost stories, for example. Chicago murder-metal institution Macabre are at the core of a distinctly local custom that reliably provides an opportunity to harmlessly vent in the mosh pit: Holiday of Horror. This

year, the mini fest—which is inspired by the band's satisfyingly vicious song of the same title—turns 21 and sprawls out over two rooms at Reggie's. Headlining the Music Joint is Putrid Pile, the gnarly, gargling one-man band of ex-Numskull multi-instrumentalist Shaun LaCanne, with support by blackened death-metal outfit Blood of the Wolf and Atonement Theory, a heavy industrial four-piece fronted by Jay Jancetic of Harm's Way and Holy Roman Empire. Macabre take the main stage, with Kenosha's finest death-metal band, Jungle Rot (who released a self-titled ninth full-length in July), and Chicago horror/death-metal crew Disinter. Holidays can produce a lot of aggression that needs catharsis, and if you still haven't had enough, there's a free aftershow with Motörhead tribute band We Are the Roadkill. —MONICA KENDRICK

SUNDAY 23

HAMID DRAKE & MICHAEL ZERANG See Friday. 6 AM, Links Hall at Constellation, 3111 N. Western, \$29. 🍷




Kurt Vile
 © COURTESY THE ARTIST

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THE SECRET HISTORY OF CHICAGO MUSIC

PIVOTAL CHICAGO MUSICIANS THAT SOMEHOW HAVE NOT GOTTEN THEIR JUST DUES by PLASTIC CRIMEWAVE



DYSFUNCTIONELLS

AFTER RICH KRUEGER WROTE ME TO SUGGEST I COVER HIS FRIEND DWAIN STORY, I REALIZED THAT KRUEGER ALSO HAD A NOTEWORTHY CAREER, LARGELY WITH WEIRDO ROOTS OUTFIT THE DYSFUNCTIONELLS—THE SELF-DESCRIBED “PUTT-UGUEST BAND IN CHICAGO.” BORN IN BROOKLYN IN 1960 AND INSPIRED AS A KID BY DOO-WOP, JACQUES BREL, AND THE BEATLES, HE CAME TO CHICAGO IN 1978 FOR COLLEGE AND STARTED WRITING SONGS IN THE MID-80S. IN 1987 KRUEGER BEGAN PERFORMING SOLO, AND IN SUMMER 1991 HE STARTED THE DYSFUNCTIONELLS. THE BAND WAS KRUEGER ON ACOUSTIC GUITAR, VERNON TONGES ON ELECTRIC GUITAR, BANJO, AND PEDAL STEEL, OLIVER STECK ON ACCORDION, HARMONICA, AND TRUMPET, RUSSELL CLARK ON BASS, AND VENCE EDMONDS ON DRUMS (WITH JIM BECKER, LATER OF CALIFONE GUESTING ON MANDOLIN OR BASS). TONGES AND KRUEGER SPLIT THE SONGWRITING & LEAD VOCALS, ATTRACTING COMPARISONS TO THE LIKES OF DYLAN, RICHARD THOMPSON, AND NEIL YOUNG. THE DYSFUNCTIONELLS PLAYED THEIR FIRST SHOW AT SHEFFIELD’S, LANDED A MONTHLY RESIDENCY AT THE CHARLESTON, AND GIGGED AT LOUNGE AX, DOUBLE DOOR, BEAT KITCHEN, AND JIMMY’S WOODLAWN TAP, AMONG OTHERS. THEY PLAYED

IN NEW YORK TOO, INCLUDING SHOWS BACKING THE LEGENDARY PETER STAMPFEL (OF THE HOLY MODAL ROUNDERS & THE FUGGS). THE DYSFUNCTIONELLS ALSO RECORDED THE LIVE CASSETTE “NOT IN OUR WILDEST DREAMS,” WITH STAMPFEL IN 1994. THEN SERVED AS THE BACKUP BAND FOR THE ROUNDERS REUNION IN NY IN ’96. SOON KRUEGER CHOSE TO FOCUS ON HIS WORK AS AN ACADEMIC PHYSICIAN, THOUGH, AND HE BROKE UP THE DYSFUNCTIONELLS BY MOVING TO LA IN 1998. THE GROUP’S ONLY STUDIO RECORDING WAS THE 1993 CASSETTE “JOUNDICED PURSUITS,” BUT THEY’VE SINCE RELEASED A LIVE REUNION SET FROM LULA IN THE EARLY AUGHTS. KRUEGER HAS BEEN BACK IN CHICAGO SINCE 2010, AND NOW PLAYS IN A FOUR-PIECE WITH EDMONDS—THIS YEAR HE RELEASED TWO ALBUMS UNDER HIS OWN NAME, “LIFE AIN’T THAT LONG” AND “NOWTHEN” (FEATURING GUESTS SUCH AS STAMPFEL, GARY LUCAS, AND ROBBIE FULKS). HE CURRENTLY WORKS AS A NEONATOLOGIST AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO.

—BIG THANKS TO THE MAN RICHARD K.

TUNE INTO THE RADIO VERSION OF “THE SECRET HISTORY OF CHICAGO MUSIC” ON “OUTSIDE THE LOOP” ON WGN RADIO 720 AM, SATURDAY AT 6AM WITH HOST MIKE STEPHEN. [COMMENTS, IDEAS TO plasticcw@hotmail.com](mailto:plasticcw@hotmail.com)
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KURT VILE & THE VIOLATORS Jessica Pratt opens. 7:30 PM, Riviera Theatre, 4746 N. Racine, \$36. 18+

I was certain that Philadelphia musician Kurt Vile had shed all his weirdness as he grew older and his public profile leaped from underground phenom to indie success. On his breakthrough third album, 2009’s *Childish Prodigy*, Vile was a ramblin’ psychedelic storyteller, playing freaky fingerstyle folk through lush, hazy soundscapes. But as he began experiencing more mainstream acceptance, his records started to reflect that: the songs were still great, but he pushed aside the sonic experimentation that dominated his earlier work for breezy heartland indie rock. Last year’s *Lotta Sea Lice*, Vile’s collaborative LP with Courtney Barnett, focuses completely on restraint

and simplicity. So October’s *Bottle It In* (Matador), which melds his recent laid-back folk-rock songwriting with his past weirdo tendencies, arrived like a breath of fresh air. Vile delivers dreamy melodies in his characteristic half-asleep vocals, riding simple, hooky rhythms while blown-out synths, alien guitars, and atonal harp set the tone for a fun, exciting dive back into the experimental. —LUCA CIMARUSTI

WEDNESDAY 26

SHEMEKIA COPELAND. See *Pick of the Week*, page 36. Copeland also performs Thu 12/27, and Kevin Burt opens both shows. 8 PM, City Winery, 1200 W. Randolph, \$38-\$48. 🎧 📱

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Notice is hereby given, pursuant to "An Act in relation to the use of an Assumed Business Name in the conduct or transaction of Business in the State," as amended, that a certification was registered by the undersigned with the County Clerk of Cook County, Registration Number: D18156043 on December 3, 2018. Under the Assumed Business Name of MK CONSULTING with the business located at: 740 W. FULTON ST. UNIT 1006, CHICAGO, IL 60661. The true and real full name(s) and residence address of the owner(s)/partner(s) is: MEGAN KOVACH 740 W. FULTON ST. UNIT 1006, CHICAGO, IL 60661, USA (12/27)

Publication Notice of Court Date for Request For Name Change: Request of: Anthoula Roberta Patelidas. There will be a court date on my request to change my name from: Anthoula Roberta Patelidas to Athoula Roberta Lagunas. The court date will be held 1/29/2018 at 1 PM at 50 W. Washington Chicago in Cook County in courtroom #1704. (12/20)

Notice is hereby given, pursuant to "An Act in relation to the use of an Assumed Business Name in the conduct or transaction of Business in the State," as amended,

ed, that a certification was registered by the undersigned with the County Clerk of Cook County, Registration Number: D18155944 on November 16, 2018 Under the Assumed Business Name of ATM CARES with the business located at: 12722 S. LAFLIN, CALUMET PARK, IL 60827 The true and real full name(s) and residence address of the owner(s)/partner(s) is: ALICIA ROBINSON, 12722 S. LAFLIN CALUMET PARK, IL 60827, USA (12/20)

Notice is hereby given, pursuant to "An Act in relation to the use of an Assumed Business Name in the conduct or transaction of Business in the State," as amended, that a certification was registered by the undersigned with the County Clerk of Cook County, Registration Number: Y18000033 on December 6, 2018 Under the Assumed Business Name of EMMA'S DINER with the business located at: 5200 N SHERIDAN RD APT 301, CHICAGO, IL 60640. The true and real full name(s) and residence address of the owner(s)/partner(s) is: JOSHUA W GOLDSTEIN 5200 N SHERIDAN RD APT 301 CHICAGO, IL 60640, USA (12/27)

MARKETPLACE GENERAL

MESSAGES

Erotic Massage by Lauren and Holly Two or four hand sessions with two lovely MILF's in the Schaumburg area. Please call or text for more information. 331 223-3143

MESSAGES

Gregory Young: Running for mayor in the city of Chicago. Write ins 773-993-6695

HELP WANTED

House Cleaner needed \$600/Weekly Working Days: Monday and Friday Time Schedule: 8AM - 3PM Email: jenniferbenny18888@outlook.com

VALENTINE'S DAY ISSUE

Want to send a note to someone special? An old flame, a missed match, or an ongoing partner? The Reader wants to be your destination for love. Call 312-392-2934 or email slnane@chicago-readercorp.com to submit your message. First ten words free, \$10 for additional twenty words.

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Face sitting, revenge porn, and prayer

Quick hits on kinks and consent

Q: I'm a kinky single woman who keeps attracting the wrong men for me—specifically, submissive guys into face sitting. I'm submissive myself, and face sitting is not a turn-on for me. But the vast majority of men who hit on me have this fetish. I think it's a size-related issue—a my-size-related issue. I'm a full-figured/curvy woman with a big butt. Granted, it's a fabulous butt, but my butt sends the wrong signals, apparently. I've tried several times to word my FetLife and other dating profiles so that I'll attract dominant men, but the messages from submissive wannabe face sittees pour in. Dating when you're not thin is hard enough. Help, please.—**BABY GOT BACK**

A: You've worded your dating profiles to attract Doms, BGB, but it doesn't sound like you've worded your profiles to repel—and crush the hopes of—submissive wannabe face sittees. Let's fix that: "I get a lot of messages from submissive guys into face sitting. I've got a great butt, I realize, but I'm a sub, I'm not into face sitting, and I only want to hear from Dom guys." Some submissive guys will message you anyway—guys who will be letting you know they have a hard time taking no for an answer, BGB, so not guys you'd ever want to meet up with IRL. Delete their messages and block their profiles.

Q: While having sex one night with my girlfriend, I pulled out a vibrator for the first time. She asked whether I (a guy) had used it with a previous partner (another woman).

I conceded that I had. She refused to let me use it on her on the grounds that it had already been inside someone else. I pointed out that since I am not a virgin, her objection did not seem principled: my penis has been in someone else and she lets me put that in her. Nevertheless, she remained adamant. Do you think she was being reasonable?—**VERY INTERESTED BOYFRIEND ENQUIRES**

A: I do not, VIBE, but since you don't want to stick your old vibrator in me—presumably—what I think is irrelevant. When it comes to who gets to stick what in our bodies, we're allowed to be arbitrary, inconsistent, capricious, and even illogical. That's why "But my dick has been in other women and you let me stick that in you!" isn't quite the slam-dunk argument you think it is. So toss that old vibrator and get yourself a new one—but save the packaging so you can pass it off as new with your next girlfriend.

Q: My cousin was a victim of revenge porn. A bitter ex-boyfriend of his sent several videos they'd made to everyone on my cousin's contact list, including me. I'm a straight woman who prefers gay male porn, and my cousin and his ex are beautiful men—they're both dancers—and I couldn't help myself: I watched the videos, more than once, before deleting them. So how bad a person am I?—**SICK AND WRONG**

A: You're a better person than the asshole ex who sent those videos to everyone your poor cousin knows, SAW, but a worse person

than those who deleted the videos without wanking over them first.

Q: Your life is a monstrous affront to God, and your life's work, your ridiculous "advice" column, encourages people to act on their worst impulses. Advice column? Take the "D" away! You write A VICE column! I was involved in the gay life once, Mr. Savage, but the love of Jesus delivered me from homosexual sin. Embrace Christ, and you too can be delivered. I pray for you every day. Someone has to.—**CHRIST EVEN SAVES SAVAGES**

P.S. I have read what you've written about your mother, whom you claim to have loved. Your mother died relatively young. I'm not suggesting God punished you by cutting your mother's life short. No, your mother died of shame.

A: You pray for me, CESS, and I'll pray for you—because all the delicious dicks you left behind when Jesus raptured you out of homosexual sin aren't gonna suck themselves, are they?

P.S. "Jesus is love," my Catholic mother liked to say. If she was right, CESS, he surely finds the things going into my mouth less offensive than the shit coming out of yours.

Q: I've been toying with the idea of having a sub provide domestic services, but all the potential subs I've met with haven't seemed like a good fit for various reasons. Last night, I had a first meeting with a man who is a good fit on paper but who turned out to be an obnoxious asshole in person—a misogynistic, mansplaining frat-boy type. Can someone be too much

of a dick for you to let them do your laundry?—**SUB IS SUBHUMAN**


A: If you wouldn't be in a vanilla relationship with someone, SIS, why would you want to be in a D/s relationship with them?


Q: I've been in a lesbian relationship for about two years. Recently, I was listening to your podcast, and you were talking about the Big/little kink. I remember thinking my girlfriend could be into that. Today, my girlfriend texted this to me: "I want you to hold me like a child, rock me to sleep, and tuck me in and kiss my forehead." I almost asked her right then if she was into Big/little play, but then I realized that I'm not sure what I would do if

she said yes. If she came to me and said, "Hey, I'm into this stuff!" I would consider it. But I am not into this stuff—not independently—or at least I don't think so. My question is this: If you suspect your partner is into something that you're not into, should you leave it alone? I feel like maybe the GGG thing to do is to ask her and offer to explore it if she says yes.—**WANNA BE GGG**

A: Are you sure you're not curious about Big/little play, aka age play? Because it sounds like you might be. If you are, don't project your interests/kinks onto your girlfriend. Just ask her if she might be interested. If you aren't into Big/little play but think she might be, the same advice applies: Just ask her.

Q: My boyfriend of three years has not left his wife for me, even though he says he will someday. He doesn't want to hurt her. He feels a duty to her. But he loves me more and swears he will leave her someday. In the meantime, we carve out half an hour a week for sex and it's super hot. Two questions (and please answer honestly): He's not going to leave her, is he? And I'm a cliché, aren't I?—**DON'T UNDERSTAND MEN**

A: No, he isn't. And yes, you are. DTMFA. 

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Wild Reeds MARK CLUNEY

NEW

Anvil 3/16, 7 PM, Reggie's Rock Club, on sale Fri 12/21, 10 AM, 17+

David Archuleta 4/2, 8 PM, City Winery, on sale Thu 12/20, noon

Alec Benjamin 4/23, 7 PM, Lincoln Hall

Carbon Leaf 4/19, 8 PM, City Winery, on sale Thu 12/20, noon

Liz Cooper & the Stampede 3/8, 10 PM, Schubas, on sale Fri 12/21, 10 AM, 18+

Dead Soft 4/3, 6:30 PM, Subterranean, 17+

Deca 1/17, 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle

Donnie 12/27, 7:30 PM, the Promontory

Will Downing 3/30-31, 8 PM, City Winery, on sale Thu 12/20, noon

Fashawn, Stro, Ezri, Cantrell 2/21, 8 PM, Reggie's Rock Club, 18+

Funtcase 1/11, 8 PM, Concord Music Hall, 18+

Grandson 3/12, 7 PM, Reggie's Rock Club

Trevor Hall 3/29, 6:30 PM, Concord Music Hall, 18+

Houndmouth 3/15-16, 8:30 PM, Thalia Hall, 17+

It Looks Sad. 2/26, 7 PM, Subterranean, 17+

Kazka 6/7, 8 PM, Concord Music Hall

Stephen Kellogg 3/22, 9 PM, Lincoln Hall, 18+

Valentino Khan 1/26, 10 PM, the Mid

Kid Capri 1/4, 10 PM, the Promontory

Habib Koité & Bassekou Kouyate 3/7, 8 PM, Maurer Hall, Old Town School of Folk Music, on sale Fri 12/21, 8 AM

Bonnie Koloc 2/16, 8 PM, Maurer Hall, Old Town School of Folk Music, on sale Fri 12/21, 8 AM

The Love Song of R. Buckminster Fuller by Sam Green with live score by Yo La Tengo 2/26, 6:30 PM, Thalia Hall, 17+

Buck Meek 2/26, 8 PM, Schubas, 18+

MHD 2/17, 9 PM, the Promontory

Milo, Pink Navel 2/15, 9 PM, Empty Bottle

Aaron Neville 3/4-5, 8 PM, City Winery, on sale Thu 12/20, noon

Planes Mistaken for Stars 3/6, 8 PM, Subterranean, 17+

Plini, Mestis 4/7, 8 PM, Bottom Lounge, on sale Fri 12/21, 10 AM, 17+

Rivers of Nihil, Enthéos 3/5, 7 PM, Reggie's Rock Club, 17+

Sean Rowe 2/19, 8:30 PM, FitzGerald's, Berwyn, on sale Fri 12/21, 11 AM

Rubblebucket 3/16, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston

Jesse Rutherford 5/3, 8 PM, Subterranean, on sale Thu 12/20, 10 AM

Antonio Sanchez & Migration 3/31, 7 PM, SPACE, Evanston

Satsang 5/3, 9 PM, FitzGerald's, Berwyn, on sale Fri 12/21, 11 AM

Travis Scott 2/21, 8 PM, United Center, on sale Thu 12/20, 10 AM

Shamir 1/25, 9 PM, Empty Bottle

Shingo2 3/21, 8 PM, Subterranean, 17+

Todd Snider 4/11, 7:30 PM, Park West, 18+

Söndörgö 4/7, 4 PM, Szold Hall, Old Town School of Folk Music, on sale Fri 12/21, 8 AM

Story of the Year, World War Me 1/31, 8 PM, Bottom Lounge, 17+

Subdudes 3/21-22, 8 PM, City Winery, on sale Thu 12/20, noon

Spencer Sutherland 2/12, 7 PM, Schubas

T-Pain 3/29, 8 PM, Park West, 18+

Teddy & the Rough Riders 1/14, 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle

This Must Be the Band 2/15-16, 8 PM, the Vic, on sale Fri 12/21, 10 AM, 18+

Yann Tiersen 5/18, 8:30 PM, Thalia Hall, 17+

Token 2/18, 7 PM, Reggie's Rock Club, 18+

Juan Wauters 1/24, 9:30 PM, Hideout

Wild Reeds 4/6, 9 PM, Sleeping Village, on sale Fri 12/21, 10 AM

Cece Winans 1/10, 8 PM, the Promontory

Yawning Man, Freedom Hawk 1/23, 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle

Zeta 1/23, 8 PM, Subterranean, 17+

UPDATED

Last Dinosaurs 5/3, 7 and 10 PM, Beat Kitchen, early show sold out, late show added

UPCOMING

David August 2/16, 10 PM, Bottom Lounge, 17+

Aurora, Talos 3/1, 7:30 PM, Metro

Randy Bachman 1/24-25, 8 PM, City Winery

Backstreet Boys 8/10, 8 PM, United Center

Baroness, Deafheaven 3/31, 6:30 PM, Riviera Theatre

Beirut, Helado Negro 2/22, 7:30 PM, Riviera Theatre, 18+

Adrian Belew 4/4, 8 PM, Maurer Hall, Old Town School of Folk Music

Mariah Carey 3/11, 8 PM, Chicago Theatre

Copeland 4/11, 8 PM, Bottom Lounge, 17+

Corrosion of Conformity, Crowbar, Weedeater 2/9, 7:30 PM, Bottom Lounge, 17+

Daughters, Blanck Mass 3/8, 8 PM, Bottom Lounge, 17+

Dead & Company 6/14-15, 7 PM, Wrigley Field

Fleetwood Mac 3/1, 8 PM, United Center

Flesh Eaters 3/10, 8 PM, Lincoln Hall

Grails 1/17, 8:30 PM, Sleeping Village, part of Tomorrow Never Knows

Ariana Grande 4/7-8, 7:30 PM, United Center

Hatebreed, Obituary, Terror 4/11, 6:30 PM, Concord Music Hall, 17+

Health 4/20, 8:30 PM, Bottom Lounge

High on Fire 1/22, 8 PM, Metro, 18+

Infamous Stringdusters 3/16, 8 PM, the Vic, 18+

Interpol 2/7, 7:30 PM, Chicago Theatre

Iron Maiden 8/22, 7:30 PM, Hollywood Casino Amphitheatre, Tinley Park

Judas Priest 5/25, 8 PM, Rosemont Theater, Rosemont

King Crimson 9/10, 8 PM, Auditorium Theatre

King Tuff, Stonefield 1/26, 9 PM, Lincoln Hall, 18+

Kiss 3/2, 7:30 PM, United Center

Le Butcherettes 2/20, 8 PM, Cobra Lounge, 17+

Phil Lesh & the Terrapin Family Band 3/7-8, 8 PM, Thalia Hall, 17+

Lotus 12/30-31, 9 PM, Park West, 18+

Jeff Lynne's ELO 6/27, 8 PM, United Center

Magic City Hippies 1/11, 9 PM, Lincoln Hall, 18+

Stephen Malkmus & the Jicks 1/23, 8 PM, Metro, 18+

Nick Mason's Saucerful of Secrets 4/4, 7:30 PM, Chicago Theatre

Metric, Zoe 3/22, 7 PM, Aragon Ballroom, 17+

Mineral, Tancred 1/24, 9 PM, Lincoln Hall

Misfits, Fear, Venom Inc. 4/27, 7:30 PM, Allstate Arena, Rosemont

Kevin Morby, Sam Cohen 6/7-8, 8:30 PM, Thalia Hall, 17+

Muse, Walk the Moon 4/12, 8 PM, United Center

Graham Nash 3/17, 7 PM, Athenaeum Theatre

Anders Osborne 2/9, 7 and 10 PM, City Winery

Parcels 3/1, 9 PM, Lincoln Hall, 18+

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Perfume 4/5, 8 PM, Chicago Theatre

Perturbator 5/9, 8:30 PM, Thalia Hall, 17+

Petal, Bernice 1/18, 9 PM, Schubas, part of Tomorrow Never Knows, 18+

Pom-Poms 1/12, 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle

Procol Harum 2/20-21, 8 PM, City Winery

Todd Rundgren 4/23-24, 8 PM, Athenaeum Theatre

Rusko 1/25, 10 PM, Sound-Bar

Soft Moon 1/24, 8:30 PM, Thalia Hall, 17+

Spiritualized 4/9, 8 PM, the Vic, 18+

Vince Staples, JPEGmafia 3/12, 8:30 PM, Riviera Theatre, Fri 12/14, 10 AM, 18+

The Suffers 2/16, 9 PM, Lincoln Hall, 18+

Teenage Fanclub 3/6, 7:30 PM, Metro, 18+

Twiddle 2/8, 8 PM, Concord Music Hall, 18+

Sharon Van Etten 2/14-15, 8:30 PM, Thalia Hall, 17+

Ryley Walker 12/28, 9 PM, Empty Bottle

Colter Wall 2/23, 8 PM, Thalia Hall, 17+

Warbly Jets 2/15, 9 PM, Schubas

Rachael Yamagata 1/29-30, 8 PM, City Winery

Yoshi Flower 2/5, 8 PM, Schubas, 18+

You Me at Six 3/2, 7 PM, Bottom Lounge

Yung Gravy 2/21, 7:30 PM, Metro

Zombo 2/8, 9 PM, Aragon Ballroom, 18+

SOLD OUT

Alkaline Trio 1/3-6, 9 PM, Metro, 18+

Jess Glynne 3/30, 7:30 PM, the Vic

Conan Gray 4/8, 7:30 PM, Bottom Lounge

Beth Hart 4/25, 7:30 PM, Park West, 18+

LP 2/8, 7:30 PM, the Vic, 18+

Ella Mai 3/3, 8 PM, Concord Music Hall, 18+

Massive Attack 3/23, 8 PM, Chicago Theatre

Mumford & Sons 3/29, 7:30 PM, United Center

Robyn 3/6, 8 PM, Aragon Ballroom

Space Jesus 12/31, 8 PM, Concord Music Hall, 18+

Lennon Stella 3/28, 7 PM, Metro



GOSSIP WOLF

A furry ear to the ground of the local music scene

JOAN OF ARC founder and vocalist **Tim Kinsella** and electronic musician **Jenny Polus**—also known as **Jenny Pulse**, and previously as **Spa Moans**—both finished their own album-release and touring cycles a few weeks ago. But instead of relaxing over the holiday season, they're firing up a brand-new duo project called **Good Fuck** that combines postindustrial club beats and oddball lyrics—their sound has Gossip Wolf imagining Chris & Cosey hosting a karaoke party in the back of a totally depressing grocery store. "We are enjoying a very lo-fi multimedia set and concentrating on the singing," says Kinsella. "New songs will definitely involve more performative live elements and improvisations." Good Fuck will drop their self-titled debut album in February on **Joyful Noise**, and on Saturday, December 22, they play the **Hungry Brain** with headliner Jimmy Whispers and DJ sets from Grapetooth.

It's been a minute since Gossip Wolf checked in with synth master **Alex Barnett**. But we're all in luck! On Thursday, December 20, he plays **Sleeping Village** as part of a night of outre electronic music, performing songs he's made under the name **Champagne Mirrors**; the project's latest release, a dark, unsettling EP called **Countdown to Upgrade**, came out on Barnett's label, **Scrapes Recordings**, in July. Also on the bill are Los Angeles outfit **VSCC** and fellow locals **Itsi** and **No Dreams**; Beau Wanzer spins between sets.

Gossip Wolf firmly believes that everyone deserves presents during the Official Merriest Time of the Year, and the goons in punky Chicago cock-rock band **I Love Rich** agree—they don't even care if you've been naughty or nice! On Sunday, December 23, they play their annual **Richmass** show at **Liar's Club**, and they've promised gifts for every fan and absolutely no Christmas music. Sharing the bill are the **Spanish Flats** (with folks from old-school Fireside Bowl bands such as the Mushganas and the Fighters) and **Pink Stink Rails**. —**J.R. NELSON AND LEOR GALIL**

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

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WED
12/26

6PM-FREE **WONDER & SKEPTICISM**
"SCIENCE COMMUNICATION: WHOSE JOB IS IT ANYWAY?"
PLAGUE OF CARCOSA

FRI
12/21

5PM-FREE
HARD COUNTRY HONKY TONK WITH
THE HOYLE BROTHERS
CONTAINER
PLATTENBAU • MUKOS

THU
12/27

LANDO CHILL
VIC SPENCER • AJANI JONES

FRI
12/28

RYLEY WALKER
OHMME (DUO) • BEN LAMAR GAY

SAT
12/22

12PM-FREE DJ BILLIAMS PLUS SPECIAL GUESTS
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FEAT. **THE TROLLS**
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SAT
12/29

12PM-FREE THE 14TH ANNUAL
ALEX CHILTON BIRTHDAY BASH
SAINT PÉ
TROY ANDERSON

SUN
12/23

FREE
A MAYPOLE XMAS MIRACLE FEAT.
WANDERING BOYS (DUO)
GLASS MOUNTAIN • EMORY GAP

SUN
12/30

FREE
THE COWBOYS

12/31: NYE WITH BULLY, 12/31 @ LOGAN SQUARE AUDITORIUM: WINDY CITY SOUL CLUB NYE 2018, 1/1: EVERYONE'S HUNGOVER 2018 (11AM-FREE), 1/1: MIKE'S HARD KARAOKE (6PM-FREE), 1/2: THE TOMBLANDS, 1/3: LOS BLACK DOGS, 1/5: T-REXTASY, 1/6: GOODGRANDKIDZ, 1/7: THE CURLS (FREE), 1/8: WET PISS, 1/9: FAINTLIFE, 1/10: SLUSHY, 1/12: THE POM-POMS, 1/14: TEDDY & THE ROUGH RIDERS (FREE), 1/15: FREE SNACKS, 1/17: DECA, 1/21: PEEL (FREE), 1/22: ANIKA, 1/23: YAWNING MAN, 1/25: SHAMIR, 1/28: ENGINE SUMMER (FREE), 1/31: OVEF OW, 2/1: P.O.S., 2/2: MELKBELLY, 2/8: GLITTER CREEPS PRESENTS BOY HARSHER
NEW ON SALE: 2/9: NAKED GIANTS, 2/15: MILO, 2/23 @ OUTSIDE EMPTY BOTTLE: MUSIC FROZEN DANCING: A WINTER BLOCK PARTY (1PM-FREE), 3/3: PSYCHEDELIC PORN CRUMPETS, 3/9 TRISOMIE 21, 3/23: JERRY PAPER, 3/29: THE KVB, 4/29: MONOLORD

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- 1.13** CORKY SIEGEL'S CHAMBER BLUES FEAT. TRACY NELSON
- 1.14-15** STEVE EARLE
- 1.24-25** RANDY BACHMAN (OF THE GUESS WHO)
- 1.18** SKYLAR GREY
- 1.29-30** RACHAEL YAMAGATA
- 1.31-2.2** ALEJANDRO ESCOVEDO WITH DON ANTONIO BAND
- 2.4-5** MS. LISA FISCHER & GRAND BATON

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12.26-27

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12.30-1.1

AVERY* SUNSHINE
NEW YEAR'S SHOWS



1.5

TALIB KWELI

UPCOMING SHOWS

- 12.28-29 **MACY GRAY** - MEET & GREET AVAILABLE
- 1.6 **SONS OF THE NEVER WRONG** WITH MICHAEL SMITH
- 1.7 **DAN TEDESCO**
- 1.8 **SHANE KOYCZAN**
- 1.10 **SLICE** - FILM SCREENING
- 1.11 **THREE WOMEN & THE TRUTH:** MARY GAUTHIER, ELIZA GILKYSON & GRETCHEN PETERS
- 1.12 **MAYSA**
- 1.16 **EAGLEMANIA**
- 1.17 **PARIS COMBO**
- 1.19 **MELANIE FIONA**
- 1.20 **JODEE LEWIS & JONAS FRIDDLE**
- 1.21 **LET FREEDOM RING, CHICAGO!** A MUSICAL CELEBRATION OF DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.
- 1.23 **THE HOT SARDINES**
- 1.27 **SUSAN WERNER**
- 1.28 **TREY MCLAUGHLIN & THE SOUNDS OF ZAMAR**
- 2.3 **HAPPY BIRTHDAY LANGSTON HUGHES:** A CELEBRATION IN POETRY, PROSE & SONG
- 2.6 **MARCUS JOHNSON** WITH KATHY KOSINS
- 2.8 **MARC ROBERGE** (OF O.A.R.)



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