

READER



Something rotten in the 20th

A Pritzker-backed machine operator, a rogue three-time candidate, and plenty of idealistic novices pack the race for alderman in the historically corrupt ward.

By **MAYA DUKMASOVA** 10

A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

HAPPY NEW YEAR, CHICAGO!

Let's start 2019 off with some great news. Comics are back—right there on page 43. All-new weekly serials from your independent favorites: Local hero Mike Centeno of *Futile Comics* (and, formerly, Quimby's Bookstore) launches a strip about the weirdness of skin. Melissa Mendes of *Freddy Stories* takes a break from her gut-wrenching, Patreon-backed family narrative *The Weight* to pen a fiction story about a girl detective. And John Porcellino of long-running, internationally lauded, self-published *King-Cat Comics & Stories* takes on a whole new project about urban wildlife. There are plenty of us who first picked up alternative newsweeklies because of the comics. I'm hoping soon there will be many, many more.

You'll also notice that we're starting in on election coverage straight out of the gate, with a deeply reported piece from the 20th Ward by our own Maya Dukmasova. What's going on in Woodlawn may not strike you as important—although it was important enough to J.B. Pritzker, who takes the state gubernatorial office on Monday, to drop a wad of cash into the aldermanic elections.

Speaking of shady politics, Ben Joravsky is back on our pages to decry the legacy of 14th Ward alderman Ed Burke. (Twenty three guns, dude? Really?)

Not news, though, really: Ben Joravsky will always be back. Especially during the election! I'll fight anybody that doesn't think Ben's voice is sorely needed in this city at this time.

Finally, we've been getting a lot of mail lately, most of it quite lovely. One kind man asked if we'd consider printing readers' letters, and the truth is that we would. We'll happily print a few in a couple weeks to see how it goes. Have thoughts about the new comics? Our political coverage? Jibaritos? Or just want to say hi? Send notes along to letters@chicagoreader.com and we'll select a couple—edited for brevity, clarity, and style—to include in the last edition of January 2019.

Isn't this year just going to be great? —ANNE ELIZABETH MOORE

FEATURES



COMICS FEATURE

At the hop

The Socialist-Feminist Working Group of the Democratic Socialists of America gets down.

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POLITICS FEATURE

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In the most packed aldermanic race in the city, rumors of corruption stand strong.

BY MAYA DUKMASOVA 10

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ON THE COVER: PHOTO BY
MAYA DUKMASOVA.



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CITY LIFE



Shatara Powell (center) with friends © ISA GIALLORENZO

STREET VIEW

Squad goals

Celebrate a birthday with dinner, a movie, and matching outfits.

"I LOVED MY DRESS the first time I laid eyes on it," says Shatara Powell, who was photographed at the AMC Dine-in Block 37 theater downtown. She celebrated her 34th birthday with dinner at TAO in River North, followed by a screening of Tyler Perry's romantic comedy *Nobody's Fool*. Powell, who works as a therapist, says she's obsessed with matching outfits. She wears the same designer from head to toe when going out—brands like Ralph Lauren, Gucci, Louis Vuitton, Chanel—curated through shopping sprees at department stores like Nordstrom, Barneys, and Neiman Marcus. For her birthday, Powell insisted that her friends wear Tommy Hilfiger. The night was captured in a slickly produced video montage, featuring Powell and her friends dressed in red, white, and blue, and celebrating with cocktails and cake. She describes her style as conservative and sexy and, sometimes, edgy. "Edgy means I'll still wear some Timberland boots in the summer with a tank top," she says. "I'm a firm believer that when you look good, you feel good." —ISA GIALLORENZO

THE LATEST ON YOUR FAVORITE RESTAURANTS AND BARS

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Chicago Taco Authority

by JAMIE RAMSAY

TRANSPORTATION

A taco shop at almost every stop

Chicago was just rated the best city for transit-and-taco satisfaction in the U.S.

By JOHN GREENFIELD

During the last presidential election, Latinos for Trump cofounder Marco Gutierrez warned that if the U.S. doesn't do more to stop undocumented immigrants from entering the country, "you're going to have taco trucks on every corner." Chicago is already approaching that utopian scenario. Our city has hundreds, if not thousands, of Mexican restaurants where *taqueros* and *taqueras* expertly griddle chunks of marinated steak and carve ruby-colored *al pastor* from trompo rotisseries, then deposit the meats in warm corn tortillas and top them with chopped onions and cilantro. Dress their creations with fiery red, green, or black salsa and a squeeze of lime and take a bite, and you're in carnivore heaven.

So it was no surprise when a recent survey by the urban planning website CityLab found that Chicagoans gave our city high marks for both tacos and public transportation, making Chicago the national sweet spot for combined taco/transit contentment.

The study, inspired by a tweet by Natural Resources Defense Council staffer Carter Rubin, asked readers to rate the quality and availability of tacos and public transportation in their metro areas from one to ten. Over a thousand people had responded by the time the results were published in mid-December. According to CityLab's David Montgomery, 83 Chicagoland residents—about 70 from the city proper—participated. (The survey is still live, if you want to have your say.)

On average, Chicagoans gave local tacos an 8.2 rating, the best score of any northern metropolis. Unsurprisingly, people from metro areas closer to the Mexican border, such as San Diego, Phoenix, and Houston, rated their tacos the highest, but most of these Sunbelt cities received low transit ratings.

Meanwhile, Chicago's public transportation score of 8.1 was the highest of any U.S. city. That's certainly debatable, since New York's MTA is far more extensive than the CTA, and D.C.'s Metro arguably has nicer stations and

railcars. On the other hand, those systems have had major meltdowns in recent years, while the CTA is relatively well maintained. Mayor Rahm Emanuel gloated about that fact in a *New York Times* op-ed in July 2017 with the Mussolini-esque title "In Chicago, the Trains Actually Run on Time."

Near-northwest-side alderman Carlos Ramirez-Rosa, who's of Mexican ancestry, argued that Chicagoans should be proud of the CityLab survey results. "It's not blustery rhetoric, it's a fact: Chicago is the best," he tweeted along with a graph of the results, garnering a thousand likes. In a subsequent tweet, he attributed the win to "leftists who fought for public control of mass transit and hardworking immigrants."

The CTA had not provided an official statement in response to the survey results by press time, but a spokesperson indicated that the agency is pleased by the accolade.

However, Active Transportation Alliance director Ron Burke argued that we should take Chicago's high transit rating with a grain of salt and not let city officials rest on their laurels. "Truthfully, this reveals little about transit in the region except that people who read CityLab are transit-privileged," he said. "They most likely represent a narrow segment of our population: college-educated people who value transit, work downtown, and can afford to live near the best train stations."

Burke added that a recent study found that for about 75 percent of Chicagoland workers, a transit commute to their jobs would take over 90 minutes. He noted that a lower percentage of Chicagoans take public transportation to work than their New York, D.C., Boston, and San Francisco counterparts, and local bus and rail ridership has fallen in recent years. He argued that increasing state funding for transit is critical if we're going to reverse that trend.

Streetsblog reporter Lynda Lopez, a first-generation Mexican-American, said we can't take Chicago's awesome and affordable transit and taco culture for granted. She noted that there's a danger of housing costs and retail rents in many gentrifying neighborhoods becoming too expensive for recent immigrants and mom-and-pop restaurants, especially in areas near el stations. "If we value Chicago's cultural diversity and cuisine, we need to prioritize equitable access to transit

and affordable housing to make sure diverse communities can remain in the city."

But perhaps the expert on the subject of our city's taco and transit prowess is Jose Bustos, owner of the Chicago Taco Authority in the Old Irving Park neighborhood, located a stone's throw from a Blue Line station. His taqueria is decorated with bus stop signs, vintage photographs of the transit system, an old fare box, and a full-size replica of the side of an el car attached to a wall of the dining room.


"Chicago is definitely a great taco town," he said. "It's because you have so many people from Mexico here, from so many different places." According to the 2010 census, a full 21.4 percent of Chicagoans were of Mexican descent. "So people have many different ways of cooking the same kind of taco." For example, while his restaurant specializes in charbroiling, when he has a taste for some flattop-grilled carne asada, he heads to Taqueria Los Gallos in Little Village.

Juan Zaragoza, who owns the goat-focused Birrieria Zaragoza in Archer Heights, which was cited as the favorite restaurant in town of *Reader* food critic Mike Sula, agrees that the presence of immigrants from all over Mexico helps make Chicago's taco scene great. "Some of our taquerias are even better than what you might find in Mexico."

He's from La Barca in the southwestern state of Jalisco, famous for goat tacos, and he noted that people from Mexico City and Michoacán have also brought their own styles of cooking to Chicago. "Michoacán is well known for carnitas [lard-braised pork]. Once they drop that on a soft tortilla with the right salsa, you've got something special."

Zaragoza added that good CTA access has been a factor in his restaurant's success. "We're fortunate that the Pulaski Orange Line stop is down the street and the Pulaski bus runs right by our front door. That certainly doesn't hurt us."

To celebrate our city's new title as the public transportation-and-taco satisfaction capital of the U.S., we've put together the Chicago Transit and Tacos map, featuring more than 100 taquerias and other spots for tacos—including many of the best in town—located within walking distance of el stops.

Check out the map at TinyURL.com/ChicagoTaco. And remember, you can't spell "taco" without "CTA." 

John Greenfield edits the transportation news website [Streetsblog Chicago](http://StreetsblogChicago.com).

 @greenfieldjohn

ON WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 19TH, I ATTENDED THE SOCFEM SOCK HOP ORGANIZED BY THE SOCIALIST-FEMINIST WORKING GROUP OF THE CHICAGO DSA (DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISTS OF AMERICA). THE EVENING BEGAN WITH READINGS AND ENDED WITH A DANCE PARTY. ALL WORDS AND IMAGES ARE FROM THE EVENT, WHICH TOOK PLACE AT CAFE MUSTACHE IN LOGAN SQUARE.

ROCK

I'M HERE REPRESENTING THE BEATNIK CONTINGENT OF THE NINETEEN FIFTIES. I'M GOING TO READ FROM "WHY WOMEN HAVE BETTER SEX UNDER SOCIALISM" BY KRISTEN R. GHODSEE...



'EM SOCK

ON JANUARY 13TH, THE "MARCH FOR LIFE" WILL BE BUSING HUNDREDS OF VERY RELIGIOUS TEENAGERS TO CHICAGO FROM SMALL TOWNS ALL OVER THE MIDWEST. WE'RE HERE TO RAISE MONEY FOR OUR ANNUAL COUNTERPROTEST, BECAUSE FULL SPECTRUM REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE IS A FUNDAMENTAL TENET OF SOCIALISM.

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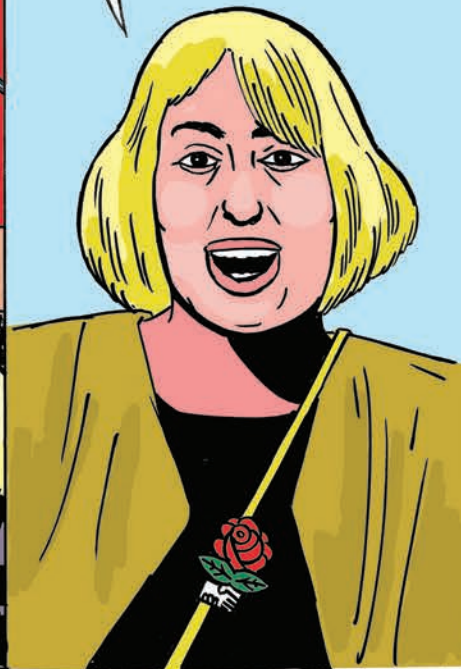
MY NAME IS RACHEL ZIBRAT. I'M THE CO-CHAIR OF THE SOCIALIST-FEMINIST WORKING GROUP. WE HAVE AN ANTI-RACIST WORKING GROUP, ONE FOR LABOR, HEALTH CARE. IT DEPENDS ON YOUR PARTICULAR INTEREST.

I'M AN ABORTION-CLINIC ESCORT AND I CAME TO SOCIALISM VIA MY INTEREST IN REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE. I JOINED THE DSA THE DAY AFTER THE 2016 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION.

YEAH!

WOO!

MY INTERESTS, MY STRENGTHS, ARE THE THINGS I GET PISSED OFF ABOUT THE MOST. HERE YOU CAN CHANNEL THAT ANGER.







Ed Burke
by KATE
GARDINER

POLITICS

Burke out as head of finance committee

Rahm has already chosen his replacement.

By **BEN JORAVSKY**

In the category of closing the gate after the horse has bolted from the pasture, Mayor Rahm fired Ed Burke as chair of the all-important City Council finance committee after the feds indicted the 14th Ward alderman on charges of shaking down a Burger King franchisee.

Wow, there's a lot to unpack in that sentence, starting with . . .

Why does the mayor have the authority to select the chair of a council committee in the first place? We're supposed to have a check and balance system between the executive and

legislative branches of government—even in Chicago.

This is like President Trump telling Senator Mitch McConnell who should chair the Senate budget committee. OK, Trump would probably get away with that. But Trump's cavalier manner of governing is hardly the model we should be emulating.

In the aftermath of Burke's indictment, Mayor Emanuel put on his sad and somber face—as though he were really hurt and surprised by what went down—and told the *Tribune* that public servants must have “a

moral and ethical compass that informs your judgment of right from wrong.

You know, I think I've had enough of quoting Rahm on the subject of morality and ethics and right and wrong—especially since Rahm replaced Burke as finance chair with 40th Ward alderman Patrick O'Connor. That's a little like running over the horse with a truck after he's bolted from the pasture—to complete that analogy.

All right, now that I've gotten that out of my system, let's break things down, starting with the obvious: why did the newly elected Rahm agree to keep Burke as finance chair in the first place?

It's not as though we needed the feds to tell us that Burke was embarrassingly incompetent at his job and morally and ethically challenged.

The finance committee oversees the approval of billions of dollars of contracts—including TIF deals. At the very least, the finance chair should be a vigilant fiduciary defender of taxpayer interests.

And yet Burke's the guy who waved through the parking meter deal—with O'Connor's assistance as mayoral floor leader—with no legitimate oversight after a day or two of hearings. Think about this—Burke (and O'Connor) thought it was a good idea to sell a \$10 billion asset for \$1.15 billion. Good God—both of them should have been bounced from office for gross incompetence years ago.

As for Burke's conflicts of interest—just a couple of weeks ago, WBEZ's Dan Mihalopoulos and the Better Government Association (BGA) broke a story about Burke being “the king of recusals.”

They're referring to Rule 14 of the council code of conduct in which aldermen must recuse themselves from voting on matters on which they have a potential conflict of interest.

As the federal indictment points out, Burke runs a law firm that specializes in winning tax breaks for wealthy and well-connected property owners (like Donald Trump).

The breaks that Burke's firm wins for the Trumps of the world jack up the taxes the rest of us have to pay to compensate.

So while Rahm and Burke are saying they're working overtime to reduce the burden on taxpayers, Burke is essentially making big bucks by getting us to pay more in taxes.

Over the last eight years, Burke has had to recuse himself on various council votes regarding his clients 464 times, WBEZ and the BGA reported—“the comparable total for all 49 other aldermen combined is 108.”

And then there's Burke's role in Council Wars—one of the ugliest chapters in recent Chicago political history.

Back in the 80s, Burke and his pal—former Alderman Edward Vrdolyak—led a Trump-like, white nationalist uprising against Mayor Harold Washington. The purpose was to exploit white fears and prejudices about a black mayor to sabotage the Washington administration and gain more power for themselves. Burke has never accounted for his role in Council Wars, much less apologized for it.

All of this history was well known in 2011, when Rahm swept into office and agreed to keep Burke as finance chair?

Obviously, Burke and Emanuel cut a deal: Rahm would look the other way as Burke made millions on his property tax business. And Burke would use his mastery of council procedure to usher through any legislation that Rahm wanted. No questions asked.

And then when the feds indict Burke, Rahm acts like he's shocked and offers lectures on ethics and morality.

It reminds me of the deal Rahm cut with Barbara Byrd-Bennett when he named her CEO of Chicago Public Schools. As long as Byrd-Bennett agreed to be the public face of Rahm's school closings in black neighborhoods, Rahm would look the other way at her shady business dealings.

If you recall, Rahm also offered sad and somber lectures on ethics when the feds indicted Byrd-Bennett for her role in a \$20.5 million contract scandal.

I suppose I could sort of put up with Rahm making deals with the devil if it meant he were passing progressive legislation that benefited everyday people.

But Rahm cut his deals with Burke to pass regressive policies that took from the poor to feed the rich. He didn't need to get into bed with Burke to do that.

And now he doubles down by replacing Burke with O'Connor—just in time to have O'Connor use his mastery of council procedure to rush approval of, among other things, the \$800 million (at least) TIF handout to the Lincoln Yards developers.

Here we go again—as Dolly Parton might say.

I say we install Alderman Scott Waguespack—a real reformer—as chair of the finance committee. Let's try to keep Rahm, Burke, and O'Connor from doing more damage than they've already done. **✍**

Twitter @joravben

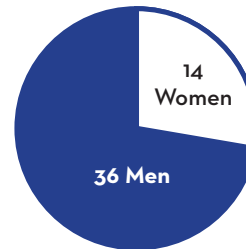
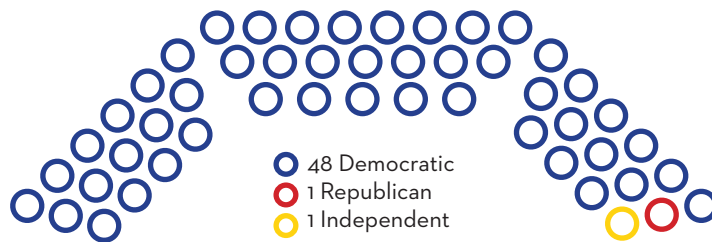
FREQUENTLY ASKED

The Chicago Aldermanic Explainer

How many aldermen are there? And what do they even do? Here's what to know.

By **BRIANNA WELLEN** | INFOGRAPHIC BY **SUE KWONG**

50
Aldermen



- An alderman is supposed to relay the needs of the folks who live in their ward to the mayor and the rest of City Council. Aldermen can serve on committees within City Council to make sure the issues that those they represent care about most are resolved, like fixing potholes, issuing liquor licenses, and raising the minimum wage.
- Aldermen are elected when they win a majority of the vote in their ward. If no candidate wins a majority, it's runoff time.
- An aldermanic term lasts four years. As of now, there are no limits on how many terms an alderman can serve.
- Candidates must be at least 18 years old to run.
- Candidates must live in the ward they want to represent for at least one year before the election.
- A person will not be allowed to serve as alderman if they owe any taxes to the city or have been convicted of bribery, perjury, or another felony anywhere in the United States.

2 aldermen are under the age of 40

5 aldermen are openly gay or lesbian

1 alderman is Asian-American



© BRIAN JACKSON

Oldest and longest serving alderman: Ed Burke, 14th Ward, 75 years old, serving since 1969



© COURTESY SILVANA TABARES

Most recently appointed alderman: Silvana Tabares, 23rd Ward, serving since 2018

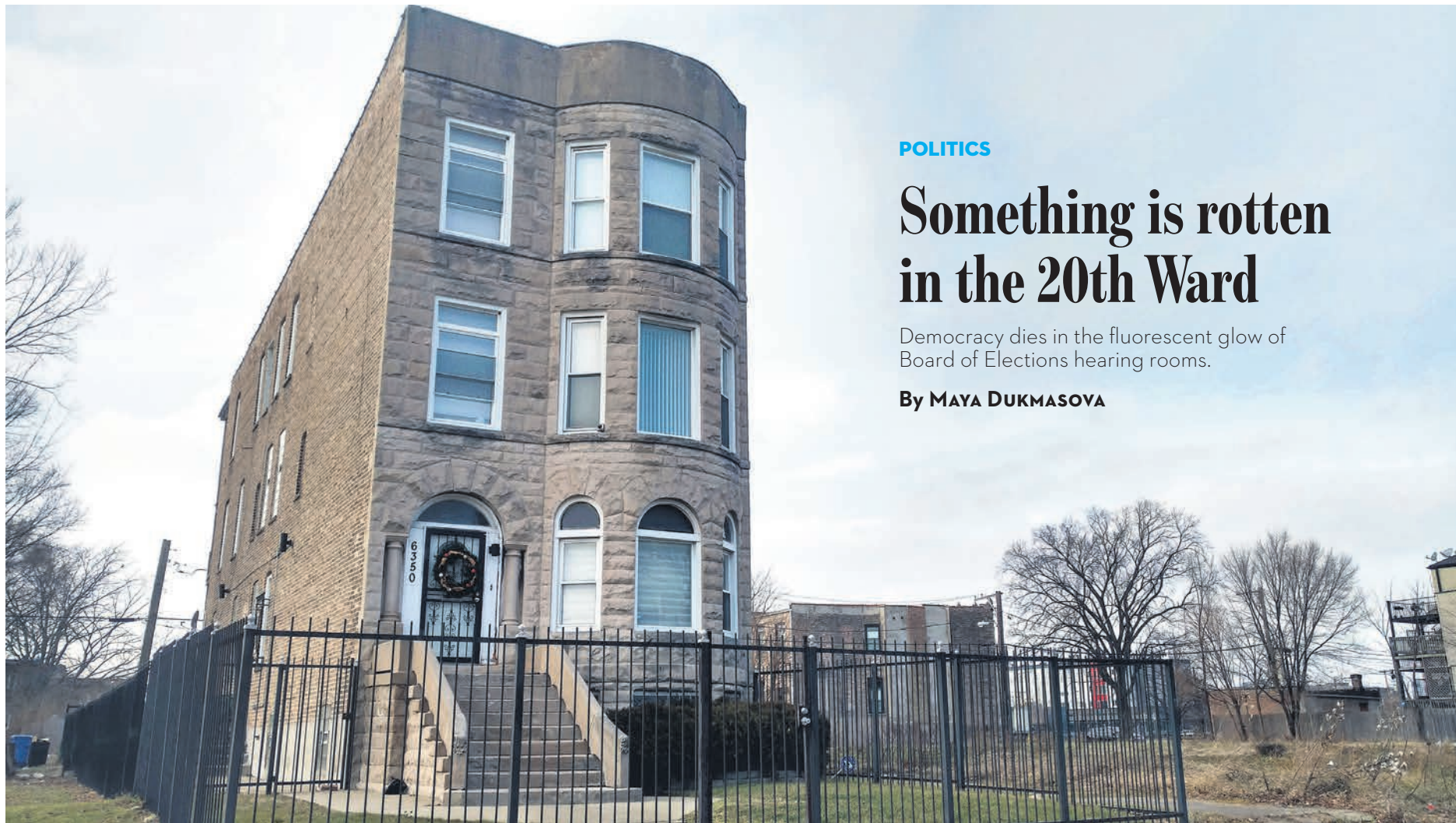


© COLLEEN DURKIN

Youngest serving alderman: Carlos Ramirez-Rosa, 35th Ward, 29 years old

Average salary of Chicago residents **\$62,857**

Alderman salary range **\$106,392.00 - \$117,832.92**



POLITICS

Something is rotten in the 20th Ward

Democracy dies in the fluorescent glow of Board of Elections hearing rooms.

By MAYA DUKMASOVA

The 20th Ward of Chicago stands at a historic moment. It's on the verge of tying with the 23rd and 31st wards, both of which have had three aldermen go to prison since 1972, for the unprestigious distinction of most aldermen convicted for corruption. Its current alderman, self-described "gangster" Willie Cochran, awaits a federal trial on bribery, extortion, and wire fraud charges. Over the last 30 years two of his three predecessors—Cliff Kelley and Arenda Troutman—have gone to prison for bribery and fraud.

It's no surprise that constituents of the ward, which encompasses much of Woodlawn and stretches west into parts of Washington Park, Englewood, and Back of the Yards, are clamoring for new leadership. Cochran isn't seeking reelection, and by the

end of November, 15 candidates had filed to run for alderman—more than in any other ward. Among them are 20th Ward Democratic committeeman Kevin Bailey, 31, and activist preacher Andre Smith, 50, both of whom ran for alderman against Cochran in prior elections. Newcomers include Chicago Police Department officer and nonprofit founder Jennifer Maddox, 47; entrepreneur and consultant Anthony Driver, 25; Chicago Housing Authority project manager Maya Hodari, 50; consultant and former CPS teacher Nicole Johnson, 29; pastor Dernard Newell, 53; and community organizer Jeanette Taylor, 43, who's garnered union support.

As the February 26 election draws near, some in the ward already fear that their next alderman will face the same fate as his or her corrupt predecessors, but many are also

hopeful that from the overcrowded field will emerge a leader with integrity who'll focus on remedying the socioeconomic inequities that have plagued the ward for years. Foremost on residents' minds are the high unemployment and crime rates, under-resourced schools, the lack of mental health care options and affordable housing, and the challenge of balancing the development forces spearheaded by the University of Chicago and the incoming Obama Presidential Center with the needs of deeply rooted local communities. Long-term residents are weary of repeats of the Cochran-backed expansion of the Norfolk Southern rail yard, which displaced hundreds of homeowners in the ward and whose devastation was the subject of the recent documentary *The Area*.

Of course, getting on the ballot is the first

battle. Every candidate needs at least 473 registered voters to sign their nominating petition. Each signatory must live in the ward and not have signed for any other candidate. In the 20th Ward, which contained nearly 24,000 registered voters as of last November's election, it is mathematically possible for 15 candidates to have gathered 473 unique signatures each. However, it's almost certain that some of the signatures filed by candidates this year are fake, forged, or duplicated. Together the aldermanic hopefuls submitted more than 30,000 signatures to the Board of Elections.

Seasoned politicians—or those who have hired seasoned consultants—often devote significant resources to challenging their opponents' paperwork and nominating petition signatures.

In the 20th, Bailey and Johnson were the only candidates who filed objections against their competitors. Bailey challenged everyone except for Smith; Johnson, who's out-fund-raised everyone running in the ward thus far, challenged Hodari, Maddox, and a pair of lower-profile women contenders. Candidates who face multiple objections have to battle each of them separately.

Bailey, a tall man with an athletic build, a crop of short dreads, a goatee, and a habit of reminding people that he's a civil engineer, has been a near daily presence over the last several weeks in two large basement rooms of the Cook County office building at 69 W. Washington. This is where petition challenge hearings are held, at plastic folding tables set up in pairs around the perimeter under harsh fluorescent lights. A hearing officer, stenographer, and clerk sit on one side of a table, the candidates, their attorneys, and the people filing objections take their seats on the other. Hearings happen all week, even on weekends, as the board rushes to finalize the list of candidates to be printed on the ballot by January 21. Unlike the candidates he's challenging, Bailey doesn't have a lawyer but sometimes shows up to the hearings with a staffer from his campaign and his stepfather, a veteran political operator with a reputation for less-than-scrupulous campaign strategies (more on that later).

“Kevin’s mom and dad are gonna run the office if he wins.”

—Anthony Driver

Bailey's challenges are more ax than scalpel, and one hearing officer after another is finding that they aren't made in good faith. When people file objections to petition signatures they have to file “appendix recapitulation” sheets—essentially mirrors of a candidate's petition signature page in which objectors indicate which signatures they're objecting to and on what grounds: that the signer isn't registered at the address indicated, that the address isn't in the ward, that



Twentieth Ward aldermanic candidate and Democratic committeeman Kevin Bailey (pink shirt) with his assistant Marlon Watson. The man with the mustache is Michael Dorf, an election lawyer who represents Jennifer Maddox, also running for alderman in the ward. They're all waiting for the beginning of a hearing at the Board of Elections during which the hearing officer will decide whether Bailey's objections to Maddox's petitions will stand.

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the signature isn't genuine, or that the signer signed another candidate's petition first.

The Board of Elections tries to discourage “shotgun objections,” when someone indiscriminately challenges sheet upon sheet of a candidate's signatures as faulty without the due diligence of consulting the board's registered voter rolls. The charge must come from the candidate, but if a board hearing officer agrees that objections aren't made in good faith they'll recommend that the objections be dismissed and the candidate be allowed on the ballot.

Accusations that Bailey was filing shotgun objections began flying from other candidates' camps right away. Some hearing officers have so far agreed with the candidates he's challenged.

Why would a candidate or his or her proxies waste time making shotgun objections if they likely won't stand? Because that's time lost for opponents, too. Objections, no matter how flimsy, can take days or weeks to resolve. When they aren't shotgun objections and are allowed to move forward they involve hours of excruciating, line-by-line examinations of each signature by board staff who hole up in stuffy rooms on the sixth floor of 69 W. Washington. Candidates and their challengers, who flank the board examiner working a computer during the process, either have to spend their own time haggling over whether the signatures should count or hire people to do it for them. If disputes come down to whether a signature is genuine the board has to schedule special examinations with a handwriting

expert. This process drains time and money from the opponents' campaigns, especially if they hire lawyers to help them survive the challenge, as most of Bailey's competitors have. Challenged candidates can't securely campaign and raise funds while an objection is pending—it haunts them with the threat of not making it onto the ballot.

As a five-minute hearing dismissing Bailey's objections to Jennifer Maddox's petitions wrapped up on December 19, Bailey calmly listened to the hearing officer's findings in his opponent's favor. He had objected to every one of Maddox's 1,700 signatures, and his appendix recapitulation sheets showed clear evidence of objections made without due diligence—in many cases he or his staff had marked objections to blank lines on Maddox's petitions first (for example, 20 objections on multiple grounds on a sheet with just four signatures), then scribbled out the number of objections to match the total number of signatures on her sheet.

Nevertheless, Bailey's objection cost Maddox a solid 16 days of Board of Elections hassles and several thousand dollars to election lawyer Michael Dorf. Bailey had also already filed a motion with the Board challenging the hearing officer's recommendations to dismiss his objections—something didn't get resolved in his favor but further foiled Maddox's campaign.

As hearing officer David Shestokas—himself a two-time candidate for Congress and a retired prosecutor—dryly explained that

he was approving Dorf's motion to strike and dismiss the objection, Bailey attempted to argue that Shestokas was wrong.

“We're not taking any evidence,” Shestokas said.

“So there's no discussion on the recommendation?” Bailey asked tentatively, his lips curling into a sheepish smile. When he doesn't get his way Bailey doesn't get mad or raise his voice but does appear ever-ready to deliver an even-toned, often tedious defense of his position if given a chance to make it.

“No sir,” Shestokas answered. Still, he allowed Bailey a moment to speak, which he used to hold forth about the hearing officer's “inconsistent” and “not proper” decision.

“Every mistake that was pointed out [in my objection] was considered to be in bad faith and I don't believe those were examples of bad faith,” Bailey said. “I believe objecting to those blank lines makes all the sense in the world,” he continued, making the mind-bending argument that he had no way of knowing that Maddox wouldn't somehow try to claim the blank lines had signatures on them.

Dorf propped his white-haired, white-mustachioed head on his hand as he waited for Bailey to complete his statements. A veteran election attorney who represented Barack Obama in his early runs for public office, Dorf, with his genteel three-piece suit and bow tie, gave the impression of someone who had seen it all over the years. In an interview a few days prior, Dorf had calmly described Bailey's challenge as “fraudulent” but a well-known machine tactic. ➔

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Dorf had no doubt that Shestokas would decide in Maddox's favor. He handled the hearings on his own, leaving his client, the candidate, to campaign. After the hearing I asked Bailey why he wasn't also working with a lawyer, preferring instead to waste his own campaign time hiking to the Board offices nearly every day and sitting through hearings that may last over an hour.

"I don't think a lawyer is super necessary at this point," he began, "but when I believe it is, a lawyer will be used." Bailey suggested that hearing officers are biased against *pro se* objectors like himself and that a cliquish "culture of civility" among the legal experts wheeling and dealing in these basement rooms puts him at a disadvantage. Yet his apparent disinterest in legal representation may be an indication of his actual motivation in filing objections: not necessarily to win a legal battle but to exhaust his competition into throwing in the towel on their campaigns.

That's certainly how Bailey's opponents and their representatives see his copious challenges. And many have more biting things to say about him than Dorf does.

"Kevin is a scumbag," said Anthony Driver, the entrepreneur and consultant who's also the youngest person running for alderman in the 20th Ward. "Kevin's mom and dad are gonna run the office if he wins." Driver, a Back of the Yards native, has focused on registering voters and building up support in the western part of the ward he says has long been ignored by local power brokers. Bailey had initially challenged him, but abruptly withdrew his objection midway through the first evidentiary hearing. Driver says he had discovered evidence of fraud in Bailey's filings with the Board and Bailey withdrew his objection to avoid including it in the official record. (Bailey didn't respond when I asked him why he'd withdrawn the objection.)

But while the procedural dramas unfold in the bowels of the Election Board, the reality on the ground is that Bailey is a front-runner aldermanic candidate in the 20th despite various allegations of impropriety.

Bailey's campaign signs are plastered on many vacant and boarded up buildings and his political organization, the Democratic committee, has grown in strength over the last two years to include the majority of election judges serving across the ward's 39 precincts. This is due in part to the fact that

MUNICIPAL GENERAL ELECTION
PETITION

We, the undersigned, being duly qualified and registered voters of the TWENTIETH (20th) WARD in the City of Chicago, County of Cook, State of Illinois, do hereby petition that the following named person shall be a candidate for election to the office hereinafter specified, to be voted for at the Municipal General Election to be held on the Twenty-Sixth (26th) day of February, 2019.

NAME	OFFICE	ADDRESS
Jennifer O. Maddox	ALDERMAN OF THE TWENTIETH (20 th) WARD IN THE CITY OF CHICAGO COUNTY OF COOK STATE OF ILLINOIS	803 EAST 61 ST STREET UNIT 207 CHICAGO, ILLINOIS 60637

SIGNATURE OF QUALIFIED VOTER ALL MUST BE WRITTEN BY THE VOTER IN PERSON	PRINTED NAME	RESIDENCE ADDRESS HOUSE NUMBER AND STREET NAME	CITY TOWN OR VILLAGE	COUNTY
1			CHICAGO IL	COOK
2			CHICAGO IL	COOK
3			CHICAGO IL	COOK
4			CHICAGO IL	COOK
5			CHICAGO IL	COOK
6			CHICAGO IL	COOK
7			CHICAGO IL	COOK
8			CHICAGO IL	COOK
9			CHICAGO IL	COOK
10			CHICAGO IL	COOK
11			CHICAGO IL	COOK
12			CHICAGO IL	COOK
13			CHICAGO IL	COOK
14			CHICAGO IL	COOK
15			CHICAGO IL	COOK
16			CHICAGO IL	COOK
17			CHICAGO IL	COOK
18			CHICAGO IL	COOK
19			CHICAGO IL	COOK
20			CHICAGO IL	COOK

STATE OF ILLINOIS
COUNTY OF COOK

I, Jennifer O. Maddox, do hereby certify that I reside at 803 E. 61st #207 in the City of Chicago, ZIP Code 60637, County of Cook, and State of Illinois. (If unincorporated, list municipality that provides postal service)

I am eighteen (18) years of age or older (or 17 years of age and qualified to vote in Illinois), that I am a citizen of the United States, and that the signatures on this sheet were signed in my presence, not more than 90 days preceding the last day for filing of the petitions and are genuine and that to the best of my knowledge and belief the persons so signing were, at the time of signing the petition duly qualified and registered voters of the TWENTIETH (20th) WARD of the City of Chicago, County of Cook, and State of Illinois, and that their respective residence addresses are correctly stated as above set forth.

Signed and Seem to (or affirmed) by Jennifer O. Maddox (Print Name of Circulator Here) before me, on 1/12/2019 (Date Signed)

Signature of Notary Public: [Signature]

OFFICIAL SEAL - NOTARY PUBLIC, State of Illinois, My Commission Expires 11/28/2019

SHEET NO.: 63

APPENDIX RECAPITULATION

Candidate: JENNIFER O. MADDOX 20th Ward Alderman SHEET # 63

LINE NO.	A SIGNER NOT REGISTERED AT ADDRESS	B ADDRESS NOT IN THE 20th Ward	C SIGNER NOT PROPER PERSON AND NOT GENUINE	D SIGNER SIGNED ANOTHER PETITION EARLIER	E OTHER STATE REASON
1	X		X		
2	X		X		
3	X		X		
4		X			
5	X		X		BLANK
6	X		X		
7	X		X		
8	X		X		
9	X		X		
10	X		X		
11	X		X		
12	X		X		
13	X		X		
14	X		X		
15	X		X		
16	X		X		
17	X		X		
18	X		X		
19	X		X		
20	X		X		

TOTAL SIGNATURES ON PAGE 44

TOTAL SIGNATURES CHALLENGES ON PAGE 4

TOTAL GOOD SIGNATURES REMAINING 40

Left: A page from Maddox's petition filings, which shows four signatures. Right: Bailey's objection to that page. It shows that someone had challenged all 20 lines on the petition sheet, then corrected the final tally of objections from 20 to four. The Board of Elections found that this was evidence that Bailey had made a "shotgun" objection to Maddox's petition to get on the ballot.

his mother, Maria Bailey (who also serves as a notary and petition circulator for his campaign), was elected the Republican committee person back in the spring of 2016, at the same time Bailey became Democratic committeeman.

Party committee people in Chicago used to rule the roost in the wards as the field marshals of the machine, commanding armies of precinct captains and keeping smoothly running patronage networks well-oiled. Though their power and influence have significantly eroded since the 1980s—as has the machine itself—their most important function remains appointing election judges. Each polling place is supposed to retain both Republican and Democratic judges, although they're not there to represent any candidates. Having both parties represented is supposed to ensure against electioneer-

ing—which is strictly forbidden with 100 feet of polling places.

This is why Cook County Republicans raised a fuss about Maria Bailey becoming ward committee person. There was speculation that she and several other committee people in Chicago were Democratic interlopers trying to consolidate power in a city with an already meager GOP presence. As evidence they cited the fact that Maria Bailey had never pulled a Republican ticket in a primary and had displayed a J.B. Pritzker lawn sign in front of her home in the run-up to the gubernatorial primary.

The Baileys have rebuffed allegations of impropriety by arguing that party doesn't really matter in a ward. "At this level of politics I don't believe there's any disagreement between any party," Kevin Bailey told me.

But concerns about the integrity of an al-

dermanic election in which judges appointed by the Baileys are overseeing polling places where Bailey is on the ballot have cropped up around the ward. Since the Baileys took over both major party committees, people who'd served as election judges for years began reporting improper treatment by the mother and son team.

The *Reader* heard about six such instances, and spoke with two election judges who both claimed one or both of the Baileys told them that they wouldn't appoint them to serve as judges unless they agreed to work as circulators for Kevin Bailey's campaign. One of the judges, Quintin Jones, filed a police report and a complaint with the Board of Elections last fall.

"I thought it was a joke," Jones, 55, told me on the phone. He'd worked the same precinct in the 20th Ward as a Democratic judge for 15

years and had never been asked to do political work in exchange for his job. (Election judges get paid between \$120 and \$220 by the board for each day they run a polling place.)

Jones said he asked whether he'd be paid for circulating and was told that he wouldn't be. "I refused and they removed me," Jones said. Ultimately, he did get an election judge assignment from the Board again, but in the 3rd Ward. He said the whole thing felt like an affront to democracy. "It's like they're sabotaging all the judges, saying they have to be with [Bailey], for him, or we can't work in the 20th Ward," he said, adding that he's worried about how Bailey's appointed judges might behave at the polls if they're there as repayment for campaign work.

"I think they need to be recused from this election. They shouldn't have to tell you who they're supporting to be able to serve," he said. "Unfortunately the 20th Ward has not been good with aldermen, and if [Bailey's] starting off like this, him and his mother, it's gonna be an office of corruption. They're already telling you they're willing to do things . . . to benefit them regardless of whether it's ethical or unethical."

Board records obtained by the *Reader* show that in last November's election, 65 percent of the ward's 150 judges were Kevin

65 percent of the ward's 150 judges were Kevin and Maria Bailey's appointees. Many of them were serving for the first time.

and Maria Bailey's appointees. Many of them were serving for the first time.

Collean Fuller, 86, has been a precinct captain in the 20th Ward for decades. She says she's noticed a big turnover in election judges since the Baileys took over. When she went to vote last November, she said all the the people working her polling place were new and "didn't know bullfrog from catfish. Some of them were asking for your social security

card, some of them were asking for your driver's license."

Fuller said the ballot counting machine was also malfunctioning and they didn't know how to fix it. "I went to vote and the machine pushed me out three times," she said. In the end she said she walked out exasperated, not sure whether her vote even counted. "I said, 'I know who I am, where I stand, I know who I serve, so fuck it.'"

Fuller apologized for being crude and added that she went to to Bailey's office at 63d and St. Lawrence complain about the machine but was told that the committeeman wasn't there. "He was riding around with J.B. on election day," she said, with a note of indignation. (Last week, Pritzker gave \$10,000 to Bailey's Democratic committee, state campaign finance records show.)

Fuller didn't want to say who she was supporting for alderman for fear of political reprisals, but she did note that she didn't like how many of the 20th Ward candidates seemed to appear out of thin air. "The 20th Ward needs good candidates, and they need candidates who've lived in the ward for at least five years," she said. "The seniors not getting theirs, the kids not getting theirs—we're lost. We can't get service, so we're just out here by ourselves. And I ain't never seen these guys until election time. I don't even know the names."

Fuller wasn't alone in her skepticism. On the Saturday before Christmas, a couple dozen kids rushed a small wooden stage in the middle of a community garden plot on the 6000 block of South Vernon. They'd been brought to carol for the neighbors by Maddox's nonprofit after school program Future Ties. As the kids wound their way through the holiday classics, wiggling and dancing, eager for their hot chocolate reward, a few passersby stopped to watch and sing along. When they were done, a man walking away with his family said "It feels good to be caroled to on *some* Christmases." He paused for effect and to get the attention of the woman walking with him. "We don't get caroled every year. Only when it's time to vote."

Maddox isn't surprised by such cynicism. She said she'd probably feel the same way if she'd never met a candidate in person, and noted that the caroling wasn't meant as a campaign event. Indeed, she hadn't mentioned a word about the election as she led the singing dressed down in a fleece jacket and sweatpants. Neither did candidate Maya



Twentieth Ward aldermanic candidate Jennifer Maddox leads a caroling session at a community garden in Woodlawn.  MAYA DUKMASOVA

Hodari, who'd stopped by to mingle with her 11-year-old son.

"I don't try to force no one's hand," Maddox explained. "I go to [voters] and explain why I'm doing what I'm doing, I give them a little background and history on myself, I ask them go to google me, and I invite them to have a conversation with me afterwards to discuss moving forward with the ward." (Googling Maddox yields a link to her CNN Heroes profile.)

Maddox hopes that her ten years of serving hundreds of kids from the Parkway Gardens low-income apartment complex with after-school and summer camp programs, mostly on her own dime, will persuade voters that she's a person sincerely dedicated to the well-being of the community. She adds that people sometimes narrow their eyes when they discover that she's a cop, especially given the fact that Cochran had also been a police officer. "But I explain to them all police officers aren't the same," she says.

Maddox sees the fact that she was challenged by both Bailey and Nicole Johnson as a sign that she's got a good chance to win. "I do think I'm a threat to them," she said, even without the money, party, union, or church backing some of the other candidates have. I spoke with her this week after she'd spent a grueling weekend fighting Johnson's objections to her signatures.

"When we were going through the signatures the Board of Election [examiner] overruled a lot of the objections because clearly the people were in the ward and they were registered voters," Maddox said. The ob-

jectors—people hired by Johnson's camp to actually come to the Board—were "not even following along on the screen. I had four people sit with me four different times and they had their earphones in their ears, writing on their paper, and just saying: 'Object, object.'" She said it was clear the process was meant to discourage her; if she didn't stay vigilant and fight every objection, her valid signature count could dip below the necessary 473.

"These last three days have really drained me and I need to get myself back up and running again," she said.

As Maddox, Hodari, Darnard Newell, Jeannette Taylor, and others trudge through the tedious procedural hurdles set up by their opponents, one of the chief contenders in the race has wasted neither his own nor other people's time with the petition challenge process.

Operating out of a storefront office a few doors down from Cochran's ward headquarters on Cottage Grove, Andre Smith is running a loud and visible campaign, bolstered by his advantage as a third-time candidate.

Smith has learned a lot in his previous two runs for alderman and has a campaign "war room" plastered with precinct maps in the back of his office. Dressed in a turquoise shirt and black slacks, he slammed a fat stack of papers on his desk when I asked him why he thought no one had challenged him. They were affidavits signed by every one of his petition signatories, he explained, stating that they really had signed for him first. No one would have been able to claim his signatures weren't valid. ➔

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“Welcome to Andre Smith,” he said with a grin as he popped open a can of soda.

In many ways Smith is already acting like an alderman. In his front office, volunteers and staff organize donations for a toy drive and take calls from residents complaining about uncut trees, unplowed streets, and criminal activity. They keep notes on follow-up calls and whether each issue has ultimately been resolved. If the callers don’t have luck getting help from Cochran, Smith takes it upon himself to contact the ward superintendent or the city’s Streets and Sanitation department to handle potholes or broken street lights. Sometimes he’ll send his own people out to fix a resident’s problem.

Many people in the ward, and some city officials, “already treat me like I was the alderman,” he claims.

Despite a fervent base of supporters, Smith has also landed in hot water. Last fall, he was alleged to have solicited petition signatures in exchange for free Thanksgiving turkeys. Rumors persist about his campaign volunteers bullying voters. But none of that is slowing him down.

Smith has a habit of talking about himself in the third person and providing receipts for his claims. Over the course of our conversation he periodically whipped out his phone to show me videos of himself clearing brush from vacant lots with a chain saw, dug up copies of newspaper articles citing his presence at community events, and even showed me framed report cards and certificates from a young man who he said had been a homeless high school dropout gang banging in the neighborhood before Smith gave him a job circulating his petitions and got him back into school. He proudly showed me footage of the young man fanning out a stack of hundred dollar bills on his phone.

“All legal money,” the boy could be heard saying, flashing a yellow receipt at the camera. “Real gangsters into politics.”

“This is Andre Smith over in the campaign office, helping out, giving back, taking the brothers from off the street, putting them into the political world so they can learn how to make real money,” Smith says as he turns the camera on himself in the video. “This is what we do, this is what leadership is all about.”

Smith suggested this is his year and said that no one else running has a proven track record of community service in the ward. He scoffed at the first-time candidates cam-

paing out of their homes and focusing on fund-raising. “These people, most of them are opportunists,” he said, jabbing his finger at a list of his opponents’ names. “We’ve been fighting Cochran for 12 years—where was you at?”

Meanwhile, on the west end of the ward, Driver may be the newest of the newcomers, but he’s developed a keen analysis of what it will take to win this election. Given that in 2015 only 6,614 people cast a vote in the election that resulted in a runoff between Cochran and Bailey—and that Cochran won the runoff by only 849 votes with a war chest ten times the size of Bailey’s—Driver said this

“The seniors not getting theirs, the kids not getting theirs—we’re lost. We can’t get service, so we’re just out here by ourselves. And I ain’t never seen these guys until election time. I don’t even know the names.”

—Collean Fuller

election will come down to a “game of bases.” He believed he’d be able to get the most people out to the polls when the time came.

Driver, who was a fellow in Rahm Emanuel’s Office of Public Engagement, has interned on Capitol Hill, and has been invited to the White House on multiple occasions, hopes people will see him as a viable alternative to the same-old self-serving politicians. He’s waged an issue-driven battle centered on tackling lead contamination in drinking water, creating a way for residents to drop off guns to the police anonymously 24-7, and boosting affordable housing options.

Soft-spoken and armed with what appears to be deeply researched understanding of the ward’s demographics Driver has focused his campaign on door-knocking, especially in the poorer parts of the ward where people aren’t seen as likely voters by the establishment

types. Having lost two close, college-bound friends to gun violence, he says he understands the challenges locals face and that he has the right communication skills and pedigree to make their concerns matter in City Hall.

A few days before Christmas, Driver stopped at Robust Coffee Lounge on the corner of 63rd and Woodlawn dressed down in a Bulls hoodie, black beanie, and puffer coat.

“When I’m dressed like this, and I’m walking out in the neighborhood, I’m going to be mistaken for a gangbanger. I’m going to be mistaken for a criminal. No one’s gonna know I have two degrees, that I’ve studied abroad,” he said. Though he’s battling a stigma because of his youth, he adds that his age is precisely what’s helping him get through to disaffected young people who don’t see a reflection of themselves in politicians.

“I’m the only person who can go into any neighborhood in the 20th Ward—the worst neighborhoods—and speak the language, talk to people out on the street, and in the same breath turn around and call someone directly at City Hall and they’re gonna answer because of my education, because of my connections. I’m the only person who can bring those worlds together.” It helps that he comes from a family of precinct captains highly active in local politics.

Driver also admires many of the other candidates running and maintains friendly relationships with them. He thinks the fact that the majority of the candidates are trying to play fair is a good sign of the shifting political culture in the ward. On his way out of the coffee shop he ran into Hodari and exchanged commiserations about Bailey.

Hodari has been a passionate advocate for the Obama Presidential Center and wants to prioritize economic development in the community. She’s for a community benefits agreement, but says that seeing a development of national import will be a boon for local kids who only get to see their neighborhood and themselves associated with crime and poverty. She too hopes the election will yield a more vibrant civic culture in the ward.

“This is not any of our last stop,” she said, reflecting on the crowded field of candidates. “I think that this has been an opportunity to get key people who are passionate about moving things forward in the 20th Ward—now we know one another. Now we can, if we choose to, work together beyond this election.”

Back on December 19, just a few hours after Bailey’s challenge of Jennifer Maddox collapsed, he and Nicole Johnson’s attorney Andrew Finko sat before hearing officer Yamil Colon. Bailey was joined by his stepfather, Hassan Muhammad, a short, pudgy man who sat behind him and grabbed onto his shoulders to whisper intensely into his ear so frequently that Colon made him introduce himself for the record.

Muhammad is a longtime political operative on the south side who’s worked for Congressman Danny Davis and Cook County Clerk of the Circuit Court-turned-mayoral candidate Dorothy Brown. In the past, he’s been the source of controversy on campaigns. In 2009, reports surfaced that he was ordering state-funded workers who’d signed up to receive job training through his nonprofit to collect petition signatures for Brown’s run for Cook County Board president. When he was confronted about this by reporters from FOX Chicago, Muhammad appeared to snatch documents from their hands, denied any wrongdoing, and was arrested on camera, although the station didn’t ultimately press any charges.

At the hearing, Colon decided to send a sample of Bailey’s many pages of objections for examination by Board staff, which would reflect the quality of his entire objection. They’d go through 10 percent of Bailey’s appendix recapitulation sheets and decide whether he was making good-faith challenges with his 5,343 objections to Johnson’s 2,727 signatures.

“There’s a pattern that they’re looking for, OK?” Colon explained to Bailey, who began arguing that this examination wouldn’t be “holistic.”

“A pattern he’s looking for,” Muhammad mumbled loudly, jerking his head in Finko’s direction.

Colon ignored the comment and ended the hearing. But Muhammad was getting heated. “It’s subjective and arbitrary,” he grumbled. “You wanna look at part of the sheet, not the whole sheet,” he continued. “Not everything on the sheet is what I wanna look at,” he whined in a high-pitched voice, in apparent mockery of Colon.

An awkward silence descended on the people around the hearing table. “Sorry, the team has put in a lot of time and effort,” Bailey said to Colon with a smirk and a nervous laugh.

“I understand,” Colon replied. “People get frustrated and upset at these things and



Twentieth Ward aldermanic candidate Andre Smith, who's run for the seat unsuccessfully two previous times against Cochran. Here he's showing a stack of affidavits obtained from each person he asked to sign his nominating petitions.  MAYA DUKMASOVA

there's nothing wrong with expressing your frustration." They set a date for the next hearing.

Muhammad continued mumbling and mocking Colon. He eventually stormed out of the hearing room and, finding an audience in the hallway, escalated his complaints to a torrent of angry shouts. Finko, a veteran election lawyer with a mane of sandy hair and a gigantic silver signet ring of the Ukrainian coat of arms, scooted away with his chair to the other side of the room for a client running in a different ward.

Reflecting on Bailey's challenge later, Finko didn't mince words. "I think what he's doing is an abuse of the system and an abuse of the rules," he said. He added that Bailey's objections were a waste of taxpayer dollars, since the board had to spend time and money on hearings that go nowhere. "I don't mind if someone files an objections for valid reasons—that's the rules," he said, apparently considering his own camp's challenges to be above board. "The stuff that Bailey is pulling—it's not professional."

Two days after Muhammad's meltdown, the board found that 82 percent of Bailey's objections didn't stand up to scrutiny. Finko filed a motion saying that the "implications of Kevin Bailey's actions . . . are very troubling. Residents of the 20th Ward deserve an alder-

man who has good moral fiber, honesty, and integrity, at all times."

Colon wrote a recommendation to the board stating that Bailey "did not meet his burden of showing due diligence and inquiry. The objection petition appears to have been conceived in fraud, false pleading, and bad faith."

At a meeting last week, the board adopted Colon's recommendation and rejected Bailey's objections. Nicole Johnson made the ballot.

Reflecting on the ordeal after a month of hearings and legal expenses, Johnson said last week that Bailey's tactics are indicative of "the type of chicanery that we have going on, which is unfortunately in the culture of the 20th Ward."

I asked why, given her campaign resources (she's gotten thousands of dollars from wealthy donors connected to the University of Chicago) and her belief that Bailey isn't playing fair, she didn't file an objection against him and focused on trying to knock other opponents—all women—off the ballot instead. She explained it was a question of resources.

Given that Bailey filed 900 pages of petition signatures and candidates only had a week to file objections "that would have been so much energy devoted to one particular individual,"

Johnson said. She and other 20th Ward candidates told me that Bailey would likely have had the 473 signatures needed to make the ballot anyway, even if more than half of those filed could have been thrown out.

Johnson, an Englewood native who's been campaigning with plans to boost small business activity and strengthen connections between local schools and colleges, lamented the way Bailey's shenanigans took candidates' attention away from pressing issues in the ward. Poverty, crime, lack of educational resources, and economic disenfranchisement all went unchecked, she suggested, while local concerns that the ward's politicians are steeped in corruption only flourished.

She said she's come across many residents who ask, "How are you gonna make sure you don't go to jail?" and added that any serious candidate in the 20th Ward must have a compelling answer. The way she sees it, it's about surrounding yourself with the right advisors, being transparent, and soliciting community input when making decisions, especially about real estate and business development.

For his part, Bailey dismissed his opponents' complaints about his tactics. He said his challenges "are all a part of challenging the status quo, increasing the quality of candidate that services our community." He

declined to explain why he didn't challenge Smith, but talked about petition challenges almost as a civic duty, suggesting that they police candidates' integrity and diligence in complying with the rules.


"As a person who's *pro se* in this legal system I will not be the biggest challenge that whoever gets into this aldermanic office will face," he said. "And if they can't handle an initial fight how can they expect to excel when it comes to fighting over resources against other seasoned aldermen that know the system in and out?"

When I asked Bailey about his campaign platform, he began talking about Cochran's inability to provide adequate basic services in the ward, such as trash cans, and claimed it's led to the proliferation of cat-sized rats. He also talked about shootings and illegal evictions as he sat in the front area of his office, wallpapered with pictures of his face.

"The schools are still on the chopping block, some are closing down, some are getting turned around, but overall we still need need holistic investment in our kids and in their future, especially while their minds are still malleable, and uh . . . I said public safety—is that all of them?" he asked, turning towards his mother, Maria Bailey, who'd been hovering around and periodically scribbling in a notebook. "The focal points are: education, health and human services, economic development," Bailey said, counting off his fingers. "I'm missing one . . ."

"I don't know, you were in the middle of a meeting back here," Maria Bailey said with a chuckle. She appeared to be growing impatient that her son was dawdling with a reporter while office staff were feverishly completing paperwork for yet another challenge-related filing deadline.

But Bailey wanted to finish his thought. "Health and human services, public safety, education, economic development—yeah that's it, those were the four," he finally concluded, satisfied. These would be the central subjects of his campaign, just as they were the last time he ran and since he'd become committeeman, Bailey said.

"There's not gonna be a change in the focus" of his campaign, he explained. As allegations of bad faith and corruption swirl around him, he said he's keeping his mind on how to best serve the residents because, since he's gotten into politics, "the quality of life hasn't improved in the community." 

 @mdoukmas



Attendees of the 2019 Modern Language Association convention in Chicago browse recent publications in the MLA Exhibit Hall. EDWARD SAVARIA, JR.

ON CULTURE

A Devil's Dictionary reconsidered

Updating an academic semi-classic at this year's MLA convention.

By DEANNA ISAACS

In 1999, two midwestern professors, Cary Nelson (University of Illinois) and Stephen Watt (Indiana University), teamed up on a cheeky pseudo-dictionary that was also a serious critique of academia.

They titled it *Academic Keywords: A Devil's Dictionary for Higher Education*—in part after Ambrose Bierce's 1911 satire *The Devil's Dictionary*. In 47 entries, many of which ran to essay length, they took down everything from Academic Departments to Yuppies. But what most concerned them was the emergence of the Corporate University and its most egregious characteristic: growing numbers of poorly paid and badly treated part-time and temporary faculty.

The book won admiring reviews and some instant notoriety.

Last week when 5,000 academics gathered in Chicago for the annual convention of the Modern Language Association (basically, the trade association for professors of literature and languages), *Academic Keywords* showed

up as the subject of one of the more than 700 presentations. According to the convention program, a panel of six speakers, including the authors, would assess the legacy of the book and propose new terms for inclusion.

The MLA convention, which is part bone-chilling interviews for precious few jobs, part deeply quirky research reports by panels that can outnumber their audiences, and part a bookworm's version of hard-partying weekend on the town, is also a guaranteed source of frustration. Like a gigantic, quickly-passed box of chocolates, it offers so many intriguing options in such a short space of time (this year's meeting ran January 3-6), that no matter which you select, you're going to feel regret for missing others. How to choose, for example, between "Posthuman Affection," "Comics Fandom in Transition," and "Philosophy of, as, and on Extinction"? To say nothing of "New Currents in Medieval Iberian Studies" and "The History of Financial Advice"? (Or, in other time slots, surprising topics of local

interest like "Brecht in Chicago" and a whole session on the work of former *Reader* writer Achy Obejas?)

So the prospect of the two professors—now white-haired old white dudes in the ripest phase of their privileged positions (Nelson is now professor emeritus)—participating in the reassessment of their own snarky, 20-year-old rant about the crumbling edifice and problematic future of higher ed made an otherwise fraught choice easy for me.

Academic Keywords had concluded in 1999 that the exploitation of part-time faculty (and "the winnowing away of tenure lines") "represents the single greatest threat to quality higher education." Two decades later, with the plight of contingent faculty the focus of a half dozen MLA sessions (and, downstairs, in the convention's exhibit area, the University of Chicago Press taking orders for a new book on the subject, *The Adjunct Underclass* by Herb Childress, a former academic), I had to hear what its authors in conversation with members of a new generation of academics would add.

The new terms the four younger panelists suggested for inclusion? "Identification" (from Yung-Hsing Wu of the University of Louisiana because it "fueled feminist criticism" and "is now explicit in our classrooms"); "Collegiality" (offered by Patrick Maley of Centenary University because it silences productive dissent); "Program Prioritization" (the choice of Mark William Van Wiene of Northern Illinois University who suggested it's a means of eliminating "less productive" campus programs and, potentially, tenured faculty); and

"Gender Studies" (contributed by Jaime Harker of the University of Mississippi along with a witty critique of *Keywords*' entries on "sexual harassment" and "spousal hiring").

Watt, in his turn at the podium, noted that universities continue to crank out increasing numbers of PhDs in the humanities (3,336 in 1983; 5,662 in 2013), while the relative number of tenure track jobs for them continues to shrink. "Cary and I have complained about this for over 20 years, and things have only gotten worse," he said before suggesting a reduction in both the number of PhD degrees granted and the time it takes to get one (now averaging nine years). Then he offered one radical partial solution: "post-tenure review with both positive and negative outcomes for our most senior colleagues." In other words, mandated or phased retirement in some cases, which hasn't existed since a 1986 amendment to the federal Age Discrimination in Employment Act that, Watt says, allows American faculty to "teach until they drop dead in the classroom." (Or, as he said happened to one dementia-addled colleague, they show up for class minus clothing under their coats.)

Nelson rued the loss of what he called the "principles that underwrite the academy," especially academic freedom. In 1999, he said, he thought corporate-style administrators were to blame for this. Now he sees the biggest threats coming from tenured faculty themselves—like those at Berkeley who called for the cancellation of a lecture by right-wing provocateur Milo Yiannopoulos.

"Key to these new assaults is a growing faculty conviction that certain political beliefs trump traditional academic freedoms," Nelson said. "Universities are supposed to be places where offensive, even loathsome views can be tested."

As for the (finally) hot topic of adjunct labor? "The Modern Language Association denied the existence of the problem of contingent faculty for nearly 20 years," Nelson told me. "They refused to admit it was a problem. They castigated those who brought the problem up. And now, when it's too late to do anything, when only 25 percent of American faculty are tenure-eligible, they're talking about it. They might as well talk about what kind of literature we should teach on the dark side of the moon. That battle is over. We lost it."

@Deannalisaacs



Lachko and roti © ALEXUS MCLANE



RESTAURANT REVIEW

Egg-O-Holic puts together Gujarat's vast eggetarian street food

Eggs: they're not just for breakfast anymore.

By MIKE SULA

The famously vegetarian state of Gujarat in northwestern India is also famously dry. And yet after dark in many large cities, out come the *laaris*, street food carts, many trafficking in an endless variety of egg dishes well-suited to meet the restorative demands of anyone who happens to have imbibed. Eggs—boiled, fried, folded into omelets, simmered in curries, swaddled in chapati, scrambled with rice, or even sandwiched between grilled white bread—are a popular street food (and hangover preventative) all over India.

But their ascendance in Gujarat—especially over the past decade or so—is a more recent development, according to the *Times of India*. Those were the days when Lay Patel and his

older cousin Bhagyesh were growing up in the capital Ahmedabad, and “Egg Night” meant a run on the *laaris* for *egg bhurji*, scrambled with onion, tomato, chili, and spices; *lachko*, a thick, puddinglike mix of shredded green chilis and cheese and soft cooked eggs; or *surati gotala*, shredded boiled eggs in a spicy tomato-based gravy, topped shakshuka-like with two just-set cackleberries.

“Every time we’d go there, we’d try something different,” Patel says.

After the older Patel, 30, immigrated to the western suburbs in 2005—eventually opening a handful of Subway shops in city—he was followed by the younger ten years later. Both lamented the absence of the *laaris* and the universe of egg possibilities they offered. ➔



Green egg rice © ALEXUS MCLANE

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“We thought there’s this really popular concept,” says Lay Patel. “It’s new and it’s getting hyped up. We don’t have something like this where we live.”

Last spring they teamed up with Bhagyesh’s old schoolmate Vilas Patil—who used to operate a laari back home—and hatched Egg-O-Holic in a Schaumburg strip mall. Egg-O-Holic adopts the model not so much of laari but the eggetarian sit-down restaurants that have subsequently popped up not just in India, but increasingly wherever large numbers of Indians resettle.

The 2001 Bollywood comedy *Jodi No. 1* featured an infectious musical number called “*Ande ka Fanda*,” which, from Hindi, roughly translates to “the fundamentals of an egg.” The partners took the title as a slogan and bedecked the interior of their store, subbing the names of their dishes—both street food classics and popular new innovations—into the lyrics of other popular songs.

The menu is extensive, with “eggetizers” ranging from plain boiled eggs, to masala-spiced French toast, to cheesy egg masala roti; more substantial rich curries and scrambles; and grilled egg and cheese sandwiches. Egg abstainers are appeased with grilled cheese sandwiches and dishes that substitute paneer for the ova. For those who prefer more developed poultry there are chicken kabobs

and sandwiches, after all: “*Anda agar na hota toh murgiyan na hoti*,” as the song goes, or “without an egg there wouldn’t be any chicken.”

Not a year in and the concept proved popular not just with the broad Indian community in the western suburbs but many from out of state as well. A little more than a month ago they opened their second location in the former Thalia Spice space on Chicago near Halsted, in part to make things easier on customers coming from Indiana.

I worked my way through just a fraction of its lengthy (eggspanive?) menu, and if there’s one unifying characteristic it’s that these egg dishes are extraordinarily rich, thanks largely to their common cooking medium: butter—not ghee—produced by Gujarat’s Amul Milk Union Limited, an iconic cooperative credited with sparking India’s White Revolution in the 70s, which made the country the world’s largest dairy producer.

Its presence is unmistakable in the aforementioned lachko, surati gotala, egg bhurji, and green egg curry rice, a kind of breakfast biryani whose richness is buoyed with mint, mustard seed, and curry leaves.


Amul-brand cheese contributes to that richness too in many dishes, forming a gooey double layer on the anda masala sandwich, a tandoori-spiced subcontinental disruption of the common egg salad sandwich.



Anda masala sandwich © ALEXUS MCLANE

A bubbly Thums Up cola, or any of the three other imported soft drinks, would probably be just the thing to help handle this sort of lactose overload, but I found relief in a cold glass of masala *chhaas*—a salty, spiced buttermilk. Alternatively one can chew it off with a bundle of pan: betel nut leaves wrapped around

candied aromatic fruits and seeds, rose petal preserves, coconut flakes, and dates.

The partners are already dreaming of laying a third midwestern location, incubating the embryo of a potential empire. 

 @MikeSula

ARTS & CULTURE



THEATER

Beyond the Fringe

Here are five theater festivals to help you survive January.

By CATEY SULLIVAN

Note to T.S. Eliot: Sorry/not sorry, April isn't the cruelest month. That would be January, the annual 31-day slog when, in Chicago, both sky and ground are a monolithic gray. If you aren't among those who use "winter" as a verb (i.e.: "We're wintering in Cabo"), consider 2019's roster of festivals the entertainment equivalent of a high-wattage sun lamp. From young playwrights to veteran puppeteers, January stages bloom with diversions. Read on for the particulars.

32ND ANNUAL YOUNG PLAYWRIGHTS FESTIVAL

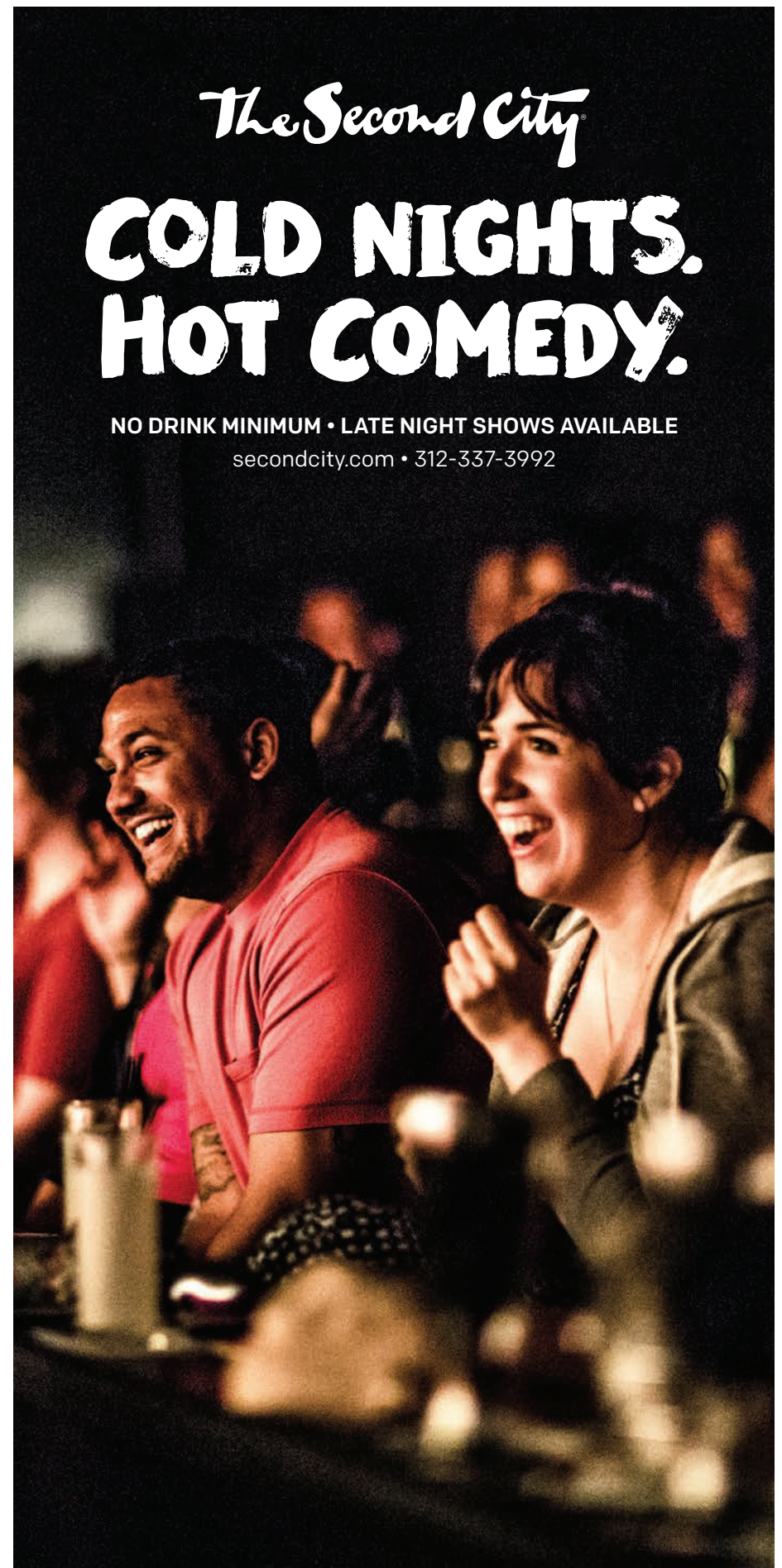
Pegasus estimates it annually reads through roughly 500 play submissions from Chicago-and-environs high school students before picking a few to stage in productions crafted by Chicago's veteran directors, actors, and designers. Kenwood Academy senior Anonda Tyler's Hyde Park-set *Fragile Limbs* is one of the three selected this year. Tyler's plot deals

with gun violence, a topic she'd initially shied away from. "I wasn't going to enter because I didn't think I had anything to say that hasn't been said already," she says. "But then I realized—nobody has told this in my voice."

That voice is inspired by real events and close friends: "Faith and Hope are a boy and a girl—their names are qualities they should have but don't," Tyler continues. "I wanted to show how pain can hinder and help us, and how these emotions can be universal. I also wanted to show that from pain, love and comfort can grow." *Through 1/27: Fri-Sat 7:30 PM, Sun 3 PM; no performance Sun 1/13, Chicago Dramatists, 773 N. Aberdeen, 773-878-8864, pegasustheatrechicago.org, \$30, \$25 seniors, \$18 21 and under.*

THE RHINOCEROS THEATER FESTIVAL

"Every year, we swear 'That's it.' We're never doing this again," says Jenny Magnus, co-founder (with Beau O'Reilly) of Curi- ➔



STEPPENWOLF

CRITICS ARE AWED BY THIS VISCERAL AND POWERFUL
WORLD PREMIERE ABOUT THE MURDERED
AND MISSING WOMEN OF JUÁREZ, MEXICO

“Plenty of
contemporary
relevance”
– *Chicago Sun Times*

“Countless
moments of sheer
theatrical beauty”
– *Newcity*

“Raw, unflinching,
passionately
acted premiere”
– *Daily Herald*

LA RUTA

A world premiere by Isaac Gomez
Directed by ensemble member Sandra Marquez



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ARTS & CULTURE

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ous Theatre Branch/Rhino Fest. This year, as ever, Magnus broke her oath. Politics, both local and national, played a role. “People making something out of nothing in this fucked-up world is extremely important,” Magnus says. “If our artistic enclaves cannot support each other? We are absolutely not going to make it.”

The 2019 Rhino entries are a multigenerational effort created by artists ranging in age from 15 to older than 80. Among them: an opening night vaudeville musicale, a drag ode to Barbra Streisand, a full production of Caryl Churchill’s demon-infused drama *The Skriker*, and a weekly podcast about Chicago’s arts and culture scene.

“I get emotional about it because things are so fucking desperate right now,” says Magnus. “Making art is one of the only answers I know.” 1/12-2/24: Wed-Fri 7 PM, Sat noon, Sun 3 PM, Mon 7 PM; see website for individual performance times, Prop Thtr, 3502 N. Elston, rhinofest.com, \$15 or pay what you can.

ENCOUNTER

When the local CBS affiliate ran a story about missing women from Chicago’s south side, playwright B.B. Browne was left with more questions than answers. “It was only a snapshot,” she says. “No follow-up. But the community has been talking about this, black and brown women disappearing. We don’t have hard numbers, but people are worried. And we know that if this was happening on the north side, we’d be hearing more about it. The question for me became, ‘How can I as an artist uplift these sisters who are crying for help?’” The answer lies in *Missing*, a short play Browne hopes to expand to full-length.

Variations on Browne’s core question inform all of Collaboraction’s Encounter, which is curated into different nightly programs, many followed by panels, discussions, and calls for community involvement outside the theater. The productions are embedded with topical urgency: Alanisse Pineda’s *16 Shots* uses the the murder of Laquan McDonald to explore both police brutality and the daily barrage of microaggressions faced by people of color. An adaptation of Tonika Lewis Johnson’s acclaimed *Folded Map Project* photographs, which bring together people from corresponding addresses on the north and south sides, takes on the geography of segregation and racism. *Picnic Summit* by Sami Ismat, who is a Syrian refugee, digs into politics as laid out at a family gathering.

“I see my piece as a jumping-off point,” says Browne. “I want there to be change. I want there to be healing. I want us to be talking about all of these things.” 1/15-1/27: dates and times vary; see website, Collaboraction, 1579 N. Milwaukee, 312-226-9633, collaboraction.org, \$25, \$15 students, festival pass \$60, \$30 students.

22ND ANNUAL FILLET OF SOLO FESTIVAL

If you were around for Fillet of Solo’s epic run at the Live Bait Theater (1987-2009, RIP), you probably don’t require further impetus to make for the box office. David Sedaris debuted stories at FoS back in the day. So did Tellin’ Tales Theatre cofounder Tekki Lomnicki, a singer-storyteller and self-described little person who spins comic gold from autobiographical tales. When the Live Bait shuttered in 2009, Lomnicki—among many others—worried for future Fillets, but Lifeline Theatre picked up the series in 2010 and it’s been running in Rogers Park ever since. This year, Lomnicki brings *Come Hell or High Water*, drawn from her experiences with business travel.

“This was the late 1980s, early 90s,” Lomnicki recalls, “when there were ‘handicapped’ hotel rooms which always only had one bed. The company I worked for was too cheap to give us our own rooms, so I’d literally wind up sleeping with strangers. I mean, fine, I can bring a stool to get to the towels or whatever. But sleeping with strangers? Come. On.”

Along with Lomnicki and her Tellin’ Tales collaborators, Fillet also includes the comic stylings of Stir Friday Night! (Steven Yeun, aka Glenn on the *The Walking Dead*, is a former member), and the unfiltered “brain-droppings” of Moth GrandSlam champ Lily Be, the Back of the Yards native whose *Stoop* series provides one of Chicago’s rare showcases for storytellers of color.

After the recent sale of the Heartland Cafe and the future of the Event Space uncertain, Lomnicki has a sense of déjà vu, like it’s the 2009 Live Bait closing all over again, minus much of the worry. “The stories aren’t going away. Neither are the storytellers,” she says. 1/18-2/2: times and locations vary; see website, 773-761-4477, lifelinetheatre.com, \$10, festival pass \$50.

CHICAGO INTERNATIONAL PUPPET THEATER FESTIVAL

“If someone who doesn’t know puppetry gets into a room where they see a contemporary piece of puppet theater, they’re shocked,”

CHICAGO YOUNG PLAYWRIGHTS FESTIVAL

Through 1/27: Fri-Sat 7:30 PM, Sun 3 PM; no performance Sun 1/13, Chicago Dramatists, 773 N. Aberdeen, 773-878-8864, pegasustheatrechicago.org, \$30, \$25 seniors, \$18 21 and under.

ARTS & CULTURE

says Blair Thomas, founder of the Chicago International Puppet Festival and cofounder of the late Redmoon Theater, the company largely responsible for helping puppets find a place within Chicago theater. Puppet Fest is about cultivating the art form as well as bringing it to audiences, he adds. "Obviously we're having a moment where puppets are grabbing hold. Take away the puppets from *Lion King* or *War Horse* and what do you have left? But those puppets didn't just happen—they took years, decades, to create."

Puppet Fest was born in 2000, co-curated by Thomas and Susan Lipmann in collaboration with the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Since 2015, it's been a biennial. This year's festival is vast, encompassing 70 events performed by 50 artists. Among them are:


Ajijaak on Turtle Island, performed by members of the Ojibwe, Ho-Chunk, Lakota, and Cherokee nations and based on indigenous legends, is a tale of cranes created from storyboards by codirectors Ty Defoe and Heather Henson, daughter of Muppets creator Jim Henson.

Just Another Lynching, from North Carolina-based puppet artist Jeghetto, is the story of a black man murdered in 1921.

Arde Brillante en los Bosques de la Noche (*Burning Bright in the Forest of the Night*), a puppet/film/live theater mashup by Argentinian artist Mariano Pensotti is based on the words and actions of Soviet revolutionary and feminist Alexandra Kollontai. 1/17-1/27: [times and locations vary](http://timesandlocationsvary.com); see [website](http://website.com), 312-753-3234, chicagopuppetfest.org, \$10-\$40.

IN MEMORIAM:

THE CHICAGO FRINGE FESTIVAL

Fests are not forever. The Chicago International Theatre Festival? Gone. The Chicago Fringe and Buskers Festival? Likewise. This year came word that the Chicago Fringe Festival (which some argued was redundant because what is Chicago's vast off-Loop theater scene if not a yearlong fringe festival?) is also kaput, after 10 years and an estimated 367 shows. The Fringe's volunteer staff was no longer up to the demands of producing the annual shebang, or so explained the official RIPress release. But mark your calendars! There's a commemorative party slated for Saturday, June 11, at the Windsor Tavern and Grill, 4530 N. Milwaukee. January will surely be over by then. 

 @CateySullivan



Good Strong Coffee

 MICHAEL COURIER

THEATER

Bright young things

The three authors in the Young Playwrights Festival aren't afraid to take on big themes.

By **DMITRY SAMAROV**

The three one-acts that make up the 32nd annual Chicago Young Playwrights Festival don't shy away from big issues, but they struggle to convey those issues in a personal way. While it's no surprise that high schoolers might have trouble dramatizing large topics such as sexual identity, domestic abuse, and immigrants grappling with gentrification in unique ways, there's no questioning the earnest effort evident in each of these short plays, produced and performed by theater professionals at Pegasus Theatre.

In *A Green Light*, by Lane Tech College Prep student Alexis Gaw, a boy comes out as gay to his female best friend and gets a chilly reaction. He is offended that she won't accept who he is or want to hear about his crushes the way he always has about hers, and wonders whether they are as close as he thought. She sees his sexuality as a political issue, while hers is a matter of "normal" feelings. It is a surprise to no one that the

real problem is that she was in love with him and his revelation broke her heart. While the sentiments expressed are no doubt sincere, I could not help feeling like I was watching an after-school special. Everything is resolved tidily at the high school prom, lessons are learned, and, presumably, everyone lives happily ever after.


In Kenwood Academy High School student Anonda Tyler's *Fragile Limbs*, a boy named Faith and a girl named Hope come together and heal each other's wounds. He grapples with the loss of loved ones to Chicago street violence, while she contemplates suicide because of her mother's abuse. A Grim Reaper-like hooded figure at first haunts the young pair but eventually becomes a kind of guardian angel as their romance develops. While some of Tyler's language leans too heavily on platitudes (and naming the protagonists Hope and Faith is beyond on-the-nose), there's no doubt that the struggles she relates are absolutely real. There's a palpable

torment to the way these two young people try to do all they can to break free of the shackles that bind them.

Good Strong Coffee by Whitney Young Magnet High School's Luna MacWilliams rounds out the program with a sprawling story of Latino siblings trying to keep their late parents' Pilsen coffee shop afloat in spite of gentrification and their own personal hopes and dreams. While certainly the most ambitious of the three plays, this one is also the one most indebted to TV sitcom tropes. Most telling are the repeated pantomimed "montage" transitions between scenes. It's the kind of thing that might work with video editing but feels completely stagey performed live. There is also a too-neat happy ending, not unlike the one in *A Green Light*.

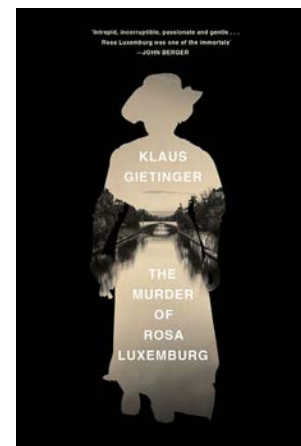
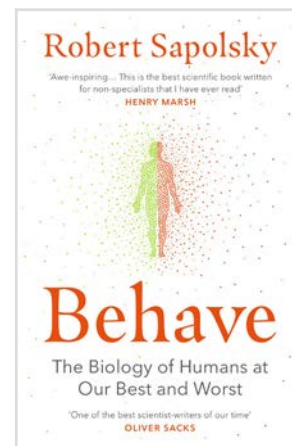
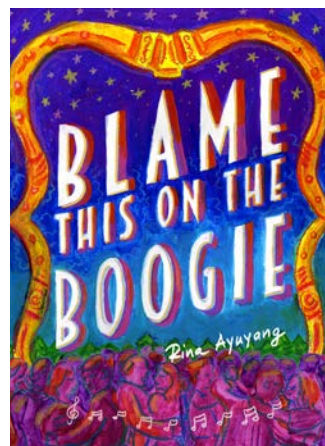
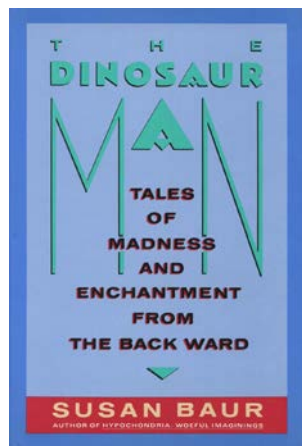
Thinking back on the three pieces while leaving the theater, I kept coming back to the spectral figure in *Fragile Limbs*. Dubbed "Fragile Boy" in the program and played with an intensity lacking in any other part of the show by Elaine C. Bell, this was the only character who did not seem to me a product of either pop culture or other known tropes. This shape-shifting spirit felt like a personal evocation of the metaphysical entirety of Tyler's conjuring.

It's probably unfair to expect writers who haven't lived very long to present insightful narratives. It takes many years to shed the influence of books, TV shows, movies, and other media, which can't help but inform and often overwhelm a young person's early creative efforts. Watching these plays, I wasn't discouraged by what they portend for the future of Chicago theater. There was little cynicism or rote jokeyness presented—just a lack of specificity, which can only be attained with time and experience.

I don't know whether these three young writers or the hundreds of other high school students who submitted their efforts to this festival will make a career on the stage, but the fact that they aspire to succeed at such a quixotic endeavor can't help but make me hopeful. Given a little more seasoning, one or two will certainly come up with new ways to make the personal political and the global local. In the meantime, I applaud their sincere, if flawed, first efforts. 

BOOK SWAP

Lit recommendations to start the year off right



If you're reading Book Swap—and you are—my bet is on your New Year's resolution being to read more books. So in the first edition of Book Swap in 2019, I thought I'd share a glimpse of Nick Drnaso's TBR pile and some of my own selections.

Drnaso's graphic novel *Sabrina* took the literary world by storm last year—and for good reason. It's a slowly built and awkward-

ly constructed narrative that only coheres as a transcendent story about human fragility in this contemporary moment of duress long after readers grow comfortable with his flat-colored forms and opaque backstories. The book is gutting and brilliant—enough so that you not only want to read everything the author has ever written (and you won't go wrong with Drnaso's 2016 *Beverly*, which won the *LA Times* Book Award for Best Graphic Novel), but you want to read what he reads, too.

So what are you reading, Nick? —ANNE ELIZABETH MOORE

ND: I have a never-ending stack of books on my "to read" pile, which is a constant reminder of all the things that are passing me by. I've chosen three from that stack that I'm particularly excited about, though they're not all new or even recent releases, so this isn't as much a "looking forward to" as a "looking back at" list.

Every Christmas my brother and I try to recommend presents to each other so we're not passing the same gift cards back and

forth. This year I asked him to buy me *THE DINOSAUR MAN* by Susan Baur. I can't remember where I first heard about this book, but it's been on my wish list for a few years. Baur recounts her time working as a psychologist with schizophrenic patients, where she developed a method of immersing herself in the delusional mind as a way to uncover and understand the internal logic.

In a similar vein, I'm also very much looking forward to digging into *BEHAVE: THE BIOLOGY OF HUMANS AT OUR BEST AND WORST* by Robert Sapolsky. My wife and I have been listening to his lectures that are available online, particularly on schizophrenia, religion, and depression. Admittedly, I told my brother to buy the book for her for Christmas as well, though I might greedily read it before she gets a chance to.

Because I might need something warmer after those books, I'll follow them with *BLAME THIS ON THE BOOGIE* by Rina Ayuyang, which I've been eager to read since the summer but keep losing in the pile. It's a graphic novel, rendered in energetic and lovely colored pen-

cil (I think). All I know is that it's about dance, music, and motherhood, so it promises to be a worthwhile and life-affirming read.

AEM: *BLAME THIS ON THE BOOGIE*'s on my pile, too. Ayuyang's gorgeous color work is so enticing! But first up is some gore, because winter.

There's no better way to commemorate the centennial anniversary of socialist feminist Rosa Luxemburg's untimely demise on January 15 than by curling up with a fresh copy of Klaus Gietinger's *THE MURDER OF ROSA LUXEMBURG* from Verso. When she and fellow Marxist revolutionary Karl Liebknecht were killed late one night in front of a posh hotel, and her body dumped into the Landwehr Canal in Berlin, it marked a turning point in the German political climate that, unfortunately, still holds a bit too much resonance today.

Former Chicagoan Aleksandar Hemon will release *MY PARENTS / THIS DOES NOT BELONG TO YOU* through MCD, a Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux imprint, in the spring. Pairing the narrative of his parents' immigration from Bosnia to Canada with his extremely personal tales will certainly offer a fantastic frame for his incisive revelations and stunning eye for detail.

One of my very favorite authors will also release a new book this year, on one of my very favorite sports: Elizabeth McCracken's *BOWLAWAY* takes on a family in New England that operates a candlepin bowling alley. I don't know how it can be anything but delightful, as I've truly loved every single thing she's ever written, from her renowned *The Giant's House* to her entire Twitter feed. Reasonably sure it will start 2019 off in the right literary direction. **RI**



© JAMIE RAMSAY

The first thing you see is a large cement viaduct bisecting the Fulton Market neighborhood. But when you walk closer, it resolves into an explosion of brightly painted murals. One mural shows photo-realistic children while another shows an elephant riding a penny-farthing bicycle.

This is the B_Line.

"It's a gallery and a museum of street art," explains Levar Hoard, its chief curator and managing director. The B_Line—as in "making a beeline for"—is a reincarnation of the Hubbard Street Murals, which started in the early 1970s.

Since its rebirth a little more than a year ago, the B_Line has expanded to cover five city blocks, from Aberdeen to Green streets, with decorated underpasses in between. Seventy-five artists from Chicago and around the world have created these astonishing murals.

Hoard, a Fulton Market resident, had spent years walking by the fading murals. Three years ago, he finally decided to look into the history of the neighborhood and discovered that in the 70s, it had been predominantly

African-American. At the time, Chicago was experiencing cultural shifts as people were pushing back against racism and power structures.

Against this changing backdrop, Ricardo Alonzo, the founder of the Hubbard Street Murals, explains, "Chicago was having a rebirth of social issues that had taken to the streets in the form of public art," most notably the Wall of Respect that went up in Bronzeville in 1967. Alonzo was inspired to, as he puts it, create "a universal message that concerns us all."

That message was about protecting the environment and saving endangered species, inspired by Genesis 1:28: "And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth." Each of the murals would show scenes of nature and wildlife.

In 1971, Alonzo and 12 students began painting the viaduct along the 900 block of Hubbard Street, but the project expanded in 1972 when

it received city funding to employ 50 students from nearby high schools at \$2.30 an hour—along with four School of the Art Institute seniors to supervise them. By 1979, they had completed the murals on the mile-long stretch between Ogden and Desplaines and employed more than 500 young people. That year, the city funding ran out and Alonzo moved to Arizona to pursue a career as art specialist for the U.S. Army.

Karen Smith and Fred Montano, a former student of Alonzo's, picked up the torch in the late 1990s after the Union Pacific Railroad made repairs to the viaduct that damaged the original murals. Their goal was to create new murals while also restoring the old ones. They wanted the project to be community driven: "Anyone could submit a mural idea," Smith says. Anne Marie Harm, who originally joined as a volunteer, helped lead the project from the mid-2000s until 2009 when she too left town.

Attempts were made to keep the project going but little happened until Hoard decided to revitalize it. Having lived in Miami, he was surprised that Chicago lacked an art district comparable to Miami's Wynwood Walls, an

outdoor area with over 80,000 square feet of murals. "How do we know we are world-class in Chicago?" he asks. "You don't know that until you benchmark to see what other cities are doing and then you attempt to go above and beyond that. It is my hope to make the B_Line that world-class example for Chicago."

Hoard first met with Adrian Guerrero, then Union Pacific Railroad's public affairs director for Chicago and Cook County, to determine the steps necessary to restart the project. It would require the cooperation of Alderman Walter Burnett Jr.'s office, the police district, and the community.

The B_Line's first mural was an abstract piece painted by the Chicago artist Lefty Out There at 895 West Hubbard. It was unveiled during EXPO Chicago in September 2017. Merlot, Amuse126, and other Chicago-based artists soon made their own contributions. Felipe Pantone, an Argentinian-Spanish street artist, was the first international artist on the B_Line, decorating an entire underpass at Peoria. The B_Line has also hosted several events.

The artists submit their designs, some of which are then chosen by a small com- ➔

ARTS & CULTURE

continued from 23


mittee of other artists and local community members based on the artist's experience, style, and skill level. Hoard explains that they wanted to avoid including artists who already had a lot of murals in Chicago. "We want this to be a one-of-a-kind destination experience in Chicago," he says. Contributors have full control over the material of their murals, though they are asked to be mindful of the Bennett Day School nearby. Hoard may provide some curatorial support as well.

While there is a 501(c)3 for the project, Hoard explained that much of the funding has come from private donors as well as corporate sponsorships and fees from commercial shoots.

Hoard has big plans for the B_Line. He wants to make it more of "a world-class street art project" with 200 new and old murals. He aims to permanently seal some of the older murals in place to keep them on display.

Hoard sees the murals as one part of a much larger project. He and his team are working with the alderman and CDOT to lay sidewalks alongside the murals, move the bike lanes, and install better lighting. His long-term plans include connecting the B_Line to the Riverwalk and the 606.

Hoard has brought in SAIC students as interns to learn from the artists. Two of the students, Kalan Strauss and Saul Palos Rodriguez, have even painted murals of their own. He hopes to expand the program to bring in students from underresourced schools. He wants to have a diversity of artists and mural images.

"You are going to see true diversity reflected in the art," he says. "That's something that started in 1971, that's how I'm keeping it alive in 2018, going into 2019, and I take that very seriously." 

 @Vogontroubadour



 JAMIE RAMSAY

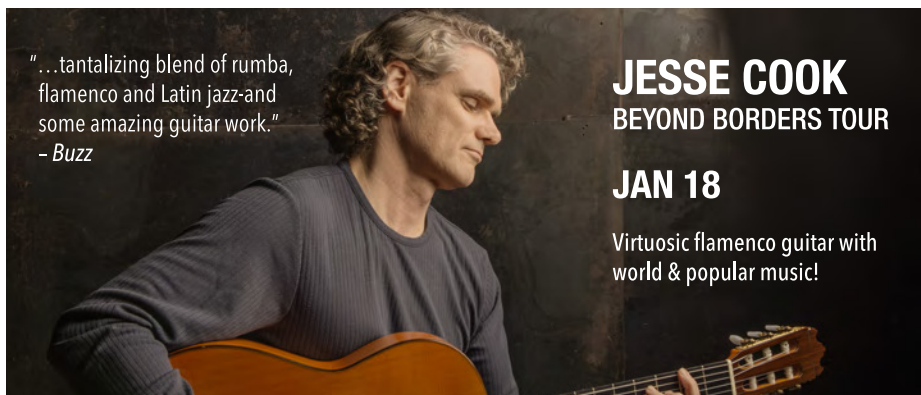


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Above: Murals painted at Aberdeen and Hubbard, 1973

 COURTESY THE B_LINE

Left: Artists assemblage, 1973

 COURTESY RICARDO ALONZO



THE OWL'S LEGACY ★★★

Directed by Chris Marker. In English and subtitled French, Georgian, German, Greek, and Japanese. 340 min. Gene Siskel Film Center, 164 N. State, 312-846-2800, siskelfilmcenter.org, \$11.



The Owl's Legacy

MOVIES

Western Civ 101

Chris Marker's essay film *The Owl's Legacy* is the best symposium on ancient Greece you'll ever sit in on.

By **BEN SACHS**

This month the Gene Siskel Film Center is screening *The Owl's Legacy* (1989), a 13-part documentary series directed by the late Chris Marker (*Sans Soleil*, *A Grin Without a Cat*), one of the pioneers of the essay film. The Film Center is dividing the series into four programs over the course of four weeks, with each program playing on Sunday afternoon and Monday evening. I recommend checking out the whole thing, but don't worry if you miss one of the parts. The series can be watched in any order, and no one episode is more illuminating than any other. The overarching theme of *The Owl's Legacy* is the influence of ancient Greek culture on modern life, and each episode tackles a concept that comes to us from the Greeks (democracy, mythology, tragedy, etc.). Taken as a whole, it's a heady and thought-provoking project that asks us to consider our connection to antiquity. Watching it is like sitting in on a superior college seminar.

You could also say that it feels like being invited to a philosophical symposium, which Marker cites in the first episode as the inspiration behind the entire series. Intercut between the myriad interviews (with philosophers, historians, and artists from multiple fields)

are scenes set at actual symposia where groups of people hold forth on the concepts at hand, aided by lots of wine. Even when Marker presents one interviewee at a time, *The Owl's Legacy* still feels like an extended discourse, as the filmmaker (who credits himself as “skipper,” as opposed to director) edits the reflections so that the speakers seem to be in dialogue with one another. One idea often leads to a counterargument or antithesis; sometimes it feels as though one speaker is building on what the previous one just said. This structure creates the impression that the ideas of the ancient Greeks are still up for debate and that the concept of civilization remains a work in progress.

This impression comes across the most strongly when *The Owl's Legacy* considers how different cultures have appropriated Grecian ideas. In one of the early episodes, Marker has several interviewees sound off on the influence of ancient Greeks on German philosophers from the 18th century to the Nazi era, with an emphasis on how the concepts of empire and permanent culture appealed to the Nazis. The appropriation of Greek philosophy—to which we owe the concept of democracy—by fascists would seem counter-

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intuitive, but then Marker brings out filmmaker Elia Kazan to remind us that ancient Greek society was hardly a democracy either, as most of its population consisted of slaves. This reminder speaks to the contradiction in Greek thought between ideals and reality—a contradiction that looms over much of *The Owl's Legacy*. The frisson is especially pronounced in the episode on mathematics (which Marker wittily subtitles “The Empire Counts Back”), though it can be felt in nearly every part, as the interviewees frequently reflect on the idealism of Greek philosophers.

Comprised mostly of talking heads, *The Owl's Legacy* may not be one of Marker's most visually striking works, though the organization of ideas is characteristically playful and probing. Marker even throws in some intellectual curveballs, such as the assertion that modern Japan is more closely aligned with ancient Greece than any European nation. This digression allows the filmmaker to indulge in his Japanophilia (one of the key threads of his masterpiece *Sans Soleil*), and it raises the question of whether Greek ideals truly belong to the entire world. Located in an episode on tragedy (subtitled “the Illusion of Death”), it finds Marker delineating Japan's integration of art into society at large and presenting striking clips of a Noh adaptation of a classic Greek tragedy. In locating similarities between Greek and Japanese modes of dramatization, Marker invites you to ponder whether certain concepts are universal.

Marker worked on *The Owl's Legacy* for much of the 1980s and premiered it on British television at the end of the decade, around the time that contemporary philosophers were pondering whether humanity had reached the end of history. Given this context, the series suggests a summation of sorts; at the same time, several of the interviewees opine that civilization still has a long way to go toward reaching its ideal form. Marker, who held radical political beliefs and explored them in quite a few of his works, seems to side with these thinkers the most. Still, he engenders a sense of wonder at all humanity has accomplished so far. The world of ideas established by the ancient Greeks comes to seem like a trove so great that *The Owl's Legacy* can only begin to scratch the surface of it. By the end of the series, you may wonder why Marker didn't make it longer. **R**

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MOVIES

El Ángel

The notorious Argentine criminal Carlos Robledo Puch committed dozens of robberies and at least ten murders before turning 18; this stylish docudrama considers the last few years of his life before his arrest in the early 1970s. As played by newcomer Lorenzo Ferro, Carlos is an alluring, sexually ambiguous blank (he often brings to mind Björn Andresen from Visconti's *Death in Venice*) who engages in criminal activity for the momentary thrill of it. Director Luis Ortega fetishizes his star to such an extent that the movie often feels like softcore porn; much of the drama centers on the sexual curiosity Carlos arouses in the members of a criminal family with whom he becomes involved. The thematic focus on the interconnectedness of sex and crime suggests the influence of Jean Genet, while Ortega's flashy direction recalls the exuberance of movies like *Goodfellas* and *Boogie Nights*. The form and content never really jibe, but this might get under your skin anyway. In Spanish with subtitles. —**BEN SACHS** 115 min. Fri 1/11, 2 and 8 PM; Sat 1/12, 3 PM; Sun 1/13, 5:15 PM; Mon 1/14, 7:45 PM; Wed 1/16, 7:45 PM; and Thu 1/17, 6 PM. Gene Siskel Film Center

RR Blue

Part one of a loosely connected trilogy by Krzysztof Kieslowski related to the colors of and abstract qualities associated with the French flag—in this case liberty—is a tale of a woman (Juliette Binoche) reassembling and reinventing her life in Paris after her composer husband and daughter die in an auto accident. Working with his regular writing collaborator Krzysztof Piesiewicz, Kieslowski had become a master at conveying raw emotional states with a pristine economy of means; as the dialogue here is all in subtitled French, which he barely knew, these means have little to do with language. He was less adept in working out a dreamy allegory about European unification. (An unfinished concerto left by the heroine's husband that she and a colleague eventually decide to complete is meant to be played in all the EU capitals at once.) But the film's grasp of the fluctuations of moment-to-moment experience,

including consciousness itself, is extraordinary, and Binoche's powerful performance never falters. —**JONATHAN ROSENBAUM** 1993 100 min. Mon 1/14, 7 PM. Doc Films

RR Do the Right Thing

With the possible exception of his cable miniseries *When the Levees Broke*, this 1989 feature is still Spike Lee's best work, chronicling a very hot day on a single block of Brooklyn's Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood, when a series of minor encounters and incidents lead to an explosion of racial violence at an Italian-owned pizzeria. Sharp and knowing, though not always strictly realistic, it manages to give all the characters their due. Bill Lee's wall-to-wall score eventually loses some of its effectiveness, and a few elements (such as the patriarchal roles played by the local drunk and a disc jockey) seem more fanciful than believable. But overall this is a powerful and persuasive look at an ethnic community and what makes it tick—funky, entertaining, packed with insight, and political in the best, most responsible sense. —**JONATHAN ROSENBAUM** 2012 R, 120 min. Tue 1/15, 9:30 PM. Doc Films

A Dog's Way Home

In this incredible journey, a dog (voiced by Bryce Dallas Howard) travels 400 miles in search of her owner. PG, 96 min. AMC Dine-in Block 37, Century 12 and CineArts 6, Chatham 14, River East 21

Escape Room

Director Adam Robitel follows up *Insidious: The Last Key* (2018), the best film to date in the *Insidious* series, with another resourceful, well-written horror movie that's suitable for older children. Six strangers meet at one of those "escape room" experiences where they have to solve puzzles cooperatively to get out of the room, only to discover that the game has life-or-death consequences—and that the way out of one room leads to another, even deadlier one. If you have fond memories of the late-90s Canadian cult favorite *Cube*, you'll probably be sympathetic to this; screenwriters Bragi Schut and Maria Melnik devise interesting puzzles for the characters

to solve, and Robitel maintains a consistent level of suspense without resorting to gore. The cast projects a generic, 50s B-movie vibe, but in a good way; no one character is especially likable or unlikable, and this keeps you guessing as to whom the filmmakers will kill off. —**BEN SACHS** PG-13, 100 min. River East 21

RR Finding Vivian Maier

John Maloof and Charlie Siskel directed this documentary about Chicago street photographer Vivian Maier, who was almost completely unknown at the time of her death in 2009 but whose work has since been celebrated in books, films, and gallery exhibitions. —**J.R. JONES** 2014 83 min. Sat 1/12, 8 PM. Chicago Filmmakers

RR Gaslight

George Cukor carefully avoids the obvious effects in telling this story of a husband (Charles Boyer) attempting to drive his wife (Ingrid Bergman) insane; instead, this 1944 film is one of the few psychological thrillers that is genuinely psychological, depending on subtle clues—a gesture, an intonation—to thought and character. Boyer and Bergman are superb, and Angela Lansbury makes her debut as a cunning cockney maid. It's also one of the few films to expand the use of offscreen space, not simply to the sides of the frame, but to the areas above and below the image as well. With Joseph Cotten and Dame May Whitty. —**DAVE KEHR** 1985 114 min. Fri 1/11, 7 and 9:30 PM; Sun 1/13, 1:30 PM. Doc Films

Go Fish

One of the delightful things about Rose Troche's stylish, low-budget, filmed-in-Chicago black-and-white lesbian comedy is that its characters all register as real people, even when bits of the dialogue are stiff or some of the lip sync is off. This isn't a movie about lesbians; it's a movie about these lesbians, and we're likely to think of them afterward as if they were people we knew. As in the better American underground movies of the 60s, which this sometimes resembles, the youthfulness and the footloose free spirit—evident in everything from the performances to Ann T. Rossetti's shooting style to Brendan Dolan and Jennifer Sharpe's jazz score to the breezy rhythmic stretches bridging narrative sequences—keep it bouncing along like a clear spring day. (And though the characters vary in age, there's a clear note of shared adolescent braggadocio in the way that sex and romance here only become real after they're talked about.) Written and produced by Troche in collaboration with Guinevere Turner, the younger of the two romantic leads (the other is V.S. Brodie), this movie dives into fantasy and stylized internal monologues with the same aplomb it brings to the buildup to a hot date. With T. Wendy McMillan, Migdalia Melendez, and Anastasia Sharp. —**JONATHAN ROSENBAUM** 1994 R, 85 min. Tue 1/15, 7 PM. Doc Films

Hale County This Morning, This Evening

RaMell Ross's lyrical documentary follows Daniel and Quincy, two young African-American men from rural Alabama as they grow to maturity. 76 min. Sat 1/12, 7 and 9:30 PM; Sun 1/13, 4 PM. Doc Films

Heaven's Gate

Well, it really is a stinker, a compendium of *The Deer Hunter*'s weaknesses (of plotting, narration, dialogue, and character) with few of its lyrical strengths. The best

scene is at the beginning—a graduation ball for the Harvard class of 1870, filmed with swirling, exhilarating camera movements that suggest the famous ballroom scene in Minnelli's *Madame Bovary*. The sequence has clearly been truncated, which suggests that similar non-narrative cuts have been made throughout, leaving only the clumsy plot framework of Michael Cimino's script. The historical background (peasants versus capitalists in old Wyoming) is a fairly bald-faced cop of 1900, with a similar Marxist sentimentalism; the foreground action (two buddies in love with the same woman) is a continuation of *The Deer Hunter*'s veiled male-bonding themes, but with little of the teasing ambiguity that made the earlier film so much fun to argue about. With Kris Kristofferson, Christopher Walken, and Isabelle Huppert. —**DAVE KEHR** 1980 R, 218 min. Wed 1/16, 7 PM. Doc Films

Impulso

The workings of internal organs might come to mind when watching experimental flamenco dancer Rocío Molina contort and pulse her body onstage; she exudes a feral abandon that most people hide beneath pleasantries and skin. In this documentary, which follows her for eight months as she prepares for a show in Paris, director Emilio Belmonte attempts to unpack her process. This includes observing Molina's "impulsos"—what she calls the urges she feels in her body before improvised movements form—and, in a sense, dancing to keep up: moving the camera along the floor with her as she slides through white ruffles and shooting from above as she swirls blood-red paint from her skirt across the stage. Witnessing Molina's outpour is so transporting that when Belmonte cuts to downtime or interviews with others, the transitions can feel disruptive. An exception is a surprising conversation with Molina's mother in Málaga, Spain, in which she describes her fear when watching her daughter dance: "She looks for this extremity, this limit she must cross to stop being herself and become this monster." What an outlet. In Spanish with subtitles. —**LEAH PICKETT** 87 min. Sat 1/12, 5:15 PM, and Tue 1/15, 8:15 PM. Gene Siskel Film Center

MacGruber

Constructing a feature-length comedy around a *Saturday Night Live* character has always been a fool's errand, but luckily for Will Forte, his demented special-ops warrior MacGruber (conceived as a parody of the ultrasourceful TV hero MacGyver) slots neatly into the formula of the fireball-laden summer action flick. As a result, this keeps chugging along even when the vainglorious and profoundly incompetent MacGruber begins to remind you of one too many Will Ferrell characters. The genre-spoof elements are pretty stale (slow-motion shots of the characters crying out in rage, or strutting toward the camera with an explosion behind them), but the movie scores a few laughs with its startling use of bloody R-rated violence, and there are enjoyable turns by Kristen Wiig (as MacGruber's sidekick), Val Kilmer (as the international bad guy), and Powers Boothe (as the good guys' commanding officer). Jorman Taccone directed; with Ryan Philippe and Maya Rudolph. —**J.R. JONES** 2010 R, 90 min. Sat 1/12-Sun 1/13, 11 AM. Music Box Theatre

Maria by Callas

Asif Kapadia's documentaries *Senna* (2010) and *Amy* (2015) seem to be the primary reference points for this chronicle of opera singer Maria Callas. Like those movies, it's assembled almost entirely from archival footage, leading viewers to reflect on the extraordinary amount



El Ángel

Free jazz two centuries deep

The members of Extraordinary Popular Delusions bring vast and varied experience to this underappreciated ensemble's regular weekly shows—which follow no rules but their own.

By **HOWARD MANDEL**

The Beat Kitchen in Roscoe Village hosts a respectable variety of entertainment in its downstairs performance space, including singer-songwriters, pop-punk bands, a weekly bluegrass brunch, and the recently popular Heavy Metal Yoga sessions. But devoted fans of Chicago's creative-music scene come to the club for something that happens in its much smaller upstairs room: the long-running Monday-night residency of Extraordinary Popular Delusions.

The musicians' musicians who founded Extraordinary Popular Delusions in 2005 have played their spontaneous, imaginative, unfettered improvisations here almost every week since 2010, after spending their first few years with a regular Tuesday gig at Hotti Biscotti. Their shows are little heralded and often sparsely attended, but 13 years of continuous collaboration have turned this quartet into a beacon of Chicago's indigenous avant-garde, with an unpredictable, provocative sound that arises from the commingling of its members' diverse influences and experiences.

Named after a 19th-century Scottish sociological study of market bubbles and manias, Extraordinary Popular Delusions are Jim Baker (piano, ARP synthesizer, viola), Brian Sandstrom (double bass, electric guitar, trumpet), Steve Hunt (drums, percussion), and Mars Williams (saxophones, toys), with Edward Wilkerson Jr. (reeds, oud, didgeridoo) regularly filling in for Williams. The five of them have spent a combined 200 years making all sorts of adventurous music in Chicago and beyond. Separately or together, they've played with icons of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians

such as Muhal Richard Abrams and Fred Anderson, as well as with maverick north-side multi-instrumentalist Hal Russell. They've collaborated with Rahmlee Michael Davis of south-side soul-funk group the Pharaohs and the famous Phenix Horns (Earth, Wind & Fire), toured with postpunk band the Psychedelic Furs, gigged on the 80s Lincoln Avenue blues scene, and studied in university classrooms with contemporary composers such as Herbert Brün and Shulamit Ran. They've shared stages with beloved pop, rock, and postrock acts, including Shawn Colvin, Nicholas Tremulis, and Tortoise, and they've worked closely with peers from their own scene who've gone on to achieve international recognition, win prestigious awards, or land plum academic gigs, among them reedist and MacArthur fellow Ken Vandermark and flutist Nicole Mitchell.

No one in EPD has built a career quite like that—three of the ensemble's five members hold down day jobs—but they don't define their success along those lines. Where this group is concerned, they're just happy to have a place to play together every week, and they'll do it for whatever ends up in the tip jar.

Extraordinary Popular Delusions have released just two recordings in their 14-year history, both now hard to find: a self-titled album from 2007 and a limited-edition 2011 disc called *Apocryphal Fire in the Warehouse, and Other Explanations*. Their residencies constitute the vast majority of their shows: outside those engagements, they've played the Hungry Brain a couple times ("Perhaps Elastic," Baker says, vaguely), a release party at Logan Hardware, and a festival in Germany. For most of the group's

history, only Williams has devoted himself to music exclusively—though Sandstrom has worked mostly as a musician, and recently left a job as a security guard at the Museum of Contemporary Art that he'd started in 2009. Game for any kind of gig and newly free to book them, this summer he accepted an invitation to Copenhagen and Norway to play with artists who'd heard him with EPD on a Monday night.

Everyone in EPD is in his 60s, and all are lifelong musicians. Their fearless commitment and stubborn integrity have inspired artists across genres and even across media. Jim Staffel, drummer of experimental metal band Yakuza, works at the Beat Kitchen and helped them get their residency there. Chicago visual artist Lewis Achenbach has invited EPD to play while he paints later this month at the Apple Store on Michigan, part of a roving series he calls Jazz Occurrences (for that gig, Joe Adamik of Califone and Iron & Wine will sit in for Hunt).

Baker first convened EPD in 2005 (full disclosure: I've known him since high school), but he'd met Sandstrom and Hunt around 1980—he used to go see them play with Hal Russell's NRG Ensemble, formed in '79. Russell was a swing drummer turned bebopper turned out-cat, and he grounded his musical satire and outrageously corrosive expressionism in accessible structures. "He was not big on completely free playing," Hunt remembers. "He called it playing music without a net." NRG was an important early nucleus for the north-side free-jazz and improvised-music scenes, which would explode in the 1990s (though Russell died in '92). At one point, the ensemble featured the scabrous saxophones of Williams

EXTRAORDINARY POPULAR DELUSIONS

See also page 39. Almost every Monday, 9 PM, upstairs at Beat Kitchen, 2100 W. Belmont, donations accepted, 21+

LEWIS ACHENBACH'S JAZZ OCCURRENCE NO. 17 WITH EXTRAORDINARY POPULAR DELUSIONS

For this concert, EPD will be Jim Baker, Brian Sandstrom, Mars Williams, and Joe Adamik. Thu 1/24, 6:30 PM, Apple Store, 401 N. Michigan, free, all ages

Extraordinary Popular Delusions, clockwise from upper left: Steve Hunt, Mars Williams, Brian Sandstrom, Edward Wilkerson Jr., and Jim Baker BY JOHN GARRISON



and Vandermark (the former passed in and out of its lineup a couple times), and the two men later played together in the duo Cinghiale and the Vandermark 5.

In 1980, Baker was working at the Chicago Mercantile Exchange (today he describes himself as a “headache collector” dealing with data aggregation at Zacks Investment Management). He’d always been serious about music—growing up, he was fascinated and intimidated by Glenn Gould’s Goldberg Variations and thrilled by Bartók, Stockhausen, Sun Ra, and John Coltrane’s quartet. At

the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, where he earned a BA in the early 70s, he’d taken courses from conceptualist composer Herbert Brün (among others) and studied developments in electronic music. But because Baker had to be at the CME so early for work, he was performing only once a month, with saxophonist Hal Ra Ru at a venue called Donna’s, which later became the Deja Vu. He found it easier to make it to shows as a spectator, and he was often in the audience at the Birdhouse (Fred Anderson’s pre-Velvet Lounge club, which closed in 1978) and later the Hideaway

(Hunt’s Clybourn Avenue rehearsal studio and performance spot).

By the mid-80s, Baker was contributing to Nicholas Tremulis’s hybrid of rock, punk, R&B, and jazz, playing electric piano and other instruments—he takes a devastating one-pitch guitar solo on Tremulis’s self-titled 1985 debut. He soon formed a trio with Hunt and bassist Kent Kessler, and Vandermark has said that their concert at Club Lower Links was the first he heard after his 1989 move to Chicago. In the early 90s, Vandermark joined Baker and Hunt in the trio Caffeine, which gigged at

the original HotHouse and the Lunar Cabaret and released a self-titled album of unfettered free improv in 1994. In the mid-90s, Baker also became the de facto house pianist for the weekly jam sessions at the Velvet Lounge, one of the few places in the decades-long history of Chicago’s avant-garde where adventurous improvisers from the south and north sides played together frequently and comfortably.

Eventually, says Baker, he hatched the notion of starting a trio with Sandstrom and Hunt. “At that time, I may have still been taking a guitar out of the house occasionally,” →

continued from 29

he says. “Part of the attraction of Brian was his guitar playing; that he played trumpet was another thing. Steve could play drums, and in Caffeine he’d use this marimba about the size of a piccolo xylophone. I thought, ‘Well, this could be different.’ With my usual amazing assertiveness and hustle”—Baker’s being ironic—“I’d happened into a couple of gigs in 2003 and ’04, but in spring 2005 Richard Syska, who used to run the Nervous Center with his brother Ken, asked if we wanted to do Tuesdays at Hotti Biscotti, at Fullerton and Drake. Briefly, I tried to bring in my tunes to try them, but it was mostly free stuff.”

About two weeks into that booking, Williams showed up and asked to sit in. He soon became a fixture, though he frequently left to tour with the Psychedelic Furs, acid-jazz group Liquid Soul, or another of his projects. It wasn’t until 2014 that Baker invited Wilkerson to be a regular sub. Originally from Cleveland, Wilkerson had earned a BA in music from the University of Chicago in 1975, studying composition and theory with the likes of future Pulitzer winner Shulamit Ran (“I have a good background in critical analysis,” he says). At the same time, he was learning from Muhal Richard Abrams at the AACM School of Music, held on Saturdays at the Child City day-care center at 87th and Bennett.

“I was exposed to both sides, the life of the mind and the practical,” remembers Wilkerson, now a database manager researching animal population dynamics for the Lincoln Park Zoo. He’s probably best known for leading the groups 8 Bold Souls and Shadow Vignettes, though he also served as AACM president for a few years beginning in the late 70s. “Muhal would say, ‘Listen to everything in the air. Don’t discriminate,’ then would play a Bach cantata and some James P. Johnson and talk about the similarities and techniques. For me, at 18 and 19 around 1971, it was the perfect thing to be exposed to.”

Before Wilkerson became Williams’s regular replacement in EPD, the two of them played together in the quartet of bassist Harrison Bankhead—and when either couldn’t make a gig, they’d ask Baker to fill in. In 2018, EPD played 50 Monday nights, skipping only Christmas Eve and New Year’s Eve; Wilkerson was aboard for 20 of those, Williams for the other 30. Williams hit the road in November and December with his Albert Ayler/Christmas music mash-up, touring Europe and the U.S.—when he made a local stop at the Hungry Brain, he enlisted Baker, Hunt, and Sandstrom as part of his rhythm section.

Extraordinary Popular Delusions’ form-free,



Jim Baker, Mars Williams, Brian Sandstrom, and Steve Hunt upstairs at the Beat Kitchen

© KELLY RAE WEIME

incident-rich soundscapes are best heard live at the Beat Kitchen. The musicians set up in half of what was once probably an apartment living room, through a door and up one flight from the front of the first-floor bar. The rest of the dimly lit room is taken up by a few cheap chairs, usually filled by hard-core listeners and fellow musicians—I saw eight EPD shows last year, including several in November, where the attendees included young bassist Mike Harmon (who plays in Bison Bison and backs folk-pop singer V.V. Lightbody, among other gigs), audio engineer Todd Carter (who also plays in TV Pow), and independent Sun Ra scholar Brad Marcus. The tip jar is usually next to a guest book on a tiny table. Behind an untended bar and its stools sits a fridge filled with cans of beer and soda, but I’ve never seen it plugged in—if you want a drink, you have to order it downstairs.

Despite these mundane surroundings, when the members of EPD begin to play you may feel like you’re in an M.C. Escher etching, its dimensions crisscrossing impossibly, or in a Kafka story where stark imagery and weird humor evoke claustrophobia and sensory derangement. This phantasmagorical subjective experience is a natural result of the effort to jettison expectations, open your mind, and absorb and organize the vast amount of sonic information generated. The musicians rarely refer to or signal one another visibly: Baker typically hangs his head low over his piano or stares fixedly at his ARP, wearing a headlamp the better to see the sliders and patch cords on

that challenging instrument. Sandstrom keeps his eyes closed a lot. Hunt does try for eye contact, but not even the horn players tend to cooperate—when Williams is there, he keeps busy with one of various saxes, a clarinet, or a table full of little noisemakers (mostly squeezable toys), and when Wilkerson plays, he positions himself about ten feet away, attentive to his tenor sax, alto clarinet, bulky oud, and didgeridoo.

The players’ individual sonic streams meander, change continuously, merge orchestrally, and arrive together at unforeseen yet seemingly inevitable conclusions—they can be thunderous as a waterfall or soft as drizzle, but they’re almost always as vivid, elusive, and hard to remember as dreams. And like dreams, they convey strong moods and can move the listener. Baker acknowledges that EPD’s music is not for everyone. “The band may be extraordinary,” he says dryly, “but we’d be deluded if we thought it would be popular.”

There was never a time when free improvisation was mainstream, but Baker suspects that changes in patterns of music consumption have further marginalized it. “I was reading something probably written 20 years ago, suggesting that current generations regard a musical recording as the standard,” he explains. “If they go out to hear music, the musicians will be judged on how well they replicate that standard. There are probably people who go out to hear music expecting it won’t be played exactly as on the record, but maybe expecting the musicians will play songs

they recognize. Or if not songs they recognize, at least songs. Or music with some clear relationship to genre attributes like a rhythm section, a degree of timekeeping, an obvious connection between a lead player and the rhythm. It’s expected groups conform to that. Which we do sometimes, but not always. More often we don’t.”

EPD’s interactions do follow some rules, but those rules arise from the music itself as it’s created. “People think improvisers get together and play whatever they want,” explains Wilkerson, “and there is a certain amount of that. However, I always tell people you can play anything, but you can’t just play *anything*.” Any one of the players can rebel against the group’s momentum, prompting everyone else to react and adjust, but some of those possible disruptive moves are still mistakes—and good improvisers follow a subconscious decision-making process that guides them away from those. Nonetheless, the impression EPD give is that anything might happen at one of their concerts. I joked to an acquaintance that the band might even play a tune eventually, and last month I was astonished—as were Wilkerson, Sandstrom, and Hunt—when Baker intoned the theme of Duke Ellington’s “In a Sentimental Mood” on his piano. The others followed, extending and reshaping the melody far from its formal parameters, which nonetheless remained in distant sight. They’d never played it before, and won’t likely again.

“I don’t play in any other context that’s →

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1.28

TREY MCLAUGHLIN & THE SOUNDS OF ZAMAR



1.29-30

RACHAEL YAMAGATA

WITH RADNOR & LEE



1.31-2.2

ALEJANDRO ESCOVEDO

WITH DON ANTONIO BAND



2.3

HAPPY BIRTHDAY LANGSTON HUGHES:

A CELEBRATION IN POETRY, PROSE & SONG



2.4-5

MS. LISA FISCHER

& GRAND BATON



continued from 30

this open,” Wilkerson says. “It took me a long time to learn to play with the ARP, because it’s not tuned like a piano and the vocabulary Jim’s developed on it, electrically generated, was foreign to me. So I try to lock in on the timbre, sliding notes on the oud. If Brian’s playing an ostinato or holding a pedal tone, I might pick up the didgeridoo. Steve to me is just perfect—he’s got the ability to insinuate rhythms without necessarily actually playing them. When Jim’s on piano, there’s usually a tonal center implied, but it’s abstract. He’s not an easy guy to pin down. I can’t describe his style. I don’t think I’ve ever heard anybody else play like that.”

Baker is indeed a singular stylist. His touch on the piano (at the Beat Kitchen he uses a Casio CZ-101 for its portability) veers from flinty to limpid, his phrases from fleeting, offhand lines to rhapsodic, fully embodied passages infused with melancholy grandeur. He composes music as well, and continues adding to a collection of 76 short songs he calls “Landscapes” that he first registered for copyright a decade ago. He considers them potential starting points for improvisation but declines to bring them to EPD. “It would be weird,” he says, “a different kind of thing than we’ve been developing. I think, ‘Do I really want to mess with this?’”

He identifies EPD’s basic plan: “I might start with something that could be the basis for a solo, but someone else will come in and it will change. Or somebody else will start what could be a solo thing and someone else will come in. It varies.”

Sandstrom suggests another possible beginning. “That could be me introducing the tonal center Ed Wilkerson hears,” he says. “I usually start on the bass, clean with no pedals, and then things happen.” Sandstrom was Shawn Colvin’s bassist when they both attended Southern Illinois University in the mid-70s, and he’s worked for Dave Jemilo at the Green Mill since the day it opened in 1986, including a longtime position in the Green Mill All-Stars. That band used to feature straight-ahead jazz stylists Von Freeman, Willie Pickens, and Robert Shy, now all sadly passed away—on this past New Year’s Eve, the All-Stars were Sandstrom, saxophonists Eric Schneider and Eric Alexander, pianist John Campbell, and drummer Kyle Swann (on Christmas break from college in Miami).

Unlike song-form music with its chorus structures, EPD’s output is in continuous flux, and its complexity increases further when Baker turns to his synthesizer. He’s been using a three-quarters-size clone of his classic ARP

2600—though he prefers the original, it tips the scales at 58 pounds, probably almost half what Baker weighs himself. The ARP can produce silvery chimes, volcanic rumbles, and keening drones among its practically limitless range of sounds. When Baker switches to the synth, Sandstrom might bow noisily below his upright bass’s bridge, play his electric guitar through wah-wah and fuzz pedals, or blow his horn—which for most of the past couple months has been muted by a little buglike toy accidentally stuck in its bore. Williams might let rip with a hollering tone, or pick up one after another of his little instruments. Hunt might put down his drumsticks to play by hand, or put one of those bugs that’s in Sandstrom’s trumpet on his drumheads to create an audible buzz, or strike a cowbell or a scraper. It adds up to immensely more than the sum of its parts.

“What’s cool about EPD,” explains Williams, “and I noticed this from the Hotti Biscotti days, is that we’ll be playing and someone might rise above what’s happening, but we’re creating this sound as four musicians and it’s not like this guy’s taking a solo. We’re playing and something will start happening that we weren’t even aware of, but start to become aware of. Maybe we look at each other, like, ‘Did you hear what just happened? Did you hear that other thing? Who’s doing that? Whoa, is that me? Is that Jim?’ And nobody is doing it—it’s a fifth thing that’s just happened.

“The music we’re creating becomes independent of what we’re doing. It’s just there. We might try to pull it in or expand on it, and sometimes we can, but sometimes it just goes its own way. It’s magical. I think by playing with each other so long, all the time, we’re able to subliminally go to this place and listen to each other, not thinking of it as jazz with a rhythm section and soloist, but rather as sound—sound manipulation. This free-improvisation thing!

“You know, Jim started this group—he’s the guy who put the musicians together. It’s his band in a way, but it’s not, because it’s a collective of four musicians and nobody is directing the music. The music can go anywhere at any time, and when it does, we try to go with it.”

Hunt has a similar perspective. “If you listen to what’s happening within the improvisation, you hear melodies and even full pieces that could be written down if someone was to take the time—but they happen in the moment that they’re there, and to me that can be a really powerful moment.” He’s been making music since age five, when he started singing and playing snare drum or piano in his church choir; today he’s employed full


time by Northfield Block, selling the virtues of concrete-masonry construction to architects, but every Sunday he still backs singers at the jazz service of his church in St. Charles.

He’s keen to draw a distinction between what Extraordinary Popular Delusions do and mere jamming. “We may be playing sonically pleasing sounds, and then of course it doesn’t stay there very long,” he says. “But we’re not just playing to play. We’re listening and trying to make statements, play lines going in and out of time—the freedom to go back and forth, but definitely rooted in something beyond just sound. There are melodies and harmonies that are really deep and meaningful.”

EPD’s devout followers agree. “Since moving to Chicago after school in Champaign in 2013, I’ve heard them like 50 times,” says Mike Harmon. “I’ve gone in spurts, religiously every week for a while. And I think ‘religiously’ is the right term, because when I attend it’s like my weekly service, to break apart everything I’ve been thinking about and then put it all together again.”

The music’s density, dissonance, and stream-of-consciousness narrative make it a challenge to process, but the challenge is an enriching one. “I just try to release my ears and take it in,” Harmon says. “It’s a great practice to listen to them. It’s so genuine. There’s no faking how much they’re playing together, listening at the same time. To play anything you want, to be that free, and actually be enhancing everything else around you—they’re all doing that at the same time, and always producing that visceral effect, coming out of nothing. How in the world?”

Extraordinary Popular Delusions continue to build on their singular process every week, with no end in sight. As ephemeral and of the moment as their performances are, though, they haven’t been simply dissolving into the air: a recorded archive of EPD’s 13 years of weekly gigs exists, started by Malachi Ritscher and continued after his death in 2006 by Sandstrom. He has nearly 1,000 hours of their improvisations stored on his computer.

“We’re trying to get our heads around a way to have our live performances up on the cloud,” Hunt says. “That’s a goal of ours. Jim has talked about making them accessible so people could hear not one performance but how we sound week by week. We’re more excited about the flow of them all than creating one exemplary performance to be represented in great audio. The point is to play and hear the music, not to have a perfect record. The music is the priority.” 

“The music we’re creating becomes independent of what we’re doing. It’s just there. Sometimes it just goes its own way. It’s magical.”

—Mars Williams

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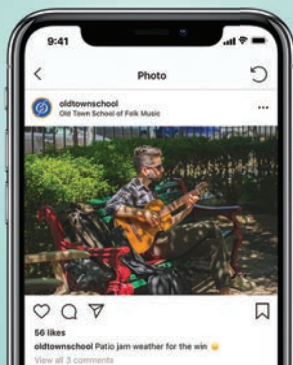
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JAN 19
MICHELLE WOLF



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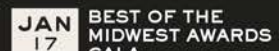
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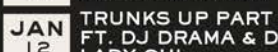
JAN 12
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JAN 15
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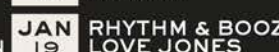
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Sun, Feb. 17 - Teflons / Sunny Side Up

Tue, Feb. 19 - Sean Rowe

IN ROTATION



A still from the video for Kirani Ayat's "Guda"

PHILIP MONTORO
Reader music editor

Paal Nilssen-Love at Corbett vs. Dempsey on December 14 The last concert at CvsD before its move to 2156 W. Fulton was an improvised solo set by Norwegian drummer Paal Nilssen-Love (Large Unit, the Thing). I love how organically he allows the competing poles of so many dualities to interpenetrate in his playing: pulsated and free, sparse and frenzied, textural and melodic, delicate and bruising.

Daughters, You Won't Get What You Want I finally caught up with this great album after missing Daughters' Chicago shows in November—but luckily, I'll get another chance at Bottom Lounge in March. The band greases its bleak, artsy posthardcore with nihilistic swagger, propelling shattered sheets of glassy black neon-lit noise with rhythms that range from a numbing throb to a laser-targeted barrage—at its most toweringly evil, it sounds like it's played with the thumpers from *Dune* and the Death Star cannon from *The Last Jedi*.

Kirani Ayat, "Guda" I enjoy lots of things about "Guda," the second single from *Aisha's Sun*, the forthcoming debut album by Ghanaian rapper Kirani Ayat: his clear, powerful baritone voice, the catchy Afropop-inflected chorus, the English phrases that pop out of his inspirational Hausa lyrics, the thick, slewing bass synth that sometimes shadows the beat. But the video puts this song in a category of its own: shot in the town of Bolgatanga, near Ghana's northern border, it showcases the beauty of the people, traditions, and landscapes of the West Sudanian Savanna.

A Reader staffer shares three musical obsessions, then asks someone (who asks someone else) to take a turn.

radio were euthanized. It was also the house in which my first musical project, WHITE-PHOSPHOROUS, was born. On a November evening in like-minded counsel, I played a set titled "First Horseman." Thanks, Jack. For everything.

Haggathorn Where grind and crust are an easy cracker on which to spread left politics, black metal proves often a little soft-spoken on the issue, oddly enough. Haggathorn are a powerful exception to that rule, and still do the things we like about black metal. Their intensity, outspoken hostility, and stage performances all hit the spot. They also learn quickly and take hits well. Haggathorn guitarist Nathan Scripter will curate the final third of this In Rotation.

KRIEGMEISTER HATESTORM

Front man for Neckbeard Deathcamp

xAbruptx Heavy music is protest fundamentally. Anyone who says otherwise is a dummy. Grind and powerviolence have never skipped a punch in that regard and take little time to parse through layers of shit to see who can hang. The pursuit of punishing riffs and blast-beats is a treasure cruise through this Chicago duo's discography. Drummer Rob and guitarist Elisa (they both sing) were some of my first friends when I moved here, and their tolerance for bullshit is consistently less than zero—a trait I have worked hard to absorb. Their split with Minimum Wage Assassins slaps, and I wouldn't be the Hatestorm I am today without it or them.



xAbruptx COURTESY THE ARTIST

The Temple of Murmur Defunct DIY venue the Temple of Murmur was the house in which my last holdout pastel choices in rebel



Hyems JAN NORTHOFF

NATHAN SCRIPTER

Guitarist for Haggathorn

Zao This West Virginia band's 1999 album *Liberate Te Ex Inferis* (which roughly translates to "Save Yourself From Hell") has a darkness and heaviness that's always stuck with me. I grew up in a strict Christian family. We were only allowed to listen to Christian music. I was beginning to explore the occult and Satanism when this record came out. I felt a deep connection between its darkness and all the struggles I had learning about my own darkness while living in that environment.

Grave Gnosis This incredible black-metal band from Florida are a huge inspiration to me. Many of their songs have been calculatedly written through black-magic ritual—and they're some of the nicest people I've had the pleasure of spending time with.

Hyems These guys are an anti-Nazi black-metal band from Germany, and they have really tight riffs. Their latest EP, this summer's 1997, features a track called "Nazi Black Metal Fuck Off." It's always good to see other black-metal musicians taking a stand against racism.

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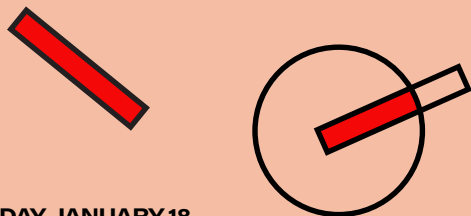
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FRIDAY JAN 11
DJ SEINFELD / ED NINE b2b KE

SATURDAY JAN 12
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x Club Chai with
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SUNDAY JAN 13
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PICK OF THE WEEK

Meshell Ndegeocello dissects and rebuilds 80s and 90s classics on *Ventriloquism*

CHARLIE GROSS

MESHELL NDEGEOCELLO

Tue 1/15, 8 PM, Thalia Hall, 1807 S. Allport, \$28-\$75. 17+

CAN SOMEONE PLEASE give Meshell Ndegeocello a Grammy already? The ten-time nominee, also known as Meshell Suhalia Bashir-Shakur, has forged a distinctive and idiosyncratic path since her 1993 debut, *Plantation Lullabies*. The singer and multi-instrumentalist has also become known for her social activism, and she's contributed work to compilations, tributes, and anthologies including AIDS-research benefits from the Red Hot Organization, a compilation album devoted to empowering women and promoting peace in the Congo called *Raise Hope for Congo*, and an essay about her experience as a bisexual woman in Dan Savage's anthology aimed at LGBTQ youth, *It Gets Better: Coming Out, Overcoming Bullying, and Creating a Life Worth Living*. Ndegeocello's music career started off with a bang—in the 90s her eminently personable, delightful neosoul incorporated hip-hop, reggae, pop,

folk, jazz, and world elements—and over the decades her sound has evolved, grown, and been reinvented many times over in challenging and surprising ways (and might be even more widely known and lauded were she a straight white man). The material on 2014's *Comet, Come to Me* is sparse and haunting, while her presence is intense and commanding, and last March she released her 12th album, *Ventriloquism*, on the Naive label (a portion of the proceeds benefit the ACLU). She's always excelled at reinterpreting others' work, and on *Ventriloquism* she reworks 80s and 90s hits by iconic artists including Janet Jackson, Lisa Lisa & Cult Jam, Prince, TLC, and George Clinton with a scientific precision, lovingly dissecting and investigating well-loved songs such as Sade's "Smooth Operator" and Tina Turner's "Private Dancer" from the inside out. —MONICA KENDRICK



Beach Bunny

JOHN TUANQUI

THURSDAY10

BEACH BUNNY *Retirement Party, Co-Stanza, and Lettering* open. 6:30 PM, Lincoln Hall, 2424 N. Lincoln, sold out. ALL

If you spent any time at Chicago indie shows last year, chances are you became familiar with the band Beach Bunny, even if you never actually saw them. The group's name appeared on so many of the gig posters and concert calendars plastered on the walls of local clubs that you could easily imagine they had weekly residencies at half of them. On top of that, they played a set at Riot Fest, and they were selected as one of the openers for a string of Alkaline Trio hometown shows at the Metro during the first week of January. I can see why established punk voices have been keen to get behind the band; Beach Bunny's clean, energetic power pop gets right to the point. Chicago native Lili Trifilio started the project as a solo endeavor with 2015's *Animalism*, an EP she wrote following a breakup and dropped in the winter of her freshman year at DePaul. In 2017 she roped in a trio of musicians to help flesh out her material, and by the time they self-released their *Prom Queen* EP last August, they'd developed a sleek, precise, and concise surf-inflected sound. Beach Bunny play their sweet hooks with an unhurried thoughtfulness, so that even when Trifilio sings about the uncertainty of the future on the anxious "Adulter," her earnest confidence suggests that at least the future of her band is secure. Good omens continue to greet Beach Bunny: last month, rising California emo label Open Door announced preorders for Beach Bunny's first vinyl release, a 12-inch compilation that includes *Prom Queen*, early-2018 single "Sports," and the 2017 EP *Crybaby*. —LEOR GALIL

BROTHERS OSBORNE *Wild Feathers* open. 8 PM, Riviera Theatre, 4746 N. Racine, \$35. 18+

Outlaw country first pulled out of the truck stop almost half a century ago now, but you wouldn't

know the genre was middle-aged (and often paunchy) from listening to the Brothers Osborne. The Maryland duo has the spirit—and at least some of the facial hair—of the men who played outlaw country in the 70s, making a groovy, dusty blend of southern-fried rock, soul, and the Grand Ole Opry. “Weed, Whisky, and Willie,” off the 2018 album *Port Saint Joe* (EMI Nashville), locks into one of those easy Waylon grooves as T.J. Osborne delivers a rangy vocal in true style. His lyrics on that song—“I get stoned for survival / It helps with the healin’ / When it all goes to hell / The only thing I believe in / Is weed, whisky, and Willie”—have the weather-beaten wit of Nelson himself. The same goes for “Tequila Again,” a laugh-till-you-cry heartbreaker about falling in love with the bottle. “Shoot Me Straight” takes a step toward Skynyrd or ZZ Top, as John Osborne provides loud and tasty classic-rock guitar heroics. It’s not all vintage; every so often, the album tips its cowboy hat to contemporary fashion. On “A Little Bit Trouble,” the group adds a doppler echo on the chorus vocal that sounds suspiciously of this decade. But for the most part, the Osborne brothers rightly figure that if the rig isn’t busted, you should keep on driving. —**NOAH BERLATSKY**

FRIDAY 11

LUKE WINSLOW-KING *Joshua Davis opens. 8:30 PM, Fitzgerald’s, 6615 Roosevelt, Berwyn, \$15. 21+*

The influence of gospel music on singer-songwriter Luke Winslow-King is obvious, even when he’s playing an up-tempo song with a title such as “Swing That Thing.” Though King doesn’t approach it in a superficial, frantic, tambourine-banging way, if you’re familiar at all with southern gospel you can easily identify its hallmarks in his use of chord changes and repetition—it often vamps on a groove. And if it’s possible to be reflective while delivering songs with a hard backbeat, then Winslow-King fills the bill. A Michigan native who relocated to New Orleans in 2001, Winslow-King got his start playing with a diverse set of musicians, including soul sing-

er John Boutte and trad-jazz group the Loose Marbles Jam Band, while spending his days busking. His debut album for Bloodshot, 2013’s *The Coming Tide*, reflected his NOLA experience, with second-line rhythms all over the place. Winslow-King moved back to his home state in 2017, and while his most recent album, last year’s *Blue Mesa*, brings a bluesier influence to the forefront, it still has a touch of southern soul every now and then. The record is dominated by slide guitar, and on “Born to Roam” he affects an up-tempo country-rock sound that still retains the air of mystery heard throughout his repertoire. —**JAMES PORTER**

DJ SEINFELD *Ed Nine & Ke open. 10 PM, Smart Bar, 3730 N. Clark, \$20, \$15 before midnight, \$12 in advance. 21+*

A few years ago Swedish producer Armand Jakobsson coped with a painful breakup by binge-watching *Seinfeld* and crafting beautiful, glacially paced house tracks. He’d previously recorded music under various aliases (he preferred the name Rimbaudian), but in 2017, when he released the heartfelt cuts he’d created during his healing process, he chose a new moniker: DJ Seinfeld. The sooty veneer and nostalgic, sentimental mood of the music, combined with the fact that Jakobsson debuted it at a time when a handful of artists with similar sonic proclivities were introducing their own projects under goofy names (Ross From Friends, anyone?), got DJ Seinfeld roped into a loose scene called lo-fi house. But Jakobsson quickly rose to the top of that hodgepodge collection of producers. In 2017 he released the triple LP *Time Spent Away From U* (Lobster Theremin/Meda Fury), which aches with romanticism; its sumptuous vocal samples, go-for-the-gut melodies, and fussy lo-fi affectations blur into a dizzying display. His affection for ghostly aesthetics and sprawl can sometimes make his work as DJ Seinfeld feel like a marathon, so if you’re curious about how that can play out in a club set, listen to his 2018 contribution to the long-running DJ-Kicks series to see if you have the stamina. —**LEOR GALIL**



Luke Winslow-King
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Jan 19 **Herobust**

Jan 25 **Two Friends**

Jan 26 **Nao**
 Xavier Omär

Jan 30 **The Amity Affliction & Senses Fail**
 Silent Planet, Belmont

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SUNDAY, JANUARY 13 7PM

Kathy Mattea

SATURDAY, JANUARY 19 8PM

Doug Martsch (of Built to Spill)

SUNDAY, JANUARY 20 10:30AM

Justin Roberts & The Not Ready for Naptime Players

Family concert

THURSDAY, JANUARY 24 8PM

Sammy Miller and The Congregation

THURSDAY, JANUARY 31 7PM

Kasey Chambers

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WED
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'HEAVY' BY KIESE LAYMON

6PM-FREE
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NEW ON SALE: 2/16: DARK FOG (RECORD RELEASE), 2/22: TY SEGALL & WHITE FENCE, 3/2: ABSOLUTELY NOT (RECORD RELEASE), 3/15: KAMAAL WILLIAMS, 3/18: ELEPHANT GYM, 3/29: THE KVB, 4/3: BEAT CIRCUS

MUSIC

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chicagoreader.com/soundboard.

Gabrielle Smith
of Gabby's World
by CHRIS SIKICH



continued from 37

SATURDAY 12

THE HUSSY *Clickbait opens. 8 PM, Burlington, 3425 W. Fullerton, \$6 suggested donation. 21+*

Here in the midwestern tundra, January can be a sleepy time for shows by touring bands, but no matter where or when Madison garage punks the Hussy play a gig, they heat things up—or even set them on fire. And that's not just cliché rock 'n' roll hyperbole; in this case, you can take those words literally. In an interview with the *Wisconsin State Journal* last January, guitarist-vocalist Bobby Wegner (who also runs DIY label No Coast) estimated that since he and drummer-vocalist Heather Sawyer joined forces in the summer of 2008, he's set his instrument ablaze about 100 times. You might call him "a firestarter, a twisted firestarter," but his vibe has little to do with the violence and nihilism that people hear in that Prodigy song—Wegner, who usually goes by Bobby Hussy, is plenty twisted, but it comes out in waves of ecstatic feedback and grimy, fuzzed-out guitar, which he uses to fan the flames of feel-good punk-rock chaos. And the Hussy is just as prolific on record as Wegner is with lighter fluid and a match: so far the group (which became a trio in 2015 with the addition of guitarist Tyler Fassnacht) has released at least 17 seven-inches, ten-inches, splits, and tapes in addition to four full-length albums—and they recently announced a fifth full-length coming in 2019. With any luck, the Hussy will play some of that new material, but either way they'll make it worth your while to leave home on a cold winter night. —JAMIE LUDWIG

POM-POMS *Not Lovely and Desert Liminal open. 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle, 1035 N. Western, \$10. 21+*

In summer 2017, rapper Kitty, who'd gone viral via Soundcloud earlier in the decade, released *Miami Garden Club*, her long-awaited crowd-funded debut album, which captured her shift away from the quirky rhymes of her early tunes and toward dreamy bedroom pop. Kitty toured on that record

alongside her husband, Sam Ray, a like-minded musician who makes beat-heavy, hazy synth soundscapes under the name Ricky Eat Acid. It seemed inevitable that the two would eventually come together for a full-on collaboration, and in September they released a self-titled, five-song EP as the Pom-Poms. On these tracks, Ray's trademark vapory production hits harder than usual, and Kitty's vocal performance edges back toward her hip-hop days, creating a heady, beyond-catchy, and surprisingly high-energy experimental dance-pop hybrid. Longtime Kitty fans will be delighted with the Pom-Poms: all of her hilarious eccentricities, clever wordplay, and knack for weaving undeniable hooks are pushed to the forefront and wrapped up in a quick, tidy package. —LUCA CIMARUSTI

SUNDAY 13

GABBY'S WORLD *Yowler, Spencer Radcliffe & Everyone Else, and Gia Margaret open. 6 PM, Beat Kitchen, 2100 W. Belmont, \$13. 18*

Indie singer-songwriter Gabrielle Smith broke out in 2015 under the name Eskimeaux. Since then, she's changed the name of her project a couple times, and last year she made her debut as the front woman of Gabby's World—which released *Beast on Beast* (Yellow K) in November. Though Gabby's World is positioned as a fleshed-out band and Smith does tour with a core group of musicians, the project seems more like the next step in her personal artistic trajectory. The album boasts a star-studded lineup of contributors, including Greta Kline (Frankie Cosmos), Yoni Wolf (Why?), and Luke Jenner (the Rapture), but while Smith's presence feels distinct throughout the record, some of her collaborators play such minor roles it's hard to actually pick out where they appear without glancing at the liner notes. In any case, *Beast on Beast* is deferential in volume and immersive in its approach to indie rock; Smith's calm grace encourages listeners to absorb the gentle melodies and uncover light magical touches, such as the small tremors in the vocal harmonies during the calm splendor of "When I Felt Giving." —LEOR GALLI

EARLY WARNINGS

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Charly Bliss
SHERVIN LAINEZ

MUSIC

MONDAY 14

EXTRAORDINARY POPULAR DELUSIONS See also Howard Mandel's feature story on page 28. 9 PM, Beat Kitchen, 2100 W. Belmont. 21+ **FREE**

For improvisers, familiarity is a double-edged sword; if musicians get too comfortable with each other, inspiration can turn into habit. But there's nothing quite so thrilling as the near-telepathic rapport of a group whose players know each other's strengths and try to push each other to greater heights. The members of Extraordinary Popular Delusions have had plenty of time to get to know one another. The quartet, which consists of Jim Baker (electric piano, synthesizer, viola), Mars Williams (reeds, percussion, zither, toys), Brian Sandstrom (double bass, electric guitar, trumpet), and Steve Hunt (drums, percussion, waterphone) have sustained a weekly gig at either Hotti Biscotti or the second floor of the Beat Kitchen since 2005, and everyone except Baker played together in the NRG Ensemble in 1980s and 1990s. Each of these musicians has experience in diverse styles of music—collectively they've played rock, country, R&B, and jazz fit for both steakhouses and art houses—but their commitment to EPD gives them a consistent space to improvise freely, and their collective sense of purpose keeps them on their toes. In Extraordinary Popular Delusions, the music shifts organically between high-energy free



jazz, coarse-grained noise, and high-voltage atmospheric explorations, which can be undertaken with utter seriousness, impish humor, or both at once. Since every member of the group also has outside projects, substitute musicians often stop by to fill in or further shake things up, but all four core members will be on hand this evening. —BILL MEYER

TUESDAY 15

MESHALL NDEGEOCELLO See *Pick of the Week*, page 36. 8 PM, Thalia Hall, 1807 S. Allport. \$28-\$75. 17+

WEDNESDAY 16

CHARLY BLISS *Active Bird Community and Girl K* open. 9 PM, Lincoln Hall, 2424 N. Lincoln, \$17, \$15 in advance. 18+

I like Charly Bliss way more than I should. The NYC foursome—really a pop act disguised as a punk band—ticks countless boxes on the list of things that immediately annoy me or make me roll my eyes: goofy, quirky lyrics; cute and zany music videos; pristine production values; and an unabashed Weezer influence (more the bad era than the good). But I let my guard down for 2017's *Guppy* (Barsuk), and I've been completely hooked ever since. I'm willing to bet I listened to that record more than anything else that year, and even their syrupy cover of Len's "Steal My Sunshine" (recorded for the A.V. Club's Undercover series) earned approximately 200 YouTube plays from me. Look past the radio-ready gloss and bubbly energy of Charly Bliss to find sharp playing, brilliant songwriting, and (from singer Eva Hendricks) some of the catchiest choruses you'll ever hear. The band just released a new single, "Heaven," a sweet, fuzzy banger that once again channels Weezer—except this time it sounds like one of their best tracks ever, 1994's "Holiday." Sorry for judging your book by its cover, Charly Bliss. I've learned my lesson and I love you. —LUCA CIMARUSTI

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+ MANY MORE

EARLY WARNINGS

CHICAGO SHOWS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT IN THE WEEKS TO COME

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Lee Fields © SESSE LIND

NEW

Eric Andersen & Scarlet

Rivera 4/21, 1 PM, SPACE, Evanston, on sale Fri 1/11, 10 AM [📍](#)

Arty 3/9, 10 PM, Sound-Bar **Jeff Austin Band** 3/8-9, 9 PM, Martyrs', on sale Fri 1/11, 10 AM [📍](#)

Beat Circus, Claudettes, Lonesome Organist 4/3, 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle

Boombox Cartel 2/16, 9 PM, Aragon Ballroom, 17+

David Bromberg Quintet 5/15, 8 PM, City Winery, on sale Thu 1/10, noon [📍](#)

Kayleigh Butcher 2/17, 8:30 PM, Constellation, 18+

Callaghan 5/19, 7 PM, SPACE, Evanston, on sale Fri 1/11, 10 AM [📍](#)

Casey 5/24, 7 PM, Bottom Lounge [📍](#)

Tommy Castro & the Painkillers 4/4, 8 PM, City Winery, on sale Thu 1/10, noon [📍](#)

Clan of Xymox, Bellwether Syndicate 3/14, 8:30 PM, Thalia Hall, 17+

Commander Cody & His Lost Planet Airmen 3/21, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston, on sale Fri 1/11, 10 AM [📍](#)

Conflict 1/25, 10 PM, Reggie's Rock Club, 17+

Luther Dickinson & Sisters of the Strawberry Moon 3/11, 8 PM, City Winery, on sale Thu 1/10, noon [📍](#)

El Hitta 2/1, 6 PM, Reggie's Rock Club [📍](#)

Elvis Depressedly 2/28, 6 PM, Cobra Lounge [📍](#)

Lee Fields & the Expressions 4/12, 8:30 PM, Thalia Hall, on sale Fri 1/11, 9 AM, 17+

Goddamn Gallows, Scott H. Biram 4/6, 7 PM, Reggie's Rock Club, 17+

Steve Gunn, Gun Outfit 4/19, 9 PM, Lincoln Hall, on sale Fri 1/11, 10 AM, 18+

Fareed Haque & KAIA String Quartet 5/19, 1 PM, SPACE, Evanston, on sale Fri 1/11, 10 AM [📍](#)

Illuminati Hotties 2/16, 9 PM, Hideout

Kamaal Williams 3/15, 9 PM, Empty Bottle

Kitka 2/10, 8 PM, Szold Hall, Old Town School of Folk Music, on sale Fri 1/11, 8 AM [📍](#)

Lorna Shore, Enterprise Earth 4/30, 6 PM, Reggie's Rock Club, 17+

Lucifer 3/21, 7 PM, Reggie's Rock Club, 17+

Midnight Tyrannosaurus 6/1, 8 PM, Concord Music Hall, 18+

Missio 4/20, 8 PM, Metro, 18+

Movements, Boston Manor 5/19, 7 PM, Metro, on sale Fri 1/11, 10 AM [📍](#)

Peter Mulvey 4/5, 7 PM, SPACE, Evanston, on sale Fri 1/11, 10 AM [📍](#)

Murder Junkies 5/26, 8 PM, Reggie's Music Joint

Nine, Pseudo Slang 1/30, 9 PM, Subterranean

Graham Parker 4/18, 8 PM, City Winery, on sale Thu 1/10, noon [📍](#)

Phuong-Dan 2/14, 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle

Alfonso Ponticelli & Swing Gitan 3/23, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston, on sale Fri 1/11, 10 AM [📍](#)

Lucy Roche & Suzy Roche 4/7, 7 PM, SPACE, Evanston, on sale Fri 1/11, 10 AM [📍](#)

Garnet Rogers, Crys Matthews 3/23, 8 PM, Szold Hall, Old Town School of Folk Music, on sale Fri 1/11, 8 AM [📍](#)

Ty Segall & White Fence, Axis: Sovo 2/22, 9 PM, Empty Bottle

Jane Siberry 4/19, 8 PM, Szold Hall, Old Town School of Folk Music, on sale Fri 1/11, 8 AM [📍](#)

Swmrs, Regrettes 4/19, 6:30 PM, Concord Music Hall, on sale Fri 1/11, 10 AM [📍](#)

Tauk 4/12, 9 PM, Concord Music Hall, on sale Fri 1/11, 10 AM, 18+

Traitors 2/27, 6 PM, Reggie's Rock Club, 17+

T.S.O.L. 5/31, 7 PM, Reggie's Music Joint

Tessa Violet 2/14, 7 PM, Beat Kitchen [📍](#)

Cheryl Wheeler 4/14, 7 PM, Szold Hall, Old Town School of Folk Music, on sale Fri 1/11, 8 AM [📍](#)

Wicca Phase Springs Eternal, Angel Du\$T 3/8, 7 PM, Subterranean [📍](#)

UPDATED

Gryffin 2/9, 6 and 11 PM, Concord Music Hall, late show sold out [📍](#)

High on Fire 1/22, 8 PM, Metro, canceled

Mandolin Orange 2/16-17, 8 PM, Thalia Hall, second show added, 17+

Yashira 3/1, 7 PM, Cobra Lounge, canceled

UPCOMING

Action Bronson, Meyhem Lauren 2/23, 6 PM, Concord Music Hall, 17+

Herb Alpert & Lani Hall 5/4-5, 8 PM, City Winery [📍](#)

American Football 3/30, 9 PM, Metro, 18+

Anderson .Paak 2/16, 8 PM, Riviera Theatre [📍](#)

Body/Head 3/7, 7:30 PM, Art Institute of Chicago

Billy Bragg 4/25-27, 8 PM, Lincoln Hall, 18+

Cannibal Corpse, Morbid Angel, Necrot 3/4, 6 PM, Concord Music Hall, 17+

Chrome Sparks 2/9, 9 PM, Lincoln Hall, 18+

Cold Cave, Adult. 2/27, 8 PM, Metro, 18+

Dandy Warhols 5/11, 7:30 PM, Metro, 18+

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

Deerhunter 2/17, 8 PM, Lincoln Hall, 18+

Mike Doughty, Wheatus 3/7, 8 PM, Sleeping Village

Dream Theater 3/29, 8 PM, Chicago Theatre

Fleetwood Mac 3/1, 8 PM, United Center

Flesh Eaters 3/10, 8 PM, Lincoln Hall

Marty Friedman 2/13, 7 PM, Reggie's Rock Club, 17+

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

Health 4/20, 8:30 PM, Bottom Lounge [📍](#)

Hives, Refused 5/20, 7 PM, the Vic, 18+

I'm With Her, Mipso 3/2, 8 PM, Thalia Hall, 17+

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

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

Jerusalem in My Heart 3/26, 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle

Valentino Khan 1/26, 10 PM, the Mid

King Crimson 9/10, 8 PM, Auditorium Theatre

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

La Luz 3/22, 9 PM, Sleeping Village

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

Lemon Twigs 1/25, 9 PM, Metro, 18+

Lords of Acid, Orgy, Genitorturers 3/7, 8 PM, Bottom Lounge, 17+

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

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

Cass McCombs 3/16, 9 PM, Lincoln Hall, 18+

Meek Mill 3/8, 7:30 PM, Aragon Ballroom [📍](#)

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

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

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

Music Frozen Dancing with Ty Segall & White Fence, Negative Scanner, Plack Blague, and Glyders 2/23, 1 PM, Empty Bottle [FREE](#) [📍](#)

My Brightest Diamond 5/9, 8 PM, Lincoln Hall, 18+

Frank Orrell 3/9, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston [📍](#)

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Pitchfork Midwinter with Slowdive, Kamasu Washington, Oneohtrix Point Never, Panda Bear, and more 2/15-17, Art Institute of Chicago

Quinn XCII 3/20, 6 PM, Riviera Theatre [📍](#)

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

Travis Scott 2/21, 8 PM, United Center

Snail Mail 1/17, 9 PM, Metro, 18+

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

Supersuckers 3/12, 8 PM, Beat Kitchen

Patrick Sweany 2/16, 9 PM, FitzGerald's, Berwyn

Tender 3/14, 8 PM, Beat Kitchen, 17+

The-Dream 2/28, 8 PM, Lincoln Hall, 18+

Tokyo Police Club 4/26, 9 PM, Empty Bottle

Uncle Acid & the Deadbeats, Graveyard 3/26, 7 PM, Metro, 18+

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

Warbly Jets 2/15, 9 PM, Schubas

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

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

Yob, Voivod 3/27, 8 PM, Thalia Hall, 17+

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

SOLD OUT

Billy Strings 1/25, 9 PM, Bottom Lounge, 17+

Dave Davies 4/20, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston [📍](#)

FKJ 5/17, 8 PM, Concord Music Hall, 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

Rainbow Kitten Surprise 2/8-9, 8 PM, Riviera Theatre [📍](#)

Robyn 3/6, 8 PM, Aragon Ballroom [📍](#)

Lennon Stella 3/28, 7 PM, Metro [📍](#)

Mike Stud 2/1, 8 PM, Bottom Lounge [📍](#) [📍](#)



GOSSIP WOLF

A furry ear to the ground of the local music scene

MOST FOLKS USE December to wind down the year's final projects and prepare for some old-fashioned holiday hibernation, but this past December 7 local rappers **Joshua Virtue** and **Ruby Watson** dropped their debut EP as **Free Snacks**. Virtue and Watson display the casual chemistry of consistent collaborators on **Eat Good Tape**, and their punchy delivery enlivens the EP's relaxed, funky, sample-heavy production. On Tuesday, January 15, Free Snacks perform at the **Empty Bottle**—their first headlining gig since **Eat Good Tape** came out, and thus a de facto release party. Malci and Sex No Babies open; the \$5 show starts at 8:30 PM.

In April 2017, during the Merce Cunningham retrospective at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago sound artist **Stephan Moore** (a former music coordinator for Cunningham's company) and dance-and-music ensemble **CabinFever** collaborated on the site-specific performance **Respire**. On Friday, January 18, Philadelphia label **Dead Definition** will release an album of the performance's musical component, which includes droning strings, acoustic guitars, and the dancers' dialogue, all processed and used as raw material for Moore's electronic improvisations. CabinFever are selling the album (including a limited run on lovely pink vinyl) via their Bandcamp page.

Last month local experimental rock duo **Comfort Food** announced they were putting the project on ice after nearly eight years. Drummer **Jake Marshall** and bassist, vocalist, and trumpeter **Daniel Wolff** have released three full-lengths of bizarre, unsettling funk- and jazz-inflected skronk via partly Chicagoan label **Already Dead Tapes & Records**, most recently **Falling Up a Down Escalator** in September. On Friday, January 11, Comfort Food will say farewell with a headlining set at **Elastic**. Big Syn, A.M. Stations, Imelda Marcos, and A Light Sleeper open; the all-ages show starts at 8:30 PM and costs \$10. —J.R. NELSON AND LEOR GALIL

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

SAVAGE LOVE

By Dan Savage

Shaming language, decisions made under duress, and a terrifying stalker

The girl who gets too wet

Q: I'm a 40-year-old guy with a 30-year-old girlfriend. We've been together a year, and I can see a future with her. But there are problems. This girl comes after two minutes of stimulation, be it manual, oral, or penile. As someone who takes pride in my foreplay/pussy-eating abilities, this is a bummer. She gets wet to the point where all friction is lost during PIV and my boners don't last. It's like fucking a bowlful of jelly. Part of me is flattered that I get her off, but damnit I miss a tight fit! (Her oral skills aren't great, either, so that's not an option, and anal is a no-go.) I love to fuck hard, and that's difficult when I'm sticking my dick into a frictionless void. Is there a way to decrease wetness? Help, please. —CAN'T LAST INSIDE TONIGHT

A: First things first: She's not doing anything wrong, CLIT, and neither are you—at least you're not doing anything wrong during sex. (When you sit down to write letters to advice columnists, on the other hand...) She can't help how much vaginal mucus she produces or how much vaginal sweating your foreplay/pussy-eating skills induce, any more than you can help how much pre-ejaculate you pump out. (Her wetness is a combo of vaginal mucus and vaginal sweating—the latter is not a derogatory expression, that's just the term for it.) And all that moisture is there for a good reason: it preps the vagina for penetration. In its absence, PIV can be extremely painful for the fuckee. So the last thing

you want to do is dry your girlfriend up somehow.

Now here's something you are doing wrong: "It's like fucking a bowlful of jelly," "I miss a tight fit," "Her oral skills aren't great, either," "I'm sticking my dick into a frictionless void." You're going to need to have a conversation with your girlfriend about this, CLIT, you'll need to use your words, but you can't have that conversation—not a constructive one—until you can find some less denigrating, resentful, shame-heaping words.

Again, she's doing nothing wrong. She gets very wet when she's turned on. That's just how her body works. Too much lubrication makes it harder for you to get off. That's how your body works. And this presents a problem that you two need to work on together, but insults like "bowlful of jelly" and "frictionless void" are going to shut the conversation down and/or end the relationship. So try this instead: "I love how turned on you get, honey, and I love how wet you get. But it can make it difficult for me to come during PIV."

If you don't put her on the defensive—if you don't make her feel like shit about her pussy—you might be able to have a constructive conversation and come up with some possible PIV hacks. If there's a move (clitoral stimulation) or an event (her first orgasm) that really opens up the tap, CLIT, save that move or delay that event until after you've climaxed or until after you've reached the point of orgasmic inevitability—if PIV isn't painful for her when she's a little less wet.

You can also experiment with different positions to find one that provides you with a little more friction and doesn't hit her clit just so—perhaps doggy style—and then shift into a position that engages her clit when you're going to come. And there's no shame in pulling out and stroking yourself during intercourse before diving back in. Be constructive, get creative, and never again speak of her pussy like it's a defective home appliance, CLIT, and you might be able to solve this (pretty good) problem (to have).

Q: I'm a woman in an open relationship of four years. I adore my partner. When we were first dating, it was casual and there were no ground rules. During that time, I slept with a guy without condoms after he cornered me in a motel room. One of the biggest rules in my current relationship is to use condoms with other partners. My current partner has made it clear that he would consider exchanging fluids with someone else cheating. I'm worried he'll somehow find out about that night in the motel room, and I feel bad keeping it a secret. If I tell him, there's a chance that our relationship will end and I'll be living in my car. What should I do? —BURDENSOME UNBEARABLE GUILT SUCKS

A: This thing happened—or this thing was done to you—before you made a commitment to your current partner, BUGS, and before ground rules were established. I'm assuming you got tested at some point over the last four years; failing that, I'm assuming neither of you has developed symptoms of an STI over the last four years. (And condoms don't protect us from all →

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SAVAGE LOVE

By Dan Savage

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the STIs out there, so even if you did come down with something, your partner could have passed it to you.) So cut yourself some slack, BUGS: You had unprotected sex under a sadly common form of duress. Fearing something much worse, you "agreed" to unprotected sex—you agreed but didn't freely consent to unprotected sex. Too many men don't understand that kind of fear or

the de-escalation techniques women are forced to employ when they find themselves cornered by threatening men—de-escalation techniques that can include "agreeing" to but not freely consenting to sex, unprotected or otherwise. You're under no obligation to tell your current partner about that night, as it took place before you established your ground rules, so it's not really any of his fucking business. And if homelessness is a potential consequence of telling your partner how you were pressured into sex you did not want, then you're lying to him now for the same reason you went bare with that asshole back then: duress.

Q: I'm a man in love with a woman half my age. We met shortly after I had to leave the city I was living in to escape a toxic relationship. I know this girl has feelings for me. My gut screams it. We also share a strange connection. It's something I know she feels. She simply can't help being tied to the energy I'm feeling. A while back, I hurt her. Unintentionally, but it hurt just the same. I was still not over my ex and very leery of ever experiencing that kind of pain in my heart again. The problem now is that this young woman won't acknowledge her feelings for me. She swears she never had feelings for me. We found ourselves alone one day, and her actions were clearly indicating that she wanted to have sex with me but her words prevented me from taking the opportunity. How can I reach this girl? She knows I love her. I know I'm not wrong. She wants what I want. This love is not something I chose and I'm beginning to resent it. —IN LASTING LOVE

A: You are wrong. She does not want what you want. Your gut is lying to you. She is not in love with you. You do not share a connection. You need to listen to her words. She is not tied to the "energy" you are feeling. You have got to stop thinking with your dick. She was probably scared out of her wits when you managed to "find" her alone. You cannot reach this woman. She can sense your resentment and she's afraid of you. In all honesty, ILL, I'm afraid of you. Just as this poor woman most likely fears becoming one of the many women murdered every year by men they've rejected, I fear being the messenger who got shot. But you asked for my advice, ILL, and here it is: Get into therapy. You need help. And my advice for her, if she sees this, is to do whatever you must to protect yourself—up to and including moving away.

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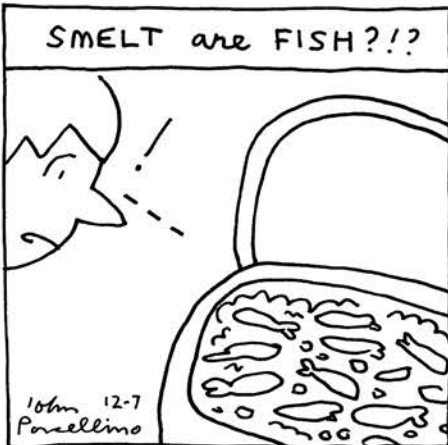
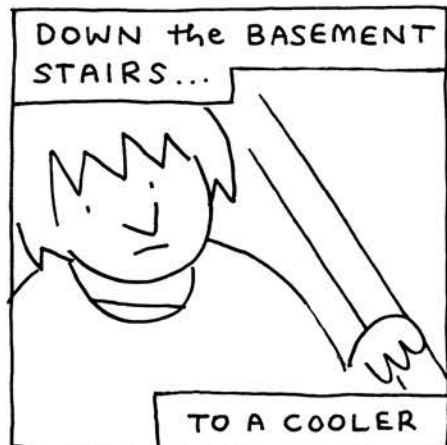
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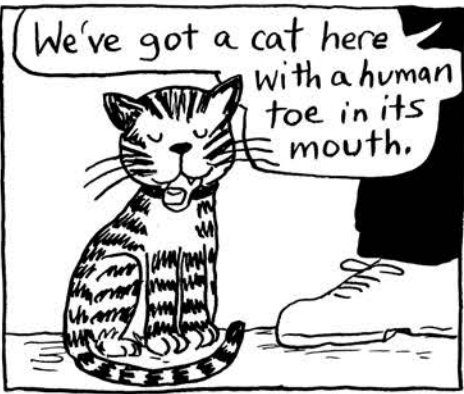
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