

READER

Spring Theater and Dance Issue

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NOTE FROM AN EDITOR

IT WOULD HAVE been easy to begin this letter by writing “Chicago is a theater town,” but also stupid because everybody knows that, even people who don’t live here: Steppenwolf, Second City, City Hall, blah blah blah. We respect you, dear readers, and so we’re not going to insult you by filling this special Spring Theater and Dance Issue with stuff you already know about and have probably seen.

Instead, we asked our writers and one photographer to go out and learn more about places and performers that fascinated them. They went behind the scenes at Prop Thtr, the Avondale hub for experimental theater,

and Links Hall, which has nurtured the dance community for 40 years. They met Lily Be, who has turned her life into a series of hilarious stories, and Blair Thomas, creator of ingenious puppets and architect of glorious spectacles. They went back in time to 1933 to revisit the dance partnership of Ruth Page and Katherine Dunham, and to 1992 because for some reason playwrights find it a fascinating backdrop for drama. They looked ahead to some of the spring’s most exciting new productions and an open mike for women of color. They went inside theaters to see what they look like when no one is there. And they went to the circus, which

in Chicago takes place not under a big top, but in industrial lofts and deconsecrated churches.

All this and reviews of 10 new plays, including the first production of a new company and the last production of an old company! Never think that we don’t love you.

There’s plenty of other drama in this issue, starting with the history of local LGBTQ politics and continuing with some dramatic questions: What does the city treasurer do exactly? Who is C.H.E.W.? Is *Us* a worthy follow-up to *Get Out*? Will Chicagoans finally learn to appreciate the Coney Island hot dog? Read on and find out. —AIMEE LEVITT

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TO CONTACT ANY READER EMPLOYEE, E-MAIL: (FIRST INITIAL)(LAST NAME) @CHICAGOREADER.COM

PUBLISHER

TRACY BAIM

INTERIM EDITORS IN CHIEF

SUJAY KUMAR, KAREN HAWKINS

DEPUTY EDITOR KATE SCHMIDT

CREATIVE LEAD SUE KWONG

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY JAMIE RAMSAY

CULTURE EDITOR AIMEE LEVITT

MUSIC EDITOR PHILIP MONTORO

ASSOCIATE EDITOR JAMIE LUDWIG

SENIOR WRITERS DEANNA ISAACS,

BEN JORAVSKY, MIKE SULA

STAFF WRITERS MAYA DUKMASOVA, LEOR GALIL

GRAPHIC DESIGNER DAVON CLARK

SOCIAL MEDIA EDITOR BRIANNA WELLEN

MUSIC LISTINGS COORDINATOR

SALEM COLLO-JULIN

FILM LISTINGS COORDINATOR PATRICK FRIEL

THEATER ASSIGNMENTS EDITOR CATEY SULLIVAN

CONTRIBUTORS NOAH BERLASKY, DEVLYN CAMP,

DAVE CANTOR, LUCA CIMARUSTI, NINA LI COOMES,

CODY CORRALL, MARISSA DE LA CERDA, SHERI

FLANDERS, ISA GIALLORENZO, ANDREA GRONVALL,

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OFFICE MANAGER S. NICOLE LANE

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CONSULTANT CAROL E. BELL

READER (ISSN 1096-6919) IS PUBLISHED WEEKLY

BY STM READER, LLC

2930 S. MICHIGAN, SUITE 102 CHICAGO, IL 60616

312-392-2934, CHICAGOREADER.COM

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Angelica K. Lewis, owner of Curvy Chick Yoga, leads class. © JINDU ELUEZE

PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

If you like to work it, work it

How to stretch out and find your inner Aunt Viv right now.

CHICAGO RESIDENTS AND visitors who like to “work it work it” show up in droves to the justifiably popular, city-sponsored Summerdance series in Grant Park. Live bands and DJs, and a first hour of dance instruction, make for a lively and free night out in downtown. Unfortunately, Summerdance doesn’t kick off this year until June 27. But there are some other free ways to work your body, stretch out, and discover your inner Aunt Viv before June.

South Chicago Dance Theatre has been offering free community workshops on first Fridays. The next workshop concentrates on modern dance techniques. You can join them Friday, April 5, from 6-7:30 PM at the Dorchester Arts + Housing Collaborative, 1456 E. 70th Street. All ages welcome.

Participants can take in the wonderful vista of Lake Michigan during free yoga at Berger Park in Edgewater. Classes are coordinated by Nothing Without a Company, a local performance organization. All levels (with or without yoga mats) are welcome at these outdoor (weather permitting) classes. Meet up every Saturday at 10:30 AM outside of the Berger Park Cultural Center, 6205 N. Sheridan Road. Homiey, a coworking space at 3455 W. North Ave. in Humboldt Park, also offers a monthly free yoga class taught by Angelica of Curvy Chick Yoga. Let’s get physical now so we can show off our moves in June.

—SALEM COLLO-JULIN

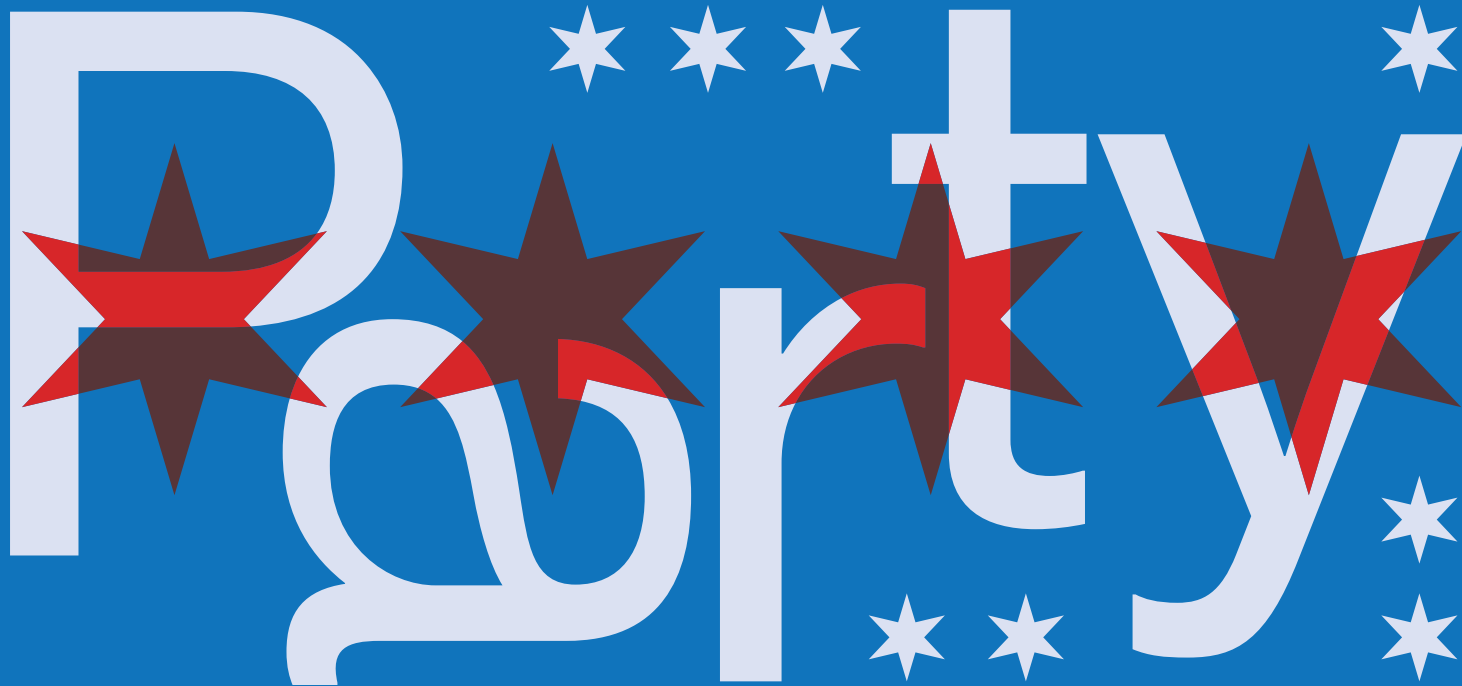
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NEWS & POLITICS



Lori Lightfoot DOUG MCGOLDRICK



Toni Preckwinkle ERIK DAVIS

POLITICS

Missing in action

It's hard to call Lori or Toni a progressive because they were not on the front lines of protest during the Rahm years.

By **BEN JORAVSKY**

For the past few days, I've been baraged with calls and e-mails from friends of the progressive persuasion, extolling the virtues of Lori Lightfoot or Toni Preckwinkle.

And if positive arguments don't work, they fall back on bashing the opposition.

It's as though the great Harold Washington had magically reappeared in the person they support or their opponent had been taken over by one of those sewer-dwelling, scissor-wielding creatures in Jordan Peele's *Us*.

Great flick, by the way—run, don't walk, to see it.

Look, I understand we've entered the frenzied final moments of a campaign, where folks are losing their collective minds with the urge to glorify the home team and demonize the opposition. And I know that if you can't convince the voters of your candidate's virtues, the next best thing is to scare them with a distorted caricature of your opponent. And I also know

that a lot of progressives feel compelled to make good on the endorsement gamble they probably should have thought twice about making in the first place.

I get all that.

But as for one candidate clearly being more "progressive" than the other? That's a different story.

With Preckwinkle you have a pragmatic and cautious Democratic Party chieftain who rose to the top by cutting deals with the Daleys and Burke and Berrios.

And in Lightfoot we have a classic Dem—sort of like Chicago's own Hillary Clinton. A corporate lawyer from a downtown firm who makes a killing representing the 1 percent.

I'm not saying there's anything intrinsically wrong with either type. Hell, I've voted for candidates similar to Lori and Toni many times over the years. It's a big world out there, people. Not everyone's like me.

So you got to learn to get along with all →

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NEWS & POLITICS

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kinds of different people.

I must admit that in the past, when forced to choose, I've been known to favor the Machine creature. After all, I'm the guy who proudly cast my vote for the guy in a coma—John Stroger—over Forrest Claypool in 2006. There are some north-siders who will never forgive me for that transgression.

But, please, don't try to tell me that Lightfoot or Preckwinkle is a champion of progressivity. Man, I can't think of one showdown issue of the Rahm era in which either candidate stood on the front lines.

And there were a lot of front lines that could have used some high-profile standing in on.

Mental health clinic closings? Nope. Teachers' strike? Nada. School closings? Unh-uh. Marriott/DePaul basketball arena in the south loop? Don't make me laugh. Demanding that Rahm release the Laquan McDonald video? Yeah, right.

The mayoral election of 2015? Man, not only wouldn't Toni run—even though progressives begged her—but she couldn't even bring her-

self to endorse Chuy Garcia, one of her closest allies on the board.

And Lori? She was on Team Rahm back then—the Chuy race was right before she became Rahm's Police Board appointee. She wouldn't have touched that election front line with a ten-foot pole.

For me, the fundamental issue over the last 20 years has been how to slice up the pie.

In the Rahm years, the biggest slices went to the folks who needed it least, as Mayor Rahm resorted to more regressive forms of taxation while dishing out more economic development dollars to relatively wealthy gentrifying communities.

There's no strong indication that either candidate will break from the Rahm/Daley positions of using property taxes to fuel gentrification and starve our city of the money it needs for everything from mental health clinics to schools.

Lightfoot says all the right things about reforming the TIF program. But I can't say for certain that she'd back up her talk, as she's never served in office. She has no track record.

I must note that since round one of the elections, some of Rahm's backers have donated to Lightfoot's campaign. Not sure what that means in regard to how a Mayor Lightfoot would slice that old economic-development pie, but it's not exactly reassuring.

As for Preckwinkle, she's hardly Eugene Debs, people. Since taking over as president of the County Board, she's never stood up to a TIF deal, even though they divert property taxes from the county.

As the Fourth Ward alderman back in 2007, she was one of the biggest flag-wavers for Mayor Daley's Olympic boondoggle, including spending \$91 million for Michael Reese Hospital. The city was going to build the Olympic Village there—now, it's a big chunk of vacant land.

In recent years Preckwinkle backed Mayor Rahm and former Governor Rauner in their effort to woo Amazon—which would have cost at least \$2.2 billion.

Only lately has she started speaking up against the Lincoln Yards deal. And even then, she didn't use her position as County

Board president to rally opposition when the matter recently came before the Joint Review Board. Instead, the county's representative didn't show up to the Joint Review Board meeting when Lincoln Yards was approved.

There's still one last hurdle Lincoln Yards must clear before we're on the hook for shoveling \$1.3 billion in property tax dollars over to Sterling Bay, the developer of the project. In April, the lame duck City Council, under a lame duck mayor, will vote on whether to create the actual Tax Increment Financing district that will fund Lincoln Yards.

Here's hoping that whoever wins—either Mayor-elect Lightfoot or Preckwinkle—shows up to strongly urge aldermen to defer the matter until she at least has a chance to study the deal. After all, that \$1.3 billion is money our next mayor won't be able to spend on progressive things the city really needs.

It's not too late for Lori or Toni to finally take their place on the front lines. **FI**

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POLITICS

More money no problems

For the first time in decades, Chicago has a say in who its treasurer will be. But what the hell does the treasurer even do?

By MAYA DUKMASOVA

There's a joke among municipal government nerds that goes something like this: A guy's running for treasurer and he goes to lunch with a bunch of business people who ask him all sorts of questions about how he'll invest pension funds and manage the city's cash flow. He says, "Wait a minute, I'm running for treasurer, not *deputy* treasurer!"

This was recently relayed to me with a chuckle by Michael Belsky, executive director of the Center for Municipal Finance at the University of Chicago. He's a local government expert who's pleased to see the city treasurer's office in an unusual spotlight this election cycle. The April 2 runoff is between 47th Ward alderman Ameya Pawar and 10th District State Rep Melissa Conyears-Ervin; their campaigns have brought the role of the treasurer out of decades-long electoral obscurity.

So what does the treasurer do? In Chicago, this is one of three elected executives, along with the mayor and city clerk (but is the lowest paid of the three, with a salary of about \$134,000). The treasurer's job is to manage the city's roughly \$8 billion cash flow (which includes revenue from property and sales taxes, fees like city tickets, and transfers from the state and federal governments through

block grants and other appropriations). The treasurer makes sure there's money behind the checks the city cuts to pay salaries, workers' comp, or legal settlements. The treasurer also makes sure city money doesn't sit idle while not in the process of being paid out. This requires managing relationships with "municipal depositories"—the 17 private banks where municipal funds are kept—and overseeing investments so that cash can generate returns. Finally, the treasurer sits on the boards of the four city worker pension funds—for police officers, firefighters, laborers, and municipal office workers. While on those boards, the treasurer can influence investment decisions and help negotiate the fees financial institutions charge to manage the tens of billions of dollars pooled between the pension funds.

Compared to other municipal government executives, the treasurer's office has relatively little power. Historically this office hasn't been a bastion for patronage, since there are fewer than 40 employees and their jobs require some financial expertise. The treasurer's discretion about investments is narrowly circumscribed by state and city laws governing how taxpayer dollars can be used to generate revenue. Investments have to be safe and adhere to a slew of other proscriptions. Plus, it's not really

the elected head who'll make minute decisions but rather the experts (hopefully) they hire—that's what Belsky's joke is getting at.

Still, Belsky says there's a benefit to the city when the treasurer takes a more public role, even if it's mostly symbolic. "It's a city-wide elected official and the job is financial in nature," he says. "It certainly is a value to taxpayers to have someone who is willing to suggest ideas, engage in the debate on the city's finances. It's really up to the person who's in the office: They could just simply sit there and follow the statutes and go to pension fund meetings and vote. Or they could come up with creative ways to use the city's dollars to promote economic development, promote financial literacy."

In recent years, current treasurer Kurt Summers has embraced this way of leading the office. The city treasurer has undertaken various personal finance education efforts and promotes resources for small business development. Summers also developed the idea of a "Catalyst Fund," which would use \$100 million in city funds generated through investment returns and matching dollars

from private investors to offer low-interest business loans in struggling communities. The fund, however, has yet to make a single loan; its slow birth could be due to political tension between Mayor Rahm Emanuel (who's supposed to appoint the board that would manage the fund) and Summers. Progressive critics like 35th Ward alderman Carlos Ramirez-Rosa and 32nd Ward alderman Scott Waguespack have also been skeptical of the idea because, they've said, no mechanisms were put in place to actually guarantee investments in underserved areas and prevent conflicts of interest between appointed fund managers, their political backers, and loan recipients.

The skepticism may be warranted, since the treasurer's office has for many years been a site of political wrangling and politicized decision-making. The current election is the first time since 1999 that the city has had a contested race for treasurer. And it's the first time in decades that voters can choose between two new candidates, neither of whom are already a mayoral appointee to the office. Between 1979 and 1989 the office was held by Cecil Partee. Upon the election of Mayor →

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NEWS & POLITICS

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Richard M. Daley, Partee was appointed to replace him as Cook County State's Attorney. Daley's handpicked replacement, Miriam Santos, was the first Latinx politician to hold a citywide elected office in Chicago.

Santos, too, was the treasurer for a decade, continuing to win elections even after her relationship with Daley soured when she sounded the alarm on the city's mismanagement of pension funds in the early 1990s. Indeed, she even won reelection while under federal indictment for mail fraud and attempted extortion in 1999. A few months later, she was convicted and was forced to resign. Daley appointed a short-lived replacement, Barbara Lumpkin—short-lived because Santos's conviction was overturned, which allowed her to leave prison after four months and reclaim her elected position with back pay. She had to re-resign six months later after pleading guilty to a single count of mail fraud rather than face retrial. Santos got time served and retired from public life.

"The mayor has wanted to control who the treasurer is because the treasurer has access to financial information that could be embarrassing to the mayor," says University of Illinois at Chicago political science professor and former 44th Ward alderman Dick Simpson, referencing the feuds between Daley and Santos. "The treasurer's office is rather limited but it also has the potential to either help promote the kind of policies that the mayor wants or [the treasurer can] go out on their own."

Daley's next pick for the job was trusted ally Judith Rice, who sailed through an uncontested election in 2003 and unexpectedly resigned in 2006. After that, Daley appointed Stephanie Neely, who left the job for the private sector in 2014. Emanuel picked Summers as her successor.

Now that the voters finally get to choose, Conyears-Ervin and Pawar are trying to convince them it's a choice worth considering seriously.

Conyears-Ervin, who has a bachelor's degree and an MBA in finance, is a relative newcomer to politics. She was first elected to represent the 10th State House district on the west side in 2016, after more than a decade of working for Allstate.

In her time as a legislator she's sponsored more than a dozen social welfare bills, including a reduction of state sales taxes on condoms, diapers, and baby wipes; bolstering teachers' collective bargaining rights; and expanding food stamp access for the elderly, homeless, and people with disabilities. She's also introduced a bill creating a new crime called "streetgang member loitering" which, if passed, could disproportionately criminalize black and brown youth. (A similar city law was struck down by the state Supreme Court as unconstitutional in the 90s.)

After an uncontested reelection last November, Conyears-Ervin, 43, has been propelled in the treasurer's race by politicians including Dorothy Brown, Willie Wilson, and all of the area's black U.S. representatives, and a slew of labor groups including the rare combination of the Chicago Teachers Union and Fraternal Order of Police. She's campaigned on her educational background in finance, her understanding of the needs and challenges of Chicago's black neighborhoods, and her plans to pressure the banks where the city parks its money—such as JP Morgan Chase and Bank of America—to eradicate banking deserts.

"It's important that we leverage the office of city treasurer to help working families," Conyears-Ervin said on the phone from Springfield last week. "One of the first things

I'm going to work on is to bring in the CEOs of financial institutions and we're gonna make certain that we speak to them and I expect a plan for the unbanked and underbanked population."

The state rep wants credit unions to be included as municipal depositories. "Credit unions are more inclined to provide capital and financing in underserved communities," she noted. "A couple of million dollars to a credit union [would] help provide capital and financing to residents" for starting businesses or buying homes. She's also proposing to move the City Council's Office of Financial Analysis under the auspices of the treasurer to be a financial watchdog over Chicago's legislators, and to create new auditing powers for the treasurer to analyze city and CPS finances.

Conyears-Ervin's biggest donors are labor unions and their associated PACs as well as political committees tied to her husband, 28th Ward alderman Jason Ervin, and other west side elected officials. Among those who've given heavily to her campaign coffers (which now tally more than \$920,000) is Leaders for Tomorrow, which is an unregistered PAC led by Cornelius Griggs, the president of GMA Construction Group. GMA is one of the AECOM subcontractors that was awarded the contract for the controversial new police and fire training academy in Conyears-Ervin's district.

Though unregistered PACs can be fined by the State Board of Elections, accepting money from them doesn't constitute a violation for a candidate. A spokesman said that the Board is working with the group to "straighten out" the registration issue. Griggs said he wasn't aware that the PAC was unregistered and that Leaders for Tomorrow consists of dozens of "individuals under 40" looking to back progressive candidates supporting minority- and women-owned small businesses. He added the

PAC had given to other candidates over the last six months but wouldn't say which ones, and the state has no records of donations to anyone but Conyears-Ervin.

Many have attributed Conyears-Ervin's political rise to her marriage. She says it's fair to ask about her relationship with Ervin, but denied it's the reason for her success. She also hinted that there's something sexist about the scrutiny. "I do believe there's some questions asked of me that's not asked of the male candidate in the race," she said, bringing up the fact that Pawar's wife, Charna Epstein, used to work as his chief of staff.

On the way to a campaign appearance with the striking Chicago Symphony Orchestra musicians last week, Pawar took offense to the insinuation that there was something improper about Epstein's work with his office. "We went to grad school together, wrote a book together, we've worked together . . . she's my best friend," Pawar said, claiming that their romantic relationship developed after she left the job in the early months of 2014. (The two were married in December of that year.) The alderman also expressed disappointment that his opponent has repeatedly emphasized that she's the only candidate born and raised in Chicago, saying that such statements are part of a "coded language" that's "playing on the existing black and brown divide."

"I was born and raised in Rogers Park," he added. "We moved to the suburbs because no one would sell my parents a house at the time." Pawar's parents are immigrants from India. After graduating from Maine East High School in Park Ridge, Pawar attended college in Missouri but came back for three master's degrees at IIT and the University of Chicago. "I've served this city for the last ten years, but even if I wasn't born here what difference would that make? Why does that matter?"



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NEWS & POLITICS

Thirty-eight-year-old Pawar, who was first elected in 2011 and is abiding by a self-imposed two-term limit, is proposing changes to state and local laws that would allow the creation of a public bank. He discounts the notion that private banks can be convinced or regulated into serving neglected communities. “People have been trying to bank the unbanked by putting pressure on the banks for two decades—there hasn’t been a major change in how those banks behave,” he says. Indeed, the federal Community Reinvestment Act, which was passed in 1977 to force private banks to remedy the effects of racist redlining policies and discriminatory lending, has fallen short on many fronts. “We’re one of the biggest actors in the market, we can take our money and investment power and launch our own vehicle to invest in each other,” Pawar said of the city’s purse.

In Pawar’s vision a Chicago public bank, capitalized by investment returns as well as money from the pension funds and state deposits, would refinance student loans, lend to small businesses, and finance affordable housing development and infrastructure projects. Currently, only North Dakota has a public bank, which doesn’t lend directly to consumers and businesses. But there’s a growing movement across the country to establish public banks, which were relatively common at the state level in the 19th century.

Pawar’s critics say a public bank would put taxpayers’ money at too great of a risk. Some write the idea off as a flashy, progressive proposal and are skeptical of Pawar’s ability to follow through. He’s backed many pro-labor measures in City Council and was the chief sponsor of the ordinance that created an Office of Labor Standards to enforce the city’s minimum wage and sick leave laws. However, he’s been criticized for a too-cozy relationship with Rahm Emanuel (who recently asked him to lead a task force exploring a universal basic income program for 1,000 Chicagoans) and for missing half of the City Council meetings in his second term, during which he also ran for governor. Though his biggest campaign donors are service and construction workers’ unions, Pawar’s other financiers include high-speed trading tycoon William Hobert and billionaire asset manager/Emanuel’s top donor Michael Sacks (and relatives of both men). His campaign war chest stands at about \$520,000.


The alderman denies that these ties discredit his progressive bona fides, and said that his relationship with Sacks developed “because we see eye to eye on student

loans and affordable housing.” He also cited endorsements from U.S. Representatives Jan Schakowsky, Mike Quigley, and Jesus “Chuy” Garcia, both the *Tribune* and *Sun-Times*, United Working Families, and several progressive-leaning aldermen.

Asked what he’d do as treasurer based on the powers and capacities the office currently has, Pawar promised to disinvest city money from fossil fuels and move “immediately” to publish a report on how much the city pays in fees to the private banks that hold and manage its money. He said he’d push the pension fund boards to do the same, so that taxpayers know how much large financial institutions profit off managing taxpayers’ dollars. “One thing that often doesn’t get talked about is a lot of these investment vehicles charge you 1 percent a year in fees—that’s 1 percent of principal whether you’re up or down. Over ten years that’s compounded.” He favors a Warren Buffet-style investment approach that would put city money behind index funds (like the kinds most people’s retirement accounts are pegged to), which deliver steady long-term returns.

Whatever the outcome of this election, the chances that the city treasurer will revolutionize anything about anything are slim. The person holding that office can be an advocate for bold new ideas, and help push other executives and legislators in a progressive direction. Or they can do none of that and still be effective in their duties.

The bottom line, Belsky said, is that the treasurer’s office “has to have a high level of integrity and honesty because this is an office where you are handling taxpayers’ dollars and you don’t want to put those at risk and be dishonest about how they’re performing.” Simpson, meanwhile, recommended that to be effective as treasurer “you want to be friendly with the mayor.” In other words, this isn’t exactly a great spot for those seeking to climb higher up the political ladder. If the treasurer is seen as a threat by the mayor—the way Summers, a protege of Toni Preckwinkle, was seen by Emanuel as several sources contended—their initiatives aren’t likely to get far.

Both Conyears-Ervin and Pawar have vowed to finally get Summers’s Catalyst Fund off the ground, but that will depend on their working relationship with the new occupant of the fifth floor of City Hall. Neither candidate would speculate on the pros and cons of working with either Preckwinkle or Lori Lightfoot. 

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THE ROAD TO VICTORY

A timeline of historic moments in LGBTQ elected history in the Chicago area



<p>1980: Tim Drake was the first openly gay Chicagoan to win an election, as convention delegate for John Anderson's presidential bid. Drake was a Republican activist at the time. Gay businessman and Democratic</p>	<p>activist Chuck Renslow ran as an Edward Kennedy delegate.</p> <p>1993: Marc Loveless, an African-American gay man, won a local school council post.</p>	<p>1994: Tom Chiola became the first openly gay person to win major public office in Illinois, when he won a seat on the bench of the Cook County Circuit Court. Cook County has one of the highest concentrations</p>	<p>of openly LGBTQ judges in the country, according to the Alliance of Illinois Judges.</p> <p>1996: Larry McKeon became the state's first openly gay (and openly HIV-positive) state legislator,</p>	<p>when a north-side district elected him to the House of Representatives.</p> <p>1996: Sebastian Patti became a judge, and in 2009 he took his seat as the first openly gay appellate court justice.</p>	<p>1997: Joanne Trapani became the first open lesbian elected to office in Illinois, as a member of the Oak Park Village Board, and in 2001 she became Village Board president—the state's first openly lesbian</p>	<p>mayor. Also that year, an openly gay man, Ray Johnson, won a trustee post in Oak Park.</p> <p>1999: Nancy Katz was the first open lesbian judge in the state, after being appointed</p>	<p>as an associate judge of the Cook County Circuit Court.</p> <p>2003: Tom Tunney was appointed the city's first openly gay alderman, and he has run successful</p>	<p>re-election campaigns ever since.</p> <p>2004: Sherry Pethers became the first open lesbian elected to a judgeship when she won a tight race in Cook County.</p>	<p>2006: Debra Shore made history by being the first open lesbian elected to a countywide seat as a commissioner of the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District.</p>
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JUDICIAL PRIDE

There is a large and historic concentration of openly LGBTQ people who have served or who are currently serving on the bench in Illinois. Charter members of the LGBTQ group Alliance of Illinois Judges are: **Hon. Eileen Brewer (Ret); Hon. Cheryl D. Cesario (Ret); Hon. Tom Chiola (Ret.); Hon. Sophia H. Hall; Hon. Nancy J. Katz (Ret.); Hon. Stuart Katz; Hon. Norene Love (Ret); Hon. Mike McHale (Ret); Hon. Sandra R. Otaka (deceased); Hon. Sebastian T. Patti; Hon. Sherry Pethers (Ret); Hon. Mary Colleen Roberts; Hon. James Snyder (first openly gay president of the Illinois Judges Association); Hon. Colleen Sheehan; and Hon. Lori M Wolfson (Ret).** Also of note: In 2012, **Mary M. Rowland** was sworn in as Federal Magistrate Judge, U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois. She is one of very few out LGBT people to be appointed to serve as a federal judge in the country.



Above: Hon. Mary M. Rowland. Below (L-R): Hon. James Snyder; Hon. Norene Love; Hon. Mike McHale.

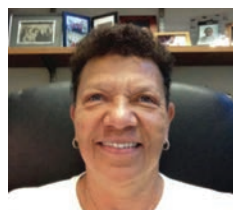


Photo credits Main section: Loveless photo by John Gress; Patti photo by Lisa Howe-Ebright; Katz photo courtesy of Katz; Tunney photo by Matt Simonette; Shore photo by Tracy Baim; Mell photo courtesy of campaign; Cassidy photo by Kate Sosin; Cappleman photo by Matt Simonette; Yingling photo courtesy of Illinois House Democrats; Ramirez-Rosa and Robinson photos by Matt Simonette; Morrison photo by AJ Kane; Garcia photo by Robert Kusel Photography; Hadden photo by Ryan Edmund; Lightfoot photo by Matt Simonette. Judicial section: Official court photos. Lavender Door section: Hart image courtesy of Chicago History Museum Archives; PR photo of Rosewell; Rice photo by Tracy Baim. Horseshoes section: Bergeron photo by Romaine; Sable photo by Lisa Howe-Ebright; Nepon photo from the *GayLife* archives; Ford and Flint photos from the *Gay Chicago* archives. All other photos from the *Windy City Times* archives.

BEHIND THE LAVENDER DOOR

Abraham Lincoln (1809–1865): Rumors abound about the orientation of the 16th president of the U.S. But some historians believe he was either gay or bisexual. (See C.A. Tripp's 2005 book, *The Intimate World of Abraham Lincoln*.)

Pearl M. Hart (1890–1975): Studs Terkel managed one of her failed attempts for a City Council seat (she ran in 1947 and 1951), then she twice ran unsuccessfully for judge. She is in the Chicago LGBT Hall of Fame.



Eddie Rosewell (1927–1999): The Cook County treasurer's career ended in disgrace when he hired a former window washer to a high-level job—a closeted man who paid a public price.

Lilia Delgado: While not fully out of the closet, Delgado was known in the community. Mayor Harold Washington knew she was gay when he appointed her to the city's Cable Commission. She ran for Cook County Board of Commissioners in 1987, coming within 5,000 votes of one of the ten seats (at the time, Chicago board seats were elected citywide).



Judy Rice, who is now a Cook County judge, was the Chicago city treasurer 2000–2006, but came out after she served.

These lists are not meant to be comprehensive, but rather highlight certain significant elections and "firsts" in area history.

More than 100 openly LGBTQ people have run for office to major posts in Illinois, from judicial seats to city councils and county, state and federal offices. While those efforts started decades ago, the onset of the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s really kick-started the regional LGBTQ movement into action on a variety of fronts, not just in health-care advocacy, but in politics and beyond. But who were the first to break down the closet doors and take their seats at the table? Here are the highlights.



2006: Openly gay, HIV-positive activist **Greg Harris**, who was appointed to complete Larry McKeon's term in the General Assembly, was later elected and continues to serve, making history in 2019 as the first openly

gay majority leader of the state House of Representatives.

2009: Open lesbian **Deb Mell** won a state representative post, serving until 2013, when she was appointed by Mayor Rahm Emanuel to fill

the 33rd Ward aldermanic seat vacated by her father, Dick Mell. She won re-election in 2015 and is in a runoff April 2.

2009: **Marge Paul** was elected as an open lesbian alderman in suburban Berwyn. In

2017 she was elected city clerk in the same election where four LGBTQ candidates won for city council.

2009: **Mark Tendam** won election to the Evanston City Council, becoming the suburb's first

openly gay elected official.

2011: **Kelly Cassidy** was first appointed to a state representative post, and she has won re-election every cycle since.

2011: **James Cappleman** was

elected alderman of the 46th Ward.

2012: **Sam Yingling** won a suburban seat for state representative in the 62nd district.

2015: Two openly gay men won seats on the Chicago

City Council in the same cycle: **Raymond Lopez** (15th) and **Carlos Ramirez-Rosa** (35th); they are the first Latino/x out LGBTQs on the City Council.

2018: **Lamont Robinson** became the first African-American

LGBTQ person to win a major non-judicial elected post in Illinois when he won for 5th district state representative.

2018: **Kevin Morrison** became the first openly LGBTQ member of the Cook County Board.

2018: **Marcelino Garcia** became the first LGBTQ person of color elected to the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District.



2019: **Maria Hadden** unseated longtime incumbent 49th Ward alderman Joe Moore to be the first openly LGBTQ African-American elected to Chicago's City Council and first African-American LGBTQ woman elected to a nonjudicial post in Illinois.



2019: The fact that **Lori Lightfoot**, an openly LGBTQ African-American woman, even made it to a runoff for mayor was historic and hardly predictable decades ago. But now, she may make more history as the first openly LGBTQ person to win election as mayor of Chicago, the nation's third-largest city.



ONLY IN HORSESHOES

Your can't win if you don't run ... and a few bold LGBTQ people paved the way for what would be the first openly LGBTQ person to win in Illinois.

1971: **Michael Bergeron**, later founder of *The Chicago Gay Crusader* newspaper, ran for at-large delegate to the Democratic National Convention.

1974: Radical gays **Don "Red Devil" Goldman** and **Nancy Davis** ran for alderman in the 44th and 43rd wards, respectively.

1977: **Gary Nepon**, at age 28, ran for 13th District state representative.

1979: **Grant Ford** (who passed away this year), publisher of *GayLife* newspaper, ran for 44th Ward alderman.

1987: Baton Show Lounge owner **Jim Flint** ran a widely covered race for Cook County Board, when city seats ran citywide.

1987 and 1991: **Dr. Ron Sable** came within a few dozen votes of unseating incumbent 44th Ward alderman Bernie Hansen in his first race, but lost by a wider margin in 1991; he died in 1993 of AIDS complications.



From left: Michael Bergeron (above); Dr. Ron Sable (below); Gary Nepon; Grant Ford; Jim Flint.

A joint project by the *Chicago Reader* and *Windy City Times*

For more details, see *Out and Proud in Chicago: An Overview of the City's Gay Community*, edited by Tracy Baim



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Lola's coney dog (Detroit-style) © NICK MURWAY

RESTAURANT REVIEW

Lola's Coney Island stands for Detroit

There's a dog in the fight in Humboldt Park.

By **MIKE SULA**



Coney taco © NICK MURWAY

Chicago has enough hang-ups about hot dogs. The last thing our home-grown dog Nazis need to do is get into Detroit's business. But that's precisely what Humboldt Park's Lola's Coney Island confronts Chicago with: Detroit-style hot dogs, which were established neither in Detroit nor New York, but more likely in Fort Wayne, Indiana, the home of the oldest operating coney purveyor anywhere. Fort Wayne's Famous Coney Island Wiener Stand was opened 106 years ago by Macedonian immigrants who, like many of their kind, trafficked in a hot dog delivery system that featured a mildly spiced natural casing wiener blanketed in a beanless but hearty chili sauce.

It's literally hearty—made with ground beef hearts—but a sprinkle of raw chopped onion and a spurt of yellow mustard brings the whole package into a balance quite unlike the over-policed riot of the Chicago dog dragged through the garden.

Northern Indiana and Michigan are the natural habitats for Coney Islands, but Detroit is usually thought of as their spiritual home, thanks in part to the century-old dogfight between the city's two iconic players: American Coney Island and its upstart neighbor, Lafayette Coney Island.

I'm not sure why Detroiters fight over that—it's a lot clearer than hot dog water that Lafayette is the better all-around establishment. Jesse Fakhoury agrees, but he is neither

a Lafayette guy, nor an American guy. He grew up a block from Duly's Place in southwest Detroit, and that's his ride-or-die.

Fakhoury is the force behind Lola's, named for his two-year-old daughter. He has a keen appreciation for the ridiculousness of the regional hot dog wars. Don't ask him what body fluid he's heard some dickheads compare coney sauce to. He's called Chicago home for 19 years—selling cars mostly—but for the last 15 or so he's dreamed of opening a Coney Island stand. He has two goals. One is to please the population of Michigan transplants that yearns for the coneys of home, and two: "I don't want to give anyone from Chicago a reason to make fun of me."

He loves them all, which is why he offers well-executed Chicago-style dogs as well as New York-style dogs (sauerkraut, onions, brown mustard), both supplied by Vienna Beef. But it's the coneys you'll be coming for: natural casing beef and pork franks from National Coney Island, a Michigan chain that also supplies his chili. In the last two months Fakhoury's made a half dozen trips to Detroit to keep himself supplied through his late R&D phase and the three weeks he's been open. The dogs are salty and bouncy, and though not as firm and snappy as a natural casing Vienna, they're still perfectly compatible with the chili. Together with its acidic and pungent flourishes it's an admirable, even craveable, expression of the style.

Search the Reader's online database of thousands of Chicago-area restaurants—and add your own review—at chicagoreader.com/food.



FOOD & DRINK

Lola's is a far more modest operation than Lakeview's late Leo's Coney Island, the Detroit diner chain that was only able to comfort homesick Michigan expats for less than two years before closing. Fakhoury mourned when that happened, and in a small tribute, he's included a coney taco on his menu—loose ground beef on a steamed hot dog bun, with lettuce, tomato, onion, and shredded cheese. That's an analogue to the loose burger, that same ground beef topped with the usual coney condiments (an improvement over Iowa's infamous Maid-Rite loose meat sandwich).

There are just a few other nods to the Michigan Greek diner tradition, such as an astonishing *avgolemeno* soup that Fakhoury refuses to say anything about, other than to not disagree with my description of it as a kind of Greek congee, an intensely lemony-chickeny rice porridge. Or, to reach across another body of water, it's the best \$5 risotto in the city.

Vernors ginger soda, and seven flavors of Juggalo blood—er, Faygo—complete a simple but satisfying tribute to Fakhoury's home-

Double cheeseburger NICK MURWAY

town. But he isn't an orthodox. He offers a rib eye sandwich on Wednesdays, and a lobster roll on Fridays. Those are just off-script things he likes to eat, and he promises he isn't going to expand his menu beyond that. Well, he might start bringing in Sanders Bumpy Cakes and making a Portillo's-style chocolate cake shake with them, which would be a conspicuous companion to the Rock and Rye float, a scoop of vanilla ice cream suspended in Faygo's pinkish cherry cream cola.

Yes, OK, in a city that celebrates bitter wormwood liquor and sausage intolerance that might sound ridiculous. But sometimes a hot dog is just a hot dog and there's nothing to make fun of at Lola's Coney Island.

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LIVE FROM CZEZ 2019

DAY 0

I WAS STILL WORKING ON MY COSPLAY* THURSDAY EVENING CAUSE I HAVE PROCRASTINATION ISSUES.

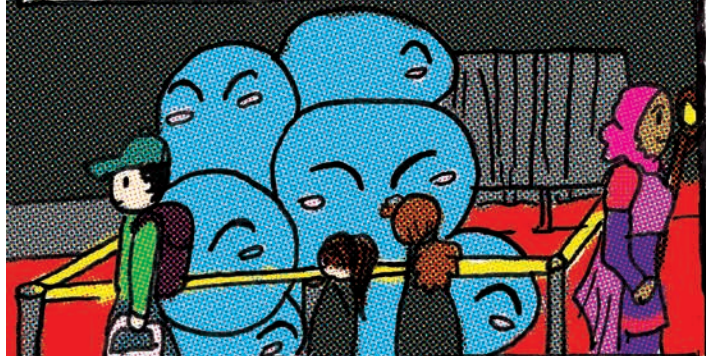
DAY 1 THE FIRST DAY I HAD TO PACK A PREPAREDNESS BAG.

I HAVE PHYSICAL & COGNITIVE DISABILITIES I HAVE TO PREPARE FOR.

WHEN I WENT UP THE ESCALATORS TO THE SHOW FLOOR IT WAS LIKE TRAVELING TO ANOTHER WORLD. I ALMOST CRIED WITH JOY.



IT'S BEEN YEARS SINCE I'VE BEEN HAPPY. MAJOR DEPRESSION MAKES YOU FORGET EVER BEING EXCITED FOR THINGS



BUT RECENTLY I'VE FOUND MEDS & THERAPY THAT WORK SO DOING A CON IS FUN AGAIN.

I FOUND ART I LOVED AND BOUGHT IT. I HAD THE ENERGY TO DRAW AT THE CONVENTION.



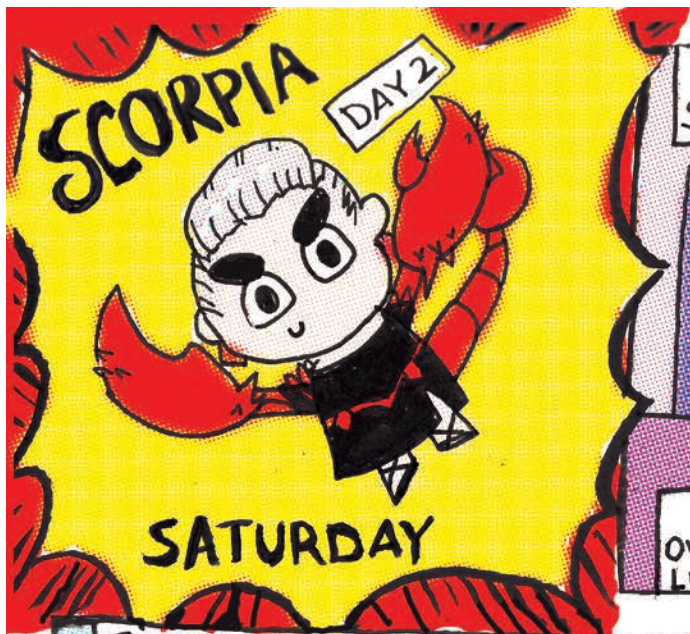
IT FELT LIKE COMING BACK TO MYSELF AFTER YEARS OF FOG.

ALL THE COSPLAYS* MADE ME SMILE. THAT FIRST DAY WAS ME RECLAIMING MY JOY.

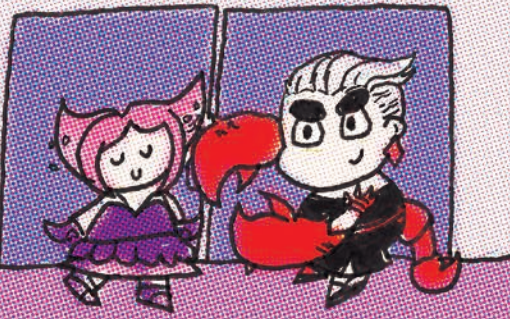


AND TAKING RAD SELFIES.

*COSTUME MADE OF A COMIC, MOVIE, TV CHARACTER

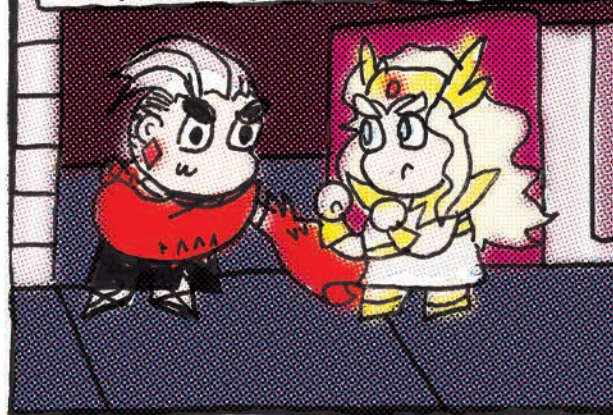


ON SATURDAY I COSPLAYED SCORPIA FROM SHE-RA.



IT'S HARD TO COSPLAY ON YOUR OWN, ESPECIALLY IF YOU'RE DISABLED. LUCKILY MY B.F.F. CAME WITH ME.

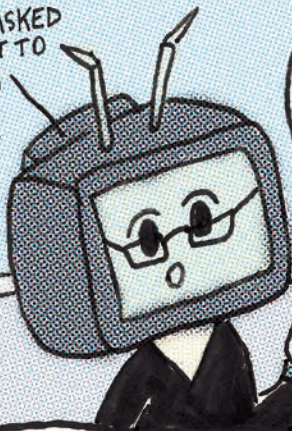
THEY* CARRIED MY EMERGENCY BAG AND SPOTTED FOR MY TAIL. AND TOOK SOME GREAT PICTURES.



*THEY ARE NONBINARY LIKE ME & USE THEY/THEM

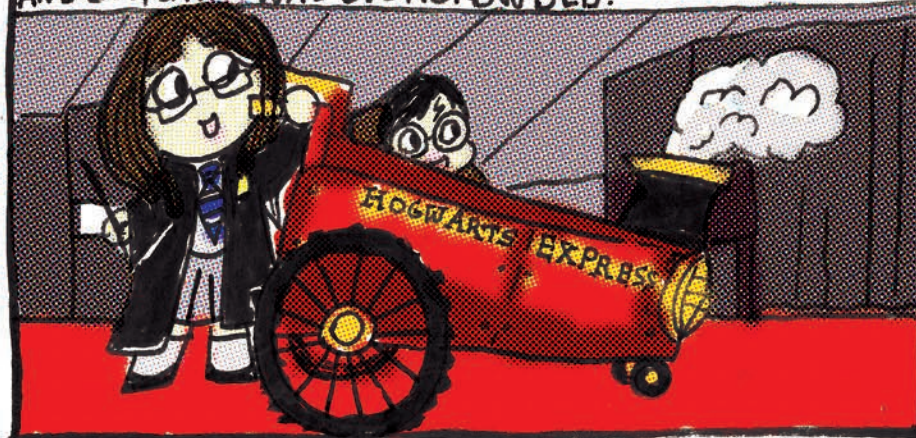
THEY ALSO SAID SOMETHING REALLY PROFOUND ABOUT THE CON AND DISABILITY.

THEY ASKED ME NOT TO DRAW THEIR FACE.

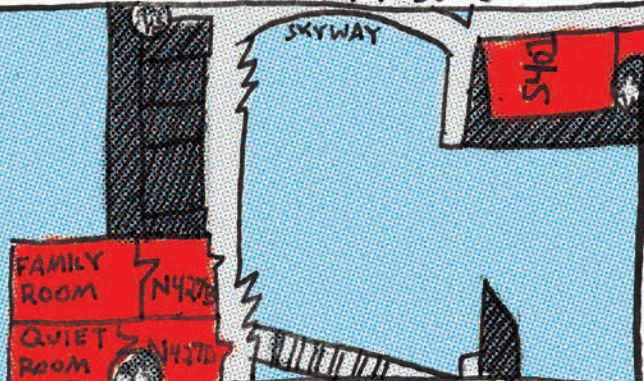


I'VE SEEN MORE DISABLED FOLKS HERE THAN ANYWHERE ELSE IN PUBLIC. I WISH MORE GATHERING PLACES WERE ACCESSIBLE TO EVERYONE.

THEY WERE RIGHT, THE CONVENTION CENTER WAS ACCESSIBLE FOR MORE PEOPLE. IT WASN'T PERFECT, FOR INSTANCE, ARTIST ALLEY WAS TOO NARROW FOR WHEELCHAIRS AND COSPLAY. IT WAS OVERCROWDED.

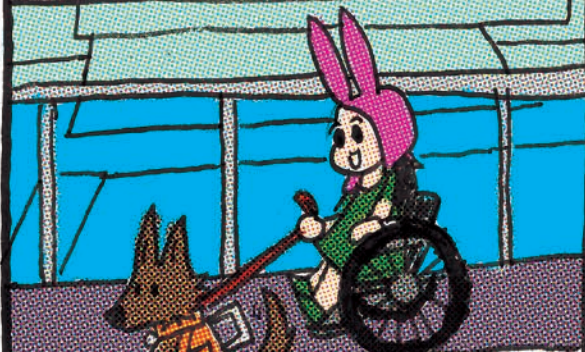


THE CONVENTION EVEN HAD A QUIET ROOM FOR FOLKS WITH SENSORY ISSUES.



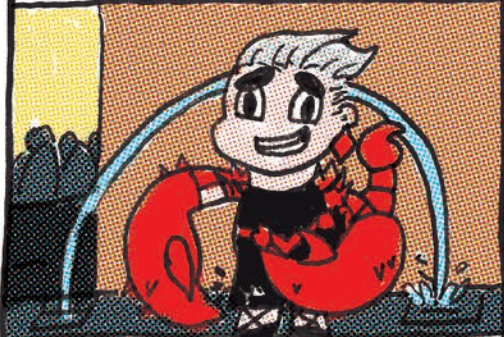
AND A ROOM FOR FAMILIES TO CALM DOWN THEIR KIDS IN.

IT MADE ME WISH ALL SPACES WERE AS ACCESSIBLE AND AS NERDY.



SEEING MY FELLOW DISABLED NERDS HAVING FUN OUT AND ABOUT MADE ME SUPER EXCITED.

I HAD A BLAST AND MET UP WITH OTHER SHE-RA COSPLAYERS



BUT HAD TO GO HOME EARLY BECAUSE MY ARTHRITIC KNEES GAVE OUT. IT WAS WORTH IT.

RIP1911



The greatest show in town

Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, step right up to the magical, the thrilling, the Chicago-style circus!

By **MAX MALLER**

“We used to have a rhino on Ringling,” Jeff Jenkins says. This was back when he was a young clown in the Greatest Show on Earth. The rhino would charge fullspeed into its pen backstage the moment the show ended, sometimes dragging its handler on the floor behind it. It was terrifying. Today Jenkins is the ringmaster of Chicago’s Midnight Circus, which he cofounded in 1997. The circus employs a pit bull named Rosie. Rosie has the same instinct to sprint to her bed backstage while the bipeds bow. But she’s far less terrifying. Cute, even.

If there’s one thing that defines the Chicago circus, having pit bulls instead of rhinos might be it. The homespun variety of circus that’s caught on here is athletic, intelligent, scaled down, and minutely worked out, based on an optimistic gamble: that what audiences really and truly want is intimacy, not spectacle. Pit bulls that do real tricks, not tusks for tusks’ sake. It’s a bold and brilliant experiment, one that’s been nurtured in part by the architec-

ture and landscape of the city itself. It all started 22 years ago in a little loft on 16th Street in Pilsen, where Sylvia Hernandez-DiStasi, cofounder of The Actors Gymnasium, let Jenkins and his wife, Julie Jenkins, an aerialist, build their first trapeze rig.

The Midnight Circus ethos was inspired in part by the new circus movement, created and codified by, among others, Pickle Family Circus cofounder Lawrence Pisoni and legendary juggling teacher Hovey Burgess. Theirs was an approach that transported the traditional narrative elements of the big top to a smaller setting, more on the order of a black box theater than a stadium. Julie Jenkins, who went to school for drama (Jeff went to clown college), cites the epic theater of Bertolt Brecht—which forced the audience to engage critically with the performance—as an early influence on what they were doing, and invokes Lenin’s dictum of “bringing circus to the people,” later the company’s motto.

In a black box, or a smaller tent, audiences would be able to see every wrist flick and arch

of the eyebrow. It would be transparent and accessible. No lions, no rhinos, no glitter shot out of a cannon.

Midnight had originally planned to try out its fresh conception of circus in theaters, but the Jenkineses and their small team found theater managers unreceptive and couldn’t get critics to pay attention when they tried staging their act on their own dollar. Then in 1998, the city called. This is how Jeff remembers the story:

James Law, who ran the Mayor’s Office of Special Events, had built a weird “haunted house” structure on Daley Plaza that served no visible purpose. It was shaped like an X and cost a quarter of a million dollars, plus installation. Then-mayor and Halloween fan Richard M. Daley, who had a lot riding on this bizarre expenditure, was livid. If he didn’t find a use for it fast, he was afraid he’d be flambéed in the press for having approved such a thing. He contacted the Jenkineses through a friend of theirs who worked for the Department of Cultural Affairs, and invited them to City Hall for

a meeting to potentially—a Hail Mary of Hail Marys—throw circus at the problem and avoid a scandal. The meeting was loaded with top brass: representatives from Cultural Affairs and Special Events, Commissioner of Cultural Affairs Lois Weisberg, and the mayor’s chief of staff. Panic sat thick over the room.

“So, whaddya got?” someone said.

Jeff had nothing. But a clown never has nothing. He’s a clown. He’ll make something.

“Well, it looks like a plaza,” Jeff said.

“Yeah, yeah! It does look like a plaza!”

“A *haunted* plaza.”

“Yeah, yeah! Yeah!”

“A haunted plaza needs residents, right?”

“Villagers!” Julie said.

“And a mayor!” Jeff went on. “Mayor . . . Maximilian . . . Spookenberg!”

“Ah! That’s great!”

“And Hester P. Stump, the Commissioner of . . .”

“Chaos!” Julie finished.

“Oh! Yeah!”

The show that came out of that free-associative idea session got the go-ahead for seven trial performances. After those first dry runs on a pair of blue panel mats in front of Law’s structure, word spread and things grew. Politicos milling around the plaza would come every day during the annual six-week run, sometimes catching every performance (there were five a day). Schools sent field trips. *Chicagoween* became the most successful circus show in Chicago’s history, running in the Loop for 17 years and attracting some of the greatest circus talent in the world. These days, due in large part to the success of *Chicagoween*, Midnight has an international reputation. Its Circus in the Parks initiative has raised more than \$1 million for the city to restore its playgrounds. People trained in the best Montreal circus schools compete to take part.

“They’ll come off Cirque du Soleil. They’ll be featured at the Cirque de Demain festival in Paris, where they’ll win a gold medal. And then two weeks later, they’re doing their act in Englewood.” Jeff pauses and spreads one of his deep-furrowed hands wide enough to waggle every finger on it. “*For five bucks.*”

Although Midnight prides itself on the quality of performers it attracts from around the country and abroad, a lot of local talent has also been involved in its shows over the years. Since *Chicagoween* took off, a host of important Chicago companies have popped up on the scene with Midnight alumnae at their helms. Probably the most illustrious is Aloft Circus Arts, headed by Shayna Swanson, who performed briefly with Midnight as an aerialist in the early 2000s. I met her at Aloft’s studio recently



© MATTHEW S. CHERWIN



Jenkins Family; Book Kennison © MARC HAUSER



during the last week of rehearsals for *Brave Space*, an all-female trapeze show that's now on a two-week tour (it will have a longer stretch of road dates in June and will play a series of free shows in Chicago later this summer).

"I built my first trapeze out of a wooden dowel rod and jump ropes from Home Depot and hung it in a tree," Swanson says. Since then, she's added more stringent safety stan-

dards, though her basic aesthetic remains punk. Aloft started out in a Humboldt Park garage with 15-foot ceilings before moving to the West Loop and then to its current digs in Logan Square, a church that has been retrofitted to serve as a gym, rehearsal space, and circus training school.

Old buildings are an important element in Chicago-style circus. Each of the spaces

that Aloft has called home dates from a time when buildings had higher ceilings than they do now, in order to let daylight into their interiors all day long. Midnight Circus's first storefront at Lake and Halsted was the same way. It may seem like a small thing, but you can only really do circus indoors if the ceiling is tall enough to fly or juggle under, the floors firm enough to support your average load-bearing unicycle. Swanson credits Chicago's architectural landscape with fostering the city's circus culture—fewer old-school structures get knocked down here than in New York or San Francisco (where the new circus movement began). I don't know how grateful she was for the resiliency of Chicago buildings when she and her crew had to power-wash stains from diesel fumes off the wall in Humboldt Park, but thinking about buildings the way she does lets you see the city the way she sees it, as a playground for circus adventures.

Aloft was always intended to double as a circus training school: since the company is for-profit, Swanson knew from the jump that she would have to teach classes to fund shows. The message on the chalkboard in the lobby at the Aloft Loft is admirably no-nonsense: "Aloft Circus Arts values: to be a Brave Space, to nurture badassery, to be purveyors of fine circus." Underneath, it reads, "Please make all checks payable to Aloft Dance." The school offers many programs for beginners and hobbyists, but at its core is a 40-hour-a-week apprenticeship program. Running away to join the circus, as everyone knows, continues to be a more viable career move than running away to join the English department. In six years of operation, she says, Swanson's intensive has graduated 90 percent of its students into careers in the circus.

The juggling teacher in Aloft's program right now is Book Kennison (he also performs at Midnight Circus). In what sounds like some old-fashioned circus yarn, Kennison ran off to join the Midnight Circus (albeit temporarily) when he was just 15. Jeff and Julie Jenkins first recognized his talents one summer at Circus Smirkus, a lauded youth training camp in Vermont they were helping run. A few months later, they spotted him in the audience at a *Chicagoween* show, which he'd taken the train from Saint Louis to see, and invited him up onstage. ("Do you have your juggling stuff?" Julie remembers asking. "Then slot in!") He's been a juggler his entire adult life. His father, Richard Kennison, is one of the premier juggling instructors in the United States. Book's a magnetic performer whose act combines contortion, juggling, and comedy in almost equal

measure. The morning I met him, though, he was feeling sore. Not only that, he seemed to be processing some new realizations about his craft.

Kennison is 29. His daily routine has shrunk from hours of obsessive solitary practice in front of the mirror to a 30-minute regimen. That's partly a concession to new aches and pains—he says that jugglers typically hit a wall around the age he is now—but it's something else too.

"I have a few goals, like just strictly juggling goals left," he says. "But I'm accepting that I'm not gonna be that much better than I am right now."

The best way he could explain how he was feeling was to refer me to a new act he created recently for Aloft's monthly showcase, *Sanctuary*. In it, Kennison does only two tricks. One of them fails on purpose. In a voice-over, he describes getting hurt backstage at a Midnight Circus show in Canada and how that forced him to radically simplify his act. The cause of the injury, it turns out, was an attempt to catch a ball with his butt. It's a hilarious act, but it speaks to what Kennison thinks is a common experience, and not just among circus performers.

"I think it's the same with any skill you have to work really hard to get," he says. "If you stick with it, and come out the other side as an artist, then you'll be like, 'Yeah, it doesn't matter.'"

It would be easy to interpret Kennison's tone as apathy. He was surprised to hear himself adopting it, he told me, because he used to get so sick of jaded professional jugglers saying similar things to him. But he isn't jaded yet. He may be ahead of the game for his age, but he's finding what he calls a "good way to get old." As an artist, not a technician, he believes in giving the intimate experience to audiences for as many more years as he can, even if it means doing less. He's finding that he can look back with pride on a brilliant first phase of a career in this city, making people happy by doing what he loves.

"People like me," he says, "we moved to Chicago for a little bit of time, or for maybe forever, because Midnight Circus existed, because they had that steady work, even if it was just seasonally. Steady work, steady friendships. All kinds of people who are east coast people, from beautiful Vermont towns, who would have never moved to the midwest, came to Chicago to be a part of that.

"Which I think is really cool," he says. "I think that's really cool." 📍

🐦 @mallerjour



Left: Blair Thomas

SAVERIO TRUGLIA

Right: *The Steadfast Tin Soldier*

LIZ LAUREN



Uncle Vanya, as an example, was unlike anything anyone had ever seen or even considered doing [here.]”

Although it’s been decades, images from the play remain fresh in his mind: Yelena defiantly staring down a room full of men while wearing a hat full of perfume that streams down her face; a family singing a requiem from a Verdi opera while posing for a portrait; servants hunched over in a surreal ballet, carrying around heated kettle ball-like weights to be placed under wealthy womens’ dresses, an image that silently reinforced the oppressive Russian cold from which they needed to be protected. “These techniques of using nonverbal performance, of using stuff that’s based in the object world to tell the story—to tell the nuance of relationships—to me was astounding,” he says. “I’ll never forget that production.”

To this day, Thomas can still pinpoint the exact moment during those ITFC years that inspired him to pursue puppetry as a serious art form. In 1988, Els Comediants, the Barcelona-based circus collective, conducted a workshop at the Park West. Els Comediants, says Thomas, exhibited a pageantry in its performances that was unusual in Chicago at the time.

“The members of the company who were leading [the workshop] said, ‘OK, here’s our story,’ like a paragraph long. ‘And we’re going to take this story, and we’re going to build the puppets and the set pieces and the things for the story, and we’re going to rehearse it, and then before this workshop is done, we’re going to go out onto the street and perform it.’ And I was just like . . . ‘What are you talking about? I don’t even know who you are.’”

Over the course of three hours, using basic building materials provided by the com- ➔

Renaissance man

Blair Thomas wants to make Chicago the center of a new world of puppetry.

By DAN JAKES

If anybody knows puppets—like *really* knows puppets—it’s Blair Thomas, founder and artistic director of the Chicago International Puppet Theater Festival and codirector of the Chicago Puppet Studio. And yet, if you ask him about the artists who are most attracted to the form, his answer is entertainingly vague.

“They’re . . . weirdos,” he says with a laugh, “but I don’t know in particular what kind of way. Most all of them are some kind of musician, some kind of writer. They sing. They can dance. It may not be any good, but they can do it.”

Long before becoming one of the world’s go-to weirdos for top-tier puppetry, the tall, grey-bearded, Alabama-born artist was a recent graduate of Oberlin College who had moved to Chicago in 1986 to begin his career as a directing intern under Robert Falls at the Wisdom Bridge Theatre. At that time, the city had a thriving and dynamic theater scene, but to Thomas, most all of it fell within the direct,

text-based actors’ theater epitomized by companies like Steppenwolf.

“The undergraduate school is this machine that just angles everything toward interpreting the playwright,” says Thomas. Although he’d studied English literature in college, he was oppositely drawn early in his career to visual and nonverbal storytelling and alternative playwrights whose work wasn’t based in naturalist drama, such as the Cuban-American avant gardist María Irene Fornés.

“Chicago could boast over 150 companies in town,” Thomas continues, “but the aesthetic was of a very narrow palette.” So what changed? For him—and also for much of the city’s theater community, he believes—it started with a festival.

The International Theatre Festival of Chicago, which ran from 1986 to 1996, brought in companies “that completely shocked the community in town in terms of what was happening onstage,” says Thomas. “The State Theatre of Lithuania, with their production of

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Photo: Cerqua Rivera Dance Theatre dancers in *Between Us*, courtesy of the company.

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pany and literal trash out of cans in the alley, Thomas and his peers whipped together a castle set and dragon puppets for a medieval fantasy story, complete with improvised percussion instruments. “It put me on fire,” Thomas remembers now. “I was so excited about that. It took one day for me to have that influence. One exposure.”

The revelation that there were radically different ways to tell stories broadly influenced Thomas’s aesthetic and his various professional projects. In 1990, he and choreographer Lauri Macklin founded Redmoon Theater, which became known for staging elaborate productions outdoors and in other nontraditional spaces that combined storytelling, live music, puppetry, acrobatics, and a great deal of pageantry. After his departure from Redmoon in 1998, Thomas created a series of solo stage works, which he took on tour to venues such as the Museum of Contemporary Art and universities around the country, then began working on ensemble pieces including an adaptation of *Moby Dick* and a staging of Arnold Schoenberg’s *Pierrot Lunaire*.

Today, Thomas is on a mission to inspire and catalyze another renaissance (a word he

uses constantly) in puppetry, showing off new styles and applications at the massive biannual Chicago International Puppet Theater Festival, which began in 2015 and wrapped up its third edition this past January. In response to an increase in requests from theater companies to provide consulting and puppet design and fabrication for their new works, Thomas, who also teaches at the School of the Art Institute, co-founded the Chicago Puppet Studio in 2017 with acclaimed puppeteer and director Tom Lee, whose resume includes the original Broadway production of *War Horse* and the Metropolitan Opera’s *Madama Butterfly*. “I was like, ‘I can’t do that on my own,’” says Thomas. “If [Tom] was not around, I would not have started that.”

Last winter’s spectacular *The Steadfast Tin Soldier* at Lookingglass, created and directed by Mary Zimmerman, was the studio’s inaugural project. Based on Hans Christian Andersen’s Christmas short story, the nearly wordless pantomime featured a parade of breathtaking puppet designs, including a toddler who takes various forms throughout the play: a massive, cloud-like head and hands and an uncanny, life-size clackity wooden boy in the style of Japanese bunraku puppetry.



Tom Lee, center, explains the workings of Pinocchio to Chris Mathews and Carley Cornelius
COURTESY OF THE HOUSE THEATRE OF CHICAGO

“[Thomas] is a beautiful artist,” says Zimmerman, “and the expression of the [wooden boy]—which feels designed but undesigned at the same time—you could project on it, and yet it does seem to have character. That’s the genius of someone who spends their life in that.” Even when they’re not being operated, the studio’s creations exude personality. “When you’re leaving at night and [the bunraku boy] is sitting backstage, you feel so sorry for it. It’s a very uncanny effect.”

When collaborating with companies, factoring in the learning curve for each puppet is an essential component to Thomas and the studio’s design process, something he learned during Redmoon’s annual winter pageants. These featured elaborate puppets, including a caterpillar that transformed into a butterfly and required 14 trained performers to operate. But the events also had a high level of audience interaction, which necessitated that puppets with “foolproof” operational designs, like a simple trigger, be handed off to untrained spectators. (Even professional actors sometimes need foolproof designs. One of Thomas’s favorites is the single-hand operated tail- and head-wagging poodle manipulated by Patti LuPone in the Chicago production of *War Paint* at the Goodman Theatre in 2016. The puppet was a compromise between LuPone’s desire for a live dog and the producers’ for a stuffed animal.)

But even for seasoned performers, the act of transmitting one’s presence through an inanimate object can be difficult. “The last thing an actor is trained to do is to be uninteresting,” notes Zimmerman. Lee and Thomas’s reputation for working with a range of actor experience levels, as well as for creating beau-

tiful and innovatively designed puppets, were what encouraged House Theatre company member Chris Mathews to cold-call Thomas for insight after he received the assignment to direct the theater’s upcoming production of *Pinocchio*—a play Mathews suspects is the *Hamlet* of the puppet world. “I don’t want to put anyone else down,” says Mathews, “but if you’re doing something associated with puppetry in Chicago, you have to think about Blair. He’s an institution.”

Thomas has assisted Mathews and his team with solving various challenges, like how to stage the surprising shark attack (something along the lines of a hidden floor “bear trap,” thinks Thomas), and making sure actor Sean Garratt is able to operate the slightly smaller-than-life-size boy puppet without overexerting himself.

The next big challenge for the newly formed studio, says Thomas, is figuring out how to maintain a sense of continuity and presence between International Puppet Theater fests. The details are in flux now, but he’s considering a monthly showcase in his and Lee’s new Fine Arts Building space, which acts as a local home for the festival office and as a satellite workshop of Thomas’s larger workshop in a barn in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin.

As for Chicago evolving into a major center for innovation in puppetry, Thomas is optimistic: all of the vital components are here, ready to be assembled. “Within the strata of the culture in Chicago, we have the support system,” says Thomas. “This is the renaissance that we’re in.”

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From left: Ruth Page in *Variations on Euclid*, ca. early 1930s; Katherine Dunham in *L'Ag'Ya*, date unknown.

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Dance as reclamation

What did an extravagant 1930s ballet—imagined by and starring a white woman, who choreographed the piece for her city's most talented black dancers—say about interracial mixing and cultural appropriation in modernist Chicago?

By LIESL OLSON

On a steamy summer evening in 1933, a group of young black dancers readied themselves into position behind the plush curtains of Chicago's Auditorium Theatre. They were the last act on a program of music and dance, a lineup that had been full of Chopin and orchestral favorites. Theirs was a new ballet, *La Guiablesse*, the story of a “she-devil” from the island of Martinique who lures a young lover away from his beloved, pushes him over a cliff, and disappears in a puff of smoke. Beyond the curtains sat an audience, including many elite Chicagoans, who would have been familiar with the venerable theater but hardly with what they were about to see.

If there was something provocative in this folktale of sex and death, it was not just the story. Based on a nineteenth-century travel sketch by wayfaring writer Lafcadio Hearn, *La Guiablesse* played upon ancient ideas about the dangers of female sexuality—women

wielding tricks and disguises, from Dido and Circe to Jezebel and Lorelei. The ballet adapted this seduction plot, but the production was as much about style, which repurposed many different forms. (*La Guiablesse* itself was a dialectal variation of *diabliesse*, a demon of Caribbean folklore.) With the first notes of the piano, the curtains parted, and the audience beheld a set that was minimal to the point of abstraction, mostly tall fishing poles and an elevated hill upstage. The set was created by Russian émigré Nicholas Remisoff, the designer for a short-lived group called Chicago Allied Arts, which loosely modeled itself on Serge Diaghilev's *Ballet Russes*, and which included Adolph Bolm, another Russian who had danced with Diaghilev. The music of *La Guiablesse*, too, was wildly new. Short, colorful sections tripped and changed, playing with jazzy riffs and shifting tempos. Composed by the Harlem virtuoso William Grant Still, the score declared variety its bold ambition.

But the most radical vision was the dancers themselves. When they turned onto the stage—scantily clad, holding long poles—the audience could see that the only white dancer was Chicago choreographer Ruth Page, age 34, playing the lead role, and at the height of her career as a dancer. Page had worked with Bolm intermittently to choreograph *La Guiablesse* since the mid-1920s, developing the ballet as she travelled the world, including through Japan, China, and Southeast Asia. She had performed as a teenager with Anna Pavlova in South America, later trained with Diaghilev in Monte Carlo, and then studied with Mary Wigman in Dresden and Berlin. Page would travel extensively throughout her career, trying out techniques from around the globe—from Balinese legong to Brazilian capoeira—but her commitment was to Chicago, a city where she aimed one day to create her own ballet company.

Page is an extraordinary if under-recognized figure in the cultural history of Chi-

cago, perhaps best remembered for her annual *Nutcracker*, staged since 1965. (Page received in 1978 one of many angry letters protesting “a negro boy as a companion to the little white girl.” She responded: “The *Nutcracker*, as you know, is a fairy tale, and the color of anyone's skin does not matter at all.”) *La Guiablesse* was part of Page's much more avant-garde period, a decade that is documented in artful and exquisite professional photographs. In the 1930s she danced with long elastic bands and sticks in a piece called *Variations on Euclid*; she writhed barefoot on the floor in *Tropic*; she wrapped her face and limbs in tape in a *pas de deux* with German partner Harald Kreutzberg; she wore a blue jersey “sack” designed by Isamu Noguchi for *Expanding Universe*. Page later looked back on these productions and called them, amusingly, her “sack, mask, and stick period.”

It was also her black period. Page's attraction to the forms and styles of African and African-American dance might have been influenced by what she knew about her city. During the 1930s and 1940s, the most avant-garde art—the aesthetic experiments better known as modernism—did not come from Page's north-side neighborhood. Rather, the creative ferment of the city could be found in Bronzeville, that thin corridor seven miles long and one and a half miles wide, where the city's black population crammed into kitchenettes under the force of the city's →

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Ruth Page and Harald Kreutzberg, ca. 1934.
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racist, restrictive housing covenants. Despite entrenched lines of segregation, inhabitants of Bronzeville were emboldened by their community's quest for economic and cultural self-determination, expressed in exciting ways across the arts, from jazz and blues to film and dance.

Page recruited her dancers for *La Guiablesse* from Bronzeville, where she also held all of her rehearsals. Among the roughly 50 dancers who would perform in *La Guiablesse*, astonishingly, were both Katherine Dunham (who played the betrayed beloved) and—in a later remount—Talley Beatty. Both would become pathbreaking artists of mid-century America, touring internationally with their own black dance troupes, and challenging the assumption that ballet was a “high art” achieved only by white dancers. Also in the cast of young villagers was the 19-year-old artist Charles Sebree, whose paintings would soon hang in Chicago galleries that also featured work by European modernists like Léger, Matisse, Modigliani, and Picasso.

What did this extravagant ballet—imagined by and starring a white woman, who choreographed the piece for her city's most talented dancers—proclaim about interracial mixing in modernist Chicago? About cultural appropriation? And what might it tell us today?

Like many groundbreaking moments in the history of performance, the details are tantalizing but it is hard to know what *La Guiablesse* was really like. Dance is notoriously difficult to archive. There is no footage of this particular production and no photographs have been located. Thanks to the archival sleuthing of scholar Joellen Meglin—and to Page's choreography notebook now held at the Newberry Library (where I work)—at least there is some account of the ballet's pastiche of movement.



Ruth Page in *Expanding Universe*, ca. 1934. © COURTESY NEWBERRY LIBRARY

It begins with children playing tug-of-war, dancing a flat-footed “shuffle” with elements of the Charleston, a popular dance with fast-kicking steps. Then two young lovers (one of them Dunham) dance a duet, including a “slow negro walk,” which Page describes in her notebook as a “cakewalk,” which is a paired dance that can be traced back to slave plantations. Historically the cakewalk has been danced, with subversive power, to mock slave owners. It also became a staple of minstrel shows. We can only speculate how Dunham might have danced it.

On an overhanging ledge of the hill, *La Guiablesse* (Page) watches in a white robe with sleeves like “veils” or “wings.” She winds her way down the hill, swinging her veils as she runs across the stage, casts off her robe, and kisses the young lover on the forehead. They move together in a “jazz dance,” a seduction of stamps and lunges. He shakes loose from the villagers to follow her into the mountains, losing his way. At the moment when *La Guiablesse* reveals her true, horrid self—an ugly hag, wrapping the lover in the veils of her strangling embrace—a haunting offstage voice merges with the music's wordless melody.

The voice, in 1933, was that of Mabelle Roberta Walker, a contralto from Evanston whose local performances were mentioned a few times in the *Chicago Defender*, the most important African-American newspaper in the country. The *Defender* noted Walker's “achievement” in *La Guiablesse* but little else. As Walker sang, the lover fell to his death and *La Guiablesse* disappeared (through a trapdoor) into the supernatural smoke.

In just 18 minutes, the ballet was over.

With black newspaper critics as spectators, and possibly members of the dancers' own Bronzeville community, the mixed-race audience would have allowed for “cross-viewing,” in the words of Northwestern University dance scholar Susan Manning—the ability to see how audience members across the racial divide responded to the performance. This phenomenon was much more frequent after World War II when theaters desegregated: cross-viewing as a possibility for *La Guiablesse* makes the ballet even more intriguing. Yet accounts of the ballet by both the white and black press—the *Tribune*, the *Times*, and the *Defender*—are positive if conspicuously vague about the performance. And there is scant record of



HIGH POINT IN BALLET. — Katherine Dunham, Jordis McGee and Ruth Page in a scene from “La Guiablesse.”



A newspaper clipping shows Katherine Dunham in the title role of *La Guiablesse*, likely in 1934. © COURTESY NEWBERRY LIBRARY

La Guiablesse and its reception, even though there is a substantial record of Ruth Page dancing other ballets during the 1930s.

Perhaps *La Guiablesse* was too black, too daring, and too much of a challenge to the standards of classical ballet, which still clung to its origins as an elite, hierarchical, and strictly European art form. Not a single reviewer comments on the erotic physical contact between a white woman and a black man, during an era when interracial marriage was not just scandalous but also illegal. Lynchings across America were frequent—a violent expression of white supremacy, to which there was no bigger threat than a black man with a white woman.

La Guiablesse may have inverted racial fear by embodying the sexual power of the shape-shifter in Page herself. It is unclear whether Page imagined that she was an exotic figure of the Caribbean, or if the production played upon her whiteness to stage her as an interloper to the Caribbean scene. It may have been a little bit of both. William Grant Still neatly typed the ballet's scene above the

musical score, including a note describing *La Guiablesse* casting off her robe to reveal a “bronzed body.” And yet the program note to the ballet, written by the Chicago dancer, poet, and painter Mark Turbyfill, describes how *La Guiablesse* “with her white deceit, comes to separate and destroy dark-skinned lovers.” Was she black or was she white? Color difference was central to this performance, if also ambiguous. Here was a world of magic, it seems, a stage that gave imaginative license to express possibility beyond the strict categories of racial segregation everywhere else in the city of Chicago.

Though the ballet was part of the city's second World's Fair, dubbed “The Century of Progress,” very little “progress” had been made in the realm of race relations. Since the 1919 race riots—the most violent week in Chicago history—civic leaders buckled down on segregation in response to a steady stream of black migrants arriving from the south, and many whites staunchly guarded their zones of work and leisure. Black artists, business people, and entrepreneurs flourished on the ➔



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south side, but few were represented at the fair's sleek art deco pavilions. Fair organizers used colorful neon to light up the tall buildings of their "rainbow city," and showcased "model homes" made of Masonite and modern appliances. But the fair was as culturally white as Daniel Burnham's 1893 "white city," and the model homes were a perverse counterpoint to the squalid housing conditions in Bronzeville.

What's more, the massive Auditorium Theatre—designed by Louis Sullivan and Dankmar Adler and completed in 1889—was built to be the world's grandest institution of high culture, which to most Chicagoans at the time implied white culture. Equipped with electricity and central air conditioning (via 15 tons of ice delivered daily), the Auditorium had hosted historical pageants and presented thunderous presidential announcements from Benjamin Harrison to Theodore Roosevelt. Yet here were 35 black dancers moving through their "evolutions" with "ease and grace" on the city's most venerable stage, wrote the *Tribune* in its scant review. When Page took the stage for her experimental performance, she was aiming for the Auditorium's civic seal. But she knew that her ballet—the music, the set, and the nearly all-black cast—would be a dramatic risk. Perhaps she chose to express in dance how lines of segregation could be surpassed, creatively, through vigilance, attention, and exertion. Through the creative labor of dance, you could witness the emancipatory potential of art.

What we do know, for certain, is that Ruth Page never danced *La Guiblesses* again. But Katherine Dunham did, before she would go on to pioneer dance anthropology and become the "matriarch of black dance." Page had been asked to remount the ballet at the Chicago Civic Opera the following year for the opera's very first dance-only program. But Page said that she was too involved in the choreography for a new piece of "Americana" called *Hear Ye! Hear Ye!* with a musical score by Aaron Copland. So she made the meaningful decision to give the lead role to Dunham, who "remembered every single detail," Page writes in her memoir, "every step." Most importantly, Dunham became the rehearsal director for *La Guiblesses*, overseeing the whole cast, including, this time around, Talley Beatty. Chicago audiences may have seen blacks on stage at cabarets and dance halls, but rarely at the Auditorium, and almost never at the opera. (A black tenor had performed once in 1932, but not, to date, a full cast.)

On November 30, 1934, a Friday evening, Dunham danced the lead to a rapturous audience at the opera house. She gave "an



Katherine Dunham in *L'Afrique*, ca. 1949.

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astonishing performance," according to the *Tribune*. A few days later she danced the lead again before the opera's performance of *Salomé*. Sitting in box seats, no less, were Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas, on one of their visits to Chicago during Stein's American lecture tour.

Herein lies the complicated transmission of *La Guiblesses* as an aesthetic form: a folktale written down by a travelling writer (Hearn), which inspired a Russian immigrant dancer (Bolm), who shared it with a white midwestern choreographer (Page), who then gifted her ballet to a black dancer (Dunham), who would become intimately connected to the culture of the Caribbean that originally inspired the story and ballet.

At this point in her life, Dunham was still studying anthropology at the University of Chicago, where she distinguished herself as a brilliant young scholar and writer. She won fellowships from the Guggenheim and Rosenwald Foundations the following year (1935-36) to pursue anthropological fieldwork in the Caribbean. She traveled through Jamaica, Martinique, Trinidad, and Haiti, where she underwent the first level of initiation into voodoo. Her fieldwork was embodied, participatory, and immersive. She would eventually give up a scholarly career in order to pursue a life in dance, becoming famous for her innovative and immensely popular choreography that fused balletic with vernacular and folk traditions. Through a rigorous practice and daunting performance schedule—she spent decades of her life traveling with her dance company—Dunham gave audiences around the globe an experience of the dances of African diaspora.

A small, torn newspaper clipping (from the papers of Chicago dance critic Ann Barzel) shows Katherine Dunham in the title role of *La Guiablesse*, likely in 1934. Dunham wears anklets of fur and feathers like the Greek god Hermes, a boundary-crosser. She raises her winglike veils over a cowering young lover. The physical exertion of dance is often eclipsed by its sheer beauty, but this photograph reveals Dunham's hardworking body: the angle of her elbows, the inward turn of her hands, the musculature of her torso. The male dancer playing her lover is identified as Jordis McGee, which is a misspelling of Jordis McCoo, the man who was briefly Dunham's first husband.

Onward Dunham flew. Did Ruth Page's *La Guiablesse* influence Dunham's fusion of Caribbean forms that she would make her own? When Dunham returned from the Caribbean, she worked as director of Chicago's "Negro Unit" of the Federal Theatre Project, where she met the highly inventive John Pratt, a white costume and set designer who eventually became her longtime collaborator and husband. In January 1938, Dunham premiered a ballet that was set in a fishing village in Martinique called *L'Ag'Ya*, a fantastical blend of martial arts and Afro-Caribbean movement, danced to the music of drums and sticks. Like *La Guiablesse*, Dunham's new ballet staged a love triangle through sexualized movements and courtship rituals, including a dramatic disrobing infused with magic. Dunham would eventually formalize many of the movements in *L'Ag'Ya* as she codified the "Dunham Technique," a method and practice that helped to take "our dance"—a reference to dancing by black people—"out of the burlesque."


L'Ag'Ya became a staple of Dunham's repertoire for the next decade as she built her touring company, established a school in New York, and soared to international fame. Page may have felt, in seeing Dunham's success, that *La Guiablesse* had really "belonged" to Dunham, or she may have realized, by mid-century, that there was little point in her dancing the ballet, when Dunham and other black dancers like Pearl Primus could better express African and African-American traditions.

It may be tempting to see Dunham as the rightful heir to the ballet, as she certainly understood the culture from which it was derived. But must artists have an embodied connection to their practice? Today, the ethics of artistic appropriation have become more complicated than ever, as we negotiate how and when it is "OK" to imagine stories, languages, and movements that are not our own.

Dunham's legacy has been dramatically defined by questions of cultural appropri-

ation, and offers us one way of thinking about its risks. Dunham was often criticized for the highly sexualized nature of her dances, for toying with stereotypes of nonwhite people in ways that would appeal to a wide audience, and for not offering "positive" representations of the race. Critics then and now play on Dunham's primitivism, her idealization of non-Western people as simple, unsophisticated, ruled by passion rather than intellect. But as her recent biographer Joanna Dee Das acknowledges, the trope of the primitive also liberated Dunham to create groundbreaking modernist forms, like it did so many other artists of the twentieth century. What's more, Dunham believed that her dances revealed how African-Americans retained complex African cultural practices, and challenged the idea that the primitive was inferior to Eurocentric dance. If she hadn't introduced the larger world to the movements and styles of Caribbean dance—at a moment when those dances were threatened by the homogenizing forces of postwar globalization—then what might have been lost?

Page and Dunham engaged in complex if murky practices of appropriation and wild invention. Supreme modernists, both of them. But they were also performing acts of recovery. During a period when choreographers were often men—and when a ballerina gave her body to the authority of the male choreographer—both Page and Dunham challenged stereotypes that equated the feminine with the body and reduced women to their biology.


The recent scandals at the New York City Ballet, where powerful male dancers and former ballet master Peter Martins have been accused of violence and sexual harassment against young women, reminds us what it meant for Page and Dunham to be avant-garde, to be *ahead* of their times. They controlled and cultivated their bodies, a physical primacy that they put at the center of the stage. Both Page and Dunham challenged the concept of dance as "naturalized expression": their art was never simply innate but the product of sweat, thought, and refinement. It was technique. A woman in 1933 at the center of a Chicago stage, dancing movements that she herself had choreographed, Page exuberantly resisted a world that largely restricted her body, and her labor. For a black woman whose body only two generations earlier could have been sold on the auction block of slavery, Dunham's dancing was not only resistance, but also an act of reclamation. 

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Alessia Rogers and Christian Clark. Photo by Kim Kenney, courtesy of Atlanta Ballet.



Links Hall founders Bob Eisen, Carol Bobrow, and Charlie Vernon ca. 1980 © CHARLES OSGOOD

A room of their own

Links Hall celebrates 40 years of being whatever the Chicago dance community needs it to be.

By IRENE HSIAO

Links Hall was originally Link's Hall, named for John J. Link, the dentist who built it in 1914 and emblazoned his name in the plaster above the front door. Links Hall was an empty room above a hamburger joint next to a women's health organization and a Japanese culture center in a seedy neighborhood where the Red Line rattled by every few minutes. Links Hall was a rehearsal space with shows at night: poetry readings, experimental music, performance art, dance. Links Hall is where moving bodies meet for the contact improv jam. "There are a hundred Links Halls, and people have the one they go to," says associate director Anna Trier.

In 1978, long before a line of glitzy bars frequented by tourists and sports fans erupted at the intersection of Sheffield, Newport, and Clark, choreographers Bob Eisen, Carol Bobrow, and Charlie Vernon founded Links Hall. "I don't know how we signed a lease, because

we didn't have any income," says Vernon, then a dance critic at the *Reader*. The three founders, who met through the now-defunct performance collective MoMing, simply wanted a room of their own to rehearse. The economics were simple: rent a place for a couple hundred bucks a month, recover costs by renting by the hour to others who also needed space to work. And such a system was ideal for its tenants. "Small spaces and small audiences mean no economy," says Vernon. "It's OK, I don't mind. To me, dancing was just a wonderful purpose."

Without a specific mission in mind, the empty white room "filled the needs of the community right away," says Bobrow, formerly a dancer with Mordine and Company (which celebrates its 50th anniversary at Links this May). Dancers flocked to the inexpensive studio. Contact improvisation, the spontaneous dance created by experiencing the body in relation to the weight and motion of other

participants' bodies, brought in "people who didn't consider themselves dancers," remembers Vernon. Eisen, formerly a performer with Body Politic Theater, was the only staff member, answering the phone, scheduling, managing rehearsals, and sweeping up afterwards. "I didn't have another job, I didn't have another life," he says. ("Links Hall wouldn't be here without Bob," interjects Bobrow.)

In addition to serving as a rehearsal space, Links Hall rapidly also became a performance venue. Exploratory musician Michael Zerang, an accompanist at MoMing who frequently rehearsed at Links, was the first to curate a

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performance series there and became de facto artistic director from 1985 to 1988. "Friday and Saturday nights were sitting empty," he recalls. "Bob said, 'Do what you want.' I said, 'I do music,' and he said, 'Fine.'"

With the music community in mind, as well as several friends who were poets ("No one was listening, and no one was paying them—it was this burgeoning scene before poetry

slams started"), he decided to institute poetry readings on Thursday nights and experimental music concerts Fridays and Saturdays. "I got grants, ran the whole show, set up chairs, swept the floor, and partied with the bands after," he recalls. Among the early performers were several who are now well-known, including Amy and David Sedaris and Tony Fitzpatrick. After three years curating and 24 years on the board, Zerang officially stepped down in 2014, though he continues to produce and perform an annual winter solstice concert—for the 29th time this coming December.


From 1989 to 2009, Links continued to grow and evolve under the direction of Jim de Jong, Kay Wendt LaSota, Bill Dietz, Asimina Chremos, and CJ Mitchell. Roell Schmidt took the helm in 2009, and Vernon enthuses, "What she has done with Links is indescribably wonderful"—a "radical transformation" that has included international exchanges with Japan and Haiti and a long-anticipated move to its current location in the former Viaduct Theater in Roscoe Village in 2013 after rents skyrocketed in Wrigleyville. Now Links Hall is the only tenant of the music venue Constellation, which Schmidt describes as a creative partner rather than a landlord.

To celebrate its fortieth anniversary, Links Hall has offered a unique gift to the city of Chicago in the form of its Pay-the-40th-Forward Season. Beginning last August and continuing through June, the space has been donated to artists to perform rent-free, an idea that seems to belong to a utopia most of America has not yet envisioned. Supported by increased fundraising from large granting institutions, individual donors, and \$4 raffles at every show, the risky experiment has produced powerful results.

"We've been trying for ten years for Links to reflect the city of Chicago better," says Schmidt. "This is the first season where the entire season has featured majority artists of color. And that feels right in a city with a majority of people of color." Adds Trier, "We've learned how much Links can expand its community when we can create points of access that don't have financial barriers for artists."

Nurturing the growth of the artistic community is a holistic process at Links. Artists developing work receive not only space and a high percentage of box office returns but mentorship from the Links staff, and other, less tangible forms of support. "The artists and the art have sustained Links, and Links supports



From left: Roell Schmidt, Felicia Holman, Brett Swinney, and Anna Trier  @IRENEHSIAO


not only the product but the process,” says Felicia Holman, director of Linkage partnerships, Links Hall’s in-kind partnerships with other organizations. “Each of [the directors] is a practicing artist, so we have the empathy that helps us to identify folks who need encouragement or a come-to-Jesus moment.” (Holman herself is cofounder of the Afro-diasporic feminist collaborative Honey Pot Performance.) More formally, efforts at Links have included a task force to increase the quality and quantity of critical discourse by and about artists of color, as well as a partnership with Rough House Theater to establish a puppeteers-of-color incubator, providing workshops and performance opportunities with the Chicago International Puppet Theater Festival.

In addition to creating opportunities for more artists to make new work, Links focuses on helping artists to create a supportive and sustaining community. “All the artists are asked to make a community investment instead of a [monetary] one,” says Schmidt. “Artists are house managing for other artists, people are providing raffle prizes, people are writing responses to each other’s work at the Performance Response Journal”—a website for artist-to-artist responses founded by past Links performers Joanna Furnans and Hope Goldman that has partnered with Links for the season. Artists are baking cakes for the Cake Lounge following the LinkSircus showcase on March 30, where the public is invited to celebrate Links’ 40th anniversary with sweets.

Perhaps most thrillingly, Links has found that artists who experience generosity reciprocate in ways that demonstrate the potent

combination of imagination and intention. Such examples include the recent *The Amtrak-lor*, in which performer Nora Sharp produced a *Bachelor*-esque competition for an Amtrak companion ticket as a fundraiser for Links. The Vertical Sideshow, which staged a drag burlesque *Giselle* at Links in February, is plotting a cabaret matinee “for kids with progressive adults” to support the reboot of *Poonie’s Cabaret*, a queer experimental variety show that lost its funding and direction in 2016.

“Everybody has some kind of resource, and we all need to pool all our resources,” says Schmidt. “This season has really shown the impact of generosity and how subversive it is,” says production director Brett Swinney. “We have this perception that generosity is a limited resource, but in reality it’s a fire; it needs tending and a spark. We give to artists, and the artists give back, and it strengthens the ecosystem. Generosity is the currency we’re really exchanging.”

An artist-founded, artist-run, artist-supporting organization, Links Hall is an empty room that has flourished into a community of diverse interests, abilities, and possibilities. Reflecting on the past 40 years, Eisen says simply, “That it’s continued is enough. Links is a community center where people can work.” And work together. “It’s really lonely to make art, even in a collaborative art form,” says Schmidt. “There’s so much doubt and fear. If we’re all relying on artists to keep imagining a world different from the one we’re in, we have to be arm in arm.” 

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Olivia Lilley
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Notes from underground

Olivia Lilley leads Prop Thtr's gang of misfits, weirdos, and visionaries into the spotlight

By KT HAWBAKER

It all began in 2015, when Olivia Lilley made a deal with the devil.

At the time, she was new to the Chicago theater scene and out to produce a living-room tour of *Faust* with her experimental company The Runaways. That was when Prop Thtr cofounder Stefan Brün got in touch.

"I was crowdsourcing apartments on Facebook when Stefan found me," recalls Lilley. "He was like, 'You're doing *Faust*? Let's get coffee. I want to talk.' We went to this little restaurant in the Gold Coast called 3rd Coast, a very old-school diner within a bourgie neighborhood, and we had a three-hour conversation."

Brün believed she would fail. But "failure" is a murky term in the ever-defiant and cash-strapped world of experimental theater. Brün wasn't talking Lilley out of the production; she sensed that he was throwing down a gauntlet.

So she persisted.

"I said, 'Oh, yeah? Watch me. Does the Prop have any spaces?'"

Doubling down on his dare, Brün let her use the apartment above his theater for the final tour stop.

"I was a bit nervous because I had to im-

press this guy," she says. "But he left that night and was like, 'All right, bitch can play.'"

Or, as Brün puts it, "Boy, I was wrong."

In fact, Lilley could play the avant-garde game so well that three years later Brün offered her the position of artistic director at Prop. She and I met there one night to talk shop.

The theater's lobby is every bit the "La Vie Bohème" fantasy that most drama kids envision after they watch *Rent* for the first time: mismatched furniture, piles of costumes, worn posters, moody lighting, chalkboards covered in a variety of handwriting, irreverent relics from shows past, and a constant draft so that we had to wear our winter coats to keep warm.

Lilley's calm and articulate demeanor feels like a foil to the mayhem, but the building's funhouse vibe speaks to Prop's history. After producing student theater at Columbia College, Brün and Scott Vehill introduced Prop in 1981, in a former strip club on Lincoln Avenue in North Center, right next to the old Clearwater Saloon. The duo set out to create the home of Chicago experimental theater. Together, they began producing work driven

by the current cultural climate instead of adhering to a rigid institutional mission; it was about nourishing new voices and getting weird and reacting to the now. Nobody was out to sell their souls.

"Stefan and Scott would go back and forth between acting and directing," says Lilley. For Prop's first official show, Brün adapted and directed Bertolt Brecht's *Mr. Puntila and His Man Matti*; Vehill starred.

Vehill and Brün eventually found Prop a new home in Lakeview, and began renting out the hallways to the people they made shows with. It was a neo-beatnik utopia, Shakespeare with liberty spikes.

"Five or six years into it, the lady punks began doing their stuff in the space," Lilley continues. "I wish I was there to see it, but it sounded very sexual and incisive and ritualistic."

In 1994, however, Prop put on an adaptation by Paul Peditto of Nelson Algren's *Never Come Morning*, directed by Jennifer Markowitz, which wound up taking home nine non-Equity Jeff Awards, including Best Production. According to a Jeff rep, it's still the record to beat.

The "grown-up phase," as Lilley calls it, continued. At the end of the decade, Prop helped found the National New Play Network, an alliance of more than 100 theaters across the country (including six others in Chicago) that support and collaborate on new dramatic projects.

In 2005 Prop moved to the two adjoining storefronts on Elston in Avondale where it has lived ever since.

Lilley seems to be a perfect fit for Prop's highly stylized yet unruly ethos. She originally set out to be a music composer as a teen. She wrote a feminist version of *The Phantom of the Opera* when she was 13 and attended the Interlochen Arts Academy in Michigan. She fit in with "the baby queers" who were into futurism, while her male music classmates called her "three-chord Broadway." In college at Carnegie Mellon, Lilley studied music composition but did everything she could to avoid writing music. After three months, she transferred to the directing program. She spent her time off from school interning at theaters in New York, including the late Incubator Arts Project, which housed playwright Richard Foreman's Ontological-Hysteric Theater.

"It was a company that did a lot of artist-led works, so seasons at Incubator usually revolved around lead artists' crazy projects," she explains. "It wasn't like, 'This is the play, this is the cast, this is what we're doing.' Those people were in conjunction with [experi-

mental playwright] Young Jean Lee and her teachers—folks like Jeffrey Jones, and Mac Wellman, who's sort of the godfather of downtown theater."

In the tempest of these dramatic forces, Lilley began to hone her own approach to theater and after graduation took off for Chicago.

"I didn't feel like I found my people in New York City, and I also thought I would be the worst assistant," she says. "I also really wanted the opportunity to actually direct and create shows from start to finish. NYC was way too expensive. When I opened my first show in Chicago, it sold out, and I didn't know anybody

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who was there. That kind of thing would never happen in NYC. I remember thinking, 'Chicagoans just like going to theater. Wow.'"

She also decided not to play "the game" when she arrived.

"You know, you assistant direct for someone and then they recommend you to someone else, and then they recommend you to someone else," Lilley says. "I was too much of a fucking punk. I wanted to figure it out on my own."

Lilley is the type of artist who will rent out an entire house in Pilsen so she can produce a show about a year in her life.

"I called it *The Party House*," she remembers. "The characters were all based on real people, and I had auditions, where I did extensive improv with the actors. Then, I wrote the script based on the cast. When we were actually working on it, I gave them enough space to improvise. It was really interesting figuring out what needed to be scripted and where they could bend the rules and play. It's like a band mentality. It's like we're making a song, but who knows what's coming from where?"

"I wanted to create something that made us think critically about the seemingly 'normal' behavior around us, while also making the everyday fantastical and thrilling to watch," she continues. "I made the kind of theater that they would never allow in a black box."

It's a self-assuredness she developed in her academic life, where her professors were always encouraging her and her fellow directing students to "reinvent American theater."

It didn't take long for her to attract attention in Chicago. After her successful punk rendition of *Faust*, Lilley began to receive offers from

folks like Beau O'Reilly and Jenny Magnus, the codirectors of Curious Theatre Branch, which also resides at Prop. Together, Prop and CTB produce Rhinofest, an annual fringe festival that celebrated its 30th anniversary earlier this winter. O'Reilly immediately wanted to bring Lilley into the Rhino-fold, sending her e-mails with the subject line "Because you did Faust."

"As someone who moved to Chicago in 2013, after having only been in the underground New York scene where everything was visual- and aesthetic-based, it was really cool to find people like Stefan and Beau O'Reilly," Lilley says. "They were making theater with their own rules. To me, the incredible thing about this work is its adventurous nature, and its willingness to craft new worlds using text, images, sound, lights, stylized physicality, music, etc."

But it would take several years before she was able to accept O'Reilly's invitation. In 2016 she partnered with the Minneapolis-based playwright Savannah Reich, who had written a musical called *Hatchet Lady*; it premiered at the 2017 Rhinofest. "We wanted to find a nice, low-stakes situation where we could work together," Lilley remembers. "Since Rhinofest provides you the space, it was a super-homegrown, no-money operation. They're all about building that sort of infrastructure where we are incubating all Chicago artists, redefining what new work is and what theater is."

In 2018, after producing and directing a number of other Prop shows, Lilley was appointed artistic director of Prop. Even though the theater's leadership hired her to be herself, she says it took some time to win over her skeptics.

"There had been other times when Prop had brought on new leadership," she says, "but every single time, the young leaders would decide that it was too big of a responsibility and would quit after less than a year. I think also the Prop elders were worried I would kick them out or call them dinosaurs. They are not dinosaurs, but they are baby boomers, so they can be sensitive. They don't realize the enormous achievement of managing to be serious artists for a majority of their lives. Prop is filled with people who have survived it all."

The role transformed Lilley's sense of self. While she was still adjusting to her new position, she wrote and directed *Neverland*, an ensemble-devised imagining of the final days of Peter Pan. Staged at Prop, the show received more grants than any of Lilley's other work, and she found herself leading about 20 people at any given moment.

"I was 29, so I had to deal with the feeling of not being the youngest person in the room. There were so many years that I had to fight because of my age, but now I don't have to anymore. It's like, 'What is this new evolution of myself?'"

Right now, Prop is running *2 Unfortunate 2 Travel*, an adaptation of *The Unfortunate Traveller*, a 1594 novel by Thomas Nashe. Lilley calls it "half-conceptual art."

"There's some really interesting performance practices along with a strong narrative and it's extremely visual. The entire set is entirely recycled materials."

The show, directed by Zach Weinberg, produced by Lilley, and devised by the cast and crew, is a scathing portrayal of Jack Wilton, a world traveler and self-appointed ally of women.

"He's trying to figure out what he can do to help, so he hires all of these women to tell his stories of his travels over the past four years," Lilley says. The show deploys shadow puppetry, game shows, and other unorthodox devices to unravel Jack's sense of identity while his cast of six women grapple with what it means to speak for him instead of themselves.


"To me, it reads as a criticism of the theater companies who think they can Band-Aid themselves and write about how they're going to be diverse on their grant applications," Lilley says.

Amid this and other critical conversations within the theater, Lilley is excited about the kinds of changes she's seeing at Prop. She hopes to continue chipping at what she describes as Prop's "insular" culture by keeping the door open to new folks who aren't a part of the theater's historic "club."

"When I got here, everybody was friends and now they're more like colleagues," says Lilley. "They were resistant to clear contracts or even nailing down job responsibilities. Over the past year, everybody has really come around to valuing organization and putting that extra effort in towards communication."

Brün echoes these sentiments, noting that Lilley has renewed the sense of professional management that had lapsed in recent years.

She is particularly good at social media to promote Prop's work—arguably the best way of making new friends and forging artistic relationships.

"The conversation about what is exciting and experimental feels so much bigger now," she says. "People were actually coming to each other's shows, people who didn't even know what this place is." 

 @ranchstressing



Live, from life

How Lily Be made the local storytelling scene look more like Chicago.

By CATEY SULLIVAN

After the rush of winning the 2013 Moth GrandSlam storytelling competition faded, Lily Be (née Lydia Edith Lucio) noticed that her fellow storytellers were overwhelmingly white. “When I heard I was the first Latinx to win the Slam I was like, ‘Are you serious? How can that be?’” she says. “It’s not like we’re some out-of-the-way place. It’s Chicago.”

Be, a Humboldt Park native of Mexican descent, decided to create a storytelling platform that actually looked like the city where she grew up. The same year as her Moth triumph, Be began *The Stoop*, now a monthly event at Rosa’s Lounge in Logan Square; a podcast is poised to launch this spring. She’s also nurturing the next generation of storytellers by teaching “Discovering Your Story” courses at Second City, the Hairpin Arts Center, and Northeastern Illinois University as well as leading an ongoing *Stoop* workshop for new-bie storytellers.

She sat down with the *Reader* to talk about how she got started, where she’s going, and how the storytelling world is changing. Her words are condensed and edited below.

I was like seven [when I told my first story]. Maybe eight. It was a joke as much as a story, this Paul Rodriguez joke that had a bad word for a phallic symbol in it. So, basically a dick joke only I didn’t know what a dick was. I told it on the way to church. What kills me is I can’t remember the punch line. But I do remem-

ber I landed it, and my mom was all, “Where did you learn that?” And I was like, “School,” because I didn’t want her taking away my cable.

Telling stories around the table, that was just a thing my family did. My mom and my grandma and my aunts used stories to teach us lessons. Like, “This is the story of that time

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your aunt got buried in the snow and ruined her new coat and almost froze after she lied about hanging out with some boys, and this is why you don’t lie.”

Sometimes they were horror stories. There was one about my grandma and Freddy Krueger. We’d ask her how the scratches in the roof of the car got there. She told us, “Oh, Freddy Krueger did that.” When I got pregnant [at 17], she told me I was now old enough to hear the truth. She told me, “Those are the scratches I put in the car myself after I found out your grandpa was giving another woman rides in our car.” She also told me about how she became an orphan. About [how] she was almost sexually assaulted by the guy whose



Lily Be
ELIZABETH MCQUERN

house she worked in, but she stabbed him in the leg with a fork and ran home barefoot.

I have this story about my grandpa and his 75th birthday. The night of the seven goat heads. They were on covered dishes. I was 18. I don’t know what I expected was under there, but it wasn’t goat heads. When they uncovered the platters there they were. Seven of them. Eyes, ears, tongues, everything. And they were devoured. Every part of them. So this is a tradition from Mexico, and after I told this story, this guy comes up to me and says, “I would not have guessed you were Mexican. You don’t look Mexican.” And I told him, “You don’t know enough Mexicans.”

That’s when I started really wondering, “Am I the only Latinx sharing stories right now? Where are the rest of us?”

Some storytelling shows come to town and I see what they book and I’m like, “Really? You couldn’t find one brown person for the show? Can we get someone who is poor on the stage?”

When I started questioning why I was the only Latinx to win the Moth GrandSlam, the [storytelling] scene didn’t like that. I’d get up on stage and ask, “Who here is from Chicago? Who identifies as a person of color?” It would be like 1 percent. The Moth was like, “Hey, we’re open for everybody.” But that’s not enough. You have to go out and get people.

My classes aren’t about craft. Whatever that is. They are about discovering your story. Not perfecting it or performing it or winning a contest with it. Discovering it. I thought I

don’t have a voice, because that’s what the world tells you when you’re poor and brown. Your family sometimes tells you that. Your partner might tell you that. Sometimes it’s right in your face, sometimes it’s real insidious. Sometimes it’s a commercial that’ll tell you, for instance, you’re a terrible parent because you’re not that mother from *What to Expect When You’re Expecting*. I want my students to know they have a voice.

When I was offered \$600 to peg a guy we’ll call Ross I was so upset and offended and hurt. I’d met him on a fetish kink website, and I was all, “How dare you!” But when I talked to my mom about it, she was all, “Are you insane? Take the money!” So I did. I can make \$600 an hour, no intercourse. I pegged guys who in the regular world are powerful in finance or law or business owners. That’s when I realized I could walk into a room of one hundred rich, powerful white men and not be afraid to open my mouth.

My sharing about being a cougar who pegs men got me a residency at the Ragdale Foundation. Which just tells you that there is no bad from which good can’t come.

I took the name Lily Be after I found out I was named after someone my father wanted to marry—Lydia. And my last name is also tied to him. Lily is what my brother called me when he was little, couldn’t pronounce “Lydia.” And “Be” is just—I am. I’m here. I exist. If you’re looking for me, here I am.

@CateySullivan

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Photo: Joe Mazza.



The Adventures of Augie March
by JOE MAZZA

Three to watch

The Adventures of Augie March, *Six*, and *Queen of the Mist* bring defiance and derring-do to Chicago stages this spring.

By **KERRY REID**

Three new shows this season celebrate defiance and derring-do, from the poetic grit of Saul Bellow to the feminist sass of six famous wives to a pioneering thrill-seeker.

THE ADVENTURES OF AUGIE MARCH

Bellow's 1953 picaresque coming-of-age tale—which opens with the famous line “I am an American, Chicago born”—comes to life in David Auburn's world-premiere adaptation, commissioned by the University of Chicago's Court Theatre and staged by artistic director Charles Newell. Auburn graduated from U of C in 1991 and won the 2001 Pulitzer for *Proof*, which Newell directed at Court in 2013. (Though Bellow taught at U of C for decades, he lasted only two years as an undergrad there before transferring to Northwestern.)

That production got the two men talking about other projects on which they could collaborate. “He started tossing around some ideas and when he proposed *Augie March*, I said yes instantly,” says Newell. This is the first time the Bellow estate has granted the rights for a stage adaptation of any Bellow work. Newell says it was Auburn's pedigree and approach to the writing that helped persuade them.

“He's taken this extraordinary 400-page novel and turned it into a play,” he says. “If you know the novel and the language, you think, ‘How the hell is this going to work onstage?’ He was brilliant in many ways, one of which is that he's translated all the events into language that sounds like real people, yet at various moments, particularly for someone who is voiceless or powerless or unable to speak, he then used direct quotes pulled from the novel for what we now refer to as ‘the Bellow music.’

So you hear some of the original Bellow syntax and vocabulary and extraordinary writing, even in a world where people talk like people.”

Six

People who know little else about English history can probably recite the fates of Henry VIII's wives—“Divorced, beheaded, died; divorced, beheaded, survived.” In Toby Marlow and Lucy Moss's pop-rock musical (which

THE ADVENTURES OF AUGIE MARCH
5/9-6/9: Wed-Fri 7:30 PM, Sat-Sun 2 and 7:30 PM, Court Theatre, 5535 S. Ellis, 773-753-4472, courttheatre.org, \$50-\$74, \$37.50-\$51 students.

Six
5/15-6/30: Wed-Fri 7:45, Sat 6 and 8:30 PM, Sun 3 and 6 PM, Tue 7:45 PM, Chicago Shakespeare Theater, 800 E. Grand, 312-595-5600, chicagoshakes.com, \$32-\$55.

QUEEN OF THE MIST
5/25-7/6: Thu-Sat 7:30 PM, Sun 3 PM, Den Theatre, 1331 N. Milwaukee, 872-903-3473, firebrandtheatre.org, \$55, \$20 students and industry.

won raves during its West End run as well as several Olivier Award nominations), the wives toss off the chains of history and join forces as a singing sisterhood of empowerment.

The show was a late addition to the Chicago Shakespeare season. Originally, a new musical version of *Bedknobs and Broomsticks* was scheduled, but it was delayed after the death of director Rachel Rockwell last year. *Six*, slated for the 2019-20 season, was then moved up a year.

Rick Boynton, creative producer for Chicago Shakes, says, “It's a kick-ass pop concert, a la Ariana Grande and Katy Perry and Beyoncé, where the six ex-wives of Henry VIII get to tell their story, rather than being known through his story.” For this U.S. premiere, Boynton notes that there will be some references updated for stateside audiences, but without losing the smarts of “the Tudor to contemporary vernacular” in the lyrics. He also notes that the flexible space of The Yard offers the opportunity for codirectors Moss and Jamie Armitage “to fill the room in a really spectacular way.”

QUEEN OF THE MIST

In only 18 months, Firebrand Theatre has attracted attention through its mission to expand opportunities for women on- and offstage in musical theater. For artistic director and co-founder Harmony France, that means seeking out work that foregrounds women's stories, even if they're written by men. In Michael John LaChiusa's 2011 musical *Queen of the Mist*, receiving its Chicago premiere with Firebrand, we meet schoolteacher Annie Edson Taylor, the first person to survive going over Niagara Falls in a barrel she designed herself.

“I've always loved the piece,” France says, “but it didn't quite fit our mission for the breakdown for male and female characters. I got in touch with Michael and asked if he minded if we reorchestrated it.” LaChiusa agreed, and thus the original cast breakdown of three women and four men now features mostly women and nonbinary voices.

Getting local legend Barbara E. Robertson to play Taylor highlights the respect Firebrand has earned in its short history. “When we were talking about who would play this incredible role, she didn't cross my mind because I wouldn't have thought it was a possibility,” says France. But one phone call got Robertson, who has won eight Jeff Awards over the course of a career that has encompassed musicals and straight plays (including the first national tours of *Wicked* and *Angels in America*), on board.

Taking big chances is Taylor's story, too. Notes France, “She was 63 when she went over the falls and lived 20 years beyond that. She was this woman at the turn of the century, living in this man's world and figuring it out.”

Twitter @kerryreid

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Dutch Masters © JOEL MAISONET

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JACKALOPE AND RAVEN THEATRES are firing up the wayback machine this spring with a pair of shows set in 1992. If you don't remember the era of cassette mix tapes, grunge, and Rodney King, prepare for a crash course on back-in-the-day.

"This is a period piece. Except it's not," says Wardell Julius Clark, director of *Dutch Masters*, a two-person psychological thriller by Greg Keller now playing at Jackalope. The play's contemporary elements are unmistakable, even when (especially when) the dialogue turns to politics, notably David Dinkins' election as the first African-American mayor of New York City. "There's this thing that happens when black people get in power. It happened then. It's happening now," Clark says. "People will say, 'Racism doesn't exist anymore.' Then there's backlash. It happened with Obama—we had eight years and then it's 'You better get back in your corner.'"

For *The Undeniable Sound of Right Now*, opening at the Raven on May 2, playwright Laura Eason drew on her memories of playing Lounge Ax and Metro in the early 90s as a member of the power-pop band Tart. The bar-concert venue where the action unfolds

is on the cusp of obsolescence, its owner hell-bent on rocking on despite the inexorable rise of electronica and DJs. "Then, you hustled for exposure, concert by concert," Eason remem-


DUTCH MASTERS

Through 4/13: Thu-Sat 8 PM, Sun 3 and 8 PM, Broadway Armory Park, 5917 N. Broadway, jackalopetheatre.org, \$30, \$20 students and seniors.

THE UNDENIABLE SOUND OF RIGHT NOW

5/2-6/16: Thu-Sat 7:30 PM, Sun 3 PM, Raven Theatre, 6157 N. Clark, 773-338-2177, raven theatre.com, \$43, \$38 teachers and seniors, \$15 students and military/veterans.

bers. "Now, you can reach millions of people overnight. But in some ways—the gentrification pushing out artists, music evolving from one form to the next—it's the same as it ever was." —CATEY SULLIVAN



AUDITORIUM THEATRE. Jeffrey Ballet completed a run of *Anna Karenina* the night before, so the sprung deck is still on the stage.

Leave the light on ●●●●●●●●


The ghost light, a single bulb in an empty theater, is for safety—and superstition.

Story and Photos By MATTHEW GILSON

Whether they're holding the paranormal at bay or preventing a misstep into the orchestra pit, ghost lights have been keeping Chicago stages safe for more than a century. Traditionally a single light bulb fitted in a cage atop a tall stand, the ghost light is a fixture placed on stage just before the theater goes dark and acts as bare-bones illumination. And, just in case, to keep spirit mischief to a minimum.

Some tempt fate. Arriving at The Yard at Chicago Shakespeare to co-direct a production of *Macbeth* last year, Teller—half of the magician duo Penn and Teller and known for his character's silence—strolled into the theater and announced to all, "Let's get this over with: *Macbeth Macbeth Macbeth Macbeth Macbeth*." To utter the name even once could, as an old theater superstition goes, tempt catastrophe.

Got a ghost light? All good. As the Lyric Opera's master electrician, Mike Reynolds, says, "if you don't put [a ghost light] out bad things start to happen around the Opera House. You're showing your appreciation for the ghost taking care of you, much like children putting out milk and cookies for Santa."

 @matthew.gilson





GIFT THEATRE. Above and right: Gift Theatre is currently performing *Doubt: A Parable* at Steppenwolf Theatre and is keeping the ghost light on in its 50-seat storefront space.



SECOND CITY MAINSTAGE. Current production: *Algorithm Nation or the Static Quo*.





CHICAGO SHAKESPEARE THEATER, JENTES FAMILY COURTYARD THEATER.

The set is for *Short Shakespeare! Macbeth*, scenic designer Scott Davis.

LYRIC OPERA OF CHICAGO, ARDIS KRANIK THEATRE.

That day, the set for *La traviata* was being struck so that the set for *Ariodante* could take its place for a main stage rehearsal. The current productions were Verdi's *La traviata* and Strauss's *Elektra*. *Ariodante* opened March 2.



WRITERS THEATRE, ALEXANDRA C. AND JOHN D. NICHOLS THEATRE.

Glencoe. Set: *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, scenic designer Todd Rosenthal.

A newer venue, Writers has its ghost light installed in the grid overhead. Architect Jeannie Gang salvaged bricks from the abandoned building that was demolished to make way for the theater, using them in the textured interior walls.



REVIEW

These colors don't fade

After 40 years, Ntozake Shange's choreopoem for colored girls remains a stunner.

By SHERI FLANDERS



© MICHAEL BROSILOW

"I found god in myself and I loved her fiercely."

African-American feminist poet and playwright Ntozake Shange's most renowned work, *for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf*, now playing at Court Theater, is a spiritual experience. Shange described the work as a "choreopoem"; it fuses poetry, dance, music, and song to create a transcendent theatrical experience.

More than 40 years after it was first performed, *for colored girls* remains a stunning feminist interrogation of subjects like love, identity, infidelity, body image, and abuse with a nuance and specificity that modern media often boils down to the empty calories of "girl power." It's comprised of 20 powerful intertwining monologues, including meditations on the contradictory kindness of rapists, the claustrophobia of city living, society's near psychopathic value of emotionless rationality, and the hilariously pathetic apologies of disappointing men.

The play begins with a killer guitar solo by the outrageously talented Melody Angel, (who recently made her theatrical debut in the epic *Father Comes Home From The Wars* at the Goodman), and then shifts to a tableaux of seven black women, their Afros and curls gracing their heads like crowns. The Grecian courtyard set, designed by Courtney O'Neill, adds to the regal effect: it honors the words of ordinary women. Shange's text intentionally reflects the way that real women speak; she purposefully chose the word "colored" for the title so that her grandmother could understand it.

Director Seret Scott, who was part of the original Broadway cast, infuses the script with vitality, prescience, and universality

by casting actors who are versatile enough to embody the broad range of perspectives in the script. This is a play for girls of all colors of the rainbow. Jubilant childhood patty-cake games like "Shortnin' Bread" delightfully morph into stepping. Later we are treated to traditional African dance and

RR FOR COLORED GIRLS WHO HAVE CONSIDERED SUICIDE/WHEN THE RAINBOW IS ENUF Through 4/14: Wed-Fri 7:30 PM, Sat-Sun 2 and 7:30 PM; Court Theatre, 5535 S. Ellis, 773-753-4472, courttheatre.org, \$50-\$74, \$37.50-\$51 students.

a heartbreaking contemporary solo by Leah Casey, whose movement expresses the pain of strong women who hide behind a facade so that the world will accept them.

It is impossible to overstate how talented this entire cast is. Patrese D. McClain gives a stellar and ebullient performance as an earnest young innocent in love with Toussaint Louverture, leader of the Haitian Revolution. AnJi White is a chameleon, delivering two of the most powerful and radically different monologues of the night. The first explores the complexities of seduction and body image and asks, can this world love a plain black woman? The second describes a nearly unspeakable tragedy, heightened by haunting lighting design by Paul Toben.

for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf is one of the top productions of this theater season. Shange's words cradle you and linger long after the final curtain. Laugh, cry, and be soothed by the full and beautiful soulful voices.

"Let her be born and handled warmly."

@SheriFlanders

THEATER

RR Grand tour
2 Unfortunate 2 Travel is escapism you can feel good about.

In Thomas Nashé's novel *The Unfortunate Traveller*, the young servant-soldier Jack Wilton swashbuckles his way through the Grand Tour about a century before such European travels became a standard part of a wellborn gentleman's education. In Prop Thtr's *2 Unfortunate 2 Travel*, director Zach Weinberg and his excellent ensemble retell Jack's story in the present day.

But who is Jack, and why do we need to hear about his trip to Mexico? In brief, Jack is the whitest white boy you have ever seen and, because travel literature along with colonialism has long been the province of white men, *2 Unfortunate* takes the fascinating approach of having Jack tell the story of his "post-election panic vacation" through the voices and bodies of six young women (three Irish, four of color—you do the math) in a cabaret-style performance on a set constructed almost entirely of cardboard (by Melissa Schlesinger). It works beautifully.

What makes this adaptation so delightful are its gifted performers, who not only deliver Jack's diary entries as strikingly individual monologues but also incorporate other storytelling methods—dance, spoken-word poetry, violin, puppetry—to create a parallel narrative that ranges between reinforcement and subversion of Jack's earnest discovery of other places and other cultures. This becomes an exceptionally powerful confrontation of issues such as allyship, safe spaces, and the political implications of its own premise. The running gag of having Jack's philosophical waxing at the end of each episode drowned out by music does not get old. —IRENE HSIAO **2 UNFORTUNATE 2 TRAVEL** Through 4/15: Fri-Sat 9 PM, Mon 8 PM, Prop Thtr, 3502 N. Elston, 773-742-5420, prophthtr.org, \$20.

Exit, pursued by a bear
Best For Winter provides an early springtime thaw.

Though advertised as an adaption of William Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* by Evan Jackson (who also directs), this production by Idle Muse Theatre is, for all practical purposes, a fairly faithful, if slimmed-down, version of Shakespeare's play with a couple of his sonnets thrown in for good measure. Jackson's simple, elegant production is well suited to the intimacy of the Edge Theater's performing space.

As in the original, there is a major shift in tone halfway through the tale, from somber psychological drama to lighthearted comedy, as the story turns from King Leontes, whose pathological jealousy leads to his wife's death, to a romance that blossoms between his exiled daughter and a handsome prince. Jackson's cast handles this potentially awkward change fairly well, though Brian Bengtson is too emotionally restrained to be fully convincing as the unhinged Leontes. The same holds for Mara Kovacevic's icy performance as Hermione, the faithful wife accused of adultery: the lady doth protest too little.

Things warm up in the second half. They almost always do in productions of *The Winter's Tale*, in part because the story is sweeter, more like a fairy tale than a tragedy, and it has a life-affirming ending. The performances in the second half of the current production feel more relaxed and playful. Kristen Alesia and Brian



Landladies © MICHAEL BROSILOW

Healy are delightful as the young lovers, and Michael Dalberg earns lots of laughs as the trickster and con man Autolyous.

Joshua Allard's costumes, Milo Bue's scenic design, and L.J. Luthringer's sound and music design all complement the production without upstaging the performances or the Bard's language. —JACK HELBIG **BEST FOR WINTER** Through 4/20: Thu-Sat 8 PM, Sun 3 PM; also Wed 3/27, 8 PM, Edge Theater, 1133 W. Catalpa, 773-340-9438, idle muse.org, \$20, \$15 students and seniors, \$10 industry on Thu.

The sap is rising
Bright Star will try the patience of even the most tenderhearted romantic.

Your ability to go along with this 2014 Steve Martin-Edie Brickell musical may hinge on your general willingness to accept the see-through sentiment and plucky hokum that pervades the American musical stage. But given the level of baked-in, overearnest nostalgia, especially in director Ericka Mac's sparkly-eyed staging for BoHo Theatre, even the most romantic sap might ache for something with a bit more depth.

It's 1945, and young soldier Billy Cane returns from the war to small-town North Carolina only to find his mother has died, a trauma he successfully processes with about 32 measures of "She's Gone." An aspiring writer, Billy leaves his bookish maybe-girlfriend Margo and heads to Asheville, lying his way into a meeting with Alice Murphy, the imposing literary editor of the esteemed *Asheville Southern Journal*. Prickly, asocial Alice has quite a backstory, which began 23 years earlier in backwater Zebulon, where an intelligent, free-spirited girl with big dreams ran into predictable trouble. The show alternates between Billy's past and Alice's present (Jim Crow doesn't exist in either place) until they intertwine in a finale so contrived and saccharine it'll likely curl your toenails.

It's all told through a repetitive bluegrassish score and a radio-serial book that eschew nuance at most every turn, mistaking plot devices for characters, ultimately suggesting that grief and villainy are no match for optimism, dumb luck, and a banjo. It's mostly well sung, despite a rather muddy live band, although the incessantly circulating chorines make it seem like North Carolina is overrun with cheery zombies. —JUSTIN HAYFORD **BRIGHT STAR** Through 5/5: Thu-Sat 8 PM, Sun 2 PM, Greenhouse Theater Center, 2257 N. Lincoln, 773-404-7336, bohotheatre.com, \$35.

THEATER

RR Full circle

ShawChicago goes out the way it came in, with *The Doctor's Dilemma*.

For 25 seasons, ShawChicago has been entertaining lovers of classic Anglo-Irish comedy with readers' theater renditions of the works of George Bernard Shaw, Oscar Wilde, J.M. Barrie, and Noel Coward, among others. The company will cease operations this year following the death of its longtime artistic director Robert Scogin; for its last production, it's presenting the same play with which it debuted in 1994—*The Doctor's Dilemma*, one of Shaw's sharpest works—in a beautifully spoken performance under the direction of Gary Alexander.

The 1906 play concerns an eminent London physician, Sir Colenso Ridgeon, who finds himself in a perplexing position. He has developed a groundbreaking new treatment for tuberculosis (an incurable disease in Shaw's time), but his busy boutique medical practice has room for only one new patient. Faced with two terminal cases, he must decide which impoverished patient is more worth saving: a mediocre but good-hearted fellow doctor or a brilliant young artist who's also an amoral scoundrel—and whose wife Ridgeon is infatuated with. This prickly premise gives Shaw ample opportunity to explore an array of ethical, scientific, and emotional complexities in one of his most intriguing, caustic, and literate scripts.

The excellent cast includes Timothy W. Hull as Ridgeon, Daniel Millhouse and Monica Orozco as the artist and his devoted wife, and Mark Richard as a misguided medical colleague of Ridgeon's. —**ALBERT WILLIAMS**
THE DOCTOR'S DILEMMA Through 4/15: Sat noon, Sun 1 PM, Mon 7 PM, Ruth Page Center for the Performing Arts, 1016 N. Dearborn, 312-587-7390, shawchicago.org, \$40, \$35 seniors, \$20 students.

RR Christine's world

Landladies explores the power dynamic between renters and owners.

The world premiere of this Northlight Theatre-commissioned work, written by Sharyn Rothstein and directed by Jess McLeod, presents a wonderfully complicated female relationship anchoring a larger story of income inequality and abuse of power. Christine (Leah Karpel) is a single mother struggling to find a home and keep herself and her daughter afloat, all while getting away from a destructive ex named Poet (Julian Parker). Lying about her situation, she rents an apartment from Marti (Shanesia Davis). It's oven-less and has a gaping hole in the floor, but it has four walls, so it will have to do. A poster of *Christina's World* by Andrew Wyeth on the wall best sums up this moving representation of eviction and homelessness: it's crippling, it disproportionately affects women, and solutions feel completely out of reach.

Karpel and Davis play their roles with a compelling mix of sharp cynicism and genuine empathy, finding common ground over their shared "otherness" and inability to get ahead. Marti has gained some independence through real estate entrepreneurship (albeit teetering on slumlord status), and sees in Christine a similarly gutsy spirit familiar with making her own luck. She gains Christine's trust through intimate conversations, acting as a seasoned advisor with her best interests at heart. What muddies the relationship, though, is Marti's power and financial dominance as the landlady. As her motives slowly come into question, it becomes clear that Christine traded one manipulative relationship for

another. The shades of grey painted by Rothstein's character development and McLeod's visceral direction are a thought-provoking delight to watch. —**MARISSA OBERLANDER**
LANDLADIES Through 4/20: Wed 1 and 7:30 PM, Thurs 7:30 PM, Fri 8 PM, Sat 2:30 and 8 PM, Sun 2:30 PM; additional performance Sun 4/7, 7 PM; no performance Wed 4/3, 1 PM, Northlight Theatre, 9501 Skokie Blvd., Skokie, 847-673-6300, northlight.org, \$30-\$88, student \$15.

Melancholy Play? Also twee as hell.

Sarah Ruhl's contemporary farce crosses the line from self-awareness to self-parody.

Playwright Sarah Ruhl is on the record as not loving the words "quirky" or "whimsical" applied to her brand of reflective, heady, poetic quasi-comedy. I can't imagine she loves the adjective "twee" either, and yet there's no getting around how prominently it hangs over the arty, wry proceedings of this frequently staged 2002 "contemporary farce," which originally debuted at Evanston's Piven Theatre.

Tilly (Alys Dickerson), a chronically melancholy bank teller, is sent by her employer to a wacky, unspecified Euro-accented psychotherapist (Martin Diaz-Valdes) to treat her aloof, not-quite-depressed condition. Her contemplative, sexy-sad way of meandering through life proves to be irresistibly alluring to everyone around her including her therapist, tailor (Kris Downing), hairdresser (Rachael Soglin), and partnered new friend (Stephanie Sullivan). To their collective horror, she somehow discovers manic, unrelenting bliss, and the gang of potential suitors set out to "correct" her newfound alienating happiness.

Director Laura Sturm's production for Organic Theater Company features live, somber mood-setting cello music by Michaela Voit and some legitimately laugh-out-loud dialogue, particularly between Dickerson and Soglin. During exchanges in which Tilly's version of small talk wears down and hypnotizes a bystander for the first time, notably in a great, show-defining haircut scene, the actors showcase the sharp, hyperspecific comedic impulse Ruhl's play seems to be aiming for.

But the sketch-length highlights aren't enough to sustain an otherwise droll-to-the-point-of-boring comedy, which more often than not luxuriates in the same character tropes and gaudy, lyrical prose it's supposedly poking fun at. An entire final-act subplot of sad people transforming into almonds blurs the line between self-awareness and self-parody to the point where it is rendered indistinguishable. —**DAN JAKES**
MELANCHOLY PLAY Through 4/14: Wed-Sat 7:30 PM, Sun 2:30 PM, Greenhouse Theater Center, 2257 N. Lincoln, 773-404-7336, organictheater.org, \$30, \$21 industry, students, and seniors.

One woman's search for meaning
My Name is Rachel Corrie shows that tragic source material doesn't make great drama.

The Jacaranda Collective's inaugural production is a one-woman dramatization of the notes and journal entries of Rachel Corrie, the young American woman killed by a bulldozer as she tried to prevent the leveling of a Palestinian home by Israeli forces. Adapted to the stage by actor Alan Rickman and journalist Katherine Viner, it's meant to be a provocative salvo from a brand-new theater company. But fraught, tragic source material doesn't necessarily equal great drama. ➔

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THEATER

➔ Imagine spending an hour and a half with one of those enthusiastic Greenpeace volunteers who button-hole people on the street and you'll have some sense of what it's like to sit through this play. In between harangues about international politics—which, like many twenty-somethings, Corrie takes herself to be an expert on—we are treated to a litany of the hopes and dreams of a very average young woman from the Pacific Northwest who wants desperately for her life to have some special purpose.

Halie Robinson does all she can to make Corrie come to life, but other than her horrible death—which one can read about elsewhere and obviously isn't a first-person account—there's just not much there. If Corrie is the sum of these journal entries, she's not someone I would've been interested to spend time with. That's not a judgment on her cause or doubt about her good intentions. Not all lives that end tragically merit a 90-minute play. Directed by Sam Bianchini. —**DMITRY SAMAROV**
MY NAME IS RACHEL CORRIE Through 4/6: Thu-Sat 7:30 PM, Den Theatre, 1331 N. Milwaukee, 773-697-3830, jacarandacollective.com, \$25, \$15 students.

RR A disaster singalong *Poseidon!* is still shipshape.

The dramatic footage from the Norwegian cruise ship stranded in rough waters this past weekend was cool, but you couldn't sing along to it. For that, you need to head over to Hell in a Handbag's remount of this 2002 show, the first in the company's checkered camp history. Created by Handbag founder David Cerda (with help from Scott Lamberty), this homage/spoof of the 1972 Irwin Allen-produced disaster-at-sea film is still mostly shipshape, thanks to a stellar cast.

Stevie Love's idiot child-woman singer, Nonnie, contrasts with Elizabeth Lesinski's brassy ex-hooker, Linda (who steams and struts her way through the show-stopping "Just Panties"). David Lipschutz as the insufferable Reverend Scott channels Harold Hill in *The Music Man* in his wrestling-with-faith number, "Dear God." (Not to be confused with the XTC song of the same title.) And Tommy Bullington as Belle Rosen warbles "(In the Water) I'm a Very Skinny Lady" with a dash of poignance. The pedophilia jokes at the expense of Frankie Leo Bennett's Robin feel awkward, to say the least, but Cerda finds an unlikely ethical workaround by the end.

Derek Van Barham's direction and Breon Arzell's choreography both commit to a more-is-more aesthetic, which plays nicely off the poor-theater inventiveness of Christopher Rhoton's scenic design. (I particularly liked how the production handled the man-falling-through-skylight sequence.) It takes a little while to find its sea legs, but *Poseidon's* affection for the original cruising matches course with a sharp dissection of its clichés. —**KERRY REID**
POSEIDON! AN UPSIDE DOWN MUSICAL Through 4/28: Thu-Sat 7:30 PM, Sun 3 PM; additional performance Mon 4/22, 7:30 PM, The Edge Theater, 5451 N. Broadway, 800-838-3006, handbagproductions.org, \$32-\$58.

The woman in the window

The best part of *Self-Accusation* happens out on the sidewalk.

The most incredible moment in this Theatre Y production of a nearly-forgotten German avant-garde play by

Peter Handke happens outside the venue. The play is presented against a window that has its curtains open to reveal the 4500 block of North Western in Lincoln Square in all its humdrum neon non-glory. The production enters its umpteenth movement of what sounds like one voice, spread across nine performers, incoherently blaming itself for everything it has ever done. People have chalk and fake blood smeared on them, they're yelling at each other, it's all a big old mess. Then this elderly lady walks up to the glass. Mesmerized at the play of bodies, gesturing to ambivalent passers-by like a kid at the fair, she is obviously a plant. Right? She's in on it, right?

Arlene Arnone Bibbs gives the performance of the millennium in what feels at first like the luckiest accident that's ever happened to a theater company trying to shake things up. Her appearance does shake things up. Codirectors Melissa Lorraine and Héctor Álvarez get the kind of chaotic magic they were going for and had thus far missed by violating the most sacred expectation of theater: that it has an outside and an inside, and that never the twain shall meet. This frame-shattering sense of fun proves impossible to wring out of a heartless script and a cast that's been trained to scream what it does not understand. But oh, Ms. Bibbs! Peer in on us anytime! —**MAX MALLER**
SELF-ACCUSATION Through 4/28: Fri-Sun 7:30 PM, The Ready, 4546 N. Western, 708-209-0183, theatre-y.com. FREE

RR Required viewing Sweat shows how Trump's America came to be.

When people talk about "Trump's America," they mean two things at once. In general, the phrase is simply a term to describe where the country's been at since the 2016 election. It's also the preferred term of condescension among blue-staters for the great swaths of Americans who elected him president. Simply as an explanation for how Trump's America got the way it is, and, by extension, how the country got the way it is, Lynn Nottage's Pulitzer Prize-winning play is the most important work of art produced in the last five years. I was fortunate to see it on Broadway; this production, with its cast of all-Chicago talent—including director Ron OJ Parson—and reimagined set design, is every bit as affecting.

The play gives the audience one view after another of disintegration. It starts with three women, coworkers in the same rust belt factory, celebrating a birthday at their favorite bar. By the end, six months later, the "vipers" running things at the plant have erased a whole way of life, and the bartender, Stan (Keith Kupferer, in a powerful performance), has gone from advising the women's kids not to leave the assembly line—"You leave, it'll be impossible to get back in"—to wishing out loud that he'd skipped town himself 30 years earlier, when the getting was good. Amid that rubble, we are left with a lacerating portrayal of one town's ruin. Sweat is required viewing for anybody in search of answers to our fractured reality. —**MAX MALLER**
SWEAT Through 4/14: Wed 7:30 PM, Thu 2 and 7:30 PM, Fri 8 PM, Sat 2 and 8 PM, Sun 2 and 7:30 PM; no performance Thu 4/4, 2 PM or Sun 4/14 7:30 PM, Goodman Theatre, 170 N. Dearborn, 312-443-3800, goodmantheatre.org, \$20-\$86. R

Handbag Production Presents

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with SCOTT LAMBERTY
directed by DEREK VAN BARHAM
choreography by BREON ARZELL
Music Direction by ANDREW MILLIKEN

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THEATER



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NOW PLAYING

SWEAT Lynn Nottage's Pulitzer Prize-winning drama about a group of blue-collar friends in Reading, Pennsylvania, dealing with economic disaster gets its local premiere under Ron OJ Parson's direction. [Goodman Theatre, through April 14](#)

HERLAND Three aging women plan a DIY retirement home and come to terms with long-denied desires in this world premiere of Grace McLeod's play. [Redtwist Theatre, through April 14](#)

FOR COLORED GIRLS WHO HAVE CONSIDERED SUICIDE/WHEN THE RAINBOW IS ENUF Ntozake Shange's groundbreaking 1976 "choreopoem" about black women's lives, loves, and struggles gets a revival under Seret Scott's direction. [Court Theatre, through April 14](#)

THE DOCTOR'S DILEMMA ShawChicago closes its doors after 25 years with George Bernard Shaw's "problem play" about rationed medical care. [Ruth Page Center for the Performing Arts, through April 15](#)

LANDLADIES Sharyn Rothstein's world-premiere drama highlights the delicate balance between two women—a self-made building owner and her tenant, an on-the-edge single mother. [Northlight Theatre, through April 20](#)

THE BRIDGES OF MADISON COUNTY This musical version of Robert James Waller's novel about the romance between an Italian war bride stuck in small-town Iowa and a well-traveled photographer features a score by Jason Robert Brown (*The Last Five Years*) and a book by Marsha Norman (*The Color Purple*). [Theo Ubiq Cabaret Theatre, through April 21](#)

POSEIDON! AN UPSIDE DOWN MUSICAL Hell in a Handbag brings back its camp musical based on the 1972 disaster film *The Poseidon Adventure*. [Edge Theatre, through April 18](#)

THE WATSONS GO TO BIRMINGHAM—1963 Christopher Paul Curtis's young-adult novel about a black family from Michigan visiting Birmingham, Alabama, during the civil rights movement gets a

world-premiere adaptation from Cheryl West. [Chicago Children's Theatre, through April 28](#)

LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS The Little Man-Eating Plant That Could returns in Walter Stearns' production of Howard Ashman and Alan Menken's pop-horror musical, based on the Roger Corman cult film. [Mercury Theater Chicago, through April 28](#)

SMALL WORLD Jillian Leff and Joe Lino's new black comedy for the New Colony places a trio of Disneyland employees inside the crumbling walls of the It's a Small World ride after an apparent apocalyptic event. [Den Theatre, through May 4](#)

BRIGHT STAR BoHo Theatre presents the Chicago premiere of Steve Martin and Edie Brickell's Tony-nominated musical love story set in North Carolina during the 1920s and '40s. [Greenhouse Theater Center, through May 5](#)

ADMISSIONS The hot-button topic of the dark underbelly of privilege that undermines the drive for diversity at prestige academic institutions takes center stage in Joshua Harmon's biting comedy. [Theater Wit, through May 12](#)

NOISES OFF Before "Slings & Arrows," there was Michael Frayn's 1982 show-within-a-show farce. Scott Weinstein's production literally takes the audience "backstage." [Windy City Playhouse, through May 12](#)

A NUMBER Caryl Churchill's 2002 chiller about cloning, identity, and family alienation features William Brown and Nate Burger under Robin Witt's direction. [Writers Theatre, through June 9](#)

COMING SOON

THE ABSOLUTE BRIGHTNESS OF LEONARD PELKEY The disappearance of a 14-year-old boy with an outsize personality in a small Jersey Shore town sparks soul searching for the community. Joe Foust plays every character in James Lecesne's play at American Blues Theater, directed by Kurt Johns. [Stage 773, March 29-April 27](#) →

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THEATER

➔ **LOTTERY DAY** Hot-as-blazes Chicago playwright Ike Holter concludes his seven-play "Rightlynd" cycle, set in the fictional 51st Ward, with this play about a matriarch hosting a community barbecue that might set off some unexpected fires. *Goodman Theatre, March 29-April 28*

CAMBODIAN ROCK BAND Lauren Yee's play offers an unlikely combination of psychedelic surf rock (courtesy of Los Angeles's Dengue Fever) and grim history as a young Cambodian American returns to her father's homeland with what she believes is evidence against perpetrators of Pol Pot's 1970s genocide. *Victory Gardens Theater, April 5-May 5*

UTILITY The working-class blues get a workout in Emily Schwend's drama about a young woman in east Texas juggling multiple jobs, a troubled marriage, and a daughter who just wants a nice birthday party. Georgette Verdin directs the midwest premiere for Interrobang Theatre Project. *Rivendell Theatre, April 5-May 4*

A CHORUS LINE Hoofers and heartbreak combine in the 1975 classic musical about dancers seeking their big break and baring their souls in songs like "What I Did for Love" and "Dance: Ten; Looks: Three." Brenda Didier directs for Porchlight Music Theatre. *Ruth Page Center for the Performing Arts, April 10-May 26*

HANNAH AND MARTIN Philosophers in love: Kate Fodor's play about the affair between Hannah Arendt and Martin Heidegger (which won raves in its 2003 world premiere with TimeLine Theatre) returns under Louis Contey's direction at Shattered Globe. *Theater Wit, April 11-May 25*

BUYER & CELLAR Barbra Streisand's recent controversial remarks on Michael Jackson aren't the only odd thing about her: she also has a collection of "Main Street" storefronts in the basement of her Malibu home to house her collection of dolls and other trinkets. Jonathan Tolins's one-man play looks at a young gay actor hired to maintain Babs' private collection. Scott Gryder stars. *Pride Films and Plays, April 11-May 19*

THE CHILDREN A pair of retired nuclear scientists at an English seaside cottage receive a disturbing visit from a former colleague in Lucy Kirkwood's climate-change thriller. *Steppenwolf Theatre, April 18-June 9*

LANGUAGE ROOMS An Egyptian immigrant finds himself trapped in a CIA "black site" when his loyalty is called into question. Kaiser Zaki Ahmed directs the midwest premiere of Yussef El Guindi's dark absurdist comedy for Broken Nose Theatre. *The Den Theater, April 19-May 18*

I'M GONNA PRAY FOR YOU SO HARD Halley Feiffer (daughter of cartoonist Jules Feiffer) wrote this acidic comedy about an actress determined to win approval from her father, a famous playwright. Cole von Glahn directs the Chicago premiere for First Floor Theater. *The Den Theatre, April 20-May 18*

NON-PLAYER CHARACTER Echoes of "GamerGate" haunt Walt McGough's drama about a woman games designer besieged by internet trolls, presented by Red Theater Chicago. *Athenaeum Theatre, April 20-May 18*

TOO HEAVY FOR YOUR POCKET A young black man must choose between a college scholarship (and the security it will promise for his family) and his calling to join the civil rights Freedom Riders in Jireh Breon Holder's drama. *TimeLine Theatre, April 24-June 29*

MAD BEAT HIP & GONE Steven Dietz's play follows two young men from Nebraska who, after a chance meeting with Jack Kerouac and company in a bar, decide to go on the road themselves. Jess Hutchinson directs for Promethean Theatre Ensemble. *The Edge Theater, April 26-June 1*

THE KILLING GAME A provincial burg becomes Ground Zero for a plague epidemic in Eugene Ionesco's late-career absurdist portrait of panic and paranoia. Dado directs. *A Red Orchid Theatre, May 2-June 23*

NEXT TO NORMAL Chicago native David Cromer, who won the Tony Award last year for directing 8, comes home to stage Tom Kitt and Brian Yorkey's Pulitzer Prize-winning musical about a family confronting loss and mental illness. *Writers Theatre, May 8-June 16*


MARY SHELLEY'S FRANKENSTEIN Lookingglass makes it four-for-four with reimaginations of Shelley's classic. (Lifeline, Remy Bumppo, and Court presented their versions last fall.) David Catlin directs his own adaptation. *Lookingglass Theatre Company, May 8-August 4*

TAKE ME Reader contributor Mark Guarino and Jon Langford of the Mekons collaborate on this world-premiere musical, based on a true story. Shelly, a woman whose husband is in a coma, believes that aliens have instructed her to move to Roswell, New Mexico, and build an amusement park. *Strawdog Theatre, May 10-June 22*

LA HAVANA MADRID Sandra Delgado's celebrated musical portrait of Latin American nightclubs in the 1950s returns with Teatro Vista in an immersive theatrical experience. *The Den Theatre May 11-June 22*

IT IS MAGIC Theater Oobleck, one of the longest-running experimental theater troupes in town, presents longtime company member Mickle Maher's mash-up of *Macbeth* and *The Three Little Pigs*, presented as a meditation on the darker mysteries of the theatrical process. *Chopin Theatre, May 17-June 29*

BLOOMSDAY More Steven Dietz, courtesy of Remy Bumppo Theatre Company. James Joyce's *Ulysses* forms the backdrop for this literary time-travel tale. *Theater Wit, May 16-June 16*

EMMA Everyone's favorite well-meaning romantic meddler returns in this new adaptation by Phil Timberlake of Jane Austen's classic. *Lifeline Theatre, May 24-July 14* 

LEMONADE STAND

Sat 3/30, 7 PM, Playground Theater, 3209 N. Halsted, theplaygroundtheater.com, \$5 suggested donation.



KAYLA PULLEY

COMEDY

Turning lemons into... well, you know

Lemonade Stand makes a safe space for women of color to be funny.

By BRIANNA WELLEN

Comedian Kayla Pulley is tired of the open mike scene in Chicago. As a black woman, she doesn't always feel very welcome or even safe in the predominantly white, male environment. Even after years of proving herself on stages around the city, she would too often find herself walking into a room and being completely ignored by comedians she saw every day. She would call out the problems with open mikes in the city on stage to zero

response. No one seemed to want to do the work of acknowledging performers of color. It got so bad that she quit doing stand-up.


But then she decided she shouldn't have to leave the scene entirely. She and fellow comedians Asia Martin, Jillian Ebanks, and Lauren Walker, all black women, started something new in an attempt to create a supportive comedy environment. Lemonade Stand is a stand-up showcase and open mike specifically for women of color that takes place the last Saturday of every month at Playground Theater.

"It's called Lemonade Stand because, as women of color, life continuously gives us lemons and we have to make lemonade with it," Pulley says. "And now we want to share this lemonade! We were like, there needs to be a place for us to feel comfortable doing this, because there are so many of us who would be so great at this, and there aren't safe spaces to do it."

Each month features a showcase of four to five comedians who are already performing around the city and eight to ten mike slots for new comics. Since the show's debut in

October, Pulley has already seen women who tried stand-up for the first time at her show performing at other places across the city.

While this space was created to give women of color opportunities to perform, it's in no way exclusionary. Preference is given to women of color, but everyone is invited to sign up for the open mike and offer support from the audience. Pulley hopes what she and her cohosts are doing with Lemonade Stand can serve as a model for how other rooms are run. Everyone needs to come together to upend toxic open-mike culture, she says, and increase the diversity among performers on Chicago stages.

"White men are allowed to come and are encouraged to come," Pulley says. "We all need to support each other, and we especially need to support women of color. What women of color are doing in comedy right now is very important for the world as a whole, and more people need to get behind that and support that if we want to see any type of change in the world." 

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Us ★★★
Directed by Jordan Peele. R,
116 min. In wide release.

REVIEW

We have met the enemy and they are *Us*

Jordan Peele's follow-up to *Get Out*

By **BEN SACHS**

Warning: This review contains spoilers.

With his debut feature *Get Out* (2017), Jordan Peele announced himself as a horror filmmaker in the grand tradition of George A. Romero and Larry Cohen, savvily using the genre to interrogate American social issues. The film was perfectly scary, but its ingeniousness lay in its satirical streak. Peele dramatized common fears among various minority groups about assimilation into and appropriation by the dominant white culture, mining the subjects for discomfiting laughs before turning the story into more unsettling territory. But even when *Get Out* became a full-fledged horror film, Peele didn't lose sight of its guiding theme of white people using a range of ploys to enthrall and ultimately subordinate people of color. Released around the time of Donald Trump's inauguration, the movie became a social phenomenon, touching a raw nerve in the culture and making loads of money in the process.

In short, Peele had a tough act to follow, and the smartest thing about his second feature, *Us* (now playing in wide release), is that it doesn't try to repeat the formula of *Get Out*. The film, like its predecessor, is centered around a metaphor, but that metaphor is more open-ended, harder to pin down. Peele's imagery carries a wealth of associations; the movie doesn't encourage the sort of straight-ahead reading that *Get Out* did. This ambiguity is something of a blessing and a curse. On the one hand, *Us* isn't a funny, cathartic crowd-pleaser like Peele's debut. (Where the audience with whom I saw *Get Out* cheered or screamed at every twist, the crowd at the theater where I saw *Us* on opening night was far more subdued.) On the other, it achieves an insidious, lingering effect that's rarer in the horror genre.

Us begins with three separate framing devices, each of which opens up a possible reading of what's to follow. First comes a title card informing the audience that there are thousands of miles of unused underground passageways in the United States; Peele uses ominous language to hint at something devious lurking beneath the surface of American life. Next comes a TV promo from 1986 about the nationwide charity benefit Hands Across America. Peele maintains the ominous tone of the title card, slowly zooming into a vintage TV set that's playing the ad and which has stacks of VHS tapes arranged around it with eerie neatness. Again, Peele intimates an unseen devious presence, but he complicates the mood by foregrounding a call for unity. What are we to make of the juxtaposition? That the promise of Hands Across America (and other photogenic acts of public concern) is simply a cover-up for darker, unacknowledged impulses within our society? Peele returns to this idea, but only at the end of *Us*, leaving the audience to wait and see.

From there the film presents a dramatic prologue, set in 1986, in which the heroine, Adelaide (played effectively by newcomer Madison Curry), gets separated from her parents at a beachfront carnival in Santa Cruz, California. Adelaide wanders near the ocean, then comes upon a fun house. Inside, she explores the hall of mirrors and encounters another little girl who looks exactly like herself. (Peele creates a nice surprise by making the stranger appear to be a reflection at first; some people in the audience when I saw the film jumped when the stranger turned around.) It's an affecting moment that taps into the fear that a person may not have agency over their identity—that someone can be him- or herself and also a stranger. Peele leaves it up to the viewer to decide how this ties into the fears introduced



Us

in the other two framing devices, letting the ambiguity get under one's skin.

The next half-hour of *Us* gives the audience time to chew over the ideas presented in the first ten minutes, as Peele builds a creepy atmosphere before getting to the next big scare. The least successful section of the film, the first act slowly introduces the primary characters, who aren't particularly interesting or unique. Adelaide is now middle-aged (and played by Lupita Nyong'o), married to a genial man named Gabe (Winston Duke), and raising two kids, aloof teenage daughter Zora (Shahadi Wright Joseph) and goofy younger son Jason (Evan Alex). Peele shows the family driving to their summer home—which happens to be in Santa Cruz—and ready to have a relaxing vacation. All that's clear about these characters is that they have money and typical upper-middle-class social aspirations; Peele doesn't reveal what the parents do for a living, what their backgrounds are like (apart from Adelaide's traumatic experience as a girl), or where they live the rest of the year. All that matters is that they're a well-adjusted black family, which Peele emphasizes for perhaps longer than he should. The director creates a compelling frisson between the normal on-screen behavior and the eerie visual aesthetic (lots of slow zooms and Steadicam shots reminiscent of Kubrick's *The Shining*), but it wears out its welcome before the plot advances.

After a day at the beach, where the characters relax with some white family friends and Adelaide freaks out when she sees that the cursed fun house from her youth is still standing, the family returns to the summer home for the night. Adelaide is restless, her post-traumatic stress triggered by what she saw on the beach, and soon her worst fear emerges in the form of a family that resembles her own. The doppelgangers barge in

and start terrorizing the protagonists, threatening them verbally before taking out pairs of very sharp scissors. With the exception of Adelaide's double, none of the other doppelgangers speak—they communicate mainly in grunts, suggesting they come from some barbarian culture. The primitiveness of the doubles is one of the most evocative details of *Us*; it suggests, alternately, those aspects of a person that can't be assimilated into polite society and the barbaric urges that society trains us to suppress.

The family's grisly escape from their murderous doppelgangers makes for the lengthiest and most effective climax of *Us*. In fending off their demonic doubles, the family succumbs to their own worst instincts, becoming murderers themselves. This development suggests a sort of negative unity, with everyone joining together in a mutual ugliness. (The film will amplify this idea in its haunting final image.) Peele reiterates the notion when the family seeks help from their friends, only to find that the other family has been murdered by their own doppelgangers and that these brutes must be destroyed lest they kill again. Adelaide's family proves surprisingly adept at getting rid of them. Eventually it turns out that a whole army of doubles is rising up from under the earth to declare war on aboveground society. Peele doesn't make clear what the hordes want, and this ambiguity (as opposed to that with which he defines the principal characters) strengthens the film's central metaphor. Do the doubles represent America's suppressed underclass? Or perhaps the realization of a fear of society devolving into barbarism? Again, Peele doesn't resolve the issue, forcing viewers to leave the theater with their fears intact. **R**

[@1bsachs](#)

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

NOW PLAYING

RR The Big Heat

Fritz Lang's sizzling 1953 film noir masterpiece features Glenn Ford (in his best performance—perhaps his only performance) as an anguished cop out to smash a maddeningly effete mobster (Alexander Scourby) and break the hold he has on a corrupt city administration. With sensational support from Lee Marvin as a sadistic hood and Gloria Grahame as Marvin's bad/good girlfriend, whose reward for hanging around is a faceful of scalding coffee. Brutal, atmospheric, and exciting—highly recommended. —**DON DRUKER** 90 min. 35mm. Tue 4/2, 7 PM. Univ. of Chicago Doc Films

Les Bonnes Femmes

Arguably the best as well as the most disturbing movie Claude Chabrol has made to date, this unjustly neglected 1960 feature, his fourth, focuses on the everyday lives and ultimate fates of four young women (Bernadette Lafont, Stephane Audran, Clotilde Joano, and Lucile Saint-Simon) working at an appliance store in Paris and longing for better things. Ruthlessly unsentimental yet powerfully compassionate, it shows Chabrol at his most formally inventive, and it exerts a pronounced influence on Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* two decades later. In French with subtitles. —**JONATHAN ROSENBAUM** 100 min. 16mm. Mon 4/1, 7 PM. Univ. of Chicago Doc Films

N The Bra

The most refreshing thing about this dialogue-free comedy (a coproduction between Germany and Azerbaijan) is that it doesn't slavishly invoke movies of the silent era à la *The Artist*. In fact, sound plays a big role in the film—there's usually some machine clanking or music playing—leading one to realize how much we hear in the world has nothing to do with language. The slender narrative concerns an aging train conductor in a small mountain community (Emir Kusturica regular Miki Manojlovic) whose engine crosses a clothesline one day and picks up a stray bra. Terminally lonely, the conductor embarks on a mission to find the item's owner to give himself something to do. What follows is basically a series of variations on the same joke—the shy gentleman finding himself in an intimate position with one strange woman after another—but cowriter-director Veit Helmer generates enough interesting sight gags to keep this from getting monotonous. With Denis Lavant and Paz Vega. —**BEN SACHS** 90 min. Showing as part of the Chicago European Union Film Festival. Fri 3/29, 2 PM, and Sat 3/30, 3 PM. Gene Siskel Film Center

City of Lost Souls

West German filmmaker Rosa von Praunheim (*Red Love, Army of Perverts*) lights out for the territory again, the sexual terra incognita of underground Berlin. It's a musical that takes place mostly in a hamburger joint and a hotel, with an all-glitter-dust assortment of uninspired talents (American expatriates stranded in Berlin) waiting for their big break on the nightlife scene. With Jayne County, Angie Stardust, and La Habana (1983). In English and subtitled German and Spanish. —**PAT GRAHAM** 91 min. Thu 4/4, 7:30 PM. Northwestern University Block Museum of Art **FREE**

Deathgasm

Plenty of hard rock and heavy-metal-themed movies successfully celebrate and satirize the culture that inspired

them, but others kinda miss the mark. *Deathgasm* is a horror-comedy in which a band stumbles upon a mysterious piece of music, and by playing it inadvertently cause its neighbors to be possessed by murderous demons. It's a throwback to gross-out splatstick classics, but beyond the bloodshed it often comes across like a visit into the fantasy life of a stereotypical metal boy . . . circa 1993. (Only one woman character has lines in the film's first 40 minutes, and she's a high school prep who's transformed into a metalhead with help from her dorky love interest and his Anal Cunt CD.) The award-winning special effects might be worth the ticket price, and catching Chicago metal trio Lair of the Minotaur in the soundtrack is a bonus. But there isn't enough plot to keep it engaging—by the end I found myself wishing I'd gone to a local metal show instead. —**JAMIE LUDWIG** 86 min. Sat 3/30, midnight. Music Box

N The Dirt

If you ever wondered if there was anything more to Mötley Crüe than scuzzy glam metal and shallow, ego-driven debauchery, *The Dirt*, the new biopic based on the band's no-holds-barred collective autobiography of the same name, will not answer your question—not that anyone's watching for that reason. Like many movies about still-living celebrities, it presents a whitewashed vision of the artists it depicts, and that seems especially strange when those artists are practically synonymous with 80s excess and bad behavior (including, for some members, domestic assault). There are plenty of fantastic movies about difficult personalities and antiheroes, and the story of Mötley Crüe could have a place in that tradition. Instead, a flat narrative and mostly one-dimensional characters land *The Dirt* somewhere between cheeseball buddy flick and Lifetime movie melodrama. Even *Airheads*, the 1994 comedy that spoofed Sunset Strip hard-rock culture, had a more gripping storyline and emotional arc (and certainly more laughs) than this tale of a real band that helped define that scene. —**JAMIE LUDWIG** 108 min. Streaming on Netflix

N Dumbo

Disney's latest live-action remake of one of the studio's animated classics gives Tim Burton (*Alice in Wonderland*) another chance to vamp with an empty spectacle that is fine for children and perhaps nostalgia-inducing for adults who watched the 1941 original on VHS. This version focuses more on the humans at the circus than on the animals they train, most of which are computer-generated and don't speak. Such a choice might have worked if the narrative and performances were excellent, but alas. The acting from everyone onscreen, including Colin Farrell as a former trick rider and Danny DeVito as a ringmaster circa 1920, is so anachronistic and unnatural that their interaction with CGI is a respite. The flying baby elephant is cute and the production design is eye-catching. The upsides end there. The refurbished story, both numbing in its predictability and painstakingly woke, is the clearest indicator that this reboot need not exist. —**LEAH PICKETT** PG, 115 min. Arclight, Block 37, City North 14, Ford City 14, Galewood Crossings 14, Navy Pier IMAX, New 400, River East 21, Showplace Icon, 600 N. Michigan, Webster Place

RR N Emma Peeters

Emma Peeters (Monia Chokri) is tired of being alive. Stuck in a dead-end job, aging out of her



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less-than-successful acting career, and dreading her future. Emma plans to end it all on her 35th birthday. Writer-director Nicole Palo's second feature is unapologetically macabre—Emma buys her own casket and searches for cyanide pills on internet forums—but her plans take an unexpected turn when she begins to take a romantic interest in a funeral home employee. Even with its taboo subject matter, *Emma Peeters* bursts at the seams with witty humor, self awareness, and a complicated feeling of hope. Sometimes taking control of your life isn't an act of optimism or inspiration—it's bleak, a little bit selfish, and full of contradictions. But Emma Peeters is a fighter through and through, and it's impossible not to root for her as she confronts her mortality head-on. In French with subtitles. —**CODY CORRALL** 90 min. Showing as part of the Chicago European Union Film Festival. Fri 3/29, 2 PM, and Tue 4/2, 6 PM. Gene Siskel Film Center

N Holy Boom

In this Greek drama directed by Maria Lafi, four strangers, who live in the same Athens neighborhood but hardly interact, connect after their neighborhood post

box explodes. The explosion destroys important documents that belong to all of them—LSD stickers, a letter from an abandoned son, and a birth certificate—setting them up for a dramatic battle for survival. *Holy Boom* successfully shifts among various characters as they continue to find ways to survive, eventually learning to rely on one another despite the generational and racial differences that set them apart. Lafi manages to create a balance throughout the film so that none of the four storylines feels more nuanced than the others. But the real strength of the film lies in its cast, which makes the premise feel natural despite some of the more unrealistic and gruesome moments. In Greek and Albanian with subtitles. —**MARISSA DE LA CERDA** 99 min. Showing as part of the Chicago European Union Film Festival. Fri 3/29, 7:45 PM, and Wed 4/3, 8:30 PM. Gene Siskel Film Center

N Hotel Mumbai

This uncomfortably intense true-crime thriller is only for viewers with a high threshold for graphic violence, as it imagines what news cameras couldn't show during the coordinated terrorist assaults on Mumbai between ➔

➔ November 26 and 29, 2008. For days reporters and onlookers camped outside the Taj Mahal Palace Hotel while fewer than a dozen Pakistani jihadists marauded the lobby and hallways of the 550-room historic edifice, killing everyone in sight, until the gunmen's overseas handlers instructed them by cell phones to begin taking a few wealthy hostages. In a composite role, Dev Patel stars as a waiter who, along with other courageous staffers, elects to stay behind to protect guests; Armie Hammer and Nazanin Boniadi play an American architect and his Iranian wife who won't leave because their infant son and his nanny are trapped on another floor. Working from eyewitness accounts and CCTV security footage, first-time feature director Anthony Maras recreates the carnage in meticulous detail, while showing that the vicious attackers were gullible youths from backgrounds so impoverished that some had never before seen a flushing toilet. The movie's coda cements the overarching message of extolling heroism and the survivors' refusal to let terror define them. But that moral still rings a little hollow, if only because as long as disproportionately large numbers of have-nots wither from neglect and indifference across our overpopulated globe, the haves will never really feel safe—nor should they. With Anupam Kher, Tilda Cobham-Hervey, and Jason Isaacs as a brutish Russian playboy who finds a conscience. In English and subtitled Hindi, Punjabi, Marathi, Greek, Russian, Arabic, Urdu, and Farsi. —**ANDREA GRONVALL** *R*, 123 min. *Landmark's Century Cinema, River East 21*

N The Hummingbird Project

Jesse Eisenberg and Alexander Skarsgård (the latter nearly unrecognizable) star as odd-couple cousins who undertake to install a fiber-optic cable between Kansas City and New York in order to speed up the process by which they can buy and sell stock, a practice known as high-frequency trading. A silver-haired Salma Hayek plays their former boss, who tries to outsmart them at their own game. What might have made for either a thrilling, high-stakes drama or, at the very least, an intelligent comedy, ends up wildly uneven—the qualities that differentiate Canadian writer-director Kim Nguyen's work (e.g. his idiosyncratic 2012 feature *War Witch*) seem out of place in a film that otherwise adheres to convention. Strong performances from the leads help to bolster it, but Nguyen's commentary on structural inequality within the financial system falls flat. —**KATHLEEN SACHS** *R*, 111 min. *River East 21*

Looking for Langston

Isaac Julien's frankly erotic black-and-white meditation on the Harlem renaissance of the 1930s. Part narrative, part polemical essay, part lyrical art film, part documentary on Langston Hughes, this 1989 British film employs clips from various kinds of archival footage (including three Oscar Micheaux films), quotes from Hughes, Essex Hemphill, Bruce Nugent, Hilton Als, and James Baldwin (the last read by Toni Morrison), and memorable glimpses of a period nightclub where black and white men in tuxedos dance together. The results are certainly striking—stylistically, intellectually, and sensually. —**JONATHAN ROSENBAUM** *45 min. Showing with Julien's 1993 short *The Attendant* (8 min, 35mm). Wed 4/3, 7 PM. Northwestern University Block Museum of Art [FREE](#)*

RR Loving Vincent

A team of 115 oil painters executed some 65,000 canvases in the style of Vincent Van Gogh to create this extraordinary animation about the painter's last days. Following Van Gogh's death from a mysterious gunshot wound, young Armand Roulin, whose family in

the French town of Arles posed for numerous Van Gogh portraits, sets out to determine whether the death was murder, suicide, or an accident—and, moreover, why the painter, who appeared happy and productive during his time in Arles, might have chosen that moment to take his own life. The roiling landscape scenes betray the redundancy of animating images that already sizzle with energy, but the portraiture works beautifully, especially because the actors who supply the characters' voices and visages are first-rate (especially Chris O'Dowd as Roulin's postman father, a compassionate soul with insights into the damaged artist). —**J.R. JONES** *PG-13, 95 min. Sun 3/31, 11 AM. Music Box*

RR Pather Panchali

In 1955, the year Satyajit Ray's beautiful first feature won the Grand Prix at Cannes, no less a humanist than Francois Truffaut walked out of a screening, declaring, 'I don't want to see a film about Indian peasants.' Time and critical opinion have been much kinder to this family melodrama—derived, like its successors in the Apu trilogy, *Aparajito* and *The World of Apu*, from a 30s novel by Bibhutibhusan Banerjee—than to Truffaut's remark. Yet there's no question that Ray's contemplative treatment of a poor Brahman family in a Bengali village, made on a small budget and accompanied by the mesmerizing music of Ravi Shankar, is a triumph of mood and character rather than an exercise in brisk Western storytelling. In Bengali with subtitles. —**JONATHAN ROSENBAUM** *115 min. 35mm. Wed 4/3, 7 and 9:30 PM. Univ. of Chicago Doc Films*

Raise the Red Lantern

Completing a loose trilogy that began with *Red Sorghum* and *Ju Dou*, Zhang Yimou's grim 1991 adaptation of a novel by Su Tong once again stars Gong Li as a young woman who marries a much older man, and once again tells a story that explicitly critiques Chinese feudalism and indirectly contemporary China. This time, however, the style is quite different (despite another key use of the color red) and the vision is much bleaker. The heroine, a less sympathetic figure than her predecessors, is a university student in the 1920s who becomes the fourth and youngest wife of a powerful man in northern China after her stepmother can no longer afford to pay for her education. She quickly becomes involved in the various intrigues and rivalries between wives that rule her husband's world and family tradition: each wife has her own house and courtyard within the palace, and whoever the husband chooses to sleep with on a given night receives a foot massage, several lighted red lanterns, and the right to select the menu for the following day. The film confines us throughout to this claustrophobic universe of boxes within boxes, where wives and female servants devote their lives to scheming against one another; the action is filmed mainly in frontal long shots. Zhang confirms his mastery and artistry here in many ways, some relatively new (such as his striking soundtrack), though the cold, remote, and stifling world he presents here doesn't offer much emotional release. In Mandarin with subtitles. —**JONATHAN ROSENBAUM** *PG, 125 min. 35mm. Thu 4/4, 7 PM. Univ. of Chicago Doc Films*

RR N Starfish

How does one grieve in the apocalypse? It's a question that festers in A.T. White's directorial debut like a ticking time bomb. Inspired by White's own experience with loss, *Starfish* follows Aubrey (Virginia Gardner) as she attempts to come to terms with the passing of her best friend, Grace (Christina Masterson), while the world turns over. It's a largely solitary story of survival:

Aubrey shouts into the void through a walkie-talkie, eats canned food, and fights off captivating monsters. Using cassette tapes Grace left behind, Aubrey begins to piece together the puzzle of the world's end, resulting in a quest to both revert the apocalypse and to cope with her own trauma. White's score is by far the standout of the film with musical themes that pivot from stirring and intense to kaleidoscopic and futuristic with ease—a worthy playlist for the remaining inhabitants of Earth. —**CODY CORRALL** *101 min. White attends the Friday 7 and 9 PM and Saturday 5, 7 and 9 PM screenings. At Facets Cinémathèque. Visit facets.org for showtimes.*

N Sunset

Who are you? What are you doing here? These questions echo throughout Hungarian writer-director László Nemes's 2018 sophomore film, underscoring its aura of anxiety and tilting disorientation in the face of a murky unknown future. Set in Budapest on the brink of World War I, this drama follows a woman (Juli Jakab, in her debut) who returns to the high-end hat shop her parents once owned in search of work, only to learn of the existence of a long-lost brother. She sets off to look for him in shadowy alleys, gothically lit soirees, and dim men's-only clubs. The pursuit is more interesting than her day job at the hat shop, which turns out to be a luminous gilded cage. Nemes doles tension out lavishly but skimps on the payoff, making Jakab's clear-eyed heroine purposeless and ultimately muddling what seemed to be a compelling mystery at the outset. Instead, this feels like an abstract ode to the frantic, listless, tightly wound thing a city becomes on the eve of its demise. In Hungarian, with subtitles. —**NINA LI COOMES** *R, 142 min. At Landmark's Century Cinema. Visit landmarktheatres.com for showtimes.*

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles

A marriage made in heaven—Hong Kong's Golden Harvest Films and Jim Henson's Muppetry—yielded this 1990 live-action romp, scripted by Todd W. Langen and Bobby Herbeck (with a goofy wit that suggests pseudonymous contributions to the dialogue by Thomas Pynchon) and directed with skill and assurance by Steve Barron. The plot involves a TV investigative reporter (Judith Hoag), a rise in thievery in Manhattan occasioned by a teenage gang known as the Foot (masterminded and exploited by a ninja villain called the Shredder), and the noble adversaries of the thieves—four teenage turtles and their rat ninja master who dwell in the sewer system, grown to abnormal size through exposure to radioactivity. Also involved is the reporter's son (Michael Turney), split between no less than three rival father figures, and an independent vigilante (Elias Koteas) who joins the turtles. The results are high-spirited martial arts and comedy, with heavy doses of *Star Wars* and *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. —**JONATHAN ROSENBAUM** *PG, 93 min. Fri 3/29-Mon 4/1, 11 PM. Logan*

RR The Terrorizers

Edward Yang's evocative and deliberately ambiguous third feature (1986) pivots on a chance encounter between a rebellious Eurasian girl and a novelist and housewife who decides to leave her husband, a lab technician. As Taiwanese film critic Edmund Wong has noted, the film offers "a refreshing look at Yang's theme of urban melancholy and self-discovery"—a preoccupation running through Yang's early work that often evokes some of Antonioni's poetry, atmosphere, and feeling for modernity. Well worth checking out. In Mandarin with subtitles. —**JONATHAN ROSENBAUM** *109 min. 16mm. Sat 3/30, 7 PM. Filmfront*

RR 35 Shots of Rum

A handsome black widower (Alex Descas) and his lovely college-age daughter (Mati Diop) inhabit a self-contained world of tranquil domesticity and affection in a gray suburban high-rise outside of Paris. A goodhearted but insecure woman down the hall (Nicole Dogué) lives in the abject hope of winning the widower's heart, and a sweetly melancholic young man upstairs (Grégoire Colin) harbors similar feelings for the young woman. It's a given that the father-daughter bubble must eventually burst, but the smart writer-director Claire Denis (*Beau Travail*) has other, subtler things on her mind than Electra-complex melodrama. This 2008 feature is beautiful but very quietly so, and definitely not for the ADHD set. In French with subtitles. —**CLIFF DOERKSEN** *100 min. 35mm. Tue 4/2, 9:30 PM. Univ. of Chicago Doc Films*

This Is Spinal Tap

Rob Reiner's 1984 satire on rock documentaries has the deadly verisimilitude of a *Harvard Lampoon* magazine parody: every cliché is in place, from the grainy kineoscopes of Spinal Tap's Mersey Beat beginnings to the rambling, vapid between-tunes interviews. The material is consistently clever and funny, though ultimately the attitudes are too narrow to nourish a feature-length film. Though Reiner has wisely introduced the elements of a plot toward the end (the breakup of the band as engineered by the lead singer's calculating girlfriend), 82 minutes is still a long haul for a film defined only by derisiveness. The cast is largely composed of Reiner's sitcom buddies, each reveling in the opportunity to be hip: Michael McKean, Harry Shearer, Christopher Guest, Howard Hesseman, Paul Shaffer, Fred Willard. —**DAVE KEHR** *R, 82 min. Thu 4/4, 9:30 PM. Univ. of Chicago Doc Films*

RR The Trial

Though debatable as an adaptation of the Franz Kafka novel, Orson Welles's nightmarish, labyrinthine comedy of 1962—shot mainly in Paris's abandoned Gare d'Orsay and various locations in Zagreb and Rome after he had to abandon his plan to use sets—remains his creepiest and most disturbing work; it's also a lot more influential than people usually admit (e.g., *After Hours*, the costume store sequences in *Eyes Wide Shut*). Anthony Perkins gives an adolescent temper to Joseph K, a bureaucrat mysteriously brought to court for an unspecified crime. Among the predatory females who pursue him are Jeanne Moreau, Romy Schneider, and Elsa Martinelli; Welles himself plays the hero's tyrannical lawyer, and Akim Tamiroff is one of his oldest clients. Welles adroitly captures the experience of an unsettling and slightly hysterical dream throughout. Given the impact of screen size on what he's doing, you can't claim to have seen this if you've watched it only on video. —**JONATHAN ROSENBAUM** *118 min. Former Reader film critic Jonathan Rosenbaum lectures at the screening. Tue 4/2, 6 PM. Gene Siskel Film Center*

12 Angry Men

Sidney Lumet's first film (1957) adapts a Reginald Rose TV play about a serious-minded juror (Henry Fonda, naturally) who gradually convinces his 11 colleagues to reconsider the guilt of a Puerto Rican youth on trial for murder. A somewhat pat liberal parable that reeks of its period, the film is pretty much saved, or nearly, by Lumet's tight direction and the capable performances, which are virtually restricted to the same closed room. Mechanically written, but within its own middlebrow

limitations, it delivers the goods. With Lee J. Cobb, Martin Balsam, E.G. Marshall, Jack Warden, and Jack Klugman. —**JONATHAN ROSENBAUM** 95 min. Tue 4/2-Thu 4/4, 10:30 PM. Logan

Velvet Goldmine

Conceptual to a fault, writer-director Todd Haynes (*Poison, Safe*) realizes one of his oldest and most cherished projects—a celebration of the glam-rock era and the bisexuality it turned into an opulent circus—with wit, glitter, and energy, but with such a scant sense of character or period that it leaves one feeling relatively empty as soon as it's over. Apart from its coy prologue (positing Oscar Wilde as the grand precursor to glam) and its cumbersome borrowings from the narrative structure of *Citizen Kane*, this 1998 film offers enough entertaining surface, snappy montage, and musical theater to keep one absorbed, but little of the tantalizing mystery that made *Safe* such an enduring experience. With Ewan McGregor, Jonathan Rhys Meyers, Eddie Izzard, and Toni Collette. —**JONATHAN ROSENBAUM** 124 min. 35mm. Fri 3/29-Sat 3/30, midnight. Music Box

ALSO PLAYING

Aleksi

Barbara Vekarić directed this Croatian/Serbian comedy-drama about a young woman trying to put off adult responsibilities while dealing with three interested men. In Croatian with subtitles. 90 min. Showing as part of the Chicago European Film Festival. Fri 3/29, 6 PM, and Sat 3/30, 3 PM. Gene Siskel Film Center

As Needed

An anger-prone chef and a teen with Aspergers become partners in a cooking competition in this Italian comedy. Francesco Falaschi directed. In Italian with subtitles. 94 min. Showing as part of the Chicago European Film Festival. Falaschi attends the Thursday screening. Fri 3/29, 4 PM, and Thu 4/4, 6 PM. Gene Siskel Film Center

The Beach Bum

Harmony Korine directed this comedy about a stoner (Matthew McConaughey). With Snoop Dogg, Isla Fisher, Stefania LaVie Owen, Jimmy Buffett, Zac Efron, and Martin Lawrence. R, 95 min. Century 12 and CineArts 6, Music Box, River East 21

Videos by Jacob Ciocci

A program of experimental works by video maker and artist Jacob Ciocci. Ciocci attends the screening. Mon 4/1, 8 PM. Nightingale

Deconstructing The Beatles: 1963 Yeah! Yeah! Yeah!

Justin Drobinski and Sean Gallagher directed this documentary of Scott Freiman's Beatles explorations, this one looking at their career in 1963. 76 min. Sat 3/30, 11:30 AM, and Wed 4/3, 7 PM. Music Box

Diamantino

Gabriel Abrantes and Daniel Schmidt directed this Portuguese/French comedic fantasy about a famed soccer player looking to redeem his reputation. In Portuguese with subtitles. 92 min. Showing as part of the Chicago European Union Film Festival. Fri 3/29, 6 PM, and Wed 4/3, 8:15 PM. Gene Siskel Film Center

Double Negative: Race, Popular Culture, and the Politics of "Quality"

A lecture by Racquel Gates (College of Staten Island, CUNY) about the critical usefulness and importance of negative black stereotypes in media. Thu 4/4, 4 PM.

Univ. of Chicago Logan Center for the Arts **FREE**

Eternal Winter

Attila Szász directed this Hungarian drama about a peasant woman learning to survive in a WWII Soviet labor camp. In Hungarian and Russian with subtitles. 110 min. Showing as part of the Chicago European Union Film Festival. Sun 3/31, 3 PM, and Mon 4/1, 7:45 PM. Gene Siskel Film Center

Float Like a Butterfly

Carmel Winters directed this Irish drama about a teen girl battling tradition that would soon have her married off in order to pursue her dreams of boxing. 101 min. Showing as part of the Chicago European Union Film Festival. Winters and production designer Toma McCullim attend the screenings. Fri 3/29, 8 PM, and Sat 3/30, 5 PM.

Limestone Cowboy

Abigail Mallia directed this 2017 Maltese film about a possibly delusional amateur running for president of Malta, and his family's history. In English and subtitled Maltese. 97 min. Showing as part of the Chicago European Union Film Festival. Fri 3/29, 4 PM, and Thu 4/4, 8:15 PM. Gene Siskel Film Center

The Little Comrade

Moonika Siimets directed this Estonian drama set in the 1950s about a young girl's life after her mother is sent to a prison camp. In Estonian and Russian with subtitles. 100 min. Showing as part of the Chicago European Union Film Festival. Sun 3/31, 5:15 PM, and Tue 4/2, 8 PM. Gene Siskel Film Center

Loving Vincent: The Impossible Dream

Miki Wecl directed this documentary about the making of the 2017 animated film *Loving Vincent*. 60 min. Sun 3/31, 12:45 PM. Music Box

My Art

Artist Laurie Simmons directed and stars in this 2016 feature about a NYC artist hoping to reenergize her stalled career. 86 min. Tue 3/26 and Sun 3/31, 2 PM. Museum of Contemporary Art

Open TV

A selection of recent web series from the local Open TV streaming platform. Thu 4/4, 6 PM. Museum of Contemporary Art **FREE**

Screwball

Billy Corben directed this documentary about Anthony Bosch and his role in a high-profile doping scandal in major league baseball in the 2000s. 105 min. At Facets Cinémathèque. Visit facets.org for showtimes.

Shards from the Mirror of History

A program of experimental and independent shorts (2012-18) by Chinese filmmakers. 60 min. Curator Nicky Ni attends the screening. Thu 4/4, 6 PM. Gene Siskel Film Center

The Silence of Others

Robert Bahar and Almudena Carracedo directed this Spanish documentary about the lingering effects of Franco's dictatorship. In Spanish with subtitles. 96 min. Showing as part of the Chicago European Union Film Festival. Sun 3/31, 3 PM, and Mon 4/1, 6 PM. Gene Siskel Film Center

The Silent Revolution

Lars Kraume directed this German film about the repercussions of a moment of silence, in protest of the Soviet intervention in the Hungarian Uprising of 1956, organized by two East German high school students. In German with subtitles. 112 min. Showing as part of the Chicago European Union Film Festival. Sun 3/31, 5 PM, and Wed 4/3, 6 PM. Gene Siskel Film Center

Tomorrow Never Knows

Adam Sekuler directed this 2017 documentary about a couple contemplating a "conscious death" when one is diagnosed with early-onset Alzheimer's. 93 min. Sekuler attends the screening. Sat 3/30, 8 PM. Nightingale

Touch Me Not

Adina Pintilie directed this experimental Romanian/German film that combines narrative and documentary to explore issues around intimacy and disabilities. In English and subtitled German. 125 min. Showing as part of the Chicago European Union Film Festival. Sat 3/30, 7:45 PM, and Wed 4/3, 6 PM. Gene Siskel Film Center

Trouble Every Day

Vincent Gallo and Béatrice Dalle star in this 2001 horror feature by Claire Denis (*Beau Travail*). In French with subtitles. 101 min. 35mm. Mon 4/1, 9:30 PM. Univ. of Chicago Doc Films

Whatever Happened to My Revolution

Actress Judith Davis stars in and directed this French comedy about a frustrated political activist who decides to visit her mother, who abandoned her family years before. In French with subtitles. 89 min. Showing as part of the Chicago European Union Film Festival. Sat 3/30, 4:45 PM, and Mon 4/1, 6 PM. Gene Siskel Film Center

Women of the Now Anniversary Screening

A program of short films from the local independent production company Women of the Now. Select filmmakers and Women of the Now producers attend the screening. Sat 3/30, 7 PM. Chicago Filmmakers **FI**

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C.H.E.W.
front woman
Doris Jeane
during a set at a
Bridgeport DIY
show space in
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SORRONDEGUY

C.H.E.W. take a bite out of hardcore

WAKE, LIKE RATS, C.H.E.W.,
CARNIVORES AT GRACE
Tue 4/2, 6:30 PM,
Subterranean downstairs,
2011 W. North, \$10. 17+

The Chicago four-piece twist and tear at their favorite genre to give it a strange new shape.

By LEOR GALIL

When Russell Harrison, bassist of Chicago hardcore band C.H.E.W., first replies to my interview request, he signs the e-mail “c/o Courageous Horned-toads Escape Wasps.” Harrison and his bandmates have suggested several other possibilities for their acronym over the years: Cocaine Heroin Ecstasy Weed, Crying Heavily Every Week, Cold Hands Elicit Worry, Chill Hard Every Weekend. By the time you finish this story, they’ll probably have come up with a few more. But C.H.E.W. doesn’t stand for anything in particular—it’s just that “Chew” was taken.

Harrison, guitarist Ben Rudolph, drummer Jonathan “Jono” Giralt, and vocalist Doris Jeane began playing nasty D-beat as Chew in 2015, and within a year (according to an interview they did with *Maximum Rockroll*) they heard from an Atlanta psych band also called

Chew asking them to change their name. The Chicago group didn’t see any potential for confusion and refused. In short order, they received a cease-and-desist notice. (Sarah Wilson, drummer for the Atlanta Chew, confirms via e-mail that her band took that step: “Our name is trademarked.”) The Chicago Chew became C.H.E.W., but it didn’t matter too much—at that point all they’d put out was a seven-song demo, so they weren’t exactly at risk of losing a large but punctuation-illiterate audience.

In September 2018, after two more releases (both splits with other hardcore bands), C.H.E.W. released their debut full-length album, *Feeding Frenzy*. (“Full-length” is a relative term, and in hardcore it can mean 16 tracks that total 31 minutes.) Bandcamp Daily published a glowing profile of C.H.E.W. that described *Feeding Frenzy* as a “perfect hardcore LP,” and the *AV Club* named it one

of the best punk albums of 2018. It came out domestically through Iron Lung, the venerable independent label run by the hardcore band of the same name. At the time, says Iron Lung drummer and vocalist Jensen Ward, the label was going through a fallow period, and he’d started to worry that it was drifting apart from its audience. “Sales were slow—people weren’t really going for the things that I was really excited about,” Ward says. “I was like, ‘I don’t really understand—maybe I’ve lost touch with the kids, who knows.’ Things weren’t selling as well as I wanted them to, or at least hoped that they would. And then their record came and sold like crazy.”

Ward pressed 500 copies of *Feeding Frenzy* and quickly sold the label’s share. C.H.E.W. got about 150 themselves, but few of them can be found unsold in the wild—Reckless has a couple left. UK punk label Drunken Sailor pressed a European version of *Feeding Frenzy*

and still has it in stock online, though you’ll have to deal with international shipping fees. Iron Lung is working on a cassette edition, which should be done before May—that is, in time for C.H.E.W.’s two-week tour opening for Boston indie-rock stalwarts Pile.

It’s less plausible now to talk about an American hardcore “scene” than it was in the 80s, in part because the Internet has connected diffuse communities and made responsible generalizations difficult. But that doesn’t prevent bands like C.H.E.W. from making an impression. “They’re proof that U.S. punk and hardcore is still very vital, and very important, and it’s still possible to make urgent music that means something to people,” Ward says. “They offer hope for people who need some. They also offer a place for people to work out their issues and listen to some angry music if they need to, or just see it and have a good time pushing their friends around.” ➔

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The rest of C.H.E.W., top to bottom: Russell Harrison, Jonathan “Jono” Giralt, and Ben Rudolph
 © MARTIN SORRONDEGUY

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Three-fourths of C.H.E.W.—Harrison, Rudolph, and Giralt—met in Orlando, Florida. In 2013, Harrison moved to Chicago with indie-rock band Great Deceivers. “I started playing in that band—writing some songs and playing shows—and a month or two into it, ‘Hey, do you wanna move to Chicago, by the way? ‘Cause we’re all gonna go do that,’” Harrison says. “I said, ‘Sure.’ And that’s why I went.” Rudolph has since joined Harrison in Great Deceivers, and they released their third full-length in January.

When Harrison left Florida, Rudolph and Giralt were playing in a skramz outfit called Knife Hits, and Giralt had taken up an itinerant lifestyle. “I had not been living in Florida for a while, and was kind of bouncing around places—the Bay Area, northern California, and Philadelphia. I went back to Orlando for a short period of time,” he says. “There was another large cluster of friends who were from Orlando who’d migrated here. Everybody who grew up in central Florida around that time all have separation anxiety and all like to stay close to each other. I like Chicago, I’ve been here a couple of times, so I figured I’d give this place a shot.”

Giralt persuaded Rudolph to move to Chicago during a polar vortex in early 2014, though they expected the weather to have eased up by the time they arrived. “We were at my parents’ garage, trying to get the motorcycle into the back of the van, like, ‘Yeah, the snow’s probably gonna be melted—the storm hit, like, two or three days ago. We should be fine,’” Giralt says. “And we were clearly very, very wrong.”

The temperature in Nashville, Tennessee, fell to 13 below the day they passed through. “I didn’t know what black ice was until we started driving on it,” Rudolph says.

Giralt landed a job at a dog day care, where he met Jeane. She’d grown up in suburban Bensenville, southwest of O’Hare; she and her friends had visited Logan Square as teenagers for punk shows at DIY venue La Casa Maldita. When she met Giralt, she had almost no experience in bands. “I played bass for a show, once, a long time ago,” she says. “It was always something that seemed cool, but it was really scary.”

In spring 2015, Rudolph, Harrison, and Giralt began working on a new project. “We wanted to start this band—we’ve said it before—and play like an anarcho band playing west-coast hardcore,” Rudolph says. About five or six bands inspire all four members of C.H.E.W., he claims, though in our conversation the only two they can agree on are London

anarcho weirdos Rudimentary Peni and Bay Area hardcore iconoclasts the Dead Kennedys.

Jeane says Giralt decided she’d be a good fit for this new group. “It was like, ‘Do you wanna join my band? You seem like you could use an outlet,’” she says. “I was very crazy. I was losing my shit. I think I was always coming to work, ‘Oh my God, *this* happened!’ He was like, ‘Have you ever tried channeling this?’”

When Giralt asked Jeane to try out, C.H.E.W. had already made rehearsal recordings without a vocalist. She was about to check herself into a mental institution for depression and anxiety, but she got the recordings just before she went in.

“I spent my time trying to write lyrics in there, which is very helpful, thank you,” Jeane says. “And then I tried out when I got out.” She didn’t know Harrison and Rudolph well, but she’d come to the audition prepared to deal with her nerves. “I had whiskey,” she says.

“You had brought the little fifth of Jameson with you,” Giralt says. “And just polished it off.”

Jeane bonded with the rest of the band quickly, but C.H.E.W. didn’t rush into their first show—it wasn’t until September 2015, after plenty of practice, that they debuted at a Humboldt Park DIY space. “We played everything in our sleep at that point,” Rudolph says.

Their first live set included the seven crusty, bite-size songs they’d later release as a self-titled demo in March 2016. Rudolph broke a string a few songs in and had to borrow a guitar. Harrison couldn’t hear any of Jeane’s vocals, even though he’d planted himself next to a PA speaker. Jeane isn’t even sure if she could hear herself. “I remember being scared at the first show and just looking at my feet,” she says. “I don’t remember much after that.”

The gig might’ve felt like a mess to the band, but it won over plenty of the people who saw it. Soon C.H.E.W. were getting invitations to play underground spaces from some of the scene’s key bookers, among them Ralph Rivera, who fronts radical hardcore band the Bug and runs Not Normal Tapes. “We got asked to play a lot of shows,” Rudolph says.

“And we just said yes to anything, whenever anyone asked us,” Harrison adds.

For about a year, C.H.E.W. played two or three local shows a month. In June 2016 they hit the road for the first time. “A three-week west-coast tour was our first tour,” Rudolph says.

“But we went to Miami first, and then we went west,” Jeane adds.

“We played in Miami *and* Portland on that tour,” Harrison says.

C.H.E.W. were tight and fierce when I first saw them, downstairs at Subterranean in July 2016. They tore through their songs so fast that their nervy demo recordings felt almost relaxed by comparison. Jeane growled and wailed, her stage fright seemingly completely gone—if anything, the stage should’ve been afraid of her.

The two split seven-inches C.H.E.W. released in 2017 included one called *Strange New Universe* with Philadelphia hardcore group Penetrode. It was released by Los Angeles label Neck Chop Records, which had reissued the C.H.E.W. demo on vinyl early that year. When the band began working with Neck Chop, their music achieved greater reach—and it wound up in Ward’s ear. “I found it really refreshing, ’cause it sounds like real music—there was no gimmick to it or anything,” he says. “It was kind of just really well-made, tightly crafted punk songs, which I’ve always liked.”

C.H.E.W. had yet to reach out to Ward or Iron Lung when they began working on *Feeding Frenzy* last winter. On a whim, they sent the label an unsolicited e-mail with early versions of two cuts off the album, “Patience” and “Positive Affirmations.”

“We get a lot of e-mails every day, from bands, like, ‘Hey, huge fans of the label, we love Total Control,’ whatever the popular thing is that month,” Ward says. “The cold e-mail is tough—of all the e-mails that we’ve gotten over the years, I’d say maybe four or five were ones that we actually said yes to doing.”

C.H.E.W. heard back from Ward, says Giralt, the day after they messaged him.

They’d started writing *Feeding Frenzy* in February 2017 and finished it the week before recording the final version in March 2018. Jeane wrote the lyrics for the title track while sitting with Rudolph at the dining-room table of DIY house Margaritaville. “That house has been a pretty pivotal place for this band,” Rudolph says. He and Giralt used to live there, and Jeane lives there now. The space can only continue to book shows because of C.H.E.W.—Rudolph supplied the PA speakers, and Harrison provided the rest of the rig.

Throughout *Feeding Frenzy*, C.H.E.W. rip through their material with such impatient energy that the brief silences between songs sometimes collapse entirely—the blackened sludge of “Positive Affirmations” spills into the switchblade riffs that open “Patience.” The record closes with “Belly Up,” a comically long dirge whose gnarly seesawing guitar incites a small army of horns to go rogue. It’s all got the sweaty aggression of the best hardcore, but


it’s also slightly out of sync with the genre.

Giralt says this quirky aesthetic has to do with the style of collaboration he’s developed with Rudolph and Harrison. “We think we’re writing something that is relatively square, and it turns out it’s fuckin’ not,” he says. “The three of us never count anything the same, so, three different diverging paths that all end at the same goal is probably what makes the songs sound the way that they do.”

Growing up in a city with a smaller scene also appears to have left a mark on C.H.E.W. “There was one point for Orlando punk, everyone was kind of listening to all this crazy shit, and everyone just wanted to write the most wacky shit possible but have it still be as mean as possible,” Rudolph says. “It was never square—songs were never formulaic.”

C.H.E.W. earned their opening spot on the Pile tour because of *Feeding Frenzy*—the Boston band’s front man, Rick Maguire, had befriended the Orlando contingent before they moved to Chicago, and the album sealed the deal. “There’s riffs for days,” he says. And he wasn’t concerned that C.H.E.W.’s bizarre hardcore wouldn’t appeal to the same crowd as Pile’s relatively straightforward rock. “Something that was kind of eye-opening for us it was lucky enough to be asked to go on tour with Converge, and we didn’t make much sense opening for them, but some of their audience liked us. I think it’s better to play with bands that aren’t like you. Hopefully the people that are coming out are fans of music and not a specific sound.”


Ward and Iron Lung would definitely consider themselves fans of music. “We put out a lot of different-sounding stuff,” he says. “One month it’s gonna be, like, a free-jazz record, and another month it’s gonna be a grindcore record, and the next month it’ll be a hardcore record, or even just like a mellow-ass post-punk record or something, you know?” And what C.H.E.W. does seems designed to appeal to curious listeners—the kind who like some unpredictable left turns thrown into their favorite genres.

“They tick all the boxes as far as what I like in a band,” Ward continues. “They play well live. The records look cool. Obviously the songs are really sick—they record them well. And they know what they’re doing, which I think is the thing that’s most impressive to me. They’re very organized, they know exactly what they want, and they just go for it. There doesn’t seem to be anything holding them back.” 

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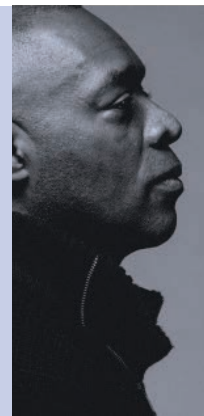
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PICK OF THE WEEK

American Football make peace with the past on their new self-titled album



ATIBA JEFFERSON

AMERICAN FOOTBALL, SAM PREKOP, CAMPDOGZZ

Sat 3/30, 9 PM, Metro, 3730 N. Clark, \$31. 18+

TWENTY YEARS AGO, Illinois emo trio American Football released their self-titled debut to little interest or acclaim, but since then the wistful, gentle record has become a totem that's eclipsed many bigger indie and emo releases of that era. Even the album's cover art—an angled photo of an Urbana house none of the band's members even lived in—has proved inspiring, becoming the subject of works of art and memes as well as being referenced by bands on their own album sleeves. The unexpected, durable success of the album nudged the original members—guitarist Steve Holmes, drummer and trumpeter Steve Lamos, and singer-guitarist Mike Kinsella—to regroup in 2014, with Nate Kinsella joining in at the new position of bassist. The past has acted like American Football's fifth member. Its shadow hangs over the band's self-titled 2016 reunion album; for its cover, they chose a photo from inside the now-famed house on the front of their debut, and the record's least compelling points serve as merely a reminder of the group's old alchemical whoosh, which inspired so many young people. For their brand-new release, another self-titled album that's colloquially dubbed *LP3* (Polyvinyl), American Football have successfully navigated their past and used it as a device to gaze at the future—and they've done so with a little help from others. On a few songs, Kinsella trades vulnerable vocals with high-profile guests: Land of Talk's Elizabeth Powell (“Every Wave to Ever Rise”), Slowdive's Rachel Goswell (“I Can't Feel You”), and Paramore's Hayley Williams (“Uncomfortably Numb”). All of the album's wind-swept melodies, aching vocals, and contemplative lyrics offer an idea of what it means for a group of fathers—who spent most of the past 20 years building their lives outside this band—to find a way to move forward together. —LEOR GALIL

THURSDAY 28

CANDY *Abuse of Power, Ekulu, Devil's Den, and Vortex* open. 6:30 PM, ChiTown Futbol, 2343 S. Throop, \$12. 18+

Candy formed in 2016, and given their relatively quick ascent among the ranks of hardcore bands, it'd be easy to use the cliché that they came out of nowhere. But in reality, Candy came from everywhere. They're often pegged as a group from Richmond, Virginia, the hometown of guitarist Michael “Cheddar” Quick, but the five members are spread across the country, with no two residing in the same city and only a couple in the same state. The band's music is equally scattered, though they're able to put it together so that it never sounds that way. Their two 2018 and two 2017 releases all use throat-ripping hardcore as a starting point, but the band make minor deviations here and there, such as the jangly Britpop song “Bigger Than Yours” and the thick, techno-inspired “remix” of it. But even without those twists and turns, Candy's hardcore aesthetics would be hard to pinpoint. Fans of proto-metalcore acts such as Integrity will find plenty to love in the band's chugging riffs and tasteful double-kick runs, but people into raw, noisy Japanese hardcore will recognize bits of that sound too. With an uncompromising artistic perspective and lyrics such as “Overconsumption / Environmental corruption” and “Systematic oppression leads to systematic death,” Candy are always on the attack. The fact that they've toured with the burly, rambunctious Terror, the expansive, indie-leaning Fucked Up, and even the shoegaze-worshipping Nothing highlights their range, and how they easily cross boundaries without stumbling over them. Candy have a bright future ahead of them—even if it's impossible to predict what they'll do next. —DAVID ANTHONY

SHANE PARISH *A trio of Eric Krouse, Ted Moore, and Emerson Hunton* opens. 9 PM, Elastic Arts, 3429 W. Diversey, \$10. 18+

Shane Parish's guitar playing in the eclectic, energetic rock duo Ahleuchatistas encompasses rapid neck tapping, convoluted chord sequences, and intricate rhythmic shifts. He and fellow guitarist Wendy Eisenberg improvise dizzily complex configurations of starburst harmonics and frantically negotiated counterpoint on their brand-new LP of acoustic duets, *Nervous Systems* (Verses). A resident of Asheville, North Carolina, he makes his crust as a guitar instructor, but while his technique is prodigious, he's a self-taught musician, and for his latest solo recording, *Autodidact* (Humanhood), he gleans creative inspiration from the state of not knowing. The album documents a journey that begins with a guitar in standard tuning, which alters course each time he changes the tuning or threads objects such as paper clips, Nerf darts, or strips of plastic through the instrument's strings—and the less familiar the sounds that come forth, the more involved with them he becomes. Parish's other recent solo recordings include *Undertaker Please Drive Slow* (Tzadik), which uses American folk and gospel tunes as launching platforms for winding improvisations, and *Child Asleep in the*

Rain (Nullzøne), which douses Eno-like instrumentals with cosmic vibes. Tonight's concert is Parish's first solo appearance in Chicago in two years, and he'll split his set between loop-based electric compositions and acoustic solo interpretations of tunes associated with 20th-century American balladeer John Jacob Niles. —BILL MEYER

FRIDAY 29

BILL MACKAY *Forest Management, Miranda Winters, and DJ Mariapaz* open. 9 PM, Hideout, 1354 W. Wabansia, \$10. 21+

Like many avant-garde-leaning guitarists, Bill MacKay exudes the spirit of a wandering player walking the earth, at peace with pulling up a rickety stool and shuffling through a dusty acoustic jam with whomever he happens to encounter along the way. A frequent collaborator with local savant Ryley Walker (the pair have made a small selection of records together), MacKay has more recently been releasing his own solo guitar explorations, which prove he has the chops to command a quiet and respectful room of listeners. Tonight is the release party for MacKay's new *Fountain Fire* (Drag City), a heady, occasionally beautiful record that mixes lightly distorted electric-guitar trails (“Pre-California”) with rambling acoustic yarns that bend toward the abstract (“Man & His Panic”). MacKay plays every instrument on the album—not only guitars but also percussion, bass, and organ. And on “Birds of May” and “Try It On,” he presents his calm, almost ghostly vocals. At its most potent, *Foun-*



Prateek Kuhad SAMBIT BISWAS

MUSIC



Baroness © PAM STROHM

tain Fire sounds as though it's miraculously staying on a course that's entirely visible only to Mack-Kay himself, while the rest of us can't see the path till it unfurls before us. At times, the record can be downright haunting, even untethered. "Arcadia," for instance, is a sojourn of wily electric guitar with plenty of slide that sounds as though it's made by a rancher lounging outside his homestead, trying to stretch notes as far as he can across the empty desert. —KEVIN WARWICK

SATURDAY 30

AMERICAN FOOTBALL See *Pick of the Week*, page 50. **Sam Prekop and Campdogzz** open. 9 PM, Metro, 3730 N. Clark, \$31. 18+

PRATEEK KUHAD *Elephant Micah and Devin Flower* open. 9 PM, *Sleeping Village*, 3734 W. Belmont, \$18, 21+

Even compared to twee icons such as Belle & Sebastian or Camera Obscura, Indian singer-songwriter Prateek Kuhad is very twee. His vocals are light, high, and breathy. His music is smooth, melodic folk-pop—think Donovan without the weirdness or the rock influences, or John Denver without the country twang. And his lyrics are steeped in sweet nostalgic indecision. On "Cold/Mess," the title track of his 2018 EP on Artist Originals, he warbles, "I wish I could leave you, my love / But my heart is a mess / The days they begin with your name and the nights end with your breath." And the video he's released for it is a montage of hand holding, kissing, romantic arguments, and meaningful

looks. So you could say Kuhad has one mode, and it's a mode that's likely to be cloying, verging on intolerable for anyone other than true romantics. For those with a place in their moderately yearning hearts for dreamily uptight sighs and earnest ambivalence, Kuhad is your guy—*Cold/Mess* is the perfect soundtrack to accompany all the emotions that come while changing your relationship status on Facebook to "It's complicated." —NOAH BERLATSKY

SUNDAY 31

BARONESS *Deafheaven and Zeal & Ardor* open. 6:30 PM, *Riviera Theatre*, 4746 N. Racine, \$33. 18+

Savannah-based sludge/alternative-metal quartet Baroness have spent a long time nursing their fifth full-length, the forthcoming *Gold & Grey*, which is their first with new guitarist Gina Gleason, replacing the outgoing Pete Adams. (Adams will be missed, but if you ask me, it's about time a band called Baroness had a woman member.) Singer-guitarist John Baizley has said this record is a look back at the band's tumultuous first decade, and will be the last one titled after a color, a theme that runs through every album (and album cover) and has become interlinked with the band's identity. The sprawling, shifting double LP shines metal, grunge, prog, and folk elements through a melancholy prism. Occasionally self-indulgent but never unforgivably so, *Gold & Grey* might lack in instantly gripping chug, but it rewards those who have patience for repeat listening. Dreamy interludes such as "Crooked Mile," "Can Oscura," and the spacy "Assault on East Falls" contrast with the heavier tracks, and this time out, the band's heart is in psychedelic, melodic trance-outs, such as beautiful closer "Pale Sun." —MONICA KENDRICK

LITTLE BIG 7 PM, *Concord Music Hall*, 2047 N. Milwaukee, \$49. 17+

Little Big have all the nuance of a Las Vegas motel sign, but that's the point. They're a Russian rave band that have employed jackhammer drums, earthquake-inducing bass drops, and synths that could soundtrack Sonic the Hedgehog on ecstasy to spoof Russian culture and dance-music clichés. The music on their two 2018 *Antipositive* EPs (SBA Music Publishing/Warner Music Russia) relentlessly bludgeon the listener—if you've ever made fun of teenage American EDM fans, these songs are likely the sound you imagined when you did it. But Little Big's strengths (and, dare I say, genius) lie in their vigorous, funny videos—listening to the tracks without them can feel like being on the wrong end of a joke. In their viral clip for "Skibidi," every living creature (and the occasional inanimate object) dances by repeatedly thrusting their arms together to form an "X" while simultaneously jerking one knee in the air, then alternating knees in time with the beat. During the song's goofy chorus, the characters pull out a dance sequence reminiscent of the Macarena, performing the moves so effusively and with such exacting precision that they double as a demonstration of Little Big's operating principle—to really sell a shtick, you've gotta embody it. —LEOR GALIL ➔

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A Tribute To ARETHA FRANKLIN & the Classic Soul Era
In *The SideBar* - *The Heavy Sounds*

Thu, April 11 - Eric Gales
Fri, April 12 - Chris Smither
Sat, April 13 - The Flat Five
Wed, April 17 - Big Band Dance Night w/APOL Orch.
Thu, April 18 - Zenith Sunn w/Eric Lindell / Anson Funderbergh
Fri, April 19 - The Steepwater Band
Sat, April 20 - Expo '76

2019

UPCOMING SHOWS



Presented by cricket wireless

- 3/29 The Selena Experience
- 3/30 The Interrupters w/ Masked Intruder & Ratboy **LOW TICKET WARNING**
- 4/3 Epik High **LOW TICKET WARNING**
- 4/5 Failure & Swervedriver w/ Criminal Hygiene
- 4/6 Eric B & Rakim
- 4/11 We Came As Romans & Crown The Empire w/ Erra
- 4/12 Citizen Cope w/ David Ramirez & MAYEANA
- 4/14 Dungeon Family Tour 2019 feat: Big Boi, Goodie Mob, Organized Noize, KP The Great & More!
- 4/16 Gunna w/ Shy Glizzy & Lil Keed
- 4/18 Dance Gavin Dance **LOW TICKET WARNING** 4/19 Dance Gavin Dance **LOW TICKET WARNING**
- 4/20 SiriusXM Presents: Yacht Rock Review
- 4/26 Rival Sons w/ The Sheepdogs **LOW TICKET WARNING**
- 4/27 Bad Suns w/ Carlie Hanson **LOW TICKET WARNING**
- 4/28 Julia Michaels w/ Josie Dunne **LOW TICKET WARNING**
- 4/29 LEON w/Morgan Saint **LOW TICKET WARNING**
- 5/1 Lovelytheband w/ Flora Cash & Jagwar Twin **LOW TICKET WARNING**
- 5/2 Overkill w/ Death Angel and Act of Defiance



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MUSIC

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SECRET HISTORY OF CHICAGO MUSIC

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

WINTER BLUES

CALVIN 'FUZZ' JONES

WINTER IS OVER, BUT I CAN'T END WINTER BLUES WITHOUT TALKING ABOUT BASSIST CALVIN "FUZZ" JONES, BEST KNOWN AS PART OF THE BLUES ROYALTY SURROUNDING THE GREAT MUDDY WATERS IN THE 1970S. BORN JUNE 9, 1926, IN GREENWOOD, MISSISSIPPI, JONES GREW UP ON A FARM NEAR INVERNESS, WHERE HE LEARNED VIOLIN & DOUBLE BASS. I'M NOT SURE WHEN HE MIGRATED TO CHICAGO AND WENT ELECTRIC, BUT IN THE 60S HE GIGGED HERE WITH LITTLE WALTER, ELMORE JAMES, AND HOWLIN' WOLF—AN IMPRESSIVE LIST. IN 1976 HE BEGAN A DECADE-LONG STINT IN MUDDY'S BAND, ALONG WITH DRUMMER WILLIE "BIG EYES" SMITH, HARPIST CAREY BELL, AND PIANIST PINETOP PERKINS. JONES TOURED OVERSEAS WITH WATERS, CAPTURED ON THE LP "GON' HOME (LIVE IN PARIS 1976)," AND APPEARED ON 1971'S "THEY CALL ME MUDDY" AND 1981'S "KING BEE," AMONG OTHERS. IN 1980 HE AND MOST OF WATERS'S GROUP FORMED THE LEGENDARY BLUES BAND, WHO BACKED JOHN LEE HOOKER IN "THE BLUES BROTHERS." THE LBB SPLIT IN 1993 AFTER 7 ALBUMS, BUT JONES KEPT WORKING WITH SMITH AND PERKINS—ALL 3 PLAYED ON THE

1996 COLLABORATION "EYE TO EYE" AND A '96 ALBUM BY THE MUDDY WATERS TRIBUTE BAND. JONES ALSO APPEARED ALONGSIDE OTHER FORMER HOWLIN' WOLF SIDEMEN ON A 1998 HOMAGE TO WOLF AND PLAYED ON BARREL-HOUSE CHUCK'S 1999 DEBUT LP. FOR MUCH OF THIS TIME JONES WAS BATTLING LUNG CANCER, AND HE HAD A TUMOR REMOVED FROM HIS NECK IN THE LATE 90S. JONES LATER MOVED TO SENATOBIA, MISSISSIPPI, AND ON AUGUST 9, 2010, HE LEFT FOR BLUES VALHALLA FROM A HOSPITAL IN NEARBY SOUTHAVEN—THE CANCER HAD COME BACK IN ONE LUNG, AND PNEUMONIA CLOGGED THE OTHER. HE DIDN'T RECORD MUCH IN THE 2000S, BUT YOU CAN HEAR HIM ON CASSANDRA WILSON'S VERSION OF J.B. LENOIR'S "VIETNAM BLUES" (IN THE 2003 PBS SERIES "THE BLUES") AND ON WILSON'S 2003 LP, "GLAMOURED." JONES ALSO JOINED THE JELLY ROLL ALL-STARS, FOR 2004'S "MUST BE JELLY," CUT IN CLARKSDALE, MS, CLOSE TO HIS LAST HOME.

TUNE INTO THE RADIO VERSION OF "THE SECRET HISTORY OF CHICAGO MUSIC" ON "OUTSIDE THE LOOP" ON WGN RADIO 720 AM, SATURDAY AT 6AM WITH HOST MIKE STEPHEN. [COMMENTS, IDEAS TO ARCHIVED @ OUTSIDE THE LOOP RADIO.COM](mailto:plasticccw@hotmail.com)

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MONDAY1

CITY GIRLS, BLUEFACE Lil Baby headlines; City Girls and Blueface open. 8 PM, Riviera Theatre, 4746 N. Racine, \$50. 18+

Much of the world's introduction to **City Girls** was through last summer's inescapable smash hit from Drake, "In My Feelings." The Miami-based hip-hop

duo of Yung Miami and JT rapped the undeniable bridge on the bounce-flavored track, which put them on stereos and streams of people worldwide and seemed to set them up for surefire success. That is, until JT was busted for credit-card fraud just when the single hit airwaves, and the serious prison sentence she received for the incident stalled the group's inevitable explosion. But before she got locked up, City Girls put together two solid releases, November's *Girl Code*—their official studio debut—and before that, May's *Period*—a real-deal hot-shit mixtape. On top of being packed with

3/2 Pures

MUSIC PAIRED WITH BEER

JEREMY ENIGK
BEAT KITCHEN 4/9

COSMIC COUNTRY SHOWCASE
W/ CASSANDRA JENKINS
THE HIDEOUT 4/12

FILM SCHOOL
EMPTY BOTTLE 5/5

THE BOUNCING SOULS
THE BRONX - SWINGIN' UTTERS
METRO 8/17

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80s-gangsta-rap-influenced smashers and over-the-top energetic rhyming, *Girl Code* and *Period* take the problematic gender politics of hip-hop and brilliantly turn them on their head, with songs about objectifying and exploiting men rapped in such gloriously raunchy detail that they'd make Eazy-E blush. It's intense, shocking, and endless fun—a breath of fresh air that's much needed in mainstream hip-hop. Yung Miami will be holding down City Girls sets until JT's release from prison. —**LUCA CIMARUSTI**

I can't blame anyone for holding off on listening to LA rapper Johnathan Porter, better known as **Blueface**, whose rapid ascent has girdled his image with "industry plant" insults, and whose viral celebrity eclipses the music he's ridden to fame. Just over a year ago, he had only one mixtape under his belt, but he'd already realized that marketing his personality was more important for building a fan base than how many releases he'd put out—and since then, he's gone from total obscurity to having

MUSIC

City Girls COURTESY EMI MUSIC

enough buzz to tour in major venues. As he recently told the *New York Times*, his Instagram savvy and troll-like flair for getting a rise out of rap fans did more for his career than his artistry: "Getting to this point probably took about 25 percent music." Blueface's great strength as a rapper is his unpredictability. No two flows on his June mixtape, *Famous Cryp* (5th Amendment Entertainment/Entertainment One U.S.), sound alike. At times Blueface seems downright deaf to the instrumental in front of him—though he plays off these performances with a cool confidence that suggests the only beat worth following is the one in his head. But when he finds a spark, he can be unstoppable—as he is on the minimal "Thotiana," which has become such a massive hit that I've noticed people crediting Blueface for inventing the titular term, erasing the five or so years it's been incubating in Chicago hip-hop culture. His oddball flow often goes sideways, but no matter how bad it gets, it's always memorable. More than most emerging rappers, Blueface understands that the only thing worse than a bad performance is being forgettable. —**LEOR GALIL** →

Sat., March 30 @ 8pm



"Honky Tonk Girl"

- a tribute to Loretta Lynn

Fill your glass up to the brim and enjoy the best fightin' drinkin' cheatin' songs: "Coal Miner's Daughter" "Don't Come Home a-Drinkin'" "You Ain't Woman Enough to Take My Man" and more!

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4.7 STORY JAM - 12 PM

4.7 TUSK
THE FLEETWOOD MAC EXPERIENCE

4.8-9 MIKI HOWARD

4.10 VICTORY BOYD
FEATURING INFINITY'S SONG

4.11 DOWNTOWN SEDER FEAT.
DAVID BROZA, MICHAEL McDERMOTT, CORKY
SIEGEL, LYNNE JORDAN, RICH JONES, KEN
KRIMSTEIN, T.J. SHANOFF, NAOMI SPUNGEN,
AARON FREEMAN, MARY DIXON & CHICAGO
GAY MEN'S CHORUS

4.12-13 MARTIN SEXTON
WITH CHRIS TRAPPER

4.14 STORY SESSIONS - 12PM

4.14 JOURNEYMAN
A TRIBUTE TO ERIC CLAPTON

UPCOMING SHOWS

4.6 WDCB JAZZ BRUNCH FEAT.
TAMMY MCCANN QUARTET

4.15 GLENN JONES

4.16-17 MARC BROUSSARD

4.18 GRAHAM PARKER
WITH ADAM EZRA

4.19 CARBON LEAF

4.20 BRAD WILLIAMS

4.21 DAVE DAVIES

4.22 MAGGIE SPEAKS:
YACHT ROCK NIGHT

4.23 A PURPLE TOUCH:
LIV WARFIELD HONORS PRINCE

4.24 RHONDA ROSS & RODNEY
KENDRICK

4.25-27 ERIC ROBERSON

4.28 CHICAGO PHILHARMONIC:
PINOT AND PIANO

4.28 KEVIN EUBANKS GROUP

4.29 BIG SUIT - TALKING HEADS TRIBUTE

4.30 PJ MORTON - KEYS AND A MIC
ACOUSTIC TOUR FEAT. THE AMOURS

5.2 DEL MCCOURY BAND
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APR
3



LOUIS YORK & THE
SHINDELLAS

APR
4



TOMMY CASTRO & THE
PAINKILLERS WITH KEVIN BURT

APR
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6



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5/08 - NICK WATERHOUSE
5/09 - MY BRIGHTEST DIAMOND
5/10 - TR/ST
5/11 - TACOCAT
5/12 - KEVIN GARRETT
5/13 - L'IMPERATRICE
5/16 - CHARLIE PARR + PHIL COOK

5/22 - WEYES BLOOD
5/23 - ANDREW BELLE
5/28 - OPERATORS
5/31 - GREAT GOOD FINE OK
6/01 - SKELETONWITCH
6/12 - TV GIRL
6/13 - JR JR
6/15 - CHARLY BLISS
6/29 - FM-84
7/29 - ALTIN GÜN
9/28 - ELDER ISLAND



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5/03 - DELICATE STEVE
5/05 - TIM ATLAS
5/10 - MATTHEW LOGAN VASQUEZ
5/16 - MOLLY BURCH
5/18 - KATIE TOUPIN
5/18 - SEGO
5/20 - CUB SPORT
5/22 - LOLO ZOUAI
5/24 - SHORTLY + SMALL TALKS
5/25 - THE JUNGLE GIANTS

5/26 - LINCOLN DURHAM
5/29 - REBECCA REGO
5/31 - AGES AND AGES
6/02 - LITTLE CHURCH
6/05 - SUZI WU
6/10 - OCEAN ALLEY
6/15 - SOAK.
6/16 - ROONEY
6/20 - LUCETTE
7/05 - DADDY LONG LEGS
8/10 - VINCENT

TICKETS AND INFO AT WWW.LH-ST.COM

MUSIC

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TUESDAY²

WAKE Like Rats, C.H.E.W., and Carnivores at Grace open. For more on C.H.E.W., see page 46. 6:30 PM, Subterranean, 2011 W. North, \$10. 17+

Misery Rites, the newest album from Canadian grindsters Wake, opens with a slow dirge that's anchored by melancholic howls and oceanic riffs. It's a fitting introduction to an album on which the band expand their palette beyond the straight-ahead blistering grindcore (complete with buzzsaw guitars) of its predecessor, 2016's *Sowing the Seeds of a Worthless Tomorrow*, to incorporate elements of sludge and technical death metal. And where *Sowing the Seeds* was full of nihilistically political songs, on this go-round vocalist Kyle Ball plumbs his internal landscape for lyrical inspiration, focusing most of his ire on his personal experiences with the cyclical nature of depression, addiction, and isolation. The band wrote the record with that underlying concept in mind, and the result is incredibly tense tracks with knotted, repetitive riffs courtesy of founding guitarist Rob LaChance and vicious drumming by Josh Buechert. Ball takes a brief break from self-examination on "Rot," an anti-cop track that's two minutes of furious guitar and blastbeats that culminate in a neck-tendon-shredding breakdown. Though Wake are very good at playing grindcore, they shine most in their slower moments. On "Burial Ground," the standout suffocating slog that closes the album, Ball howls, "I won't change / I never change." It's a strangled cry of someone able to recognize the crushing weight they carry inside, and their inability to imagine living without their burdens. After Ball's vocals drop out, the band creaks to a halt, leaving the listener bathed in feedback. —**ED BLAIR**

WEDNESDAY³

MOTT THE HOOPLE '74 8 PM, Chicago Theatre, 175 N. State, \$45-\$79.50.



Wake @ MIKE WELLS

A decade ago, I desperately tried to find a way to the UK after I heard that legendary band Mott the Hoople was re-forming for a show at London's Hammersmith Apollo. Though five original members were touted, four ended up playing, and that reunion—along with 2013 and 2018 UK shows—were met with generally glowing reviews. I missed all those gigs, but pinch me: at last, these glam-rock gods are coming to the U.S. for their first tour since 1974. To be fair, we only get three actual Hooplers. Corkscrew-haired front man Ian Hunter (who does tour here quite regularly), guitarist Ariel Bender (the pseudonym of Luther Grosvenor, who played under his own name in Spooky Tooth), and flamboyant keyboardist Morgan Fisher. I actually hesitate to call the band "glam," as that diminishes their power and versatility—I mean, do people refer to Queen as "just" a glam band? Mott is also unfortunately known to some people as a mere footnote in another glamster's career—I won't bother to mention him here because he already gets way too much lip service, but his name rhymes with "Mavid Snowie," he wrote Mott's biggest hit, "All the Young Dudes," and he was a huge fan of the band (as was Mick Jones of the Clash). Hunter started rocking in the 1950s, so he was no spring chicken in 1969 when Mott formed out of the ashes of a band called the Silence. Early

Mott albums touched on Dylan-esque roots rock, blasting protopunk, and gentle, poetic ballads—but by 1972 they'd rolled over to the glam look and sound. While they just had the one aforementioned hit over on these shores, in the UK and Europe they hit the charts with classic-styled rockers, including "Honoloochie Boogie" and "All the Way From Memphis," and epic singalongs such as "Walking with a Mountain" and "Roll Away the Stone," while also exploring theatrical, almost progressive song structures on "Marionette." (All of these songs have appeared in their recent set lists.) The last time they toured the States, Queen was actually in the support slot, and the experience inspired Queen's 1975 single "Now I'm Here," which includes a lyrical name-drop: "Down in the city / Just Hoople and me." Famed glitter guitarist Mick Ronson joined Mott the Hoople later, but he and Hunter eventually left to form their own group together, leaving the band to slog on somewhat directionless under the shortened name Mott until 1976, when they morphed into British Lions. I've seen Hunter a few times, and even at age 80, the man still has moves and energy. So file this show under "Bands I never thought I'd get to see in my lifetime" and this reviewer under "Ready to rock!" —**STEVE KRAKOW**



WOLF BY KEITH HERZIK

GOSSIP WOLF

A furry ear to the ground of the local music scene

LAST AUGUST, Emily Blue dropped *69, a glossy, idea-packed EP whose five tunes burst with pulsing electro beats and wall-opping synth-pop choruses—a small surprise to Gossip Wolf, since she's best known as the effervescent-voiced singer of catchy local indie-rock band **Tara Terra**. But a few listens to Blue's radio-ready solo jams, such as "Microscope" and "Falling in Love," make it clear that she can translate her razor-sharp hooks into any musical language! On Friday, March 29, **Midwest Action** drops a CD reissue of *69 with four new songs, and Blue celebrates with a set at **Chop Shop** on Friday, April 5. And don't despair, Tara Terra fans! On Sunday, April 7, they play **Sleeping Village** for their first show since 2017—it's a release party for the new EP **Couch Surfer, Lover**.

Local singer-songwriter **Marian Runk** writes uncannily vivid lyrics. The lovely country- and folk-inflected songs on her recent debut album, **A Few Feet From the Ground**, make it easy to picture her characters: the undertaker with a bad toupee in the sparse, dusty "Crowell," for instance, and the lovelorn snow goose pining for a missing companion in the moving ballad "The Loneliest Birds." On Friday, March 29, she plays the **Hungry Brain** on a bill with **Joybird**, the project of fiddler Jess McIntosh, who released the similarly folksy (and excellent) **Landing** this month.

Nonprofit south-side community radio station **WHPK** celebrated its 50th anniversary last year, and on Friday, March 29, it hosts a benefit show at the **Empty Bottle!** Wild avant-rockers **Blacker Face** headline—they've been burning up DIY spaces for years, and Gossip Wolf's heard whispers that they've got a full-length coming this year. Also playing are pop singer **Violet** (who fronts dark rock outfit Doctor Death Crush) and art-rockers **Pete Willson & the Rooks**. WHPK DJs spin between sets, and the folks behind ace Chicago zine **The Sick Muse** will be in the house with copies of their new issue! —**J.R. NELSON AND LEOR GALIL**

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

CHICAGO SHOWS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT IN THE WEEKS TO COME

ALL AGES FREE



Deerhoof COURTESY OF POLYVINYL RECORDS

NEW

Advance Base, Ratboys, Elisa Latrice 4/6, 7 PM, GMan Tavern

Ages and Ages 5/31, 9 PM, Schubas, 18+

Allah-Lahs, Tim Hill 8/16, 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle, on sale Fri 3/29, 10 AM

Altin Gun 7/29, 8 PM, Lincoln Hall, 18+

Yasiin Bey 4/27, 8 PM, Concord Music Hall, 17+

Andrew Bird, Madison Cunningham 7/16, 7:30 PM, Chicago Theatre, on sale Fri 3/29, 11 AM

Black Pistol Fire, Emily Wolfe 5/18, 9 PM, Metro, 18+

Tommy Carroll's Calculated Discomfort 4/10, 9 PM, Whistler FREE

Casual Hex, North by North, Tomblands, Rainbow James 4/13, 6:30 PM, Subterranean, 17+

Chai Tulani, DJ Skoli & Sun Blvd, Louie Mendez 4/17, 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle

Claude, Ziemba, Simulation 5/7, 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle

Crywolf 4/7, 9 PM, Chop Shop, 18+

Dawn Ray'd, Lifes 6/5, 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle

Brett Dennen 5/31-6/1, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston, on sale Fri 3/29, 10 AM

Dip, Moorea Masa and the Mood 4/25, 9 PM, Chop Shop, 18+

Do Re #metoo with Kelly Hogan, Nora O'Connor, and more 5/9, 8 PM, Metro, 18+

Drums, Tanukichan 5/1, 8:30 PM, Metro, 18+

Grelley Duvall Show with John Cicora Tuesdays, 9:30 PM Through 4/23, Hideout

Ludovico Einaudi 6/6, 7:30 PM,

Cadillac Palace Theatre

Elkhorn, Mark Shippy/Daniel Wyche, Molly Jones 4/14, 9 PM, Elastic

Mark Farina, DJ Heather 4/13, 10 PM, Smart Bar

Flora, Jordanna 4/18, 9 PM, Schubas, 18+

45 Donuts with Merrick Brown and more 4/6, 9 PM, Harbee Liquors & Tavern

Gazebo Effect, Captain Coopersmith, Splor 4/20, 9 PM, Schubas, 18+

Great Good Fine Ok, Vesperteen 5/31, 9 PM, Lincoln Hall, 18+

Shaun Hague, Daniel Correa 4/14, 7 PM, City Winery

Hellogoodbye, Hala 5/11, 8:30 PM, Chop Shop, 18+

Hip Abduction 5/3, 9 PM, Chop Shop, 18+

I Don't Know How But They Found Me, Superet 5/15, 7:30 PM, Lincoln Hall

In Motion, Buzz 5/24, 8:30 PM, Constellation, 18+

Little People, Marley Carroll, Anchorsong 4/26, 9 PM, Chop Shop, 18+

Lucette, Long Lost 6/20, 9 PM, Schubas, 18+

Duff McKagan, Shooter Jennings 6/6, 8:30 PM, Thalia Hall, 17+

Scott Mulvahill 8/23, 7 PM, SPACE, Evanston, on sale Fri 3/29, 10 AM

Mystery Skulls, Snowblood 7/23, 6:30 PM, Subterranean

Nth Power, Congregation 4/11, 9 PM, Martyrs'

O.R. They?, Defcee 4/12, 10 PM, Subterranean

Oh Sees, Prettiest Eyes 10/11-12, 8:30 PM, Thalia Hall, 17+

Paris Chansons 8/10, 7 and 10 PM, SPACE, Evanston, on sale Fri 3/29, 10 AM

Charlie Parr, Phil Cook 5/16, 8

PM, Lincoln Hall

Party Pupils, Pat Lok 4/6, 9 PM, Chop Shop, 18+

Physical Therapy, Harry Cross 4/12, 10 PM, Smart Bar

Pink Talking Fish 6/15, 11:30 PM, The Vic, 18+

Pixel Grip, Grun Wasser, Cameron Traxx, DJ Ariel Zetina 4/13, 9 PM, Sleeping Village

P.O.D., Nonpoint, Hyro the Hero, Islander, Nine Shrines 5/12, 6:30 PM, Bottom Lounge, 17+

Rebecca Rego and the Trainmen, Minor Moon, Adam Remnant 5/29, 8 PM, Schubas, 18+

River Whyless 6/4, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston, on sale Fri 3/29, 10 AM

Rooney 6/16, 8 PM, Schubas, 18+

Saicobab 5/6, 8:30 PM, Constellation, 18+

Score, Lostboycrew, Overstreet 5/2, 7 PM, Lincoln Hall, 18+

Mike Servito, Olin 4/5, 10 PM, Smart Bar

Shed, Aurora Halal, Ariel Zetina 5/3, 10 PM, Smart Bar

She's Crafty 6/21, 8 PM, Schubas

Smallpools 5/29, 7:30 PM, Park West

SoDown, Cofresi, Homeade Spaceship 4/20, 10 PM, Chop Shop, 18+

Summer Salt, Dante Elephant, Motel Radio 7/30, 6:30 PM, Bottom Lounge

Tallest Man on Earth 9/28, 8 PM, Cadillac Palace Theatre

Tennyson, Sports Boyfriend 4/10, 7:30 PM, Schubas

Tusk 4/7, 8 PM, City Winery

TV Girl, Negative Gemini 6/12, 8 PM, Lincoln Hall, 18+

Urulu, B. Hayes 4/27, 10 PM, Smart Bar

EARLY WARNINGS

Vesper, Zigtebra, Big Syn 4/16, 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle

Liv Warfield 4/23, 8 PM, City Winery

Winter, Feels 5/8, 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle

Suzi Wu 6/5, 7:30 PM, Schubas

Mike Zito 8/23, 10 PM, SPACE, Evanston, on sale Fri 3/29, 10 AM

UPDATED

Flat Five 6/2, 3:30 and 7:30 PM, Hideout, 3:30 PM show added; 7:30 PM show is sold out

Hand Habits 4/4, 9 PM; 4/5, 10 PM, Hideout, 4/4 sold out; 4/5 added

UPCOMING

Herb Alpert & Lani Hall 5/4-5, 8 PM, City Winery

Eric Andersen & Scarlet Rivera 4/21, 1 PM, SPACE, Evanston

Adam Ant 9/7, 8 PM, Riviera Theatre, 18+

Atliens 4/6, 8:30 PM, Bottom Lounge, 18+

Avantasia 5/21, 8 PM, Patio Theater

Avett Brothers 9/20, 7:30 PM, Huntington Bank Pavilion

Backstreet Boys 8/10, 8 PM, United Center

BadXchannels, Midoca 4/10, 8 PM, Concord Music Hall, 18+

Clarks 5/31, 8 PM, Beat Kitchen

Claypool Lennon Delirium 4/26, 9 PM, Thalia Hall, 17+

Jon Cleary 7/18, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston

Anna Clendening 4/17, 7 PM, Schubas

Romain Collin 5/26, 7:30 PM, SPACE, Evanston

Cowboy Junkies 4/13-14, 7 PM, Maurer Hall, Old Town School of Folk Music

Dave Davies 4/21, 8 PM, City Winery

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

Deer Tick 5/7, 8:30 PM, Thalia Hall, 17+

Deerhoof, Palm 4/21, 8 PM, Lincoln Hall, 18+

Dehd, Hecks, Mavis the Dog 5/10, 9 PM, Empty Bottle

Dodie 9/17, 7:30 PM, Riviera Theatre

Earth, Helms Alee 6/23, 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle

Ex Hex, Moaning 4/10, 8 PM, Thalia Hall, 17+

Faux Ferocious, Glyders, Junegrass 4/12, 9 PM, Empty Bottle

God Is an Astronaut 9/25, 8 PM, Thalia Hall, 17+

Justin Jesso 5/9, 7:30 PM, Schubas

Johnnyswim 5/25, 7:30 PM, Riviera Theatre

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Durand Jones & the Indications 4/11, 9 PM, Thalia Hall, 17+

Kodak Black 5/2, 7 PM, Patio Theater, 18+

L7 5/21, 7:30 PM, Metro, 18+

La Dispute, Gouge Away 4/23, 6:30 PM, Thalia Hall

La Santa Cecilia 4/5, 7 PM, Concord Music Hall, 17+

Lady Lamb, Renata Zeiguer, Alex Schaaf 4/17, 6:30 PM, Lincoln Hall

Delvon Lamarr Organ Trio 4/20, 8 PM, Martyrs'

Mark Lanegan Band 5/7, 8 PM, Bottom Lounge, 17+

Last Bison 4/7, 7 PM, Subterranean, 17+

Lisa Lauren, Gregory Douglass 5/23, 7:30 PM, SPACE, Evanston

Jeremy Loops 4/16, 8 PM, Bottom Lounge, 17+

Lord Huron, Bully 7/26, 8 PM, Chicago Theatre

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

Mana 10/11-12, 8 PM, Allstate Arena, Rosemont

NRBQ 6/21-22, 8 PM, Hideout

Olivia O'Brien 4/4, 7:30 PM, Lincoln Hall

Ocean Alley 6/10, 8:30 PM, Schubas, 18+

Pelican, Young Widows, Cloakroom 6/29, 9 PM, Metro, 18+

Perfume 4/5, 8 PM, Chicago Theatre

Perpetual Groove 4/27, 10 PM, Bottom Lounge, 17+

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

Lawrence Peters Outfit, Jeremy Pinnell, David Quinn 4/27, 9 PM, Hideout

Samiam, Off With Their Heads 5/15, 7 PM, Chop Shop

San Holo, Taska Black 4/27, 8 PM, Aragon Ballroom, 18+

Skating Polly, Jo Passed 5/2, 7 PM, Schubas

Turnover, Turnstile 5/2, 6 PM, Concord Music Hall

Vampire Weekend 6/16, 6:30 PM, Huntington Bank Pavilion

The Who 5/21, 7:30 PM, Hollywood Casino Amphitheatre, Tinley Park

Xeno & Oaklander, Odonis Odonis 4/11, 9 PM, Empty Bottle

Xiu Xiu 5/17, 9 PM, Empty Bottle

Yheti 5/3, 10 PM, Bottom Lounge, 17+

Zveri 5/31, 7 PM, Concord Music Hall, 17+



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SAVAGE LOVE

Sad boys and vaginal design

Audience-submitted questions from a live event.

Savage Love Live stormed into Revolution Hall in Portland, Oregon. Comedian Corina Lucas absolutely killed it before our sold-out crowd, singer-songwriter Elisabeth Pixley-Fink performed an amazing set, and two lovely couples competed in our first (and most likely last) Mama Bird Cupcake Eating Contest. I wasn't able to get to all of the audience-submitted questions, so I'm going to power through as many as I can in this week's column.

Q: How do you handle it if your partner constantly apologizes during sex? "Sorry, sorry, sorry . . ."

A: With sensitivity, tact, and compassion—and if none of that shit works, try duct tape.

Q: Should I continue to have casual sex with someone I'm in love with?

A: If it's casual for them and not casual for you, and they've made it clear it will never be anything other than casual for them, you're going to get hurt—which I suspect you know. Now, if you think the pain of going without sex with them will be greater than the pain you'll feel when they inevitably meet someone else and move on, by all means keep fucking them. (Spoiler: the pain of the latter > the pain of the former.)

Q: Best tricks for a quick female orgasm & how to keep yourself from overthinking it?

A: My female friends swear by a little legal weed, where available (or a little illegal weed, where necessary), and a nice, big, powerful vibrator.

Q: My five-year relationship ended abruptly. Is there a time frame for getting over it?

A: Studies vary. Some have found it takes the average person 11 weeks, some have found it takes half the length of the relationship itself, some have found it takes longer if it was a marriage that ended. But don't wait until you're completely over it to get out there—because getting out there can help you get over it.

Q: Besides a fiber-rich diet, what are your tips for a newbie to anal play? Size is a BIG factor and it's creating a HUGE mental block whenever anything goes near my hole.

A: Start small, e.g., lubed-up fingers and small toys. And don't graduate from tongues/fingers/toys to someone's big ol' dick in a single session. Start small and stay small until your hole's dread at the thought of taking something HUGE is replaced by a sincerely held, quasi-religious belief in the absolute necessity of taking something huge.

Q: What is the formula for getting comfortable farting in front of a partner?



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By Dan Savage

SAVAGE LOVE

A: Same as comedy: tragedy + time.

Q: In the era of online dating, how do you navigate the people who think the grass will always be greener and have difficulty committing to truly building a relationship?

A: The expression “the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence” has its roots in a Latin proverb first translated into English in 1545—which means the sentiment predates dating apps by, oh, roughly half a millennium. But the “paradox of choice,” or the idea that people have a hard time choosing when presented with too many options, has certainly complicated modern dating. But too many options beats too few, in my opinion, and it certainly beats no options at all, e.g., deserted islands, compulsory heterosexuality, unhappy arranged marriages, etc.

Q: Any advice for a 22-year-old woman who meets only sad boys who need a mom?

A: Your handwriting is such that I thought you wrote “sub boys,” and I was going to respond, “Enjoy.” But then I reread your question: sad boys, not sub boys. Okay, if you’re meeting only one type of person or all the people you’re meeting have a certain character flaw, either you’re seeking that type of person out—consciously or subconsciously—or you’re projecting your own shit onto that person. This is a case where the best people to ask for a gut/reality check are your actual friends, not your friendly sex-advice columnist.

Q: How good are cock rings? I tried a stretch

rubber one, and it was just uncomfortable. Is it worth more time and research?

A: Cock rings are made from all sorts of different materials, and it’s important to find the material (rubber, metal, leather) and fit (snug but not too tight) that works for you. I definitely think you should experiment a bit before giving up—cock rings are great. And, hey, did you know there’s a Wiki page with a lot of good info about cock rings?

Q: Will you be my sperm donor?

A: Well, that depends. Are you male, between the ages of 25 and 55, and (my entirely subjective notion about what is) hot? Then sure!

Q: My partner wants me to move in with him and have kids. He also wants an open relationship and to be able to father children for other women if they choose to be single moms. I’m not comfortable with that. How can I express this without blocking him from getting what he wants?

A: By not moving in with him, by not having kids with him, and by not continuing to partner with him.

Q: Why wasn’t semen designed to stay in a woman’s vagina? It always makes a terrible mess. I hate waiting for it to leak out of me.

A: I wasn’t around when semen and vaginas were designed—I’m old, but not that old—and I’m pretty sure they didn’t have a designer. I’m also guessing leakage wasn’t a problem until our ancestors began walking

upright about four million years ago.

Q: My mother-in-law had episodes of amnesia after orgasm in her 50s. Have you heard of this? WILL IT HAPPEN TO ME?


A: I have not! I HAVE NO IDEA! I have also googled this for you, and—holy shit—it’s a thing and it has a name: transient global amnesia (TGA). Apparently, any form of strenuous exercise can trigger TGA. So don’t fuck, don’t run, don’t bike! Just sit still and you’ll be fine!


Q: What do you think is the most needed focus of left activism in the United States today?

A: Most needed: defeating Trump and combating climate change. Most prevalent: relitigating the 2016 Democratic primary.

Q: My mom finishes every call with “God bless you.” I’m not a believer, but it’s not something we could ever talk about. I usually ignore it, sometimes I say it back, but it’s always awkward. What should I do?

A: You should sneeze.

Thanks to everyone who came out to Savage Love Live in Portland! Savage Love Live is coming to Seattle, Denver, San Francisco (with Stormy Daniels!), Chicago, Madison, Minneapolis (also with Stormy Daniels!), Toronto, and Somerville. For more info and tickets, go to saveagelovecast.com/events. 

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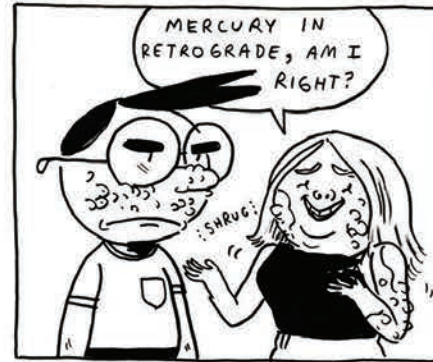
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Cook Case Type: Name Change from Kaitlin Darbi DeBerardinis to Kaitlin Darbi Masters Case Initiation Date 3/12/2019 Court Date 5/17/2019 Case # 2019CONC000300 Assigned to Judge Calendar, 12 (4/4)

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