

READER

Year in review



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

PUBLISHER TRACY BAIM
EDITORS IN CHIEF SUJAY KUMAR, KAREN HAWKINS
CREATIVE LEADS SUE KWONG, RACHEL HAWLEY
MUSIC EDITOR PHILIP MONTORO
THEATER AND DANCE EDITOR KERRY REID
CULTURE EDITOR BRIANNA WELLEN
ASSOCIATE EDITOR JAMIE LUDWIG
SENIOR WRITERS DEANNA ISAACS, BEN JORAVSKY, MIKE SULA
STAFF WRITERS MAYA DUKMASOVA, LEOR GALIL
EDITORIAL ASSOCIATE S. NICOLE LANE
LISTINGS COORDINATOR SALEM COLLO-JULIN
CONTRIBUTORS ED BLAIR, NOAH BERLATSKY, LUCA CIMARUSTI, MARISSA DE LA CERDA, JOSH FLANDERS, SHERI FLANDERS, JACK HELBIG, IRENE HSAIO, CATALINA MARIA JOHNSON, MONICA KENDRICK, STEVE KRAKOW, NOËLLE D. LILLEY, JAMIE LUDWIG, MAX MALLER, ADAM MULLINS-KHATIB, J.R. NELSON, JEFF NICHOLS, MARISSA OBERLANDER, MATTHEW SIGUR, CATEY SULLIVAN

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ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT TARYN ALLEN

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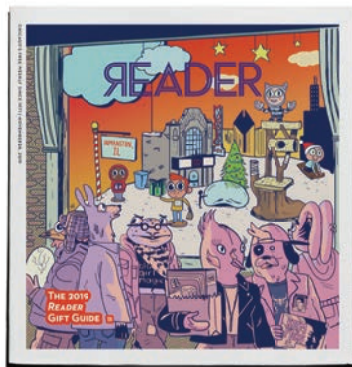
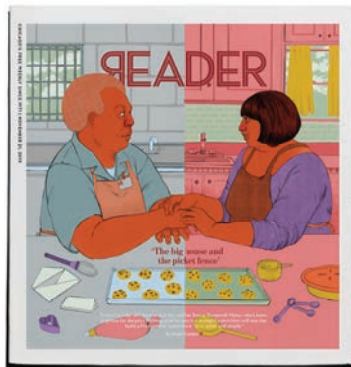
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STAFFING CHANGES AT THE READER

KEEN-EYED READERS of our masthead will notice several changes we'd like to acknowledge this week. After 20 years with the *Reader*, Kate Schmidt is stepping away from her role as deputy editor to pursue other projects. We are restructuring the *Reader's* art department as creative lead Sue Kwong moves on, and Rachel Hawley takes over her role. We have also made the difficult decision to eliminate the position of photo director held by Jamie Ramsay. On the business side, senior account representative Bob Griffith is also leaving. We wish everyone the best. Thanks for reading.



CITY LIFE '19



The Riverview Bridge, near Lane Tech high school, is said to sound like a bass harmonica when the wind hits it just right.
 © JOHN GREENFIELD

TRANSPORTATION

Making a transfer

2019 was a year of new beginnings, and transportation was no exception.

By JOHN GREENFIELD

It was only fitting that 2019, the year leading up to the new Roaring Twenties, should be a time of transitions, milestones, and new beginnings in the Chicago transportation scene.

The most obvious change was the May inauguration of Mayor Lori Lightfoot, the first Black LGBTQ woman to lead the city. While her predecessor Rahm Emanuel had a generally strong record on walking, biking, transit, and traffic safety, he was often accused of callousness when it came to marginalized communities. In contrast, Lightfoot promised to look at policy decisions through a racial and economic equity lens, and that was reflected in her transportation plan.

Some of the planks in Lightfoot's platform included addressing racially biased traffic enforcement and reforming the motorist ticketing system; reducing transit fares for low-income Chicagoans; and speeding up bus service with dedicated lanes, all-door boarding, and other time-saving features. Additional strategies included encouraging affordable transit-oriented development on the south and west sides; reforming the ride-hail system; and building 100 miles of new bikeways. She's generally been doing a good job of keeping her promise to promote mobil-

ity justice, with one glaring exception—more on that in a bit.

While 2019 saw many Chicago transportation triumphs, let's get the lowlights out of the way. Although the city's Vision Zero program, launched in 2017, has the goal of eliminating serious and fatal crashes, this has not been a good year for pedestrian deaths, with 36 cases as of early December, a higher-than-average number.

Bike fatalities are down, with only four cases to date, compared with the recent average of six, but the last two cases sparked outrage. On November 6, a turning truck driver failed to yield to school counselor Carla Aiello, 37, who was on her bike, crushing her under the wheels. To protest her death, dozens of people showed up to the Old Irving Park crash site, lining Milwaukee Avenue to form a "human protected bike lane" and holding a banner reading "Please don't kill us!"

Eleven days later an unlicensed driver killed cyclist Lee Luellen, 40, in Grand Crossing. Advocates were quick to point out that he was the second bike rider fatally struck in two years on that stretch of Stony Island Avenue, where Aldermen Leslie Hairston and Michelle Harris have blocked the installation of protected bike lanes. ➔

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On the bright side, this year the Chicago Department of Transportation completed a number of projects to improve safety and convenience for cyclists and pedestrians. These included adding concrete curb protection to bike lanes on 55th Street and in the South Loop; new bike lanes on the far south side, Little Village, and the near west side; and paint-and-post sidewalk extensions in Logan Square and Andersonville.

The most exciting new piece of bike/ped infrastructure is the Riverview Bridge, a serpentine three-block causeway connecting Clark and California parks near Lane Tech College Prep High School. The span, which opened last month without fanfare, is said to sound like a bass harmonica when the wind hits it just right. It's part of the 312 RiverRun trail network, which will eventually offer a car-free route for 1.5 miles between Belmont and Montrose avenues.

Another bike milestone was an agreement inked this spring between Chicago and Lyft, the Divvy concessionaire, to add 10,500 electric-assist bikes, expand the system citywide, and generate a guaranteed minimum of \$77 million for the city over the remaining nine years of the bike-share contract, among other benefits. Lyft's archenemy Uber, which owns the JUMP bike-share system, fought the exclusive deal tooth and nail with a propaganda campaign. That included buying flattering "news" coverage in local media and recruiting dozens of clergy members to back up Uber's bogus claim that the arrangement would hurt poor people.

As for the CTA, the agency wrapped up a couple of high-profile station projects this year. The new \$280 million 95th Street Red Line terminal debuted in January, garnering a generally positive response from south-siders for its futuristic, spaceship-like appearance and its public art installations by local artist Theaster Gates, including a sound studio with live performances by DJs, musicians, and poets.

The \$17 million Belmont Blue Line station rehab in gentrifying Avondale was less warmly received. Its main feature is a giant, *Jetsons*-esque blue awning that would look more at home on top of a Superdome stand. Neighbors also complained that, even after the reconstruction, the station still isn't wheelchair accessible. (The CTA said that would have added \$55 million to \$75 million to the price tag.)

We can expect a lot more sustainable

transportation infrastructure upgrades in the coming years thanks to the \$45 billion capital bill passed in Springfield in April by Democratic governor J.B. Pritzker. The legislation included the unpopular but necessary move of raising the state gas tax, which had been stuck at a flat 19 cents a gallon for two decades, to 38 cents, and indexing it for inflation. The Active Transportation Alliance deserves a shout-out for successfully lobbying to include a \$50 million annual earmark for bike/walk infrastructure, with a focus on underserved communities.

Another legislative victory for eco-friendly transportation was Lightfoot's late-November passage of a new ride-hail tax structure that lowers the price of the more sustainable shared UberPool and Lyft Line rides, while slapping a \$3 surcharge on traffic-clogging solo downtown rush-hour trips. This strategy should reduce the Loop gridlock that slows down buses. And \$2 million of the projected annual \$40 million in additional revenue will be used for the city's Bus Priority Zone program, which includes bus lanes and other improvements on busy routes like Chicago Avenue, Western Avenue, and 79th Street. That should help stanch the CTA's ridership bleeding—the system has lost 48 million trips a year since ride-hail launched here five years ago.

The one thing the mayor has been doing that is truly counterproductive to transportation equity is stonewalling a proposal by Cook County, Metra, and other local entities to lower fares and increase frequency on two south side commuter rail lines, which would improve transit access for low-income Chicagoans. Lightfoot claims she's worried about the impact on CTA revenue, but it's probably not a coincidence that she's opposed to a plan whose most vocal proponent is her former political rival, Cook County president Toni Preckwinkle.

That's frustrating. But one thing that makes me hopeful for local transportation is Lightfoot's recent selection of Gia Biagi, who has led the urbanism and civic impact practice at the Studio Gang design firm, as the new transportation department commissioner. Biagi's firm, led by "starchitect" Jeanne Gang, is best known for downtown's watery-looking Aqua tower, and I'm optimistic that, by employing the same outside-the-box mentality as transportation chief, Biagi will make some positive waves. **■**

 @greenfieldjohn



I can't decide if we're any better off politically as we stagger from the teens into the twenties. **■** DOUG MCGOLDRICK; IOWA DEMOCRATIC PARTY; PETE SOUZA; SHEALAH CRAIGHEAD

POLITICS

Looking on the bright side

As the teens turn to the twenties, it's a struggle to find cheer in the gloom.

By BEN JORAVSKY

As one decade turns into the next, I find myself struggling with one of the great existential questions of our time: Which version of "Bet-cha By Golly, Wow" is best—the Stylistics's or Prince's?

Answer? Neither—it's jazz guitarist Grant Green's version.

That's not really the most vexing question on my mind. I'm just ducking and dodging the fact that I can't decide if we're any better off as a civilization as we stagger from the teens into the twenties.

Yes, folks, I'm dealing with the transition

from the end of one decade to the start of another. And before I try to answer my question, I must make a confession. As a lefty covering Democrats in the neoliberal age of Mayors Daley and Rahm, I've had to spend the better part of the last 30 or so years battling doom and gloom.

But I'm going to try to look on the bright side, starting with national politics . . .

So, even though our president is (allegedly) a lying rapist who stole money from his own charity and cuts taxes on the rich and slashes food stamps and looks the other way as the earth overheats, I will advance the argument that we're better off today than at the start of the decade when Barack Obama ruled the land.

Yes, I voted for Obama—twice.

But having finally got around to reading some books about his presidency, I've come to the conclusion that, in retrospect, he was an accommodationist who sold out many Democratic values in his illusory pursuit of bipartisanship.

Even now he counsels restraint and advises Democrats not to be too "woke"—as if the alternative, being asleep, has worked well for Obama voters. **➔**



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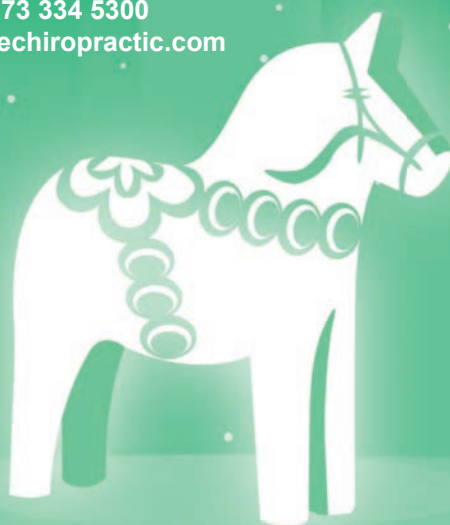
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In short, my argument is that Democrats are better off vigilantly defending their values in a fight with a despicable Republican than watering them down to accommodate the nervous nannies in a Democratic White House.

How's that for looking on the bright side, even if I'm not sure that I really believe it?

On the local front, well, think of it this way ...

I know of no Democrats who are helping Donald Trump pay less in property taxes by appealing the assessment on his tower. That's in contrast to most of the decade when Alderman Ed Burke used his clout as a property tax lawyer to win thousands of dollars of savings for Trump.

So that's good—right?

Nor is the current mayor throwing billions of tax dollars to Jeff Bezos, the world's richest

man, in the hopes that he brings Amazon, the world's richest company, to town. Like the last mayor did.

More progress, people.

On the other hand, the current mayor did look the other way as the last mayor rushed through City Council approval of \$2.4 billion in TIF money for Lincoln Yards and the 78. And she sent in city lawyers to kill the lawsuit that was intended to kill Lincoln Yards.

So the jury's still out on whether Mayor Lightfoot will keep her promise not to waste public dollars on projects that don't need public dollars.

Back to the bright side ...

Every mayor has pledged to do what they can to bridge the gap between the poor and rich. And yet the gap continues to widen as Chicago becomes more expensive and more poor people leave. Especially Black people.

The last mayor didn't seem to think that was a problem. The current mayor does. Or says so anyway. So that's progress.

Also, the current mayor's not closing mental health clinics and then having police spy on protesters. Like the last mayor did.

On the other hand, she says we're too broke to reopen the clinics he closed. You know, it's like one foot forward and one half step back in the fight against gloominess.

On the sunny side, our current school CEO is not facing prison time for stealing money from the schools. As Barbara Byrd-Bennett did back in the Rahm years.

Byrd-Bennett pled guilty to helping a couple of scam artists win more than \$20 million in contracts to operate a principal training program that no one needed, asked for, wanted, or benefitted from.

In return she was to get kickbacks from the scam artists. Something she needed because

she had "tuition to pay and casinos to visit," as she put it in an e-mail.

It's going to be hard to top that scandal.

On the other hand, former police chief Eddie Johnson recently got fired after he was caught getting plastered in a bar, making out with a woman who was not his wife, and then falling asleep behind the wheel of his car.

Or maybe he wasn't asleep. Maybe he was in the throes of romance with yet another woman—also not his wife.

Mayor Lightfoot says she's investigating. I think I speak for all Chicagoans when I say that's one police report everyone's looking forward to reading.

Say this about our scandals—at least they're getting more interesting over time.

Hold it! Just got a press release from Mayor Lightfoot. She says she found the money to open neighborhood library branches on Sundays.

Also, she's doing away with fines on overdue books. That's especially good news for me as I'm overdue on at least one book I checked out about Obama.

The decade began with Mayor Rahm proposing to cut hours and fire employees at neighborhood branches, until an uprising of north-side library users prompted him to declare: What kind of fucking losers still go to libraries?

Well, he didn't really say that. Though it sounds like something he might say.

Anyway, as one decade flows into the next, let's appreciate that we have a mayor who appreciates libraries. At least she learned from the last one that there's hell to be paid for closing them.

That's me—always looking on the bright side. 

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“That’s just alcohol.” The mixed drinks at Ceres Cafe famously come with the mixer on the side.

📷 MAYA DUKMASOVA FOR CHICAGO READER

NEWS

‘Eddie Johnson drunk’

A night spent reveling in the absurdity of the firing of Chicago’s police superintendent

By MAYA DUKMASOVA

“Humor can often be the most disarming thing and put people in a position where they’re questioning things that they might not have otherwise,” said Matt McLoughlin, a lanky man with a thick handlebar mustache and a tiny ponytail, as he and a few acquaintances settled at a table in the center of Ceres Cafe in the Board of Trade building. On the night of Wednesday, October 16, Ceres became ground zero (or perhaps one of several ground zeros) for an evening of drinking and alleged romantic indiscretions by Chicago police superintendent Eddie Johnson. He was fired by Mayor Lori Lightfoot on December 2 for allegedly lying about what he did that night.

After the mayor’s announcement McLoughlin didn’t hesitate to call on the city to gather at Ceres and mark the occasion by getting “Eddie Johnson drunk.” The Facebook event he created started trending immediately; more than 2,400 people ultimately

responded they were “interested” and more than 700 said they were going.

“I think it’s a disgrace that after years and years of lying, covering up police misconduct, the code of silence, it took this thing that was gonna be embarrassing to the mayor for her to actually pull the trigger on firing Johnson,” McLoughlin said.

On Monday, December 9, the cavernous, subway-tiled bar was well lit, decorated with pine garlands and Christmas wreaths, and filled with a mixed—and unusually integrated for Chicago—crowd. There were finance bros in their slacks, button-downs, and fleece vests; rambunctious girlfriends celebrating a birthday; office workers in company polos standing around high-tops; and at least three dozen people there to lambaste Johnson. The swooping curve of the bar lovingly held people alone and in pairs as they nursed stiff drinks and watched the Giants-Eagles game over plates of wings and baskets of fried appetizers.

I’d never been to Ceres before and the first round made clear what I’d been missing. A \$10 whiskey-coke is really a tumbler of the spirit on the rocks, with a lukewarm can of the mixer on the side.

“Yeah that’s all whiskey—that’s just alcohol,” said Michael Ehrenreich, an avuncular man who introduced himself as an activist. “Apparently this is an important institution within the finance community and the rest of Chicago.” He’d never been to Ceres either, even though he works two blocks away. The fast casual atmosphere belies, perhaps even excuses, the dive-bar intensity of the drinks. “I can be two blocks away from the police commissioner who’s getting blackout drunk? It’s just very funny to me.”

Ceres, I was told, is unlike most downtown watering holes, which either serve bougie aperitifs to white-collar types or watered-down pours to tourists. The crowd, like the beverages, feels different here. “What I like about this is it’s the union of the finance industry that’s destroying the city and the police that are destroying the city in this perfect cocktail of just the worst that’s happened to Chicago,” Ehrenreich observed. “And that’s why I’m here to get drunk. I want a taste!”

As the liquor flowed and the crowd grew thicker, a table of about a dozen cackling friends who had gathered to mock Johnson

fused with McLoughlin’s party for a group photo. “I’m trying to see who I’m gonna end up kissing before the night is over with!” a woman exclaimed.

At another table, a couple of regulars named Chuck and David said they usually come to Ceres for the strong drinks, good food, friendly service, and “the ladies.” Chuck hadn’t even heard all the seamy details about Johnson’s firing but wasn’t at all surprised that a night of alcohol consumption here ended in alleged infidelity and indiscretion. “Everybody does that here!” Chuck said, lifting his glass. “He probably had two of these and don’t remember half the shit he did.”

“He was gonna lose his job anyway,” David said. “Every superintendent gets fired for something.”

The dreaded last call drew closer. The reported details of Johnson’s evening were retold and rehashed with dashes of wild speculation, adding grist to the rumor mill. Was he really drinking with nearly a dozen other cops at South Loop’s Bar 22, as reported by the *Chicago Crusader*, before drinking for hours more at Ceres after 8 PM and canoodling with a woman from his security detail? Strange, since Ceres closes at 9. What was he doing in the hours before he was found in his vehicle at 12:30 AM? Was he really discovered sleeping while pulled over or was he receiving oral sex from a woman who was neither his wife nor his drinking companion, as alleged by the “Second City Cop” blog? Why would anyone call 911 over either of these scenarios? Was he really fired for lying about it all, or because Lightfoot saw a ➔



Revelers got “Eddie Johnson drunk” at Ceres Cafe to dwell on the absurdity of the police chief’s firing. 📷 MAYA DUKMASOVA FOR CHICAGO READER

continued from 7

safe way to look tough on police misconduct? “If we know anything about the police this would not have come out if they wanted to hide it,” Michael said confidently.

“It’s a cover-your-ass thing, I think,” said one of a half-dozen guys gathered nearby—computer programmers who’d initially come to see one another, not to celebrate Johnson’s departure. “There has got to be something else, that has to be something *bad* he did. She wants to go on the record and say ‘I wasn’t a part of that.’”

“The man was wasted, he got some head, and now he’s fired? I would never work if I got fired for indiscretions,” said stand-up comedian Dawn B. As she sipped her cognac on the rocks she scoffed at the idea that lying to the mayor was a fireable offense too. “What did he lie about? Let’s all have an understanding, because hell people have lied in all positions. Chicago is a goddamn lie.” Her manager Veronica chimed in that lying about whatever happened that night doesn’t hold a candle to “all the bullshit. When he said that bullshit that he’s never seen misconduct out of police I was like, ‘Come on now! Laquan McDonald wasn’t misconduct?’”

“I’m just out here drinking, hoping to find out the truth,” Dawn said. “I’m just a citizen trying to get an understanding. Why is sex misconduct? Why is shooting or racial profiling—why is that not misconduct? It is misconduct but you won’t lose your fucking gig behind it. I’m here because I want to support the mockery. I want to support the nonsense. Hey I’m about to get Eddie Johnson drunk—I hope the result is some head!”

The crowd kept on talking and laughing and snapping pictures and gossiping about what the conversation between Johnson and Lightfoot must have been like. Ceres’s manager, a short middle-aged white man in a brown turtleneck and beige sport coat darted around the establishment, preparing to close down for the night. “There’s Lori Lightfoot in white face!” Dawn shouted. “She would wear that outfit.”

Ridiculing the powerful is an ancient ritual in human societies, often sanctioned and encouraged by rulers and religions so the populace can express its frustration in festivities instead of revolution. But it’s also an occasion for ordinary people to wink and nudge at one another, to find comrades and conspirators, and to realize that our collective energies can be harnessed for much more than partying.

“It’s sad in a way, we all know the truth about the way the city is run and who benefits,” McLoughlin said, reflecting on the evening. “Whether it’s corrupt police, a corrupt mayor, a corrupt state’s attorney—some people have lost their jobs in the last few years but at the end of the day there are thousands of people in the city who have had their lives ruined by those individuals and they don’t get those back. Any time I’m at a protest or even something as silly as this it’s reassuring to know that we are not alone in acknowledging what’s happening here. What happened is a joke, it’s a sick joke that this is what it took for this guy to lose his job. I think cathartic is the perfect word for this. Getting fucked up here is cathartic.” [f](#)

[@mdoukmas](#)



By last call, the rumor mill was in full swing. [MAYA DUKMASOVA](#) FOR CHICAGO READER



Caravaggio, *The Cardsharps*, 1594

ON CULTURE

Safe bet, sucker deal

The Chicago casino is still in the works, but it’s likely to end up raising far less money for the city than originally promised.

By **DEANNA ISAACS**

Would you have bet that this year would end with a massive expansion of legalized gambling in Illinois—a whole new crop of casinos, racinos (combination racetrack-casinos), slots, and even online sports betting—all justified as the way to get legislative approval for a long-sought Chicago casino, but there would still be no Chicago casino in the works?

Sure you would. It’s Chicago.

You might not even have been surprised when Mayor Lori Lightfoot came home from ostensibly victorious negotiating sessions in Springfield last summer looking as grim and tapped out as any craps table loser.

So what do you think the odds are that she’ll be going back down there in January to clear the way for a very profitable, privately-owned, probably downtown casino, while the city and state take a giant haircut on their share of those profits? And that we, the suckers—er, citizens—won’t have any idea how much that haircut’s costing us until

it’s a done deal?

It looked like a done deal at the end of June, when Governor J.B. Pritzker signed an 800-page omnibus bill that—among other things—authorized six new casinos, 5,000 sports betting kiosks, and nearly doubled the number of gambling positions in the state, to just under 80,000.

There was a casino for Chicago in this statewide jackpot, but not the publicly-owned facility its new mayor had campaigned on. Down there, in the mysterious cornfields of Springfield, the idea of public ownership quietly vanished, and what got approved was private ownership, but for a casino that would share its profits equally with the city and state: each would get one-third of adjusted gross receipts (AGR, the amount of money wagered, less the amount it takes to pay off the bets).

The government already had big plans for that money: the city would use its share for police and firefighter pensions; the state’s portion was earmarked for Pritzker’s \$45

NEWS & POLITICS

billion infrastructure project. And the public conversation was briskly herded on to the question of where this golden goose of a casino would be located, with the mayor inviting the public to weigh in, and picking five spots on the city's south and west sides that she preferred. Then she sent the whole package to a Las Vegas-based gambling industry consulting firm, Union Gaming Analytics, to have its feasibility evaluated. The legislation that set this all in motion stipulated a 45-day time limit for a completed report.

What a surprise when the report, released in August, concluded that the major features of the plan were unworkable. Locations on the south and west side? Wouldn't draw enough tourists. A one-third cut each for city and state? Wouldn't leave enough profit to attract any private developer.

It might work, the consultant noted, if the city gave up its 33 percent share. Or if the city became the owner, in which case it might hire a management firm to run the place and take the profits as its share.

That sent the mayor back to the drawing board. But not on the issue of ownership. She returned to Springfield in the fall with amendatory legislation that would reduce the taxes—now perceived as “onerous.” Even with the governor onboard, however, she wasn't able to line up enough support in the short veto session, and it was never called for a vote. The plan now, according to its sponsor, State Representative Robert Rita (D-Blue Island), is to call for a vote on it after the legislature reconvenes in late January. You have to have a workable casino, Rita told me, in order to have casino revenue. The changes they're seeking include extra time for all casino owners to pay a one-time “reconciliation charge” (equal to 75 percent of their most profitable year among the first three), and the elimination of interest charges on those payments. Also, potential owners will be required to make their proposals public. And Cook County's share of the Chicago casino tax is halved—from 2 percent of AGR to 1 percent.


But the biggest change—the one that'll have the biggest impact on any public benefit from this venture—is a switch from a flat tax (of 33.3 percent) to a more complicated graduated rate. According to the new plan, slots (including all electronic devices) will have a combined annual city and state tax rate that ranges from 22.5 percent to 74.7 percent. And table games, like blackjack and roulette, which bring in a smaller amount of revenue but are more profitable for the owner, will be taxed at

combined city and state rates of 15 percent to 35 percent. The tricky part of this is that, no matter how much money the casino makes, the higher tax rates are only applied to the tippy top of its income stream. The 74 percent rate, for example, will only be charged on the slice of slots AGR over \$1 billion.

What does this mean in dollars for the city? I asked both Lightfoot's office and Rita's; at press time neither had provided an answer. (Lightfoot's office said, however, that “the City remains steadfast in its pursuit of changes to the current tax structure to ensure we can unlock the significant economic benefit that a Chicago casino would bring.”)

So we're left to do our own math. Say we have a Chicago casino with total annual AGR of \$900 million (about twice as much as Rivers Casino in suburban Des Plaines is generating), one-third from table games and two-thirds from slots. At the original flat rate, the city would get about \$300 million in taxes every year. And at the graduated rate currently proposed, the city's share will drop to \$159 million.

That's \$141 million annually from the city, along with similar cuts to the state's share, that will be redirected into the owner's pocket.

Would the original plan, for a one-third share of the pie for the owner, have attracted investors? It was never offered, so we don't really know. But if this one makes it through the legislature, it's a good bet that there will be takers. 

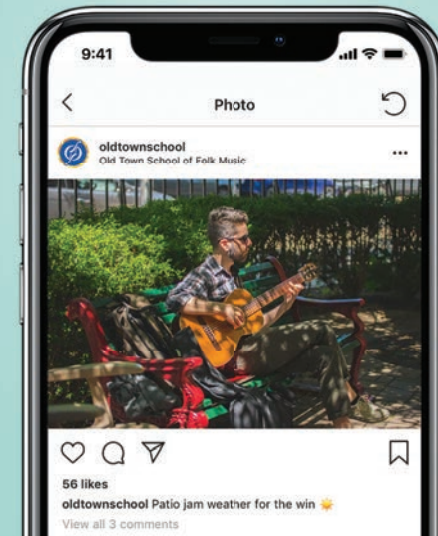
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GOOD EATS

My year of eating

You want a list, I'll write a damn list.

By **MIKE SULA**

People always say to me: “Mike,” they say. They say “Mike, how do you maintain your waifish figure?” My answer is always the same: housing fistfuls of sugar-free gummy bears.

But that’s just one of the reasons I managed to lose 30 pounds in 2019. The primary one is that journalism is on a starvation diet and as a result I don’t eat out nearly as much as I used to. Consequently I don’t have an end-of-the-year hot list, but at least I can breathe when I bend over picking half-eaten burritos off the sidewalk. Another upside: I have no idea what kind of aural wallpaper restaurants are over-working on Randolph Street playlists these days.

I also lost my once formidable tolerance for unhealthy volumes of whiskey, but now I have my memories! Here are the top ten:

1. Getting my face lasered onto a slice of cheese at the National Restaurant Show.

2. Cherries jubilee at Mirabella.

3. A chef calling me a dick in the best way he knows how.

4. Amish donuts from a parking lot in semisuburban Virginia.

5. Cooking at home again on a regular basis: whatever I want, whenever I want. If there’s something wrong with dinner I know exactly who to blame. My phone is full of weird and occasionally wonderful things I cooked and ate that I’ll never write about. A fellow needs to keep some secrets.

Okay, I did do some food writing this year and the nice thing about how things are going is that it’s less of a roll of the dice. In most cases I’m writing about subjects I can be pretty enthusiastic about, rather than grappling with interesting ways to explain why something isn’t worth your hard-earned money. You’ll just have to read about Tao on Yelp.

6. Only three restaurants I wrote about this year went out of business, which feels pretty good relative to previous bloodbaths: Pink Salt (when Fulton Galley went bust), Umacamón (which closed just two weeks after I wrote about it—that explains why they were so reluctant to work with a photographer), and WokNChop, which, on the bright side, begat Sheeba Mandi House.

7. Ripping dabs with Mindy was fun. Impending legalization made for a more permissive atmosphere in which to write about getting high, so Mom’s Purple Kush cream puff and Dark Matter’s Supernova Bar were no big whoop. Expect to see a lot more of that stuff coming up (as soon as next week even).



Bun Bo Xao Nam Bo at Buncha Hanoi KRISTAN LIEB FOR CHICAGO READER



Dishes at El Sabor Poblano ANJALI PINTO FOR CHICAGO READER



From left: Wagyu brisket, smoked lamb terrine, cannelloni, porchetta, confit potatoes at Flat & Point SANDY NOTO FOR CHICAGO READER

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8. The jury is still out on whether the food hall is a good business model for budding restaurateurs, but at least in the case of Politan Row it brought some stellar and previously underground chefs into the limelight, such as the folks behind Mom’s, Bumbu Roux, and Thattu.

9. If all I had to write about was sandwiches I’d be happy. I still dream about the CFC sandwich at Hermosa, the Cubano at Mima’s, the doner at Ali Baba, and the lecsó sandwich at Finom.

10. Best of all, giving love to the sort of places that don’t retain publicists makes it all worthwhile: such as El Sabor Poblano and

Kizin Creole in Rogers Park, or Flat & Point in remote western Logan Square, Café Antigua in Jefferson Park, Slab in South Shore, and Hermosa in Hermosa. Ask me what the hottest dining neighborhood is and I’ll say suburban Glenview, home of Kairali Foods and Buncha Hanoi.

Annual year in review columns are usually a gimme for writers; an easy rehash of work already done. But looking back on this year was sobering, realizing that Amazon reviews of sugar-free gummy bears are the highest form of food criticism I can aspire to.

@MikeSula

CHICAGO READER

Supper Club



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Chicago Board Game Cafe
1965 N. Milwaukee, Chicago
BONUS: A conversation on Chicago and food criticism with Kevin Pang and *Chicago Reader* senior writer Mike Sula
BONUS: Free set of Cards Against Humanity with bonus packs
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FEB. 17-18

**Luella's Southern Kitchen /
Luella's Gospel Bird** 4609 N. Lincoln, Chicago
BONUS: A conversation with chef Darnell Reed and food writer Donna Battle Pierce



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DRINKS

Wine therapy at Red & White

For when you just need a fucking drink.

By LEE GUSMAN

My work weeks aren't that nine-to-five Dolly was singin' about—I'm on that running-a-wine-bar/shop-4-PM-till-late-night-six-days-a-week grind. And on Sunday night, after a long week of slingin' grape juice, I need a fucking drink. If you work in the service industry you know how important this postshift libation is. That sacred ritual can be the one thing stopping you from body-slaming a rude guest, WWE-style. My place of choice for this therapeutic act is Red & White Wines in Bucktown.



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The interior is warm and cozy, lit by candles on every table that form a constellation so ethereal you feel like Enya should be playing while you walk through it. The people are warm too. Catie Olson, who runs the place and who is also a DJ, artist, and print-mixer extraordinaire (seriously, her outfits are on point), always greets me with a cute lil *petillant naturel*. She calls it “thinking wine” for one to peruse the list with. One of the best of these, a 2018 Thillardon Pet Nat Beaujolais Gamay, tasted like a late '90s Eurodance track (think Vengaboys) trapped in a strawberry Jolly Rancher: so juicy, so jumpy, and a little chaotic.

The wine list is extensive, but not like steakhouse-bigger-than-a-copy-of-*War-and-Peace* extensive. It's steered by a staff that not only knows it, but loves it in the most unpretentious way. My favorite thing is to ask for recommendations from Tamas Vilaghy (also a cool-cat DJ), who works next to Olson. He approaches the list with such passion and unfiltered excitement, reminiscent of a kid showing you their favorite trading cards. The recommendations come with “Ohs!” and “You have to try this!” before he locks in on a bottle, with a dramatic choreography similar to the denouement on *Say Yes to the Dress* where a bride finds “the one” and everybody freaks

out. You feel special.

A standout recommendation was a bottle of 2013 R. López de Heredia Viña Tondonia rose from Rioja, Spain. The wine is lip-smackin' good, bright, a tad vinous (like most older wines tend to be). It made me believe in a higher power, cured my severe daddy issues, and tucked me in bed that night with a nice buzz.

Jamie Davis and Mike Hillyard, food duo and best buds (at least judging by the giggles I hear from them in the kitchen), have crafted a small menu for Red & White that includes a top-notch charcuterie board with the best *boquerones* you'll ever find outside of Spain. Davis started Eight Weeks for Access, a series of events that utilizes the Chicago service industry to raise funds for safe abortions in states that are actively attempting to prohibit them.

Every wine poured at Red & White was made with minimal human intervention. The shop showcases producers who work with the earth rather than exploit it. Of course, there are plenty of places with similar programs (mine included), but there's nowhere quite like Red & White. It's a rare wine shop that weaves the pulse of these wines and the narratives behind them into service that feels genuine, playful, and, above all, human. One giant big fucking hug. 



Sex Militant
 JEX BLACKMORE

VISUAL ARTS

Six visual art shows that made 2019 bearable

2020 has some big shoes to fill.

By S. NICOLE LANE

In the past two weeks alone, I've found myself at Wrightwood 659, the Renaissance Society, the Leather Archives & Museum, and the Smart Museum. All varying in public prominence, I feel lucky to know these spaces, to really get inside of them, to see show after show come in and out. And these are just a few of the hundreds of impressive DIY spaces, commercial galleries, and large museums that we have in this City of the Big Shoulders.

This year in particular hasn't been that easy for me. Thinking about trekking out into the world to look at art when you're beat up

emotionally and mentally from the current political climate is exhausting. However, artists persist, and their persistence inspires me to keep going and to keep doing. So, that's what I did, and here are some of the things I saw along the way.

There's no denying that yes, this was a dim year for the world, but it was a damn good year for art.

Breakout artist (and *Reader* contributor) Zakkiyah Najeebah addresses politics through womanhood, queerness, and narrative in her photography. Her exhibit **"A Different Kind of Love Story: For Us,"** which closed at Addis Donna in January, exhibited the complex identities of Black women and how they are consumed in media. Large-format black-and-white photographs as well as smaller Polaroids present playful and candid moments where the subjects are simply living their everyday lives. By embracing Alice Walker's idea of "Womanism," Najeebah's show at Addis Donna highlighted strong, vulnerable, and multifaceted images of Black and queer women.

"Still Here: Torture, Resiliency and the Art of Memorializing" opened at the Arts Incubator in March with six commissioned design proposals. Juan Chavez's glass structure with

aloe vera plants in the center symbolised healing, while Sonja Henderson's piece featured rows of chairs that memorialized each torture victim. The designs were meant to be spaces for people to sit, heal, and honor the victims who suffered at the hands of the Chicago Police Department. The designs were also considerations for the permanent Chicago Torture Justice Memorial, which will bring awareness to the torture of more than 120 Black men and women by the Chicago Police Department from 1972 to 1991. In June, it was announced that artists Patricia Nguyen and John Lee's stone design was chosen for that monument.

Leather Archives & Museum has always been historic to the queer leather community and lately, their Guest Artist Gallery (GAG) has been putting the museum at the forefront for queer artists. **"Fruiting Bodies,"** a solo exhibition from Andrew Bearnot, opened in March and focused on objects found in the archives like personal correspondence and Chuck Renslow's ball of pubic and beard hair, alongside Bearnot's pieces made with hair and glass. The works were intimate, highlighting the queer archives of Robert Gaylor, whose "obedient slaves" shaved the pubic hair from their right testicle and mailed it to him. Bearnot exhibited these notes—

and hair—with his "hair drawings" and bulbous-shaped glass pieces.

In May, the National Museum of Mexican Art opened **"Peeling off the Grey,"** which looked at the overwhelming spread of gentrification in Pilsen. The turmoil felt within the community was exhibited by artists like Sam Kirk and Sebastián Hidalgo, whose images depicted the toll that gentrification has taken on the neighborhood. Kirk's painting, *All we fought for, all we built*, illustrated the disappearance of Pilsen residents by removing the color from their bodies and painting them in a grey hue. Video, installations, photographs, paintings, and collage works were all included in the group show that criticized the dehumanization and removal of the people of Pilsen.

In June, fashion designer, DJ, architect (and so much more), Virgil Abloh opened his show **"Figures of Speech"** at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago. Abloh's interest in Chicago and the urban environment has found its way into the artist's day-to-day creative practice—he's worked with Kanye West on design, album covers, and merchandising. This first-ever museum exhibition dedicated to Abloh featured finished works alongside prototypes, taking viewers through his creative process. The 20-year time span of Abloh's work exemplified his interest in advertising and branding. Additionally, the show ran with a pop-up shop called "Church & State," where limited merch was sold to those willing to drop a pretty penny (hoodies were priced at more than \$600). As a result of Abloh's presence, the number of visitors to the museum this summer doubled compared to previous years.

"Sex Militant" sparked a protest this fall from a local Catholic church when the two-night exhibition and performance ritual event opened in September. Jex Blackmore collaborated with various artists to create a body of work on the connection between eroticism and state violence. The exhibition featured repurposed American flags, images from protests, and a live droning guitar alongside a spoken-word performance, and a glowing cross being pulled by performers in fetish play. The show was political, full of tension, and incredibly powerful, which had the Catholic clergy shaking in their boots and knocking on Co-Prosperty Sphere's door. [📍](#)

[🐦 @snicolelane](#)

LIT

Live lit is what Chicago is all about

The best reading events of 2019 have been going strong for years.

By SALEM COLLO-JULIN



Kevin Coval at Tuesday Funk © COURTESY TUESDAY FUNK

Chicago is a writer's town, from top to bottom. We have an excellent public library system, many great independent booksellers, and enough Sturm und Drang in every corner of the city to inspire pens to paper. Fans and fellow writers alike can make their way to reading events for poetry, fiction, and slice-of-life storytelling year-round, and 2019 brought us consistently interesting and dynamic work from writers at a myriad of venues. Here are some of my favorites from this year (with a special nod to several that have been going strong for more than ten years).

Tuesday Funk Reading Series happens on the first Tuesday of each month at the Hopleaf Bar in Andersonville. It features a mix of poets, essayists, fiction, and genre writers interspersed with regular features (a highlight: a topical haiku by host Andrew Huff). The Hopleaf's upstairs lounge gives both the readers and the audience a chance to focus on the words, but you can't be that close to one of the best arrays of craft beer in the city without some breaks—the evening includes a quick intermission to head downstairs to imbibe. The series was started in 2008 and highlights five writers each night, making for a

solid list of alumni (including Elizabeth Tamny, Joe Meno, and Megan Milks). The next event takes place on Tuesday, January 7, and will feature *Reader* contributor Dmitry Samarov, Darshita Jain, Michael Palmer, Maggie Queene, and Cameron McGill.

Miss Spoken describes themselves as a “Lady Live Lit Show,” and they’ve given space to writers, bloggers, and comedians to tell their tales—sometimes sordid, sometimes inspiring, always engaging—on the stage on the last Wednesday of the month at the Gallery Cabaret bar and elsewhere since 2014. Each month covers a theme (this year’s included “Miss Manners,” “War Paint,” and “Family Feud”) and the storytellers are given free rein to deliver their interpretations of the theme while mining their personal moments. In September, the theme was “Show ‘n’ Tell,” which allowed for the performers to include visual aids via slideshow, resulting in a party-in-your-living-room salon feel. Miss Spoken is one of the few regular series in the city devoted to featuring only female-identifying and nonbinary performers. The next event is scheduled for Wednesday, January 29, at the Gallery Cabaret.

Red Rover Reading Series is a boon for experimental writers and poets. The series toys with the ideas of what can happen in a reading event, and past nights have included fairy tales, people reading in costume, concrete poetry, and more. Red Rover has consistently taken place in nonbar venues: starting in 2005 at the now-gone Humboldt Park arts space the Sparerroom, and continuing these days at similar art and performance spots like Outer Space (above Volumes Bookcafe) and Tritriangle, both in Wicker Park. Current curators Laura Goldstein and Jennifer Karmin have taken Red Rover on the road, creating large-scale improvisational collaborations with writers at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago and the New Orleans Poetry Festival. Though the series may not always feature the expected, the performances can veer toward the extraordinary: past shows have included diverse performers including musician Jaap Blonk and Philadelphia poet Gabriel Ojeda-Sagué. Red Rover happens almost every month, usually on Saturdays, but they’re taking a winter break until February 2020.

The **Uptown Poetry Slam** is the grandfather of slam poetry events, and we’ve been lucky in Chicago to have it available to us for most Sunday nights since 1987 at the Green Mill on Broadway and Lawrence. Marc Smith (“so what!” is always screamed by the audience after he introduces himself) has been hosting this open mike with a feature slam the entire time, and I’m happy to report that it never gets old. It would be impossible to have a staid poetry reading in a bar like the Green Mill, and the poets and writers on stage are anything but quiet—past nights have included published professors and sometimes bartenders from the Green Mill taking a break to share their poetic wares. I have a sweet memory of an early 90s Sunday show where Marc borrowed some of the feature time to call a buddy in prison and put him on the microphone via landline. (“It’s Christmas in prison,” his friend’s poem started.) It’s thrilling that we have a regular series devoted to loudmouths delivering poems that has been going strong for more than 30 years, but then again, that’s what Chicago is all about. 📖

🐦 @hollo

COMEDY

Nine places for laughs in 2019 (and beyond)

Because every year we seem to need more and more comedic relief.

By BRIANNA WELLEN

It can be overwhelming trying to decide where to see comedy in Chicago. Once you start looking, there’s a seemingly endless list of showcases every week, and, thanks to an embarrassment of riches when it comes to talented comics in Chicago, most of them are a guaranteed good time. Still, there are standouts. This list features the results of a quick informal poll of some local comics—the people who arguably see more comedy than anyone—combined with some of my personal favorites, shows that have inclusive lineups, creative concepts, or were simply just a blast to attend in 2019. Lucky for you, they’ll still be going strong in 2020.

Every Thursday at rotating venues, **Arts & Culture Club** gives performers the chance to nerd out about that week’s topic, whether it’s as broad as “online” or as specific as “Drake.” Expect a night of comedy, PowerPoint presentations, music, costumes, storytelling, and, in one instance, a pair of anonymous masked dancers whose identity is still unknown, one of the greatest sagas to follow on Instagram this year.

Cupcake Comedy Cabaret, every Thursday at Gallery Cabaret, lives up to its name. The weekly showcase features comedians, cabaret performers like burlesque dancers or magicians, and freshly baked cupcakes. There’s an open mike beforehand for anyone feeling inspired to try out some jokes of their own.

ARTS & CULTURE '19

Sleeping Village is slowly becoming one of my favorite “not a comedy venue” venues, and that’s in part because of the monthly showcase **Just Us Gals**. The lineup consistently features some of the most hilariously bizarre comics in the biz, with a focus on women, nonbinary folks, and queer performers.

A recent report from the Comedy Club Database showed that less than 1 percent of comics booked at 55 different clubs across the country were Latina. **Las Locas Comedy** is working to change that. Every month at Dstrkt Bar and Grill the show features a lineup of primarily Latinx stand-ups—and a few lovingly called “honorary locas.”

If you’ve ever wondered whether your favorite stand-ups can also sing, then **Low Key Karaoke** is for you. Every Tuesday at Northside Bar & Grill comedians perform jokes and then sing a karaoke song. An open mike follows, and anyone who sings can add another minute into their set—the person with the best set of the night wins a \$25 gift certificate to the bar.

The Missy is named as such because each month at the Boxcar two comedians need to put their thing down, flip it, and reverse it. Translation: each of the performers do a ten-minute set while the other is not in the

room. The hosts of the show write down keywords as a setlist and then the comedians improvise a brand new ten minutes based on the other person’s set.

Full disclosure: I performed at **the Paper Machete** this year. But even if I hadn’t, this weekly live magazine at the Green Mill would still top my list as one of the most cathartic comedy experiences in the city. Comedians, musicians, journalists, and one beloved puppet break down the week’s current events, and it feels so much better to laugh until you cry instead of just crying.

Celebrating the body types and expressions of performers on stage makes laughing along to their jokes all the more euphoric. The monthly body-positive stand-up show **Strip Joker** at Mary’s Attic encourages performers to wear as little or as much as they please, often resulting in an item of clothing being tossed with every punch line.

Everyone loves a good roast. At **Toasted**, every Saturday at Comedy Clubhouse, stand-ups perform and turn the spotlight on willing audience members with the delicate and time-honored art of the roast. To take the sting out of it, every show ends with a toast celebrating the roasted. **🍷**

🐦 @BriannaWellen



Chad the Bird performs at the Paper Machete. SARAH ELIZABETH LARSON

THEATER



The Nutcracker. DARREN LEE

PROFILE

Sara Schumann is seeding new dance in Wisconsin

The longtime Chicago dancer moved from labor lawyer to artistic director at the Madison Ballet.

By IRENE HSIAO

For most, the holidays mean food, family, festivities, and fits of reckless acquisition. But for ballet dancers, Thanksgiving is the last supper before the marathon of merrymaking that is *The Nutcracker*, which first flopped in 1892 Russia only to become a seasonal sensation in 1950s America. More than two dozen productions of the annual phenomenon exist in the Chicago area alone, ranging from extravagant and spectacular to DIY and Dance Along, ensuring that the magic of Christmas is broadly allied with the ritual of dance. The story of a sensitive girl who journeys to the Kingdom of the Sweets with a magical nutcracker has become synonymous with in-

nocence and nostalgia. However, for the ballet industry, *The Nutcracker* more accurately represents another middle-class value: work. Annual ticket sales account for an average of 48

THE NUTCRACKER
Through 12/28: see website for schedule, Overture Hall, 201 State St., Madison, 608-278-7990, madisonballet.org, \$11-\$63.

percent of a company’s season revenues, and some dancers have reported that *Nutcracker* gigs represent a third to a half of their annual freelance income. ➔

continued from 15

“*Nutcracker* is a production that helps support the rest of the season—it’s the bread and butter,” says Sara Schumann, a Chicago-based labor lawyer and the artistic director of the Madison Ballet. Originally from New Jersey, Schumann performed with the Lyric Opera of Chicago, Ruth Page Civic Ballet, and Ohio Ballet. Perceptive and reliable, Schumann was selected by choreographers to help stage work in addition to performing in it, eventually becoming ballet mistress at the Lyric.

Schumann was also the leadership choice of her peers: in her first year dancing at the Lyric, she was elected by her fellow dancers to serve as their union delegate as the shop negotiated a four-year agreement. “That was how I met the AGMA [American Guild of Musical Artists] attorney, Barbara Hillman,” recalls Schumann. “She was wonderful. I watched her in these negotiations, thinking, ‘This seems kind of fun.’ I was interested in how the contracts worked and how negotiations worked. I realized that I like to read the contracts, but most people did not.” And with this knowledge, Schumann made sure dancers and choreographers understood and benefited from their agreements. She continued to serve as the opera shop delegate even during periods she was dancing with Ohio Ballet, a nonunion company. “They needed somebody there to represent their views,” she says.

In 2005, after several years as ballet mistress at the Lyric Opera, Schumann decided to pursue an education that would allow her to directly advocate for the rights of dancers and other workers, piecing together credits from courses she had taken at Wilbur Wright College, Oakton Community College, and the University of Akron (“I figured, I’m there [at Ohio Ballet] without my husband; I might as well get some classes”), as well as any credits she could muster from her professional experience to complete an undergraduate degree at Northeastern Illinois University by 2006. She earned a law degree in three years from Chicago-Kent at IIT, attending part-time as she raised two sons. And with her dancer’s work ethic, Schumann continued her career in the arts, setting the movement in Verdi’s *Un Ballo in Maschera* at the Houston Grand Opera during her first year studying law. (“The fee was going to cover my first semester,” she says. “I had to tell my legal writing professor I couldn’t be there but I would be



Sara Schumann ■ COURTESY GRETCHEN BOURG

writing on my laptop.”)

After nine years as a labor attorney, Schumann found herself once again approached by artists in search of leadership when Madison Ballet’s artistic director retired and a small group of dancers from the company encouraged her to apply for the position. “It’s not every day that somebody says, ‘Come be our artistic director,’” she says. “It’s been an honor and a joy for me, and it’s an opportunity to give the dancers a really good work environment.” Under her direction (and with the help of revenue provided by *The Nutcracker*), Madison Ballet has seen remarkable growth, including moving to new studios and partnering with the YMCA and the public library in outreach programs for children and people who have been through the criminal justice system. In June, the company hired theater and opera director Jonathan Solari as CEO—the first in its history—and they’ve also embarked upon a \$1 million capital campaign.

But finding financial footing isn’t the only goal for Schumann. “Primary for me has been making it a good experience for the dancers. You have to come to the rehearsal room with respect for the artist. Their life as a dancer is so short, and we need to be doing work that is going to be worthy of their time. It’s not just about money—it’s about getting your horizons broadened by the people you work with.” ■

■ @IreneCHsiao

FEATURE

‘What do we do with horribleness?’

The worst-ever day in Chicago theater provides the impetus for a beloved quirky holiday show.

By MAX MALLER

I fished this jacket I hadn’t worn since last winter out of storage the other day and found a pin in the inside pocket that said, in small black capitals, “MAGIC COTTON BALLS.” Many playgoers around town probably have one of these pins lying around too, waiting to remind them that perhaps our best, most unique Chicago theater tradition—The Ruffians’ annual production of *Burning Bluebeard*, now in its eighth year of holiday runs—is around the corner again. I got my pin as a postshow souvenir after last year’s mesmerizing blackbox production with the Neo-Futurists. This year, the show plays its

first downtown venue, the Ruth Page Center for the Arts, with Porchlight Music Theatre.

It wouldn’t be an exaggeration to call *Burning Bluebeard*, written by Jay Torrence, the most delightful work of theater there’s ever been about a mass death. In 1903, the old Iroquois Theater caught fire during a costly and elaborate staging of the play *Mr. Bluebeard*. (The line on my pin alludes to a sadly unfulfilled children’s giveaway offer that day, “half a cotton ball,” whatever that was supposed to mean.) Hundreds of people asphyxiated, burned, or were trampled. Torrence’s show imagines what two clowns, a stage manager, an actor, and an acrobat from the *Mr. Bluebeard* company would have done differently that day, if the unthinkable hadn’t happened.

But, surprise: smush two clowns, a stage manager, an actor, and an acrobat on stage together—let alone their scene-stealing otherworldly accomplice, the Faerie Queen (Crosby Sandoval), who lives inside a trunk—and what you get is liable to be a hundred times more joyous than a tragedy has any right to be. Think somersaults, pantomimes, Amy Winehouse karaoke. But then it gets sad again. Then joyous again. Then deeply sad. In clowning as in life, the reversals are the point.

Excitement sat thick over the room when I visited the Ruffians at the tail end of their rehearsal process. I asked director Halena Kays what it’s like to zero in on funny technical details—on reblocking a cartwheel, on making sure no one stomps too soon during the ham-



Burning Bluebeard ■ MICHAEL COURIER

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THEATER

bone—for a show so suffused with pain. “Joy is different than happiness,” she said. “Joy also comes from a depth of sadness, for me. It has to be in there to feel that sense of it.”

Torrence, who in addition to creating the piece also plays Robert Murray, the stage manager, believes his show is ultimately about hope. He drew attention to the discipline of clowning, with its built-in emotional seesaw, as context for his show’s blend of levity and tragedy. “Red-nose clowning is these highs and lows,” he said. “What do we do with horribleness?”

It’s the play’s obsession with technique—with “doing it right, this time,” as the comedian Eddie Foy (Ryan Walters) puts it—that keeps hope alive. That doesn’t change in its new staging, with its larger scope. A glorious singed colonnade, designed by Jeff Kmiec, now looms upstage; the actors talk to the Ruth Page’s real balcony for the heaviest scenes, those that address the fictional, doomed cheap seats at the Iroquois, which were the first to burn.

There is a small sense of lost magic, now that so much less of the play’s world is on you to imagine in the mind’s eye. Torrence told me that *Burning Bluebeard* was once performed at a flea market in Berlin, Ohio, Torrence’s hometown, inside an Amish barn, and in a way that scale suits the play better than its new one does. The upshot is a kind of charming bashfulness, like a kid in a too-big suit, which may wear off as the run continues. A big house does mean no buttons this year, sadly. (No, you can’t have mine.)

All gussied up, the play still lives and dies by its celebration of technical brilliance—I would trade all the proscenium stages in America for one pout, one perfectly-timed tilt of the eyebrow, from the great Pamela Chermansky, who plays Fancy Clown. I was reminded, watching her work, of something Chermansky said to me in rehearsal: “The audience is the partner with a clown.”

“By the way,” she added, after I told the cast about rediscovering my magic cotton ball pin, “have you ever looked really carefully at the side of the button?” I dug mine out for a closer inspection. In fine print along the metal edge, as if a fairy put it there without me knowing, it read: “NOT A WHOLE ONE, JUST A HALF.”

[@mallerjour](https://twitter.com/mallerjour)



The Light in the Piazza
 LIZ LAUREN

REVIEW

The Light in the Piazza shines at Lyric

And it’s not just about Renée Fleming.

By DEANNA ISAACS

It’s a dangerous thing to marry a stranger: the beautiful girl passing through town; the impetuous boy taken with her at first sight. My parents discovered this, to their eternal regret. But that’s another story. The story at hand is *The Light in the Piazza*—a rental production of Adam Guettel’s rapturous musical adaptation (book by Craig Lucas) of the 1960 novella by Elizabeth Spencer in a holiday-season run at the Lyric Opera House. Thanks to Guettel’s soaring score, a fine cast, and a deceptively complex plot (not the simple love story you might expect), this production manages to transcend its positioning as a showcase for renowned soprano and Lyric creative consultant, Renée Fleming.

Fleming’s on show, of course, but not merely that. The diva melds almost seamlessly into the starring role of Margaret Johnson, an American on an Italian sojourn with her beautiful but—spoiler alert—developmentally disabled 26-year-old daughter, Clara. While her second-act solos are vocal high points, and will be thrilling to her fans, she’s convincing all the way through as the deeply conflicted mother, haunted by a tragedy and facing a moral dilemma. “I played a tricky game in a foreign country,” she tells the audience early on. Quite so.

There’s some casting against type here: Solea Pfeiffer is not the blonde Barbie we’ve seen as Clara in previous productions. She brings an acute sensitivity and strength to the role that rings true. Similarly, Rob Houchen is a surprise as her love-at-first-sight, Fabrizio (a role played in a 1962 movie version of the

novella by George Hamilton); his impassioned tenor quickly proves to be exactly right. Alex Jennings is spot-on as Fabrizio’s stereotypically traditional Italian father, and there’s a standout vocal and dramatic performance by soprano Suzanne Kantorski in the supporting role of Fabrizio’s embittered sister-in-law. Direction, by Daniel Evans, has the ensemble leaning to the broad side, but tolerably. A serviceable uni-set gives us one view of a statue when the action’s in Florence, another when it’s in Rome.

Guettel, who is the grandson of composer Richard Rodgers, writes his own lyrics (though he’s better at the music). In this story, about love without a shared language, they sometimes lapse—appropriately, even brilliantly—into sheer sound: “La la la la.” That made the biggest problem I had in a mid-main-floor center seat—the frequent indecipherability of the lyrics, in spite of amplification—less of an issue than it could have been, though I would have traded the microphones during those moments for supertitles. Nevertheless, it was wonderful to hear Guettel’s beautiful score played by 30 members of the Lyric Opera Orchestra, under the baton of Kimberly Grigsby.

The Light in the Piazza was not produced by Lyric, but it illuminates the future of American opera. [L](https://www.lyricopera.com)

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THEATER

The power of telling the truth

The best of Chicago theater in 2019 put the spotlight on reshaping old narratives and false history.

By **KERRY REID AND CATEY SULLIVAN**

To pick the most memorable moments or productions in Chicago theater any year is a daunting endeavor. With hundreds of shows covered by over 15 *Reader* writers during this past year, too many will be overlooked. But the productions below all had a common theme, and one that felt present in many other shows:

the urgent need to tell unvarnished truths in ways both poetic and direct, raw and raucous. These stories were also leavened with hope for redemption, but the kind that only comes after tearing down the false narratives that have shaped our collective and personal histories.

For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/When the Rainbow is Enuf

Court Theatre

The late Ntozake Shange's visionary 1976 choreopoem about the lives of Black women in America just finished a revival at New York's Public Theatre, but Court's production (directed by Seret Scott, who was in the original Broadway staging) was, as Sheri Flanders called it in her *Reader* review, "a transcendent theatrical experience." The eight Black women telling these stories all provided, as Flanders noted, "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.'" —**KERRY REID**



For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/When the Rainbow is Enuf © MICHAEL BROSILOW

Dana H.

Goodman Theatre

It doesn't get more raw and to-the-bone than hearing a woman telling an incredible and searing story about surviving abuse. When the woman is the playwright's own mother, the stakes feel even higher. In *Dana H.*, Lucas Hnath honored his mother's experiences as a survivor of a months-long kidnapping ordeal over 20 years ago by using recordings of the real Dana's voice, to which the astonishing Deirdre O'Connell lip-synched. What may sound gimmicky on the page became a gripping narrative and an exploration of both how trauma causes us to disassociate, and how seldom abused women are believed. (Dana's captor, a member of the Aryan Brotherhood, hoodwinked cops more than once, even as Dana, bruised and silent, stood by him.) Yet by the end of this gut punch of a show, we get a glimpse of healing as Dana—who works as a hospice counselor—tells us, "A person who can be an empathetic witness can bring healing." I can't think of a better description for why theater matters in these times. —**KERRY REID**

Cambodian Rock Band

Victory Gardens Theater

At the close of the first act of Victory Gardens's magnificent production of Lauren Yee's unforgettable *Cambodian Rock Band*, the seven-member ensemble unleashed a cover of Dengue Fever's "One Thousand Tears of a Tarantula." The music was all fire and joy, the bass-heavy, string-screaming, thunderous essence of rock and roll. Or so it was until the music was overtaken by the sounds of obliteration: helicopter rotors thrumming, the crunch of rolling tanks, both becoming ever louder until the band was engulfed. Yee's musical drama was an ode to

the two million (roughly—no one really knows the exact number) Cambodians killed by the Khmer Rouge, a tragedy of such brutal scope it's almost impossible to wrap your mind around. But in that first act closer, director Marti Lyons's cast made the devastation visceral, understandable, and impossible to tune out. In both words and music, Yee put Pol Pot's genocidal devastation in stark, uncompromising terms. Yet for all the tragedy that propelled *Cambodian Rock Band*, there was no denying the drama's ultimate takeaway: art and artists can never be wholly snuffed out. Yee made resilience blare from the amps, even as tragedy came for her characters. —**CATEY SULLIVAN**

True West

Steppenwolf Theatre

Embedded deep within Sam Shepard's anti-western, Austin (Jon Michael Hill) has a bit of dialogue that burns straight through the mask of heroism that made John Wayne a star. It's a passage that eviscerates the fake cowboy's acting ("acting" is more accurate) and all the noxious, white-male-supremacist machismo Wayne stood for. It was an unforgettable moment in a drama packed with them, and it exposed the centuries of genocidal racism that fueled the notion of Manifest Destiny. The mockery didn't explicitly invoke the wholesale slaughter of Native Americans or the slavery of African Americans that bankrolled many a (white) westward-ho expedition. Hill's subversive, hilarious delivery made all that clear nonetheless: John Wayne, and everything he and his ubiquitous brand of American history stood for, is straight bullshit. The moment captured all that was brilliant about Steppenwolf's production, which also starred Namir Smallwood as Austin's brother, Lee. Before



The Steadfast Tin Soldier © LIZ LAUREN

True West delivers its final, shocking moment, the brothers destroy both the desert home they're holed up in and the history most of us were taught in school. Their drama is rooted in hard truths, the kind that are all too rarely taught in class. —CATEY SULLIVAN

DANCE

No one is alone

The best moments in dance this year focused on the power of community.

By IRENE HSIAO

In the mad scene in Akram Khan's *Giselle* for the English National Ballet at the Harris Theater, the corps de ballet encircles the title character just after she has discovered that the man she loves is betrothed to another. They clasp arms and huddle about her, pulsing like a heartbeat. They lift her, and she seems to float above a billowing skirt before she drops back down into an ocean that overwhelms, soaks, and submerges her. They swirl, hunch-backed and abstracted, hiding and revealing her, sometimes making the image of hive or a home, other times a herd or a school of fish. They swarm, leaping into the air, a stampede. This moment encapsulates the work of theater: individual feeling amplified and understood through a community. In Porchlight's *A Chorus Line*, dancers wear the most unforgiving of costumes (shiny, synthetic, skintight), giving voice to what no audition or audience ever wants to know about the mass of moving

figures behind the star: who these artists are and why they dance.

In *The Quiet Hours*, dancers smear their skin across the mirror at Dovetail, fogging the glass with sweat and skin cells, sending a frisson of horror down the spine of anyone who has ever cleaned a studio to get free classes. But what an image: bringing the residue of the living body into plain sight, complicating the idea that playing holds a mirror up to nature, as the mirror reveals an aspect of mortality at the same time that the image of it gets distorted. (Work-studies can breathe: they cleaned after themselves.)

One dancer sits outside the circle during Lucky Plush's *Rink Life*, trying to find her "happy place" apart from the jingoistic singsong of the group—individuality at last achieved by a refusal to act.

The bright buzz of a forest of LEDs combined with dancers in Visceral Dance Chicago's *Synapse* to show a vision of networked humans, part machine.

Bodies told stories more forcefully than words in Court Theatre's *Oedipus Rex*, Bronks's *Us/Them* at Chicago Shakespeare Theater, and Lookingglass's *The Steadfast Tin Soldier*.

Throughout the year, choreographers danced for each other in peer-led gatherings hosted by The Field, DanceWorks Chicago, Jello, Chicago Dancemakers Forum, and others. Dancers taught dance, yoga, and Pilates, poured coffee and wine, brought your omelet, gave you a massage, and took your picture. Dance is a living art created on and by bodies living in the world—never alone. **FI**

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THEATER

OPENING

RR What's the matter with misfits?

A reality-competition spoof invokes some familiar oddball toys.

America's *Best Outcast Toy*, by Larry Todd Cousineau (book and lyrics) and Cindy O'Connor (music), starts off as a send-up of various reality TV shows—*America's Got Talent*, *Survivor*, *Dancing with the Stars*—and ends up being about a lot more. The premise is that some citizens from the Island of Misfit Toys, made famous by a beloved television special about an ostracized reindeer—including a spotted elephant, a bird that acts like a fish, a cowboy who rides an ostrich, a basic doll with low self-esteem—are competing for the previously mentioned title. The tasks the toys must perform are familiar to anyone with even a passing familiarity with the genre—there is a dance-off, a bake-off, and a sing-off—and after each event someone is invited to leave by a snobby, sadistic, self-obsessed celebrity judge.

Cousineau's book, and the songs he penned with O'Connor, are loaded with charm and wit. And though the show is rarely fall-out-of-your-seat hilarious, it is start-to-finish funny. The show also has a lot of heart, and a message about love, friendship, and self-acceptance that could have been lifted right from the Rudolph story.

Director Donterrio Johnson's triple-threat nine-member cast do the material right. Haylie Kinsler is quite winning as a brash "Jackie" in the box, as is Danny Ackman as the hapless stuffed elephant. And Patrick Regner does plenty of comic turns as the show version of Hermie, the elf-turned-dentist, who in this version turns unctuous TV host. But the show really belongs to Tyler DeLoatch, who proves to be quite the chameleon, appearing at various times as a misfit toy, a glamour queen, and a Simon Cowell knockoff, and playing each with an intensity and believability many actors have trouble mustering for one role. —**JACK HELBIG** *AMERICA'S BEST OUTCAST TOY* Through 1/12: *Thu-Sat 7:30 PM, Sun 5 PM, the Broadway at Pride Arts Center, 4139 N. Broadway, 800-737-0984, pridefilmsandplays.com, \$40 premium reserved, \$30 general reserved, \$25 students and seniors (not valid Sat).*

The death of logic

Death Tax has too many plot holes to sustain the drama.

Toward the back end of Lucas Hnath's 90-minute series of overheated monologues, Todd, a nursing home supervisor, tells Tina, a nurse, to destroy some legal papers. It's meant to be an extremely high-stakes convo: If the docs aren't shredded, they both could go to jail. There is yelling and tears and gnashing of teeth as it becomes apparent that while it is 2010, Tina and Todd have not yet discovered e-mail. Hnath has issues he wants to monologize about, and he's not about to let a canyon-wide plot hole like the ubiquity of electronic communication get in his way.

Thus, it never occurs to Tina or Todd that a lawyer somewhere has copies of these potentially catastrophic papers. It's a problem throughout. Hnath's dialogue purports to deal with substantial issues. It fails because when pesky matters of this-would-never-happen-in-real-life get in the way of a drama presented as realism, Hnath simply buries truth



Working. © AUSTIN OIE PHOTOGRAPHY

under mundane, wordy hyperbole about life, death, family, and money. There's not a lot director Rinska Carrasco-Prestinary or her earnestly overwrought cast can do. So: No e-mail, even though it's 2010. And: Tina bars her patient Maxine's (unnamed) daughter from visiting and unnamed daughter accepts this, not because there is any reason she should, but because she has her own monologue to deliver. I could list more examples, but I'm running out of words and patience. Hnath does explain some things. There's a lot of "It is 2010. I am a nurse. I am in a hospital room" exposition. Death, taxes, and family are the stuff of great drama. But not when the drama would suffocate if the plot holes were sewn up. —**CATEY SULLIVAN** *DEATH TAX* Through 1/19: *Thu-Sat 7:30 PM, Sun 3 PM, Redtwist Theatre, 1044 W. Bryn Mawr, 773-728-7529, redtwisttheatre.org, \$35 Thu, \$40 Fri-Sun (\$5 off for students and seniors).*

RR Unfinished business

Blank Theatre tackles *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*.

One of the easier riddles to solve in Rupert Holmes's 1985 musical comedy is why so few theater companies ever seem to produce it. Its orchestral and vocal bars to entry are significant—in true 80s Broadway form, Holmes's score mashes up operatic arias and ornate harmonic chord progressions with toe-tappy, whistle-able melodies. Its required cast size can be prohibitively large for smaller companies, its plot is often inscrutable, its humor is irony-free, and its obscure source material—Charles Dickens's last work—is literally unfinished. So be it young bravado or something else that inspired Blank Theatre Company to take it on with an orchestra comprised solely of a bass (Leo Finan) and piano (Declan Ryan), the results are as surprising as they are entertaining—these kids really do have the chops to pull it off.

Framed as a show-within-a-show in a British music hall, director Danny Kapinos's production follows a sinister love triangle involving a young musical protégé (Phoebe Moore). When Edwin (Maisie Rose), her betrothed, is discovered dead, it's up to the audience to decide the culprit from a lineup including a predatory, mustachioed vocal coach (Chase Heinemann) and a visiting, orphaned suitor (Nathan Karnik). Dickensian class drama is present but takes a back seat to the lower-stakes, goofier antics of the performing company (like the charmingly overeager emcee work by Dustin Rothbart). Music direction by Aaron Kaplan is a highlight, including a dizzying, delightful word buffet "Both Sides of the Coin" performed by Rothbart and

Heinemann, and a memorable rendition of "The Wages of Sin" by Katherine Dalin. —**DAN JAKES** *THE MYSTERY OF EDWIN DROOD* Through 12/29: *Thu-Sat 7:30 PM, Sun 3 PM, Edge Theater, 5451 N. Broadway, blanktheatrecompany.org, \$25, \$15 student and industry.*

RR Working it out

The musical based on Studs Terkel's book returns.

As the populist question goes, "If work's so great, how come they have to pay you to do it?" That attitude provides the jumping-off point for *Working*, the musical based on Studs Terkel's 1974 book of interviews where "people talk about what they do all day and how they feel about what they do." Originally adapted in 1978 by Stephen Schwartz and Nina Faso, the show got a revision several years ago from writer-director Gordon Greenberg. The score features songs from Mary Rodgers of *Once Upon a Mattress* fame to James Taylor to (more recently) Lin-Manuel Miranda.

Theo Ubique uses Greenberg's version in Christopher Chase Carter's staging, which starts off unevenly but, thanks to a generally strong cast, builds an emotional arc by the second act. Even in its revised form, the current incarnation doesn't fully address the "gig economy," though Miranda's "A Very Good Day" gives voice to the exploding (yet still invisible) class of caregivers for children and the elderly. Though the first act feels more generalized in its grievances about work (lack of respect for blue-collar labor, the boredom of working as a stay-at-home mom, a long-distance trucker, and a food-service minion), Taylor's "Millwork," performed by Kiersten Frumkin's luggage-factory worker, goes into specific and grim detail about the harshness and danger of the environment.

Cynthia F. Carter's performance of "Cleanin' Woman" (written by Micki Grant) captures the primary (and perhaps obvious) reason many of these characters work so hard: to make it possible for their kids to have more options in life. And as the concluding song, "Something to Point To" (by Craig Carnelia) movingly makes clear, what most people also want out of a job is to feel that they've created something that will last beyond their time on earth. Theo Ubique's production elevates the occasionally dutiful clock-punching material to create a moving collage of the dignity of doing one's best without fanfare. —**KERRY REID** *WORKING* Through 1/26: *Thu-Sat 7:30 PM, Sun 7 PM, Theo Ubique Cabaret Theatre, 721 Howard, 773-347-1109, theo-u.com, \$42-\$57 (optional dinner \$29).* **RR**

FILM

Ben Sachs's top 12 films of 2019

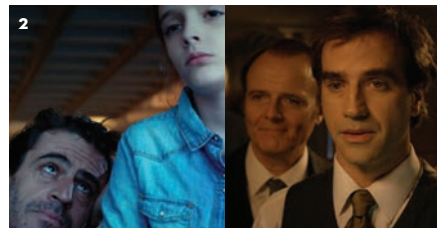
Yes, there are some ties.

By BEN SACHS

Most of my favorite films to have premiered in Chicago in 2019 played here before September, which is when I began my career as a special education teacher. Since then I've slowed down on my intake of new movies, but what I saw in the first eight months of the year provided me with much to admire. I'm especially grateful for the brief run, in May, of László Nemes's *Sunset* at the Landmark Century and AMC River East. *Sunset* is one of the most innovative and invigorating films I've seen, and I can't imagine that anything else this year could have topped it. Nemes's artful approach to history—a rich aesthetic that brings together exacting camera movements, long takes, detailed mise-en-scene, and emotionally charged close-ups—renders the past scary and immediate as few other movies have. This perspective also makes a perfect fit for the film's subject matter, Hungary's societal breakdown in the period leading up to World War I. Nemes's fusion of form and content makes *Sunset* an instructive masterpiece, providing insights into our own period of societal breakdown through means distinctive to its creative medium.

At least two other great films to play Chicago in 2019 were similarly instructive: Christian Petzold's *Transit*, which took place in a conflation of contemporary and World War II-era Europe, and Mike Leigh's *Peterloo*, which contemplated the British government's massacre of protestors in the early 19th century to comment on the present-day persecution of dissidents. Neither movie appears on my list of annual favorites since they received their local premieres at the 2018 Chicago International Film Festival, and per *Reader* rules, this makes them inadmissible for a list of Chicago movies in 2019. Nevertheless, I value both almost as much as I value *Sunset*.

Below are my favorite Chicago film premieres of the year, listed in order of preference. As usual the city offered so many great opportunities to engage with great cinema that I found it difficult to narrow my list to just ten titles.



1. **Sunset** See above.

2. Tie: **Belmonte** and **The Moneychanger** Sometimes I think that international film culture doesn't deserve Federico Veiroj, the endlessly creative Uruguayan director of *A Useful Life* and *The Apostate*. With these two features, Veiroj confirmed his position as one of the most imaginative filmmakers working today. *Belmonte*, a dreamlike account of a middle-aged painter that played at the Chicago Latino Film Festival in April, found new things to say about divorce and artistic frustration in practically every scene, employing a subtle visual language to convey the hero's complex internal life. The comic docudrama *The Moneychanger*, which played at the Chicago International Film Festival in October, was no less inspired in its compositions and montage, and it advanced a wry sense of morality in its ironic account of a corrupt banker who thrived under Uruguay's era of dictatorship.



3. **"I Do Not Care If We Go Down in History as Barbarians"** Radu Jude's Brechtian comedy about the public recreation of one of the worst episodes in Romanian history (the massacre that launched the country's Jewish genocide of World War II) managed to make historical reckoning seem exciting and vital. It represents the finest work to date by Jude, the New Wave director of *Everybody in Our Family* and *Aferim!*

4. **The Wild Pear Tree** Alternately intimate and epic, Nuri Bilge Ceylan's novelistic tale of a Turkish family in decline was consistently surprising in its storytelling—watching the film, you're never sure whether Ceylan will adopt a nearsighted or cosmic perspective on the material. Ceylan's characterizations were so full, moreover, that they stayed with me for months after I saw this.

5. **The Image Book** The 2010s found Jean-Luc Godard as inspired as ever. The formal inno-

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ventions of *Film Socialisme* (2010), *Goodbye to Language* (2014), and now this head-spinning essay film (2018) showed that the octogenarian Swiss master had no intention of resting on his laurels in old age. *The Image Book* was characteristically cerebral and playful, posing challenging questions about knowledge, technology, colonialism, and art while advancing a childlike enthusiasm for the possibilities of sound and image. The movie's three-week run at the Gene Siskel Film Center this January was undoubtedly one of the year's major art events, as it provided multiple opportunities for Chicago audiences to experience Godard's impressive use of 7.1 surround sound.

6. **Relaxer** Joel Potrykus's low-budget comedy (which played at Facets Multimedia this summer) was not only the year's funniest American movie, but the year's most formally distinguished American movie. Potrykus found innumerable ways to render cinematic the film's single location, a grungy Michigan apartment where a childlike slacker spends months trying to reach the fabled 257th level of *Pac-Man*. The defiantly adolescent dialogue, which recalls the proto-punk theater of Alfred Jarry, was riotous, and Potrykus's cast (Joshua Burge, David Dastmalchian, and Adina Howard) delivered it brilliantly.

7. Tie: **Hotel by the River** and **Grass** Hong Sang-soo was the most reliable auteur of the decade, delivering at least one witty, probing examination of romance and the creative process every year between 2010 and 2018. These two black-and-white features (which played at the Gene Siskel Film Center in the spring) were exquisite examples of his mastery; each explored the human condition in a manner witty, precise, and concise. At this point it feels as though Hong can create a lovely composition or reach psychological insights offhandedly—the films successfully translate his carefree filmmaking process into narrative form. But despite their breezy surface tone, they're suffused with a deep melancholy that makes them linger in the mind.

8. **Coincoin and the Extra-Humans** Bruno Dumont followed up his singular TV miniseries *Li'l Quinquin* (2014)—which infused his rigorous, Bressonian aesthetic with absurd, unpredictable humor—with one that was even funnier and weirder. In this chapter aliens invade Dumont's small northern French town of lovable, amoral oddballs; one of the ➔

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best jokes is that none of the residents seems to notice or mind that they're being replaced by extraterrestrials. Dumont continues to work wonders with nonprofessional actors and forbidding landscapes, and this creates a fascinating frisson with the ridiculous comedy.

9. **The Souvenir** The best film yet by British writer-director Joanna Hogg, this autobiographical drama marked an interpretation of Bressonian cinema that's every bit as personal and surprising as Bruno Dumont's. Like Bresson, Hogg deliberately leaves details out of her stories to make viewers put them together in their imaginations; she's also so attuned to the feeling of living in the moment that her film succeeds as a hypnotic account of idiosyncratic behaviors. Playing a doomed romantic couple in early-80s London, Honor Swinton Byrne and Tom Burke delivered the finest, most emotionally precise performances I saw in 2019.

10. **First Love** The inimitable Japanese director Takashi Miike has more than 100 features to his name, and this freewheeling mix of slapstick comedy, romantic melodrama, and crime thrillers is one of his greatest accomplishments. What makes *First Love* so special is how it combines the gonzo storytelling techniques of Miike's breakout films of the 1990s and early 2000s with the steely formal control of his early-2010s remakes of *13 Assassins* and *Hara-Kiri*. The film represents a sustained organized chaos that few other filmmakers could achieve. It's also wildly entertaining.

Honorable Mentions (in order of preference): *Vitalina Varela* (Pedro Costa), *Give Me Liberty* (Kirill Mikhanovsky), *Pain and Glory* (Pedro Almodóvar), *Richard Jewell* (Clint Eastwood), *The Sower* (Marine Francen), *The Laundromat* (Steven Soderbergh), *The Wandering Soap Opera* (Raúl Ruiz), *Ghost Tropic* (Bas Devos), *The Grand Bizarre* (Jodie Mack), and the last 40 minutes of *The Irishman* (Martin Scorsese). **R**



Chained for Life

NOW PLAYING

Bombshell

It's not imperative to align with a film's political perspective to enjoy it, but it should at least present a moral backbone strong enough to understand it. That's the main issue with Jay Roach's *Bombshell*, a film that begs its audience to champion the famously (and sometimes self-identified) anti-feminist women of Fox News as misunderstood feminist heroes without ever trying to bridge that gap in a substantial way. Following the explosive takedown of former Fox News CEO Roger Ailes amidst allegations of serial sexual harassment, *Bombshell* fumbles its goal of humanizing Megyn Kelly (Charlize Theron) and Gretchen Carlson (Nicole Kidman) by coddling their glaringly harmful ideologies. A glimmer of resistance comes in the form of the film's fictional staffers: the doe-eyed and ambitious Kayla (Margot Robbie) and the closeted lesbian Democrat Jess (Kate McKinnon). But critiques of the establishment are few and far between, and rarely have a stake in the film's larger narrative. Instead, any sense of nuance or introspection that could exist in *Bombshell* is replaced with a self-righteous framework that refuses to be questioned. —**CODY CORRALL** *R*, 108 min. In wide release

RR Chained for Life

Prefaced with a quote from Pauline Kael about why audiences prefer actors and actresses to be better looking than average, writer-director Aaron Schimberg's second feature is an entrancingly bizarre and often humorous metaexploration of physical representation in movies. It follows the making of an unintentionally campy film helmed by a self-serious German auteur, styled in the vein of horror and exploitation films from decades past. The story of the film-within-the-film concerns a beautiful young blind woman who finds herself in a hospital full of so-called "freaks." Jess Weixler (*Teeth*) stars as Mabel, a sighted person playing the blind woman. Adam Pearson (*Under the Skin*) plays Rosenthal, a man experiencing neurofibromatosis—one of several people with real disabilities who appear in the film—with whom both Mabel and her character become close. The film is perhaps overly ambitious in its mission to accomplish several objectives, ranging from critiquing cinematic representations of physically different people to both paying homage to and scrutinizing the filmmaking process. Nevertheless it's effective on the whole, making for one of the most original independent films I've seen of late. —**KATHLEEN SACHS** *R*, 91 min. *Gene Siskel Film Center*

RR A Hidden Life

Set in Austria in 1939, *A Hidden Life* portrays the story of peasant farmer Franz Jägerstätter in the small mountain village of St. Radegund along with his wife Fani and their three small children. A conscientious objector to the horrors of the German war effort, Franz is conscripted then ultimately imprisoned and tried for his refusal to swear an oath of allegiance to Adolf Hitler. Eschewing some of the typically unstructured narrative composition of Terrence Malick's previous work (*The Tree of Life*, *The Thin Red Line*, *Days of Heaven*), the film is both meticulous and beautiful, comprised of a series of vignettes of loose chronological order that is driven forward largely through voiceover narration of correspondence between Franz and Fani. Director of photography Jörg Widmer maintains the improvisational photographic style typical of Malick, providing an expansive view of the ordinary life and labor of the villagers of St. Radegund as it is subsumed by the historical events taking place around them. As such, the film is notable not only for its somber portrayal of Jägerstätter's quiet act of resistance, but its focus on the effect that his refusal has on Fani, who is left behind to suffer the skepticism and revulsion of her neighbors. Ultimately, *A Hidden Life* is a moving portrayal of a small act of opposition that serves to remind us of the possibilities of our own humanity in inhumane times. —**ADAM MULLINS-KHATIB** *PG-13*, 174 min. *Century Centre Cinema*

RR Richard Jewell

For better or worse—some will say better, many more will say worse—Clint Eastwood is the most American director working right now. Not the greatest, mind you, just the most. This is especially evident in several of his recent films, each one as divisive—and thus reflective of the current political climate—as the last. This compelling docudrama details the events and aftermath of the Centennial Olympic Park bombing at the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta as they impacted security guard Richard Jewell (Paul Walter Hauser in an inspired performance), who discovered the bomb and was later suspected by the FBI of having planted it, a suspicion that was unduly promulgated by the news media. Most thematically aligned with Eastwood's 2016 masterpiece *Sully*, this too explores the complicated relationships between ordinary people and organizational bodies. Not without its share of controversy involving the portrayal of real-life journalist Kathy Scruggs (Olivia Wilde), the film may seem straightforward in its message. But like much of Eastwood's recent work, it's more nuanced than it lets on; the film illuminates contradictions on all sides of the equation, including those of its own. —**KATHLEEN SACHS** *R*, 129 min. *Century Centre Cinema* **R**

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Reverend Mack McCollum leads Sunday service on December 1, 2019, at New Home Missionary Baptist Church. A song he recorded with New Home's choir in the 1970s appears on *No Other Love*. MELISSA BLACKMON FOR CHICAGO READER

'Do what the good Lord gave you and keep going'

The new compilation *No Other Love* shines a light on a self-reliant strain of midwest gospel that's survived outside the mainstream for more than 50 years.

By **AARON COHEN**

On a Sunday morning at New Home Missionary Baptist Church in South Austin, Reverend Mack McCollum waits till the service is well under way to make his entrance. He knows that pacing himself for the long haul always beats making a reckless rush. A banner in the stairwell of

this west-side church celebrates his lengthy career: "60 Years Preaching / 55 Years Pastoring / 85 Years Young." The building itself, constructed in 1996, is relatively modern, but the music inside on this day is mostly time-honored gospel. An organist and drummer guide the choir through its peaks and valleys, expertly building tension, and McCollum's

voice provides the release.

At New Home, congregants of all ages recognize gospel standards such as "You've Got to Move"—as visiting organist Tim Hughes puts it, the church knows the old favorites, even if every single churchgoer doesn't. McCollum eases into the tune, singing while he directs the choir and congregation. He shapes the

music with his control of dynamics, moving between a shout on "I Will Trust in the Lord" and quiet moans on "Mean Old World" and "That's Heaven to Me," both of which gospel star and soul man Sam Cooke popularized in the 1960s.

Not that the programming ignores younger generations: McCollum next introduces stylish spoken-word artist Jennifer Freeman, also a New Home congregant. "She ain't got my Christmas wrap," he says, "but she has a rap." During the recession, the instrumentalists play Donny Hathaway's holiday favorite from 1970, "This Christmas." Still, throughout the service, McCollum unmistakably emphasizes traditions from further back.

Generational divides and historical memory also come up in a breakfast discussion between McCollum and a few visitors, including Hughes, who played with McCollum for many years at New Home but now lives in ➔

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Mississippi. Hughes mentions that younger church performers in his area don't know the older repertoire and performance styles, and McCollum nods, gently chiding children who ignore the music of their parents and grandparents. With a sly grin, he quietly replies, "They're not anticipating someone getting old."

The traditions that McCollum embodies are documented on the compilation album *No Other Love: Midwest Gospel 1965-1978*, produced by global music scholar Ramona Stout and released last month by San Francisco archival label Tompkins Square. It presents a cross-section of underappreciated performers, whose style, sound, or age placed them outside the mainstream of the gospel industry, with its infrastructure of major record labels and popular radio and TV shows. Most of the artists on the compilation have died, and only two are still regularly performing—McCollum and Carnell Drummer, guitarist and vocalist for the Sensational Travelers of Zion. Both live in Chicago.

Musicians like McCollum and the Travelers took it upon themselves to be their own advocates and their own entrepreneurs. They pressed their singles in small runs of around 100 copies, occasionally partnering with tiny labels (the Travelers worked with west-side indie Cash Records) to release their music or promote their performances across the region or the country. This self-reliance is a key reason they're still active today, offering a living connection to this rich history. It's an inspiration to hear and speak with McCollum and Drummer in their Chicago neighborhoods—the kind of inspiration that should be universal, no matter your feelings about God.

These artists' exuberance flows through *No Other Love*. They lacked the large arrangements of some of their contemporaries, but this meant they also avoided a production sheen that could sound more dated today. McCollum recorded the album's stomping-and-shaking version of "I'm Gonna Stand Still and Do My Master's Will" at a 1970s service, and his choir responds to his gravelly voice and ragged phrasing with the same kind of lift it still conveys. On the Sensational Travelers of Zion's "I Want You to Help Me," Drummer's understated electric guitar blends into and

frames the group's hair-raising harmonies and wrung-out pleas. An unknown guitarist adds barbed asides to the Reverend H.H. Harrington's consciousness-raising "Black Pride," released as a 45 on his own Atomic-H Records in the 1960s.

The minimalist aesthetics of this music—usually adopted out of economic necessity—were what struck Stout when she first heard it decades later. It made such an impression that she eventually assembled *No Other Love*. "My faith is in the power of the music to move people," she says from an airport in Washington, D.C., while traveling from a research mission in Ecuador to her home in Greece. "Mack McCollum says that there is no 'church music' and 'world music'—there's music. People who don't pay attention to gospel music in that way miss out on a lot."

McCollum has always sung gospel, but he also heard B.B. King, Muddy Waters, and Little Walter while he was growing up in Mississippi in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Because he expected more for himself than a rural southern town could offer, he migrated from Tunica, Mississippi, to Chicago in 1953, when he was about 18. McCollum set up his ministry six years later, but at first it couldn't sustain him financially—he continued to work in a series of other jobs. For a time he painted cars at Earl Scheib, quitting after he started coming home at night spitting up different colors. In 1966, while working at a rubber-processing factory in Cicero, McCollum lost his right arm.

Nowadays, McCollum laughs off that incident. Years ago, while he was touring church programs in California, a minister billed him as "The One Arm Bandit." At breakfast a few weeks back, when his wife, Pecola, mentioned that the two of them have yet to go on a cruise, McCollum responded with a joke: "You know I can't swim with just one arm!"

"Well, I didn't suffer too much from losing the arm," McCollum says. "I didn't have major problems. Of course, the arm was important, and I did the best I could after that with the church, so here I am."

This even-tempered attitude has sustained him through more than one tribulation. When McCollum tried to present his music outside the city in the late 1960s and early 1970s, he faced a generational challenge: the gospel industry was shifting its focus away from the midwest.



Carnell Drummer holds an old photo of his group the Sensational Travelers of Zion, who have a song on *No Other Love*. Drummer is second from right in the front row. © COURTESY TOMPKINS SQUARE RECORDS

"The locus of the gospel sound started moving to California in the 1960s," says Robert Marovich, author of the 2015 Chicago gospel history *A City Called Heaven*. "Arrangements and backgrounds in the 1950s were an electric guitar, organ, piano, and drums. Then came bass guitars, electric keyboards, bigger rhythm sections, and bigger sounds with more rock and jazz. Chicago sort of lost its crown in terms of being the place for artists who wanted to remain relevant."

McCollum took it upon himself to create opportunities, which included a slew of self-

pressed recordings. His church's basement offices still document his efforts: they contain flyers for many of his appearances, including dates he coheadlined with gospel and R&B singer Otis Clay. A map of the United States bristles with push pins marking cities where McCollum performed. Adjoining rooms are filled with his 45s, LPs, CDs, and eight-tracks, along with a vintage Ampex reel-to-reel tape machine and other equipment used to record them.

"I've always been into that kind of electronics," McCollum says. "The mikes that have ➔



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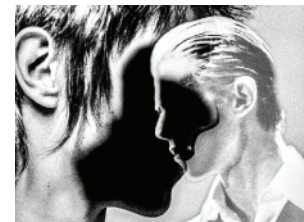
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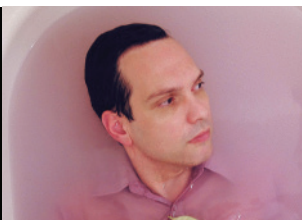
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Reverend Mack McCollum founded his ministry in 1959. © MELISSA BLACKMON FOR CHICAGO READER

a wire to them, I made my own wire. Soldering, tubes, everything. And everywhere I've been, every church, I've always had a good sound. When I got on the road, I used to have my own sound with me. Because a lot of places you went, the sound was horrible—and I set my sound up. The mike, the board, everything.”



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Drummer isn't a minister, but he shares a lot of other things with McCollum: faith, self-reliance, and similar life journeys. At his home in North Lawndale, he talks about moving to Chicago from Alabama 64 years ago, when he was 21. Drummer co-founded the Sensational Travelers of Zion Gospel Singers in 1957, and he's the sole surviving original member in the lineup that still performs. They sang across the midwest at weekend church services, and Drummer held down a job at a metalworks until his retirement in 2000. Since the group didn't trust promoters, they pushed their own gigs, including on such radio stations as WVON.

Drummer is a high tenor, and he's trained the other members of the quartet to maintain a constant balance in their harmonies. His guitar part on “I Want You to Help Me” (the Travelers' only song on *No Other Love*) starts with a brief swing flourish, then pushes the group along with minimal chord changes. He's not quite an autodidact on the instrument, but he learned from a source close to home.

“My wife Margaret and I went to the Sears downtown and bought a guitar and amplifier,” Drummer says. “Margaret tuned it. She could play, but I never could play. She showed me how to play, but it was just one finger—one finger across strings and moving it. I still play. Still try to play, as they say.”

Drummer may make his supposed ineptitude the subject of self-deprecating jokes, but his unvarnished guitar is the sort of thing that helps make the records on *No Other Love* so valuable—they provide insight into a small but enduring corner of gospel. Though these artists were outsiders in the 1960s and 1970s, that status meant that their musical messages arrived in the world as they envisioned them, not contorted into whatever shape a major label thought might be easiest to market.

“These were much freer, more raw experiences on record than you would get with bigger companies,” Marovich says, comparing the acts on *No Other Love* to the kind of smoother, more heavily produced groups that still rise to the top of the *Billboard* gospel charts. “Many became oral calling cards to sell at their programs or give to radio announcers to get some more publicity. When they're working programs for little to no money, they made money selling records and pictures. Small companies were happy to oblige. Producers might make suggestions, but they were not going to pigeonhole them to sound like the Winans.”

As a European, Stout approached the music



San Francisco archival label Tompkins Square Records released *No Other Love* in November.

from a different background, but she found connections between Black gospel in the American midwest and the music of cultures from further away. After attending high school in London and living for a while in Russia, she started studying Near Eastern culture and history at the University of Chicago in 2002. She took courses in Turkish and in central Asian ethnomusicology while her husband, Kevin Speck, worked at the 2nd Hand Tunes on 53rd Street. Years later, as they collected and sold records on their own, certain small-label and self-issued gospel sides clicked with her at a deep level.

“Because I've moved around a lot and hold three citizenships, I don't identify with a nation,” Stout says. “So I find a home in different kinds of music—irrespective if they're associated with me or my belief system. This dynamic of despair, hope, and courage that was articulated in gospel related closely to my experience. It's tricky moving to America from Europe as an adult and seeing how people were living as infrastructure was collapsing. That's why the music spoke to me as clearly as it did.”

Stout's interactions with the people who created this music inspired her just as much. She describes Drummer, a lifelong Baptist, as “kind of Buddha-like” in his belief that “suffering doesn't matter and hopes abide.” Though she and Speck left Chicago in 2011, she spent the next eight years working to articulate how these gospel tracks can double as a commentary on her memories of living in the States. The liner notes to *No Other Love* include her autobiographical essay, where she asks whether gospel can help fill the void when optimism has been evacuated from a city or nation.

In our conversation, Stout also links collecting and producing gospel with her recent work digitizing tapes of 1950s and '60s Ecuadoran music. She compares Ecuadoran vocal harmonies, which some families have modeled

after the sound of pan pipes, to the music of the Georgia Brooks Singers, a mother-son-daughter group from Gary, Indiana, who have a track on *No Other Love*. For Stout, a shared worldview transcends language.

“Not that I'm lyrically focused, but the atmosphere of the songs unifies them,” she says. “There's a Quechua word, *llaquiglla*, that means ‘joy through sadness,’ and I think that's what a lot of Ecuadorian music tries to cultivate: we're going to feel joy, but we're going to do it through an atmosphere of sadness. I suppose that's a theme of a lot of music that I like, is joy through sadness.”

As Stout points out, though, the gospel artists she met while preparing *No Other Love* don't tend to dwell on the grief and pain in their own lives. A few weeks ago, as Drummer's great-granddaughter's dog rested in his family's living room, he talked about the performances he's looking forward to. And he still follows an inspired credo: “Don't try to outdo somebody else, put somebody else down,” Drummer says. “Don't try to do better than somebody else. Just do what the good Lord gave you and keep going.”

McCollum also looks to God to keep him on the right path. When we spoke for this story, the Reverend Clay Evans—the Chicago ecclesiastical giant who founded Fellowship Missionary Baptist in 1950—had just died at age 94. That death reminded McCollum of the preciousness of his remaining days, and convinced him that it's time to revisit the recording gear he built.

“To do this one last record is my desire,” McCollum says. “I love the Lord, so I take this as no joke—this is real stuff. I don't play with it. I'm going to stay in with what I'm doing until I can't do it no more. I know it's going to come to that, but right now, I'm happy with it.”

Twitter @aaroncohenwords

'19

Chicago's best overlooked hip-hop of

2019

The shrinking of music media requires a new definition of "overlooked," but even the strictest criteria admit a vast unexplored trove of riches.

By LEOR GALIL

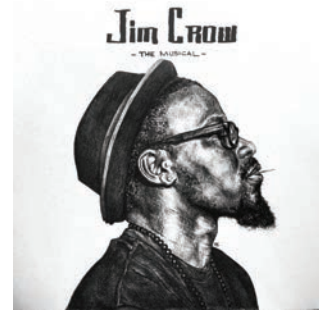
Chicago hip-hop is closing out its biggest decade on the international stage with some remarkable releases and dramatic moves on the charts. Yet the mainstream press has rarely reflected the reality on the ground here, instead focusing on obviously popular figures such as Chance the Rapper and Kanye West (both of whom dropped albums this year that I've mostly forgotten). And though the media finally caught up with Juice Wrld as soon as his second album, *Death Race for Love*, debuted atop the *Billboard* 200, I saw far more coverage of his unexpected death earlier this month (and of the still-emerging details surrounding his run-in with the feds in the last moments of his life) than of his music.

Of course, it'd be unfair to make these complaints about the state of music reporting and criticism without acknowledging that those fields have been disproportionately harmed by the instability in the journalism business. News and culture outlets continue to shut down at an alarming pace (pour one out for Pacific Standard), and at those that survive, music coverage gets cut before hard news does as budgets shrink. (The situation is even worse for people trying to write about theater, dance, books, or visual art.) This is by no means a new trend—the *Sun-Times* hasn't had a full-time music critic for years—but it does make it increasingly difficult for curious fans to get a sense of what's happening in their regional scenes. When one of the most aggres-

sively visible Chicago rappers of the decade, Vic Mensa, pulled a Tommy Wiseau in August with the political rap-rock album *93Punx*, Anthony Fantano of the Needle Drop (who's based in Connecticut) was the only noteworthy critic who bothered with a review.

A note for those who may have forgotten: Chance the Rapper has only updated the Chicagoist homepage once since publicly announcing he'd bought the defunct news site in July 2018: he added a "find your alderman" search that became inaccurate when the newest batch was inaugurated in May. In November, Chance told *Fast Company* that he plans to relaunch "the Chicagoist" as an app devoted to food and entertainment, then cede control to an editor. But unless Chance also sells the app, one of the city's few outlets focusing on local music will be owned by its biggest pop star.

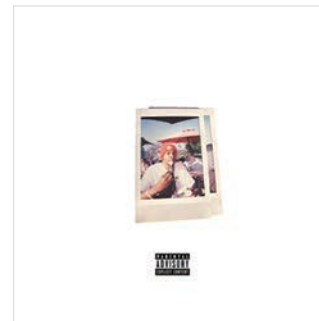
For six years now, I've put together an annual list of the best overlooked hip-hop releases in Chicago. Under present circumstances, determining what counts as "overlooked" is more challenging than ever—fewer and fewer releases get any media coverage at all. That's just one variable that goes into my decision, though: I also consider chart placements, streaming stats, frequency of local performances, accessibility of the music to fans, social media presence, and more. Because I regularly cover Chicago hip-hop, I didn't include any artist I've ever written about before—but that still left me with more candidates than I knew what to do with.



Add-2

Jim Crow: The Musical

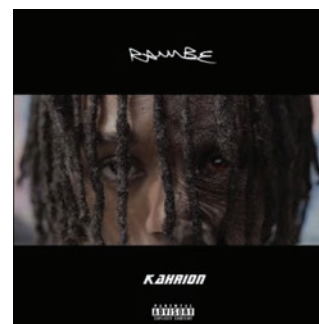
Veteran rapper Add-2, who also mentors at-risk youth via programs at his Haven Studios, unpacks the complexities of Black life and Black art as well as the deep historical roots of structural racism atop white-knuckle beats and sumptuous soul melodies.



Don't Be Kendall

Did U Die?

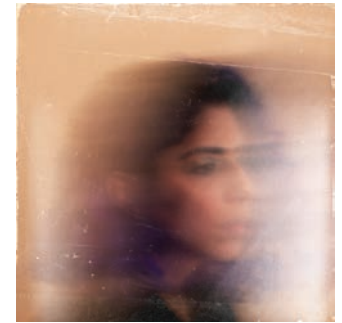
Don't Be Kendall distills youthful vigor into loose lines that he sprays across stylistically disparate instrumentals—and he's got the charm to make it all hang together.



Kahrion

Rambe World

Kahrion has a husky voice and the lyrical perspective of someone who's seen it all, and on *Rambe World* he wisely uses gritty old-school beats to complement his stylish air of mystery and magnetic mystique.



Ness Heads

Numb

On her debut EP, *Numb*, Ness Heads flips between lightning-fast rapping and cool-in-the-pocket singing with enough grace to make you wish stardom were a meritocracy.



SBG Kemo and Shawno

Kollege Kidz

Rising street rapper SBG Kemo brings along his friend Shawno for a smattering of frenzied tracks that sparkle with a smidgen of pop glee despite the hard edge in the duo's delivery.



Honorable mentions

Escher, *Escher*

Illuminati Congo, *Time Killaz*

Malveaux Donnell, *Memoirs 7*

Noah., *What Was That?*

Semiratruht, *I Don't Wanna Have to Yell for You to Listen*

@imLeor

PICK OF THE WEEK

Jaimie Branch's Fly or Die band celebrates a new record that nixes the sophomore jinx



JAIMIE BRANCH'S FLY OR DIE, BEN LAMAR GAY
Fri 12/20, 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle, 1035 N. Western, \$15. 21+

© DAWID LASKOWSKI

JAIMIE BRANCH'S 2017 debut LP, *Fly or Die*, heralded the arrival of an already mature talent. While it wasn't a secret that she's a superb trumpeter, it was her chops as a composer and bandleader that made the record stand out. She devised bold themes and galvanic grooves that inspired a band of elder musicians, all fellow ex-Chicagoans, to outdo themselves. (Branch is now based in Brooklyn, but she lived here till 2012.) Her latest release, this year's *Fly or Die II* (International Anthem), proves that the success of the first album was no fluke. Once more, Branch has assembled a compelling sequence of exultant melodies, atmospheric improvisations, and panglobal percussive workouts. Drummer Chad Taylor, bassist Jason Ajemian, and cellist Lester St. Louis (taking over from original cellist Tomeka Reid) deliver celebratory performances fueled by the empathy and confidence they developed during a couple years of steady gigging. Branch also has some things to say about American racism, and her dynamic vocal performance on the multipartite "Prayer for Amerikkka Pt. 1 & 2" is every bit as persuasive as her fearless and flexible horn playing. Labelmate Ben LaMar Gay, who has guested on both *Fly or Die* records, opens the show.

—BILL MEYER

THURSDAY 19

8MATIKLOGAN Joel Q, D2X, Jonathan Stewart, and 3name open. 8 PM, Subterranean, 2011 W. North, \$12. 17+

This summer Chicago rapper 8MatikLogan released "House of Pain," a blazing, salacious single punctuated with tasteful claps. Its video is closing in on 400,000 YouTube views, and it could become an even bigger breakout success—which would be a long time coming for the MC. He started rapping in 2012 under the name Logan, and he's built up a catalog of raw, teeth-grinding rhymes. In 2015 he dropped his debut mixtape, *1636*, and became firmly entrenched in the local scene, collaborating with artists such as Saba and Taylor Bennett. He's been quiet the past couple years, but he reemerged this summer as 8MatikLogan, and he's continued to show great promise since then. He's now signed to At the Studio, a label run by Chicago producer and mentor William "LPeezy" Jones that's tied to Hitco (started by L.A. Reid following his controversial departure from Epic Records). Logan has focused his aggressive energy on delivering pop hooks, which is obvious on "House of Pain" and its club-ready follow-up, "Blah Blah," whose chattering beat is softened with melting vocal samples and a wash of AutoTune. "Blah Blah" is somehow not available on Spotify, even though it seems perfect for the platform's company-run pop and rap playlists—the song's got enough mischievous charm to stand out in a field overstuffing with rap wallpaper. —LEOR GALIL

AVREEAYL RA & TIME MACHINE Matt Piet and Jeff Kimmel open. Vocalist Marvin Tate emcees, and Lewis Achenbach creates art during the sets. 8:30 PM, Constellation, 3111 N. Western, \$15, \$12 advance. 18+

People with synesthesia perceive things typically associated with one sense, such as sound, through one or more additional senses, such as

sight, taste, smell, or touch—a B-minor chord, for instance, might register as green. A number of famous musicians, including Mary J. Blige, Pharrell Williams, and Lady Gaga, have claimed to have (or are believed to have) synesthesia. The Jazz Occurrence series, founded by artist Lewis Achenbach, offers its audience an opportunity to experience something approximating synesthesia: Achenbach invites musicians to perform while he creates artwork inspired by their sound. At Jazz Occurrence 21, multidisciplinary artist and lyricist Marvin Tate will serve as master of ceremonies and provide vocal bridges between an opening set, performed by pianist-vocalist Matt Piet and clarinetist Jeff Kimmel and entitled *Suffering*, and a headlining solo set by percussionist Avreeayl Ra, a former member of the Sun Ra Arkestra, that's part of a practice he calls Healing Arts. This performance gives Ra and Achenbach a chance to collaborate in real time, an experience both men have desired for many years. Piet's *Suffering* set is intended to provide the audience with a safe environment to interact with improvisation and tone and inspire the release of pent-up feelings. After Tate intervenes to set the stage, Ra hopes to soothe those raw emotions and bring the audience safely home: his forceful yet understated drumming reflects his long-standing interest in the healing arts. Achenbach customarily sketches from the audience during shows, with the performers only seeing his work after their sets are done. For this event, though, the musicians and the crowd will both be able to watch Achenbach as he creates traditional and digital art in real time. "I'm often improvising solo, like a documentarian," he says. "But for this Jazz Occurrence, the musicians will be in the same boat as me, jumping off the cliff into the waters of experimentation—freedom, improvisation, fear, public humiliation, joy. But I'd expect that our collective experience will carry us through and provide a great abstract and lyrical storytelling event for all." Audience members should be prepared to open themselves up to a multisensory experience that engages their emotions through their eyes and ears. —AUDREY HENDERSON



8MatikLogan
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MUSIC



Anti-Flag © JOSH MASSIE

FRIDAY20

ANTI-FLAG *J. Navarro & the Traitors, Code, and Blind Adam & the Federal League open. 8 PM, Reggies' Rock Club, 2105 S. State, \$26, \$21 in advance. 17+*

For the better part of 30 years, Pittsburgh band Anti-Flag have made unapologetically confrontational political punk, cranking out fervent, hook-driven diatribes against facism, racism, animal cruelty, the surveillance state, and other social ills. They've also walked the walk, using their band as a platform to support a variety of causes (among them Amnesty International, the ACLU, Greenpeace, and Pittsburgh's Center for Victims of Violence and Crime) and playing free shows at pro-

tests and demonstrations, including one outside the 2008 Republican convention. They've even launched a couple of organizations of their own; one of them, Military Free Zone, opposes military recruiting in schools. And while many punk bands become more complacent with age, Anti-Flag have only grown more resolute in their fight for social justice, and you can feel their rage in their music. In 2018 they released *American Reckoning*, which compiles acoustic versions of songs from their previous two albums (2015's *American Spring* and 2017's *American Fall*) with a few protest-rock covers (including John Lennon's "Gimme Some Truth") and highlights their lyrical chops with its mix of dark and lighthearted moods. On the upcoming *20/20 Vision* (Spinefarm), they're going straight for the jugular of the Trump administration and all the theocrats, white supremacists, gun lobbyists, and other right-wing thugs in its gravitational pull. The title track is

a pop-punk indictment of the way alternative media frameworks developed by punks in the 80s and 90s to challenge power structures have been co-opted by the alt-right at the expense of the left. Album opener "Hate Conquers All" begins with a sample from a Trump speech before the band dives into a grooving, anthemic ripper that rejects the idea that love alone can beat those who seek to destroy us. Rather than mire listeners in a sense of helplessness, Anti-Flag urge them to be strong and get involved in the fight: as vocalist-guitarist Justin Sane sings in "Unbreakable," "What doesn't kill us now / Will lead us back from hell." —**JAMIE LUDWIG**

JAIMIE BRANCH'S FLY OR DIE See *Pick of the Week*, page 28. *Ben LaMar Gay opens. 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle, 1035 N. Western, \$15. 21+*

CASE *An Abstract Tribe opens. 7 PM, Beat Kitchen, 2100 W. Belmont, \$10. 17+*

Chicago rockers Case make wispy, heart-on-sleeve folkish songs that befit coffeehouses and 2000s indie bands. Their style isn't exactly en vogue, but the fivesome are skilled enough to easily draw upon disparate sounds that'll draw in listeners who typically find indie-rock stuffy. On "So Much It Could Be; So Little Is," off the 2018 EP *Questions of Space*, front man Cale Zepernick sings in a soft falsetto that recalls Rhye leader Mike Milosh, and helps elevate the sumptuous R&B vibe of the shimmying acoustic guitars. Case's versatility have helped them crossed over into other scenes; they've gotten gigs playing with hip-hop band Manwives and buzzy rapper Ric Wilson, who also tapped Case cofounder Seamus Masterson to play violin on his 2018 EP, *BANBA*. On Case's self-released debut album, June's *A Place We Belong* they often sound timid, particularly on their most straightforward and somber cuts. But when they bust out colorful flourishes, such as on the horn-heavy climaxes in "Take It Away," they show they've got the makings of a promising career. —**LEOR GALIL** →

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JANUARY 1	SMILIN' BOBBY AND THE CLEMTONES 3PM
JANUARY 2	AMERICAN TROUBADOUR NIGHT MIKE FELTEN TOM COMPTON
JANUARY 3	KYLE SODOWSKI THE LAY-DOWN RAMBLERS
JANUARY 4	RICK SHANDLING DUO 9:30PM
JANUARY 5	FIRST WARD PROBLEMS
JANUARY 6	ANDREW D HUBER PROSPECT FOUR 9PM

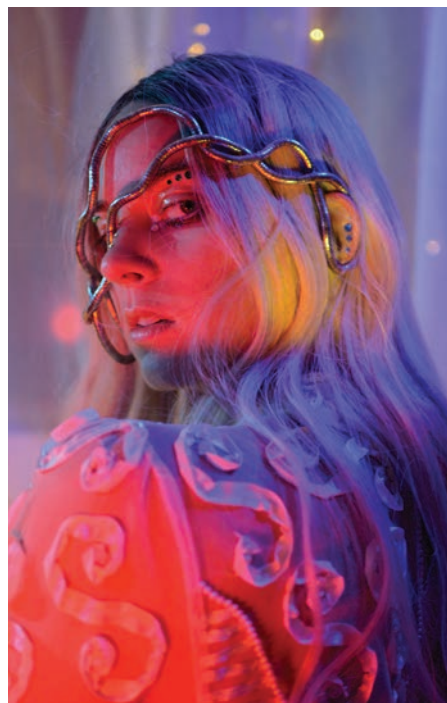
OPEN MIC ON TUESDAY EVENINGS (EXCEPT 2ND)

MUSIC

continued from 29

TAMA SUMO & LAKUTI *Harry Cross opens.*
10 PM, Smart Bar, 3730 N. Clark, \$20, \$15 in advance. 21+

Tama Sumo and Lakuti, each a key player in electronic music for nearly three decades, have been linked professionally and romantically for several years, even though their journeys started in different continents. Lerato Khathi, aka Lakuti, went to her first rave in Johannesburg in 1990, and since then she's worn several hats: DJ, promoter, booking agent, and label head. She established her first label, Süd Electronic, while living in London in 2002 (during that time she also organized a series of underground parties, also called Süd Electronic). Within five years, Lakuti had moved to Berlin, where she launched the Uzuri Recordings imprint, established the Uzuri Artist Bookings & Management agency, and met her future partner in life and music. Born Kerstin Egert, Tama Sumo got her first DJ gig in 1993, spinning at a bar called Drama in Berlin's hip Kreuzberg neighborhood. She's since grown into a foundational figure in Berlin's dance scene, and maintains a residency at the city's internationally renowned club Berghain (as well as at its smaller adjacent venue, Panorama Bar). Lakuti and Tama Sumo began collaborating musically a few years ago, and in their DJ mixes they reach across dance music's past and draw from their own histories to develop expansive, engrossing musical narratives. They made their first Web mix for Discwoman in 2017, weaving house and techno edits together with Tall Black Guy's arty hip-hop, Loleatta Holloway's refined disco, and Allan Harris's rangy jazz. The mix lasts just short of two hours, but with all its



Eve Maret © RIAN ARCHER



Anne Heaton © COURTESY THE ARTIST

unexpected turns and uplifting jolts, I wish it could soundtrack my entire day. —LEOR GALIL

SATURDAY 21

THE 29TH ANNUAL WINTER SOLSTICE CONCERT SERIES WITH HAMID DRAKE & MICHAEL ZERANG See also Sunday and Monday. 6 AM, Links Hall at Constellation, 3111 N. Western, \$30. 🎧

I have to admit, I literally slept on going to Michael Zerang and Hamid Drake's winter solstice concerts for the first 27 years (though granted, I was only 17 when the first one happened). Out-of-town friends even crashed at my pad to attend the early-morning shows, but as a former night owl, I always thought 6 AM was just too early. That finally changed last year, as this old dog has finally become capable of getting up at a decent hour. At my first solstice concert, I was moved to the point that I vowed to make them an annual tradition. "Concert" might not even be the right word to describe these events—I'd liken them more to happenings or ceremonies, because there's true magic in them. Zerang and Drake should need no introduction to most local music lovers, as these two percussionists, magicians, and genuine forces of nature have CVs as long as novels. A Chicago native of Assyrian descent, Zerang has been playing and composing music since 1976. He has more than 100 titles in his recorded catalog, and he's played all over the world with free-jazz heavies such as Peter Brötzmann, Jaap Blonk, and Mats Gustafsson. Drake, an Evanstonian via Louisiana, started collaborating with saint-like saxophonist Fred Anderson in 1974 and remains one of the world's most sought-after accompanists in jazz and several forms of international music; he's worked with such giants as Don Cherry, Herbie Hancock, Pharoah Sanders, and William Parker. Not that these credentials will be on your mind when you actually see and hear these two holy sonic messengers receive and release the music

of the planetary spheres together. Starting in total darkness, the duo slowly build up their rhythmic alchemy on bells, tablas, djembes, and trap kits as the sun begins to rise and peek through the windows. As the sound swells, a cosmic communion between audience and performers unfolds and the musical rite completes itself in the illuminating rays of our giant life-giving orb (you know, the sun). I simply can't imagine a more beautiful and spiritual way to bring in the new year—it reminds me of the title free-jazz originator and demigod Albert Ayler gave his 1969 album *Music Is the Healing Force of the Universe*. My Reader colleague Bill Meyer, who compiled a history of the solstice concerts for the Reader in 2015, declared in a preview for the 2016 installment, "I've never left one without feeling uplifted and hopeful for a better year to come." I wholeheartedly agree, and I wish that I could make up for lost time—or at least that we'll get 29 more years of this fun, sacred, uplifting music. I won't miss it again —STEVE KRAKOW

THE 22ND ANNUAL HOLIDAY OF HORROR *Macabre headline the Rock Club; Novembers Doom, Without Waves, and Everything Must Die open. Hewhocorrupts headline the Music Joint; Something Is Waiting and Extraction Point open.* 6:30 PM, Reggies', 2105 S. State, \$20. Rock Club 21+, Music Joint 17+

For 22 years, south-side murder-metal legends Macabre have been running their Holiday of Horror festival, enabling Chicago metalheads to blow off seasonal stress in a cathartic evening of joyous brutality. This year's fest features an all-local lineup of live music across two stages at Reggies'. The main-stage lineup in the Rock Club includes Macabre, of course, as well as thrash-grind trio Everything Must Die, the atmospheric and muscular Without Waves, and the melancholy and masterful Novembers Doom. The latter recently celebrated their 30th anniversary with the release of their 11th full-length, *Nephilim Grove*. The album is as heavy as anything they've ever put out, and hangs onto their roots

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SECRET HISTORY OF CHICAGO MUSIC

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



The Moondogs

PEOPLE DON'T TEND TO THINK 'COUNTRY ROCK' WHEN THEY THINK OF CHICAGO, BUT IN THE 70S & 80S THERE WAS LOADS AROUND THESE PARTS. CASE IN POINT: THE MOONDOGS, WHO DESPITE LOADS OF TALENT AND GREAT ORIGINAL TUNES DIDN'T RELIEASE ANY MUSIC FORMALLY. I GOT THE STORY FROM FIDDLER IVAN STRUNIN WHO MOVED HERE FROM HIS NATIVE NEW YORK FOR LAW SCHOOL IN 1979 BUT QUIT AFTER A SEMESTER TO PURSUE MUSIC, AFTER FAILING AN AUDITION FOR THE JUMP IN THE SADDLE BAND (OF 'THE CURLY SHUFFLE' FAME). HE STARTED HIS OWN GROUP WITH A FRIEND, GUITARIST NICK SANABRIA, BASSIST & FRONT MAN MITCH ALVAREZ, GUITARIST BRIAN BARRETT, AND DRUMMER TED RAWLINGS COMPLETED THE ORIGINAL 5-PIECE LINEUP. INSPIRED BY COUNTRY ROCK (POCO, OZARK MOUNTAIN DAREDEVILS) AND OUTLAW COUNTRY (WAYLON JENNING), THE MOONDOGS BECAME THE HOUSE BAND AT MR. KILEYS IN THE EARLY 80S & ALSO GIGGED AROUND CHICAGOLAND: AT MOTHERS AND FITZGERALDS AT COLLEGES & HOTELS, EVEN AT A CHINESE RESTAURANT IN LISLE. THEY ROCKED CHICAGO FEST, TOURED TO NYC FOR WEEKLONG ENGAGEMENTS AT CITY LIMITS, AND SHARED BILLS WITH GIANTS SUCH AS VASSAR CLEMENTS AND JOHNNY FRISCO.

THE MOONDOGS CUT 4 SONGS AT COLUMBIA COLLEGE AND AN ALBUM AT CHICAGO TRAX, BUT NOTHING EVER CAME OUT (BOTH SESSIONS ARE NOW AT moondogs1977.com). THE BAND UNDERWENT SEVERAL LINEUP CHANGES, BRINGING IN DRUMMER GREG KOMORSKI, GUITARISTS JONATHAN STEPHENS & LEO 'THE LION' COTE, AND GUITARIST-FIDDLER J.B. SMITH. THE MOONDOGS SPLIT AFTER STRUNIN RETURNED TO LAW SCHOOL; HE BECAME A TAX LAWYER IN 1987 AND EVENTUALLY MOVED TO HONG KONG EXCEPT FOR SANABRIA, WHO STARTED A FAMILY. EVERYONE KEPT PLAYING MUSIC. ALVAREZ PLAYED ALL OVER, INCLUDING WITH FRIGO, BARRETT, NOW A COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE BROKER, JOINED VETERAN COUNTRY ROCK ACT FREEWHEEL (FOUNDED BY ALVAREZ). THE FRESHLY RETIRED STRUNIN WANTS TO JAM AGAIN, AND SANABRIA, WHO GOT INTO THE STUDIO BUSINESS, IS NOW AN ANNOUNCER FOR FOX 32. THE MOONDOGS HAVE REUNITED IN 2009, 2011 AND 2012, AND ARE CURRENTLY RECORDING ONE OF ALVAREZ'S TUNES. —HUGE THANKS TO IVAN STRUNIN, NICKS, MITCH A., BRIAN B., EVAN M.

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. ARCHIVED @ OUTSIDETHELOOPRADIO.COM

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while showcasing the next phase of their gradually increasing sophistication, with wind-blasted soundscapes and songs that at times border on progressive and technical. The Music Joint show features metal-punk hybrid Extraction Point, grimy rock outfit Something Is Waiting, and grindcore institution Hewhocorrupts, whose music is a dirty riot based on taking the piss out of commercial metal. If you still haven't had enough after all these bands have finished slaying, you can do the tube-snake boogie at the free official afterparty at the Music Joint, which features ZZ Top tribute band Eliminator. —MONICA KENDRICK

singer-songwriter collective Winterbloom. Some of the songs also draw upon the writings of Tibetan Buddhist nun Pema Chödrön, which helps give the record its soothing, spiritual touch. This hometown show is also a release party for *To the Light*, and Heaton will be joined for parts of her headlining set by opening artists Jenny Bienemann and Anne Harris as well as by local songwriters Frank Marotta and Leah Griffith. —SALEM COLLO-JULIN

MONDAY23

THE 29TH ANNUAL WINTER SOLSTICE CONCERT SERIES WITH HAMID DRAKE & MICHAEL ZERANG See Saturday, 6 AM, *Links Hall* at Constellation, 3111 N. Western, \$30. 🎫

EVE MARET Coupler and Hali Palombo open. 8:30 PM, *Empty Bottle*, 1035 N. Western. 21+ FREE

SUNDAY22

THE 29TH ANNUAL WINTER SOLSTICE CONCERT SERIES WITH HAMID DRAKE & MICHAEL ZERANG See Saturday, 6 AM, *Links Hall* at Constellation, 3111 N. Western, \$30. 🎫

ANNE HEATON Jenny Bienemann & Anne Harris open. 7 PM, *SPACE*, 1245 Chicago Ave., Evanston, \$15. 🎫

Wilmette-born, Milwaukee-based pianist and singer-songwriter Anne Heaton started learning classical piano at three years old, and since then she's immersed herself in a variety of music. After studying at Notre Dame in the 90s, Heaton moved to New York, where she sang in a Harlem gospel choir and toured in a band with jazz drummer Max Roach, among other things. Heaton also wrote her own material, and in 2002 she released her debut album, *Black Notebook*. Though the lyrics and melodies of its piano-driven folk-pop songs recall artists such as Dar Williams and Sam Phillips, she always enchants with a clear-hearted delivery that's distinctively her own. On "Let Yourself Be" from her new CD, November's *To the Light* (Spill), she offers a gentle, inspiring nudge of self-love to the listener: over a rainfall of strings and drums, she sings, "Now it's black every morning / It's black every night / You will still rise." The album (which includes an accompanying book of her lyrics and short writings) contains songs inspired by her collaborative work with other songwriters over the past decade, including fellow members of Boston-based women's

When asked by online magazine Earhart whether she's a musician or a performance artist, Nashville multi-instrumentalist and composer Eve Maret described herself as "a spiritual being that seeks to know herself and the divine within-without her through creative acts." If that sounds like a quote from the liner notes of a new age album, well, you're not totally off the mark. Maret's latest album, 2018's *No More Running* (Banana Tapes) is an exercise in spaced-out 80s retro electronica; its heady frequencies transmit the bright uplift of starry-eyed seekers of generations past, including innovative composers Vangelis, Beverly Glenn-Copeland, and Pauline Anna Strom. "Sound of Space Between" makes copious use of synth shimmer as the composition builds and dissolves into ambience around Maret's heavily processed vocals. "I Can't Hear What U Don't Say" is sweet techno disco for gyrating flesh computers, while "No More Running" slips between odd grinding noises and soaring tones that culminate in a cascade of thereminlike swoops. "Many Moons" is perhaps the album's most affecting track; Maret's voice, rising out of a crystalline multitracked chorus, almost seems to come apart as she sings "Everyone I love will change." It's not a lament so much as a prayer for a future in which we all get to shift into new cyborg bodies made of vacuum tubes and light. —NOAH BERLASKY 📧

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- 01/24 - HALF MOON RUN
- 01/30 - THE ANNIVERSARY

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- 02/13 - THE JUNGLE GIANTS
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- 02/18 - TENDER
- 02/20 - SUSTO
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- 01/17 - MODERN NATURE - *tnk*
- 01/18 - HAND HABITS - *tnk*
- 01/19 - BUCK MEEK - *tnk*
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- 01/21 - JORDY

- 01/22 - YOUR SMITH
- 01/24-25 - BAILEN
- 01/30 - RYAN MCMULLAN
- 02/01 - JAX ANDERSON
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NEW

Accessory, Products, Tenci 1/16/20, 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle
Acid Mothers Temple & the Melting Paraiso U.F.O., My Education 4/24/20, 8 PM, Subterranean
Airbourne 5/14/20, 8 PM, Bottom Lounge, on sale Fri 12/20, 10 AM, 17+
Allie X 3/31/20, 7:30 PM, Subterranean, on sale Fri 12/20, 10 AM
Dave Alvin & the Guilty Ones 1/25/20, 8:30 PM, FitzGerald's, Berwyn, on sale Fri 12/20, 11 AM
Amendola Vs. Blades 4/19/20, 7:30 PM, SPACE, Evanston, on sale Fri 12/20, 10 AM
Steve Aoki 3/13/20, 9 PM, Aragon Ballroom, 18+
Bad Ambassadors, Manasseh 1/10/20, 9:30 PM, Hideout
Chandeliers, Killer Drones, I Kong Kult 1/9/20, 9:30 PM, Hideout
Charlie Reed, Flamingo Rodeo, Tobacco City, Chicago Honky Tonk DJs 1/17/20, 9 PM, Empty Bottle
C.J. Chenier & the Red Hot Louisiana Band 2/7/20, 8:30 PM, FitzGerald's, Berwyn, on sale Fri 12/20, 11 AM
Carl Cox, Chip E. 3/6/20, 10 PM, Radius Chicago, 18+
Cupcakes 2/29/20, 8 PM, Metro, 18+
Cass Cwik & the Small Gas Engines, Hughes Family Band, Head, Skip Church 1/5/20, 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle
Def Leppard, Mötley Crüe, Poison, Joan Jett & the Blackhearts 8/28/20, 4 PM, Wrigley Field
Droeloe, Taska Black 3/6/20, 9 PM, Concord Music Hall, 18+

Floozies, Sunsquabi, Defunk 3/21/20, 9 PM, Riviera Theatre, 18+
For Frankie! A Celebration of Frankie Knuckles's 65th Birthday featuring Michael Serafini, Garrett David, Alan King, Mark Grant, Zac Jones, and more 1/19/20, 10 PM, Metro
Dillon Francis 2/29/20, 9 PM, Radius Chicago, 18+
Fuerza Bruta, Royal Hounds, Chubby & the Gang, Affront, Maneaters 1/20/20, 7:30 PM, Subterranean, 17+
Gigan, Djunah 1/10/20, 9 PM, Empty Bottle, on sale Fri 12/20, 10 AM
God Awful Small Affairs, Tigershark, Don't Quit, Neighbors You Know, Wet Wallet 1/15/20, 8 PM, Subterranean, 17+
Goddamn Gallows, Mystery Actions, Last False Hope 12/29, 7 PM, Reggies' Music Joint
Shakey Graves 2/16-2/18/20, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston, on sale Fri 12/20, 10 AM
Green Jelly 1/9/20, 8 PM, Beat Kitchen
Sarah Harmer 5/15/20, 8 PM, Szold Hall, Old Town School of Folk Music
Hellhole 3 dance party with DJ Cqchifruit, DJ Pluto, and more 1/11/20, 9 PM, Empty Bottle
Anne Hills & Bill Jones 4/19/20, 1 PM, SPACE, Evanston, on sale Fri 12/20, 10 AM
Honey Butter, Nev, Khaliyah X 1/7/20, 8 PM, Schubas
Hoodoo Gurus 11/3/20, 8 PM, City Winery, on sale Fri 12/20, noon
James Supercave 3/20/20, 9 PM, Empty Bottle
Juice 4/18/20, 8 PM, Subterranean, 18+

Ata Kak 4/6/20, 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle
Emily King 2/14-2/15/20, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston
King Gizzard & the Lizard Wizard 4/24/20, 8 PM, Radius Chicago, 17+
Led Zeppelin 2 (tribute) 1/10-1/11/20, 9 PM, House of Blues, 17+
Lil Wayne 3/28/20, 9 PM, Radius Chicago, 18+
Liquid Stranger 4/3/20, 9 PM, Concord Music Hall, on sale Fri 12/20, noon, 18+
Liquid Stranger, Shlump, Hydraulic, Inzo 4/4/20, 9 PM, Concord Music Hall, on sale Fri 12/20, noon, 18+
Norman Long/Sara Zalek Duo, Jake Wark/Jakob Heine-mann/Bill Harris 1/9/20, 9 PM, Elastic
Los Lobos, Paul Cebar Tomorrow Sound 1/17/20, 8:30 PM, FitzGerald's, Berwyn, on sale Fri 12/20, 11 AM
Make-Up 3/7/20, 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle
Manas, Rempis/Lopez Duo 1/7/20, 9 PM, Elastic
Mattson 2 3/6/20, 9 PM, Empty Bottle
Michigan Rattlers 3/12/20, 8 PM, Martyrs'
Mitis 1/11/20, 8:30 PM, Avondale Music Hall, 18+
Elizabeth Moen 2/15/20, 9 PM, Lincoln Hall, 18+
Oso Oso, Prince Daddy & the Hyena, Just Friends 3/29/20, 7 PM, Bottom Lounge, on sale Fri 12/20, 11 AM, 17+
Judith Owen, Pedro Segundo 4/29/20, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston, on sale Fri 12/20, 10 AM
Perpetual Groove 3/27-3/28/20, 8 PM, Chop Shop, 18+
Mac Powell & the Family Reunion 2/2/20, 7 PM, City

Winery, on sale Fri 12/20, noon
Radioactivity, Vacation 2/19/20, 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle, on sale Fri 12/20, 10 AM
Rapsody 2/19/20, 8 PM, Bottom Lounge, 17+
Dave Rempis/Brandon Lopez/Ryan Packard and more 1/14/20, 9 PM, Elastic
Roddy Ricch 2/10/20, 7:30 PM, Patio Theater
Dan Rodriguez 5/28/20, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston
Rootin' Tootin' Boogie Brunch with DJ Brett Cra, DJ Motown Mustang 1/5/20, noon, Empty Bottle
Sessa 2/4/20, 8 PM, Beat Kitchen, 17+
Shadow of Intent, Inferi, Signs of the Swarm, Brand of Sacrifice 1/22/20, 6:30 PM, Reggies' Rock Club, 17+
Sir Mango, Sunvolume, Soul Honey Records 1/13/20, 8 PM, Schubas, 18+
Soulwax 3/3/20, 8 PM, Metro, 18+
Sullivan King, Eliminate, Grabbitz 1/10/20, 8 PM, Park West, 18+
System 1 featuring Physical Medium DJs, Brian Case, Alex Morales 1/12/20, 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle
Tchami 3/13/20, 9 PM, Radius Chicago, 18+
Elle Varner, J. Brown 2/1/20, 7 and 10 PM, City Winery
Vaudevileins, Terminus Victor, Joy Machine, Burned or Buried 1/14/20, 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle
Kurt Vile, Cate Le Bon 4/8/20, 8:30 PM, Thalia Hall, on sale Fri 12/20, 10 AM, 17+
Zack Villere, Mulherin 2/26/20, 7:30 PM, Lincoln Hall
Stephen Wade 4/11/20, 8 PM, Maurer Hall, Old Town School of Folk Music
Dale Watson 3/26/20, 8:30 PM, FitzGerald's, Berwyn, on sale Fri 12/20, 11 AM

UPDATED

Aventura, Romeo Santos 2/27-2/29/20, 8 PM, United Center, 2/27 and 2/29 added

UPCOMING

Adicts 1/29/20, 8 PM, House of Blues, 17+
Bailen 1/24-1/25/20, 9 PM, Schubas, 18+
Blue Stones, JJ Wilde 2/11/20, 7:30 PM, Schubas, 18+
BoDeans 12/29, 7 PM, City Winery
Bodysnatcher, Great American Ghost, Born A New 2/19/20, 7 PM, Cobra Lounge, 17+
Bottle Brunch featuring DJ Catieo 1/4/20, noon, Empty Bottle
Billy Branch & the Sons of Blues 1/10/20, 10 PM, SPACE,

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Evanston
Ronnie Baker Brooks 12/27, 9 PM, FitzGerald's, Berwyn
Brother Brothers, Dead Horses 2/23/20, 7 PM, Schubas, 18+
Chicago Farmer & the Fieldnotes, Joseph Huber 2/15/20, 8:30 PM, FitzGerald's, Berwyn
Chicken Bone, Eve's Twin Lover 1/30/20, 7:30 PM, SPACE, Evanston
China Crisis 1/29/20, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston
Earth Program, Doleful Lions, Camp Edwards 12/30, 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle
Echosmith 2/20/20, 7:30 PM, Park West
Ethnic Heritage Ensemble 2/7/20, 7 PM, SPACE, Evanston
Hazy Seas, Knees, Brass Calf 1/6/20, 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle
Heavy 2/6/20, 7:30 PM, Park West
Sierra Hull, Jodee Lewis 2/27/20, 8 PM, Maurer Hall, Old Town School of Folk Music
Hunny, Bay Faction, Mundy's Bay 3/22/20, 8 PM, Subterranean, 17+
Freddie Jackson 12/28, 8 PM, City Winery
Hayden James (DJ set) 1/17/20, 10 PM, Spy Bar
Albert Lee 1/4/20, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston
Levin Brothers 1/16/20, 7:30 PM, Reggies' Music Joint second floor
Howard Levy 4 2/23/20, 7 PM, SPACE, Evanston
Lil Tjay 2/21/20, 7 PM, Concord Music Hall
Liquid Soul 2/7/20, 10 PM, SPACE, Evanston
Replicant, Fee Lion, Visceral Anatomy, Comfort Cure 1/4/20, 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle
Thrice, Mewithoutyou, Drug Church 1/31/20, 6 PM, Concord Music Hall, 17+
Tvinn, Bentleycoop, Cactus Maz, Treble, Emurse 12/28, 8 PM, Chop Shop, 18+
Unknown New, Oh Yeahs 1/7/20, 7:30 PM, SPACE, Evanston
Midge Ure 1/29/20, 8 PM, City Winery
Weighted, Stillwell, Antighost, Pelafina, Sugarpill 1/11/20, 7 PM, Cobra Lounge
William Elliott Whitmore 12/31, 10 PM, Sleeping Village
Whitney, Chai 1/28/20, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston



GOSSIP WOLF

A furry ear to the ground of the local music scene

IF LIKE GOSSIP WOLF you're a dedicated hater of Christmas music, this time of year can be an endless waking nightmare. Every public space is blanketed in treacly tunes celebrating fake holiday warmth. Bah! Humbug! Local label **Eye Vybe Records** has the right idea: its new cassette compilation, **Alone in Logan on Christmas Eve**, is refreshingly frank about how grim and miserable this supposedly merry season can be. The album's eight acts include honky-tonkers **Cat Mullins & Them Boys** (who contribute the steel-guitar-saturated "Lonely Holiday") and pop polymath **Magic Ian** (with the hilariously deadpan anti-gift-giving screed "Digital Friends"). Beginning Monday, December 23, you can buy a copy at Cafe Mustache, Bric-a-Brac, the Burlington, and the Chicago Diner (as well as via Eye Vybe's Bandcamp). Proceeds benefit **Molasses Chicago**, a Black and Brown trans and nonbinary collective that hosts an awesome monthly party at Berlin.

Three years ago, **FeelTrip Records** owners **David Beltran** and **Diana Bowden** launched a monthly **Slippery Slope** party called **Reptilian Traxx**. Now they want to focus on the label and their record store, **No Requests**, so the final Reptilian Traxx is Thursday, December 19. Music includes DJ sets from Beltran (aka **DYB**), Bowden (**DJ Hii**), **Druid Beat**, and legendary house producer **Steve Poindexter**; the event also includes a pop-up record store where a portion of the vinyl is pay-what-you-want!

Logan Square arts hub **Comfort Station** is one of the city's coziest venues. It brings together talented artists and musicians throughout the year, but it doesn't charge you so much as a thin dime to see them. You can return the favor by springing for a \$50 ticket to Comfort Station's first **Holiday Concert Benefit** on Thursday, December 19, which will help fund many of next year's shows. The lineup is an absolute doozy and well worth it: **Angel Bat Dawid**, **Bill MacKay**, and headliners **Ohmme**. —J.R. NELSON AND LEOR GALIL

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

DON'T MISS...

12.21-23	MICHAEL MCDERMOTT MISCHIEF & MISTLETOE	1.8	MIKI HOWARD WINTER RESIDENCY FEAT. CHERRELLE
12.25	CHRISTMAS FOR THE JEWS FEAT. JOEL CHASNOFF, JASON SURAN & SOHRAB FOROUZESH	1.9	NICHOLAS TREMULIS AND THE PRODIGAL 9
12.28	FREDDIE JACKSON	1.10	SYLEENA JOHNSON
1.2	CHICAGO 2020: FUNKADESI & FRIENDS	1.12	SONS OF THE NEVER WRONG WITH KATIE DAHL
1.3	PETER ASHER	1.13	THE MEN OF MISTER KELLY'S
		1.14	DAVID BROZA & FRIENDS

UPCOMING SHOWS

12.21	LEVI KREIS HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS	1.16	GLEN PHILLIPS (OF TOAD THE WET SPROCKET) & CHRIS BARRON (OF SPIN DOCTORS)
12.22	CHICAGO PHILHARMONIC BRUNCH SERIES: MERRY AND BRIGHT	1.19	SAWYER FREDERICKS
12.29	BODEANS	1.20	MELI'SA MORGAN
1.4	SPAGA - 2 PM SHOW	1.21	JOSEPHINE BEAVERS
1.5	JON B.	1.23-24	ERIC BENÉT
1.7	HOUSE OF BODHI WITH LOLA WRIGHT	1.25	PAT MCGEE BAND
1.15	MIKI HOWARD WINTER RESIDENCY FEAT. GLENN JONES	1.26	SIMPLY THE BEST TINA TURNER TRIBUTE
		1.27	FRIEDA LEE - 80TH BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION
		1.28	SY SMITH - INDIE SOUL JOURNEYS

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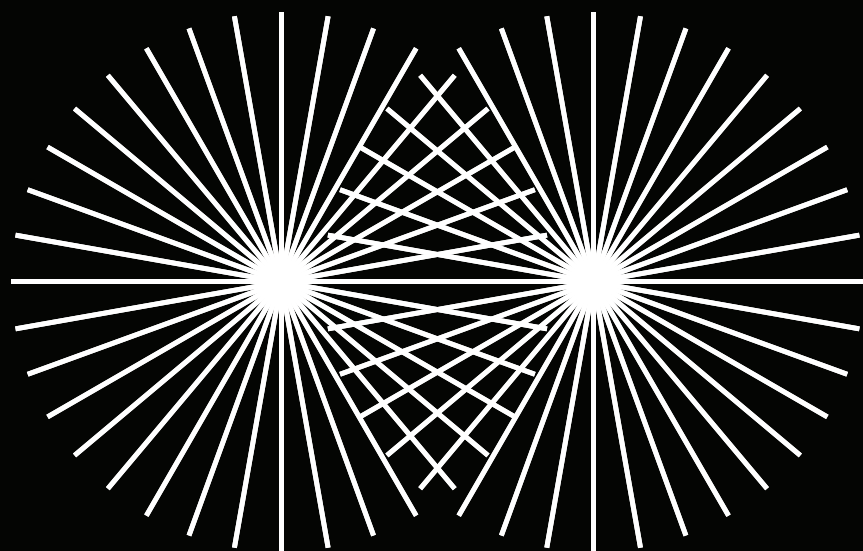
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JAN 17 + 18



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OPINION '19



If mainstream media outlets are protected by the First Amendment, then why aren't Assange and Manning? VERTIGOGEN / FLICKR

FIRST AMENDMENT

2019's biggest free press stories

Assange and Manning are being persecuted for speaking truth to power.

By **LEONARD C. GOODMAN**

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

The most important stories of the year for those who care about a free press involve the arrest of Julian Assange from the Ecuadorian embassy at the request of the U.S. government, and the rearrest of the whistleblower Chelsea Manning.

Assange is the founder of WikiLeaks, a website that publishes official documents exposing the crimes and lies of world leaders. Before publishing, WikiLeaks verifies that the evidence submitted is authentic. Of the millions of items published by WikiLeaks, not one has been shown to be fraudulent or untruthful.

Chelsea Manning is a former Army intelligence officer who leaked hundreds of thousands of classified documents to WikiLeaks that exposed war crimes and official lies relating to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Manning confessed to her crimes and was sentenced to 35 years incarceration. But her sentence was commuted after seven years by President Barack Obama, who conceded that she had acted out of a sense of duty to expose wrongdoing.

For at least three decades, our national government has primarily served the interests of the one percent—the major donors to the Democratic and Republican parties. To carry on in such an undemocratic fashion in a country that still requires leaders to stand for election, our leaders need to lie with impunity, especially about matters of war. To get away with this, they classify as secret every official document that has the potential to embarrass them or enlighten the people.

Of course, Assange is not the first publisher to expose government crimes. What makes Assange such a threat, and so hated, is that he publishes *official* government documents in real time that are impossible to dispute or discredit.

To grasp the power of WikiLeaks, imagine

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OPINION '19

it had existed in 2002 during the run-up to the Iraq war. At that time, the administration of George W. Bush was telling the nation that we faced a grave threat from Iraq and its president, Saddam Hussein, who we were told had reconstituted his nuclear weapons program and had amassed large, clandestine stockpiles of deadly VX, sarin, and mustard gas. The situation was said to be so dangerous that we couldn't even wait a couple months to allow a team of international weapons inspectors to finish their job. Then-National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice warned that the smoking gun in Iraq "may be a mushroom cloud."

Of course, our leaders produced no actual evidence to support their claims about Hussein and Iraq. All of the evidence was classified. The American people—who were called upon to pay for the war in blood and treasure—were not entitled to see any of the actual evidence for war. The mainstream press, including the *New York Times* and NPR, repeated the evidence-free assertions by our public officials as if they were proven fact. The American people were given no choice but to fall in line.


Years later, after it was too late to do any good, the actual intelligence reports were leaked. They showed that nearly everything we were told by the Bush administration about its evidence for war was a lie. The wild claims about chemical weapons were all based on the stories of a known fabricator named Curveball, and on tales invented under torture by a CIA prisoner named al-Li-bi. The dire warnings about a "mushroom cloud" were based on a forged document that pretended to show Hussein purchasing uranium from Africa, together with a bogus report that ordinary aluminum tubes purchased by Iraq might be used to enrich uranium.

Had WikiLeaks existed in 2002, a patriotic officer like Manning might have leaked the official intelligence reports exposing the lies

our leaders were telling to get us to go along with the war. Hundreds of thousands of lives could have been saved, and the trillions of dollars spent on the Iraq War could have been used instead to give every American free health care, free college, and a Green New Deal.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has been publicly threatening Assange since Pompeo was CIA chief. But there is concern among Assange's foes that a fair-minded judge might recognize that Assange's actions were no different than the actions of the *New York Times* and the *Guardian*, which also published the leaked material from Manning. If these establishment papers were protected by the First Amendment, then why isn't Assange and WikiLeaks?

This explains why the U.S. government has put Manning back in jail. They need her to testify that Assange helped her steal classified documents, something the government almost certainly knows is untrue. The Obama Justice Department spent years trying to find evidence to justify a claim that Assange did more than act as a publisher but found nothing to justify that accusation. Besides, if the Trump Justice Department had any evidence that Assange participated in the theft of classified documents, it wouldn't need to force Manning to say it.

This holiday season, Assange is locked away in the Belmarsh high-security prison in London, awaiting extradition to the U.S., while Manning is back in jail in Virginia. Our government believes that any person with the courage and integrity to expose the misuse of power must be eliminated. I am sending these words of encouragement to Assange and Manning. May they continue to find the strength to resist a ruthless foe and help save our democracy. 

 @GoodmanLen



A series of political engagement events as curated by

**Indivisible IL9
Weekly Roundtable
December 19
12pm - 1pm
5539 N. Broadway Ave.**

**December Lakeview
Rent Control Action
December 20
4pm-6pm
Whole Foods Market
3201 N. Ashland Ave.**

**Block Party for the
Homeless & Hungry
December 20
6pm-8pm
2750 W. Harrison St.**

**Indivisible Evanston
Book Club
January 8, 2020
7pm-9pm
Page 1 Books (Central
Street Business District)
1808 Central Street
Evanston, IL 60201**

**Handmaids Stand
Against MFL
January 11, 2020
12:30pm-3:30pm
Daley Center Plaza
50 W. Washington St.**

**2020 Deputy Voter
Registrar Training
January 13
5pm - 6pm**

Black Ensemble Theater
4450 N. Clark St.
**Happy Blue Year
2.0
January 13
6pm - 8:30pm**
Black Ensemble Theater
4450 N. Clark St.

**Sunrise Movement
- January Hub
Meeting
January 14
6pm - 7:30pm**
George C. Hall Library
4801 S. Michigan Ave.

**Solidarity With Our
Neighbors: Chicago
Immigrants and
Their Allies
January 14
7pm - 9pm**
KAM Isaiah Israel
1100 E. Hyde Park Blvd.

**Women's March
Chicago 2020
January 18
11am - 1pm**
Grant Park

**Impact of the 2020
Census: Collections,
Concerns, Changes
January 21
5:30pm - 7pm**
Union League Club of

Chicago
65 W. Jackson Blvd.

**Roe Vs. Wade
Anniversary Event
January 23
5:30pm - 9pm**
Morgan Manufacturing
401 N. Morgan St.

**Candidate Forum:
US House of
Representatives IL9
January 23
7:30pm - 9pm**
First Unitarian Church of
Chicago
5650 S. Woodlawn Ave.

**How to be an
Antiracist
January 28
6pm - 7:30pm**
League of Women
Voters
332 S. Michigan Ave.

**Public Workshop
February 9
4pm - 6pm**
Chicago Therapy
Collective
5247 N. Clark St.

For more information of listed events please visit persistlist.org



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OPINION

SAVAGE LOVE

There will be blood

Plus, do your screw diligence and read the fine print on dating profiles.

By **DAN SAVAGE**

Q: I am a 60-year-old heterosexual man, and I am being told that I’m normal. I have been to several urologists, and they say I have no medical issues. But I’m having a hard time buying it, because for the last six months, my ejaculate has been extremely bloody. This is embarrassing, especially since oral sex—giving and receiving—has always been my favorite. The urologists’ explanation is that as you get older, there are blood vessels within the penis that can break during an erection. They gave me some pills to ensure there was no infection, but then they told me that I’ll probably have to use condoms for the rest of my life. My partner doesn’t need contraceptives, so we haven’t used condoms for decades. If I were bleeding out of any other orifice, there would be a team of doctors helping me. Is there really no hope? —TELL ME IT AIN’T SO

A: “Hemospermia—blood in the ejaculate—is usually not considered a big deal, in the sense that the vast majority of the time it’s not a sign of cancer,” said Dr. Ashley Winter, a board-certified urologist, the cohost of *The Full Release* podcast, and my go-to expert on all blood-in-spunk-related matters. “I’d want to know how much he’s actually bleeding and what they’ve done to check him out. But that said, sometimes a guy with a large prostate will bleed with orgasm.”

For everyone out there

panicking because they saw blood in their semen one time a decade ago, Dr. Winter says a one-off bloody load isn’t something to worry about. But if you saw blood in your semen that one time and you have health insurance and you’re a hypochondriac like me, Dr. Winter recommends a visit to a doc for a short consultation and a quick physical exam.

“But in a case like TMIAS’s, where the issue is ongoing and the subject is over 55,” said Dr. Winter, “a typical evaluation would include a PSA blood test (a prostate cancer screening test), as well as testing for STIs (such as gonorrhea, chlamydia, and herpes), along with a urinalysis to check for blood in the urine and urinary infections. If those tests were not revealing, I would consider doing an ultrasound or MRI of the prostate and surrounding organs, as well as putting a camera up the urethra (called cystoscopy) to check out the plumbing.”

Assuming you’ve had all those tests, and your prostate was present on photo day, and the doctors found no sign of cancer or infection, TMIAS, then what the hell is going on?

“Typically, the cause would be something such as dilated blood vessels along the ejaculate exit route,” aka the urethra. Quickly: The urethra is a tube that connects the outside world (and all those piss bottoms) to your bladder; it’s the tube we all piss through. In males, the urethra pulls double duty, men also ejac-

ulate through it (and some women do, too!)—it runs through the prostate gland, a gland that produces about a third of the seminal fluid. An enlarged prostate squeezes the urethra, which can make urination difficult and uncomfortable, and can also result in—you guessed it—blood in the semen.

One possible “fix” for an enlarged prostate is a transurethral resection of the prostate (TURP), which basically amounts to “a ‘roto-rooting’ of the prostate,” as Dr. Winter so vividly put it. A doctor shoves something called a resectoscope up your urethra and slices away chunks of prostate tissue.

“The problem with these procedures is that they can cause a person to stop ejaculating at all,” said Dr. Winter. “So if TMIAS has already had a fairly robust evaluation, then either using condoms or just having his sex partner adapt to the presence of blood may be the best solution. And in the absence of an infection, shooting a bloody load into your partner is not dangerous. Couples have intercourse during menstruation without harm, and plenty of F-F couples have sex during menstruation as well.”

But hold on and back up and wait just a goddamned minute: Didn’t your doctors say everything looked normal? Doesn’t that mean your prostate isn’t enlarged?

“A ‘normal’ prostate generally means that it is not cancerous and normal in size for

OPINION

your age,” said Dr. Winter. “As you get older, your prostate gets bigger. So it’s highly probable that what TMIAS has is a big-ass-but-normal-for-his-age prostate. And bigger prostates tend to have larger blood vessels lining the urethra and are therefore more likely to bleed when he experiences those lovely contractions associated with orgasm. When TMIAS was told that ‘there are blood vessels within the penis that can break,’ I suspect his doc was referring to this and was trying to simplify the explanation.”

And while the presence of blood in your ejaculate may not be normal or ideal, TMIAS, it’s likely your normal, and there’s nothing your doctor—or a team of them—can do about it.

“Sometimes a lack of a ‘fix’ is not dismissiveness, it’s just an admittance that a lot of things medical folks do/offer aren’t perfect,” said Dr. Winter.

Q: I’m a woman with a dating profile on OkCupid that states I’m nonmonogamous and only looking for the same. Recently, I had two great dates with a guy who described himself as monogamous on his profile. However, after our first date and a lot of messaging, I intuited that he hadn’t actually read the fine print

on my profile. Usually guys bring that up when they’ve read it, and he hadn’t mentioned it once. So I brought it up at the end of our second date when we were having post-dinner drinks at a bar. In retrospect, I should have set up a time to seriously discuss this, not spring it on him while we were drinking, but I felt like the longer it went unsaid, the more “betrayed” he might feel. And boy, did he have a reaction. He went from “This is not a deal breaker” to “Oh my god, I can’t do this, I should just go” in 20 minutes, and then rushed out of the bar. We cleared the air the next day, and he apologized for being a jerk and bailing. But clearly we’re not going to be dating going forward. Maybe this was always how a guy like him was going to react, but when is the right time to bring nonmonogamy up if you meet someone in real life first? Or if it’s clear someone didn’t read the damn fine print on your profile before jumping straight to infatuation? He claimed his meltdown was an emotional response to the conflict he was feeling between (a) the expectation that serious relationships need to lead to monogamy and (b) the great time he was having with someone who turned out to be (gasp)

nonmonogamous. Was there a better way to have shared this information? A time sooner or later? We were really clicking, so his freak-out was a huge surprise. —READ THE FINE PRINT

A: Dude should have read the fine print on your profile. He should have done his screw diligence—but you should have done yours, too. Or followed through with yours. You read the fine print on his profile, RTFP, you knew he described himself as monogamous, but you went on a date with him anyway—you went on two dates and swapped a lot of messages—without stopping to ask him the dreaded direct question (DDQ): “My profile says I’m nonmonogamous and only looking for the same, and yours says you’re monogamous. Are you making an exception for me because I’m amazing or did you not read my whole profile?” You should have asked this guy the DDQ not to spare him the horror of your company and avoid wasting his time, RTFP, but to spare yourself that stupid scene in the bar and avoid wasting your time. **✂**

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