

# READER

## Where **misfits** fit in

Neo closed in 2015, after providing a sanctuary for generations of night crawlers—but its subcultural legacy continues to reverberate.

By LEOR GALIL 22

The Drinks Issue

WINDY  
CITY  
TIMES

Special quarterly insert inside!

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## A NOTE ON THIS WEEK'S COVER STORY

LINCOLN PARK NIGHTCLUB Neo closed for good in the middle of the summer six years ago. So why write about it now? Most, if not all, of the sources I reached out to for this week's cover story asked some version of this question. There's no obvious hook for such a story to exist now. This week's issue doesn't fall on an anniversary of the nightclub's debut or final days, and there's no big event commemorating Neo right now either. The answers I gave were usually complicated and long-winded, which partly explains why this story stretches past the word count I'd originally set for myself. But to put it bluntly: I see Neo's influence everywhere.

One of the many reasons I love working at the *Reader* is that I'm afforded the space to dig into the city's subterranean cultures and connect them to the present. Music journalism can sometimes feel like a matter of keeping up with the Joneses. Am I writing about the "right" artist, or trend, or album? I love that I often can ignore such matters at a regional alternative publication. I don't need to let what's hot or trending dictate the terms of my work. I get to write about what I think is important to this city and beyond, and I argue that in every paragraph-long album review or 6,600-word feature. Sure, running a story on Neo now is unconventional, but so was Neo. —LEOR GALIL



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Abena Boamah-Acheampong and the company's line of shea body butters. © COURTESY HANAHANA BEAUTY

## SHOP LOCAL

### 'Something that makes me feel good in my skin'

Hanahana Beauty creates a circle of care.

By JANAYA GREENE

“There’s no need to be ashy.” This directive from Chicago-based Hanahana Beauty comes as a perfect reminder as colder months approach and protecting our skin from the city’s bristling wind becomes a high priority.

The conscious skincare and wellness brand has come a long way since its founder Abena Boamah-Acheampong began making the brand’s signature shea butter in her three-bedroom apartment in 2017. At the time, she was both a teacher and enrolled in grad school, and still adjusting to Chicago’s brutal winters.

“I started making it because I was stressed and I didn’t really think about it as a business endeavor. I was living in Chicago [for the first time] and those first winters were wild,” says Boamah-Acheampong, who grew up in Columbus, Ohio. “I was like, ‘Wow, I need to create something that makes me feel good in

my skin.’ I wanted to create a moment to take care of my skin and be intentional.”

But the Ghanaian American founder had not always had a favorable relationship with shea butter.

“Anytime anyone was coming from Ghana, my parents would have them bring shea butter. Anytime my dad went to visit, he would bring shea butter over. It was raw and we were slathering it all over our bodies,” she explains. “My mom would melt it with cloves and add some type of sud and honestly, I didn’t like it. I didn’t like the texture of it. I didn’t like all the work that you had to do.”

As an adult, Boamah-Acheampong sees the beauty in shea and the wonders it does to protect the skin. Hanahana Beauty prides itself on being a transparent, clean beauty brand that does not use harmful products. The company sources its raw shea directly from the Katariga (Suglo) cooperative in Tamale,

Ghana. The social impact arm of the company, which they refer to as the Hanahana Circle of Care, pays two times the asking price for their shea butter per kilo. Hanahana also provides biannual health-care days for the Katariga community, in addition to health-care education and hepatitis B vaccinations for Ghanians in the area.

The beauty industry talks a lot about fairness, but often takes advantage of its workers and unethically obtains ingredients used in cosmetics. Hanahana Beauty set a standard for itself to care for its customers while also caring for the communities that make the products possible.

“Within the clean beauty and natural beauty industry, it’s been really whitewashed. It makes it seem like it’s not really accessible to us as Black people, like it’s something new and different. With Hanahana I’m trying to reconnect it back,” says the founder. “We in-

duced skincare that is aesthetically pleasing, that feels good, that does exactly what it says. For Black people, generally you can feel connected, because not only is it a Black owner, but you see yourself represented in the products, you see the language, and you understand it. You feel like it’s for you.”

Today, Hanahana Beauty has grown to have a full team that works on its lines of exfoliators, lip balms, and other body and facial products. With single products ranging from \$12 to \$32, Boamah-Acheampong is clear that her company has a ways to go in becoming even more accessible. As she puts it, “sustainability itself is just expensive.” Still, the company reaches communities in other ways through local events in Chicago and throughout the country.

“Everytime I see people (everyone in general, but especially Black people) enjoying and taking care of their health through Hanahana, it brings so much joy for me; seeing them being intentional around their self-care through just skin because I think it’s something that we try to brush over a lot. People say this all the time and it’s true, our skin is our biggest organ,” she says.

In October, Hanahana Beauty held pop-ups in Chicago featuring conversations, yoga classes, facials, and more to connect with its community in person, as it’s primarily an online business.

Next year, Boamah-Acheampong plans to launch Hanahana Beauty in retail stores for the first time and she sees no signs of stopping the brand’s product and communal growth, always taking notes of what Hanahana’s customers want next.

“I want people to have the whole shower experience with Hanahana. Cleansers are something that I’m really interested in. I hope one day—I don’t know when—but sunscreen. I feel like if I ever did sunscreen it would have to be the most top-tier because I already have my favorite sunscreens,” she says. “Daily use products is how I want us to grow with our product development. How can Hanahana be a household name when it comes to your skincare products?”

📍 @janayagr



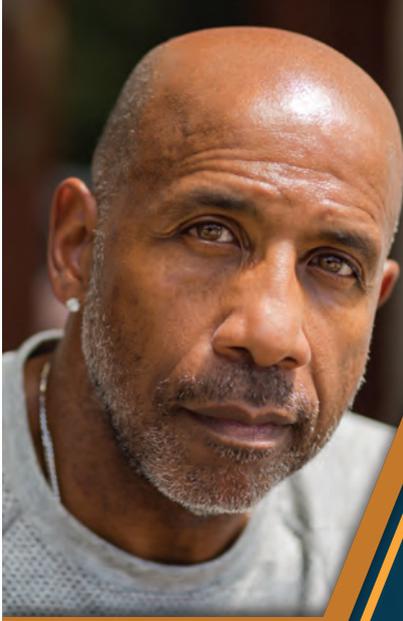
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## POLITICS

### FOIA fighter

To find out if Rahm covered up the murder of Laquan McDonald, we ask the city to show us what they've got.

By **BEN JORAVSKY**

For the last few weeks, there's been heated debate about Mayor Rahm and his handling of the Laquan McDonald video.

The question is: Did the mayor cover up evidence of a murder when he sat on the video showing police officer Jason Van Dyke shooting McDonald in 2014—only releasing the video after a Cook County judge ordered him to do so?

One side says yes, that's an obvious cover-up. The other side says stop picking on Mayor Rahm!

Representing the Rahm side is a bunch of very powerful people, including President Joe Biden, Senators Richard Durbin and Tammy Duckworth, Mayor Lori Lightfoot, and former Chicago inspector general Joe Ferguson.

A formidable team if ever there was one.

The other side includes my old friend and political strategist Delmarie Cobb, her ally Norman Solomon, a whole bunch of leftists, Matt Topic (more on him later), and ugh, well, me.

Or as the *Sun-Times* summed us up in a sub-head—"no significant opposition." Which is, let's face it, how the Rahms of the world view

the left in this country.

The most relevant person on that list—at least for this column—is Topic. He's a local lawyer who's made a reputation as the go-to guy in legal battles with the city over FOIA requests.

FOIA stands for Freedom of Information Act. It's the law that requires municipalities like Chicago to fork over information those municipalities probably should have made public in the first place.

Topic was the lawyer who forced Mayor Rahm—fighting all the way—to turn over the video that showed Van Dyke gunning down McDonald.

That video demonstrated that the city's more-or-less official position on that murder—that McDonald was the aggressor and Van Dyke acted in self-defense—was a lie. And had been since the day McDonald was killed.

Topic filed his FOIA lawsuit on behalf of a freelance writer named Brandon Smith. Mayor Rahm had turned down Smith's request to publicize the video on the grounds that the shooting was the subject of an ongoing investigation. As such, he could not turn

What will the city turn over to prove Mayor Rahm is telling the truth about Laquan McDonald? 🗳️

WESLEY TINGEY / UNSPLASH

over a videotape that might jeopardize that investigation.

Judge Franklin Valderrama ruled against Mayor Rahm—and for Smith—after pointing out that the city had not produced any evidence that releasing the video would compromise any investigation.

The matter of Mayor Rahm and the video resurfaced earlier this fall when President Biden nominated Emanuel to be ambassador to Japan.

Cobb, Solomon, and their allies argued that it was a disgrace to reward Emanuel with an important position like an ambassadorship given that he covered up evidence of a murder.

On the other side, Ferguson sent a letter to the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, which held a hearing on Rahm's appointment, saying that questions about a Mayor Rahm cover-up "are not fair, because they are not grounded in fact, because the facts simply do not exist."

Ferguson also wrote: "My office's comprehensive investigation did not reveal any evidence that would support the lingering surmises and accusations of a 'cover-up' orchestrated out of City Hall. None."

And . . .

"Decisions made about the non-or-delayed disclosure of the body-worn camera videos at the time were in fact the longstanding policy and practice of the city of Chicago and its Law Department."

Topic and I were discussing the case on my podcast. I was going on and on, as I tend to do, calling the case an obvious cover-up. And Topic said something to the effect of . . .

If you feel so strongly about it, file a FOIA request. You know—shut up and do something.

I must confess, I have a skeptical view of FOIA requests. As I said, the law is supposed to be a tool for the public. But all too often it's used as a tool against the public.

My favorite example is what I called blankpieceofpapergate.

That's the one where Joanna Brown, a school activist in Logan Square, filed a FOIA

request asking Chicago Public Schools to turn over any information they had about a meeting on changing the attendance boundaries of Mozart Elementary School.

Eight months after Brown sent her request, CPS finally responded by sending her a blank sign-in sheet for a public meeting. In other words, it took them eight months to send her a blank piece of paper.

In legal terms, that's known as go fuktum yourselftum. Which is Latin for go . . . oh, you can figure it out.

Anyway, Topic told me not to be so jaded. And to believe in the process. So what the hell, I had him send in the request. Here's what I'm hoping to find:

Ferguson says his "comprehensive investigation did not reveal any evidence" of a cover-up? Fair enough. Let's see what evidence the inspector general and his staff did uncover. Let's see how comprehensive that investigation really was.

My reporter friends tell me not to expect anything along the lines of an e-mail from Mayor Rahm to his lawyers saying, "Burn that tape!"

Presumably, Mayor Rahm's way too smart to put that in writing, even if he felt it.

On the other hand, maybe Ferguson and his investigators uncovered an e-mail from Rahm to his lawyers saying, "Why is this investigation taking so long? I demand an immediate update! I really want to release the video to Brandon Smith 'cause it's the right thing to do. And I always try to do the right thing, even if it hurts me politically."

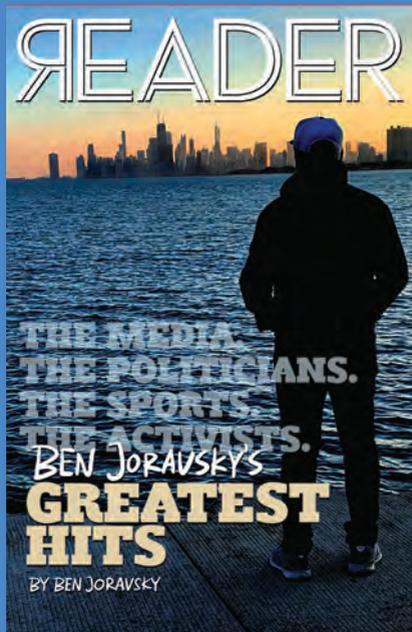
Well, it's always a possibility.

My guess is that after many delays and excuses, the city will send me heavily redacted material, if they send me anything at all. Perhaps they'll fork over a copy of the blank piece of paper they sent to Joanna Brown.

Or maybe they'll deny my request. At which point Topic will take them to court. Like he's had to do so many times before. 🗳️

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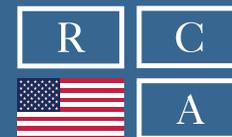
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Take a seat opposite the endangered Thompson Center's late architect. (Still from *Helmut Jahn: In a Flash*)  COURTESY NATHAN EDDY

## CULTURE

# A stiff drink, please

The verdict on Chicago's endangered Starship is about to land.

By **DEANNA ISAACS**

**T**rudging east on Randolph toward the Siskel Center on a gloomy, COVID-depopulated early evening last week, I heard something that stopped me in my tracks:

“Mom, mom, what’s *that* building?”

I turned to see the source. A boy of ten or so was pulling at his mother’s arm as they walked south on Clark. With his other hand, he was pointing across the street at the massive, glassy, otherworldly hump of the James R. Thompson Center.

Even as it stands now—dilapidated and mostly emptied, its spectacular, 17-story atrium off-limits to the public after 6 PM and on weekends—the Thompson Center can ignite the attention of a passing child.

I was on my way to a screening of four short films on architecture by journalist and documentarian Nathan Eddy, including his 2017 Thompson Center paean, *Starship Chicago*. That film is more relevant than ever as we await the announcement of the building’s fate.

Governor J.B. Pritzker put the futuristic 36-year-old structure, which stands on a full city block, up for sale and possible demolition last spring. In its request for proposals, the state noted that the building lacks historic landmark designation and claimed that it’s not currently eligible for government preservation incentives.

Apparent translation: demo green light.

After extending the bidding deadline from August to October, and getting the city to pass a zoning density change that allows the construction of a massive tower on the site, the state said it has received all of two bids from potential buyers. The “winner” is to be announced this month.

Names of the bidders and details of their proposals have not been released, and won’t be until then, when it’s a done deal. Do they plan to repurpose the building or to demolish it? We don’t have a clue.

The Illinois Department of Central Man-

agement Services, which is handling the sale, says state law forbids the disclosure of buyers, prices, and plans until after the contract is awarded.

Which law is that? Public Act 100-1184, written specifically for this sale, and effective as of April 5, 2019. According to this law, no appraisal is necessary, and the sale (after a one-year pandemic extension) is to be completed by April 5, 2022.

“It feels as though the process is very non-public for a public body,” says Preservation Chicago executive director Ward Miller. “And it’s really unfortunate that they would even consider selling such a valuable public asset, part of a governmental center in the Loop. It smacks of old-style Chicago politics.”

And then there’s the timing: we’re in the midst of a pandemic-instigated, Internet-enabled, office market meltdown.

Meanwhile, in January, the state paid \$73 million for a much smaller, less distinctive

building in the West Loop, and began moving employees from the Thompson Center there.

The stated reason for dumping the Center is the cost of repairs, mostly incurred because the state cheaped out initially on construction materials and then routinely failed to do maintenance. Estimates of how much it would cost to fix have ballooned from about \$100 million in 2015, to \$325 million in 2017, and a recent prediction by Pritzker’s staff that it could be \$525 million by 2026.

“Many of us feel it could be updated and restored at a lower number,” Miller says. “This is the building that put Helmut Jahn on the world stage.”

Eddy’s latest documentary, *Helmut Jahn: In a Flash*, was also on the Siskel Center program that night, its premiere screening. A condensed biography in the architect’s own words, it mostly consists of 2016 interview footage that wasn’t used in *Starship Chicago*. Eddy, who’s based in Berlin, told me that he happened to be here last May, arriving the day after Jahn was killed in a bicycle/auto accident. “I thought immediately, you need to take that footage and turn it into a single-person documentary,” he recalled.

The film opens with Jahn’s voice. “It’s very hard to make a statement which goes beyond the ordinary,” he says. A flash-card review of his many, never ordinary, local projects follows, coming to rest in a Chicago skyline that features the flat plane of the McCormick Place Lakeside Center in the foreground—another iconic project that, in his earliest Chicago years, Jahn worked on. After that, Eddy puts the viewer opposite Jahn at his desk, for a 20-minute conversation that amounts to an illustrated overview of his prolific, brash, and innovative career. “When I got here, in the 60s,” he begins, “Chicago was the center of the architectural world . . .”

While the Thompson Center’s fate hangs in the balance, you can take that seat opposite Jahn yourself: through December 19, MAS Context and Goethe-Institut Chicago are hosting a free digital screening of *Helmut Jahn: In a Flash* at [mascontext.com](http://mascontext.com). 

 @Deannaisaacs

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# The Reader's 2021 Gift Guide

Locally available items and gift ideas handpicked by *Reader* staff, from calendars to cowboy boots, plus records, books, CBD, sex toys, and more.

**H**ere are some goods, places to donate, and more ideas to consider for this Chicago gift giving season. And remember, you can always find items that support the *Reader* at our gift shop, [store.chicagoreader.com](https://store.chicagoreader.com).

**ADAM M. RHODES**, staff writer and co-host of *Chicago Queer & Now*

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**KAREN HAWKINS**, co-publisher and co-editor in chief

**Darling** by K. Ancrum. This modern-day retelling of *Peter Pan* set in Chicago was written for young adults, but it scared the bejesus outta me—in a good way—as a grown-ass woman. (\$18.99 hardcover, \$10.99 ebook)  
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**Chicago Flag Necklace** from Stumble and Relish. Hometown pride, but make it shiny. (\$14)  
[stumbleandrelish.com](http://stumbleandrelish.com)

**"Bitch, Please. I'm From Chicago"** mug from The Silver Room. Author Mikki Kendall showed this off during

her *Reader* book club appearance, and I haven't been the same since. (\$16)  
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**I Woke Up Like Dis / Feminist** T-shirt from A Long Walk Home. A cozy shirt, a feminist manifesto, and a benefit for an amazing nonprofit all in one. (\$30)  
[alongwalkhome.org/shop](http://alongwalkhome.org/shop)

**LEOR GALIL**, music writer

**Energy Never Dies: Afro-Optimism and Creativity in Chicago**, by Ayana Contreras (University of Illinois Press). I knew I had to buy this cultural history of Black Chicago the minute Vocalo music director, DJ, and historian Ayana Contreras announced it earlier this year; it arrives December 14. (\$19.95)  
[indiebound.org](http://indiebound.org)

Jeff Parker, **JP's MySpace Beats** double-LP (International Anthem). The celebrated jazz guitarist and Tortoise member issued this vinyl-only compilation of his mid-2000s beat scene productions, which illuminates the connections between instrumental hip-hop and jazz. (\$35)  
[intlanthem.bandcamp.com](http://intlanthem.bandcamp.com)

**Hamburger Dad** (VHS) and **Strange Tapes** zine. The Chicago cult-video zine *Strange Tapes* not only reissued two versions of this early 2000s, no budget, shot-on-video Seattle comedy about a father who experiences a Kafkaesque transformation into a burger (I prefer the short version), but put together a pretty neat compendium about the movies. (\$30)  
[strangetapeszine.bigcartel.com](http://strangetapeszine.bigcartel.com)

Original 1971 pressing of Ella Jenkins's **"I Got A Harmonica for Chanukah"** b/w "It's a Holiday" and a Hohner harmonica (\$25). The team behind a forthcoming documentary



Top-bottom: *Darling*, Ella Jenkins seven-inch, prints from Maura Walsh COURTESY THE ARTIST

on the “first lady of Children’s Music,” Chicago’s Ella Jenkins, are selling recently salvaged original copies of this delightful 50-year-old holiday seven-inch. (\$25 for set)

[ellajenkinsfilm.bandcamp.com](http://ellajenkinsfilm.bandcamp.com)

**LISA SOLOMON MANN**, senior account executive and co-host of “Cannabis Conversations” segment on *The Ben Joravsky Show*

For a favorite couple, or your someone special, give a couples massage or energy healing treatment at **Massage Evolved**, a woman-owned and -operated small business in the West Loop. (services starting at \$125 per person)

[massageevolved.com](http://massageevolved.com)

For the friend who shared that their sex life needs some spicing up, the sexy **Truth or Dare** game can help light a fire in the bedroom (or beyond). (\$14.95)

[early2bed.com](http://early2bed.com)

Since alcohol and family holiday dinners don’t always mix . . . **CANN Social Tonic**, an all natural, low-dose cannabis beverage is designed to give you a light and uplifting buzz. Available at area dispensaries. (\$24 for a six-pack, or three six-packs for \$54)

[drinkcann.com](http://drinkcann.com)

For your furry friend(s): **Cubbing-ton’s Cabinet P’Nut Budder CBD Drops** can help them chill out with you, maybe even during NYE fireworks. Other flavors are available at Cubbington’s Cabinet in Roscoe Village. (\$55)

[cubbingtons.com](http://cubbingtons.com)

**MICCO CAPORALE**, listings coordinator

**Psychodrama T-shirt** by Cae Monāe (\$40)

[caemonae.com](http://caemonae.com)

Hand-marbled **leather cowboy boots** by Cloina (\$89)

[cloina.store](http://cloina.store)

A tattoo from tattoo artist **Theresa Escobedo** (\$100-\$400)

[instagram.com/theresa\\_escobedo](https://www.instagram.com/theresa_escobedo)

Gift card for **Tone Deaf Records** (\$10-\$100)

[tonedeafrecs.com](http://tonedeafrecs.com)

A donation in any amount to **Assata’s Daughters**

[assatasdaughters.org](http://assatasdaughters.org)

**SALEM COLLO-JULIN**, culture editor

**The Beautiful Men of Goth 2022** calendar made by Chicago artist Erin Page (\$30)

[erinpageforever.com](http://erinpageforever.com)

**Chicago North Stars** home jersey (\$60)

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[etsy.com/shop/SaltyBrownFemmeMakes](https://etsy.com/shop/SaltyBrownFemmeMakes)

A one-year membership to **Experimental Sound Studio** (\$40-\$500)

[ess.org](http://ess.org)

A gift certificate to buy zines and other stuff at **Quimby’s** (\$5-\$100)

[quimbys.com](http://quimbys.com)

**TARYN ALLEN**, editorial associate and co-host of *Chicago Queer & Now*

Merch from Uprise skate shop’s new **bodega signage collection** (\$12-\$70)

[upriseskateboards.com](http://upriseskateboards.com)

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[fiveelementshome.com](http://fiveelementshome.com)

**Skull & Eagle Shirt** from local tattooer BodyRuiner (\$25)

[bodyruiner.com/store](http://bodyruiner.com/store)

**Wheel throwing workshop** at Penguin Foot Pottery in Logan Square (\$45, includes finished and glazed creation)

[penguinfoot.com/wheel-workshops](http://penguinfoot.com/wheel-workshops)

**YASMIN ZACARIA MIKHAIEL**, audience engagement manager

**Pistachio baklava** from Middle East Bakery & Grocery (\$6-\$13)

[middleeastbakeryandgrocery.com](http://middleeastbakeryandgrocery.com)

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[freestreet.org](http://freestreet.org)

**Tiny Tiny Tiny Tiny Bulldog Har-ness** by Emma Alamo (\$85)

[emmaalamo.com](http://emmaalamo.com)

**Makeshift Chicago Stages: A Century of Theater and Performance** (Northwestern University Press, \$34.95)

[indiebound.org](http://indiebound.org)

**Satisfyer Pro 2** from Early to Bed (\$59.95)

[early2bed.com](http://early2bed.com)



AMBER HUFF

## POETRY CORNER

### Autumn Door

By Mark Turcotte

for Jim Harrison, in the swoon

Have we — whether a step just within, just without — finally arrived in this place to linger, maybe never pass, only dwell between our own autumn and the autumn we have made of memory? The autumn of time and one timeless?

Within the deep and smoky season, where so many things have gathered now to await our grieving, our letting go of everything gone. Listen to us. Rattle laughter of leaves. Throaty lowing of white pines in crisp lean.

Gone our father, mother's hazel eyes. Gone our little brother in the murky river. Gone big sister sticking out her tongue. Gone our child startled by the sky. Gone lovers. Gone our winding way.

Gone the mad woodsman scribbler. Old trickster. Boy, wolf, bird.

And then the thin and blurry season, where so many things have gathered now to await our return, our re-waking of everything still. Look at us. A flash of something like ourselves, our once leaping selves, abandoned to joy.

Still our mother, father's horse chuckle. Still our little brother of the splashing river. Still big sister sticking out her tongue. Still our child in the startled sky. Still those lovers. Still our winding days.

Still the mad woodsman poeteer. Old trickster. Boy, wolf, bird.

We could fly. Don't you remember? We plunged into the brittle, paused between soar and dive. We curled up and sprung, hung like breath in the air. We lingered there, maybe never passed, un and also born. Wombed in space.

(this poem, in a different version, first appeared in Door County Living Magazine, 2016)

Mark Turcotte (Turtle Mountain Ojibwe) lives and works in Chicago, where he teaches in the English Dept at DePaul University.

Poem curated by Natasha Mijares: Natasha is an artist, writer, curator, and educator. Her debut collection of poetry, *violent wave*, is forthcoming from PANK Books. She received her MFA in Writing from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She has exhibited at various international and national galleries. Her work has appeared in *Gravity of the Thing*, *Hypertext Review*, *Calamity*, *Vinyl Poetry*, and more.

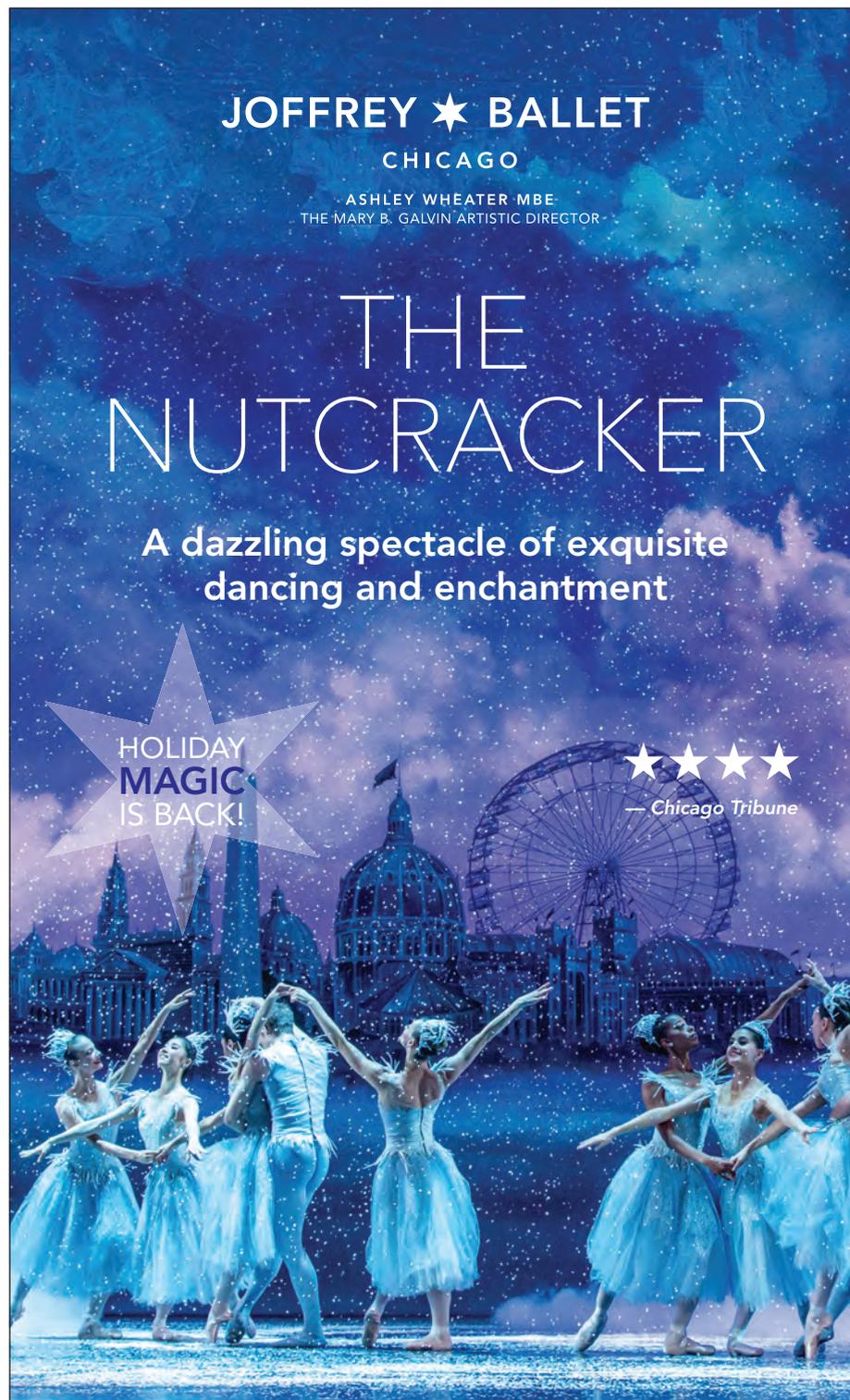
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The Joffrey Ballet Ensemble in *The Nutcracker*. Photo by Cheryl Mann.



Overgrown Orchard started as Stan Wash's cidermaking hobby that grew out of control.  COURTESY OVERGROWN ORCHARD

## DRINK FEATURE

# Overgrown Orchard makes the best wine in Gary, Indiana

Their wild-fermented dry apple cider is fruity, funky, and very food-friendly.

By MIKE SULA

Stan Wash, dwarfed by towering metal shelves stocked with faucets and toilet seats, raises a small glass of butterscotch-colored liquid to his lips, takes a taste, and gasps.

“WHOO! Oh my goodness! UGH! That’s so tannic!”

We’re standing in a cavernous plumbing warehouse in Gary, Indiana, where Wash and a partner, Zach Getzelman, press, age, and bottle wild-fermented apple cider under the label Overgrown Orchard.

“That’s gonna need some time,” says Getzelman.

Wash pulled the sample from a bung hole atop a repurposed whiskey barrel, which they’d filled with their own fermented GoldRush apple juice. He picks up a glass pipette—otherwise known as a wine thief—and draws another measure from an old sauvignon blanc barrel. This juice was pressed from Golden Russets, foraged crabapples, and fruit they’d harvested last season on a four-acre

orchard a quarter mile to the southwest.

This one has had more time to develop in the barrel, but still isn’t quite ready. “Wow,” says Wash. “That’s delicious. It’s got some real sharp, hot notes to it. It’ll age and blend well, but it needs time. That’s what new juice tastes like.”

“But it’s good juice,” says Getzelman. “Caramel and vanilla.”

I spent a day at Overgrown Orchard last month, eating cheese and tasting finished, bottled cider—and also barreled ciders still maturing after the wild spontaneous fermentation that’s begun with naturally occurring yeast found on apple skins, in the air, and on the oak. Each one had its own distinct nose and flavor, but overall what distinguished them from the one-dimensional, canned supermarket ciders that dominate the U.S. market was their dry fruitiness, food-friendly acidity, and very often a whisper—sometimes a gust—of farmhouse funk.

American cider in the U.S. is popularly

viewed as a sweet, gluten-free alternative to beer. And though there’s a thriving parallel independent craft cider movement with plenty of interesting and delicious things to drink, the vast ocean of it is produced quickly, under strict control, from sweet, pasteurized apple juice or concentrate, spiked with commercial yeast strains and added seasonings.

It wasn’t always this way. America has an old cidermaking tradition—interrupted by industrialization and Prohibition—that was more akin to ancient cidermaking in northern Spain, northern France, and the UK. Slowly, amid the last decade’s cider boom, a handful of cidermakers have returned to old methods that are closer to natural winemaking than brewing.

“We’re essentially winemakers,” says Wash. “It’s the exact same methodology, and it’s extremely simple: you press apples and you let the juice age.” Cidermaking for Wash, who is a commercial litigator for a major law firm during the week, started as a hobby that

quickly got out of hand.

Seven years ago he stumbled across an unfamiliar fruit at the Nichols Farm stand at the Federal Plaza farmers’ market: a Cox’s Orange Pippin, an heirloom English dessert apple that sent him down a rabbit hole of forgotten varieties with names like Ashmead’s Kernel, Roxbury Russet, and Transcendent Crab; many with sour, bitter, and bittersweet flavors that would never pass in the produce section. “I was like, ‘Oh my gosh. There are apples that exist almost exclusively for making cider.’ There was this epiphany: you go up to any dude with a neck beard and he can name five hop varieties, but ask if he likes cider and, ‘No, I don’t like sweet beverages.’”

Wash read all the cider books he could find, began listening to cider podcasts, and he skipped work for three days to attend Cider-Con 2015, the annual conference of the American Cider Association, held frequently in Chicago. By then he had enough confidence to give it a go. He bought a \$1,500 mill and press from a farmers’ supply site, and, “I went to the farmers’ market and walked up to some apple seller and was like, ‘Hey can I get 400 pounds of apples?’”

Wash hit up his old law school classmate Getzelman, who he describes as “a consummate drinker. Just a real expert alcoholic.”

“Hey, do you wanna crush apples in my backyard?” They purchased carboys, a bottler, and sanitizing equipment from a home brew shop, where the clerk told him it was the largest order they’d ever filled. “That’s a sign that my hobby is absolutely out of control.”

They made about 15 gallons the first time around using conventional methods and commercial yeast—even dry-hopping a batch in line with a nascent fad adopted from brewers. “It was garbage,” says Wash. “But it gave us enough courage to keep going. I didn’t have kids yet, so I was like, ‘Why don’t I waste my future children’s college fund buying stuff?’”

There are a lot of barriers to entry to making the kind of cider Overgrown Orchard has sold over the last five years. It’s easier if you’re already a brewer or vintner who knows how to ferment things; or a farmer growing the uncommon sharp (or acidic), bitter (or tannic), or bittersweet and bittersharp apples needed

to make real cider. Wash and Getzelman were neither, but they did have Wash's plumber brother, who begrudgingly lent them warehouse space for the \$16,850 Austrian Voran mill, the four 220-gallon egg-shaped tanks they use for primary fermentation, and the increasing numbers of used oak barrels stacked in the shadows of the toilet seats and faucets, where apple blends mature anywhere from 12 to 18 months before bottling.

At first it was difficult to find the proper fruit, but they made relationships with farmers and foraged for many of the bitter crabapples, or "spitters," whose tannins, with time, age into the pleasant tactile astringency that's such a prized quality in good wine.

"I keep orange vests in the back of my car and a ladder," says Wash. "I have these big onion bags that can hold probably a hundred-plus pounds of apples. There are awesome crabapple trees in Old Town. If you put on a vest, nobody says anything to you."

The more they learned, the more they gravitated toward wild fermentation, minimizing intervention by letting natural yeast do all the work. There are even more barriers to this kind of cidemaking; it takes much longer, and it's more unpredictable.

But they did have land—or rather, Wash's brother did. Over two years they planted more than 400 trees—67 varieties from all over the world: sweet French Fenouillet Gris; sharp Danish Gravensteins; bittersweet English Dabinetts; bittersweet Russian Dolgo Crabs; and the sweet Indiana native Winter Banana.

The trees, in various stages of growth, line up neatly southwest to northeast, wedged between freight tracks, I-80/94, and the shallow Deep River, which empties into the East Arm Little Calumet. Wash is full of self-deprecating jokes about the postindustrial terroir of Gary, the weeds, and the diesel fumes. But he's discovered herons, tadpoles, fish, and shrimp in the river. Beavers have marauded the orchard, taking more than a dozen trees, and deer have attacked them too, but the most the partners do to intervene is to mow the weeds between the rows so the field mice, which gnaw on the tree bark, can't hide from the raptors that keep them in check. They don't water, fertilize, or use pesticides.

Meanwhile, honeybees from 60 hives on the riverbank help pollinate in the spring. Last summer some of the honey fed the yeast that carbonated their 2019 Ella, blended from Golden Russets, Muscadet de Dieppe, and Winesaps. It tastes like a dry champagne with a hint of fermented caramel.

The silty loam produces high-acid, low-sugar apples. The same apples grown in a warmer climate, like say, Virginia's, would produce more residual sugars, theoretically leading to sweeter ciders. But Wash is among the cidemakers who believe that terroir is best expressed by what happens in the cider house, more than the orchard.

Last fall, Wash, Getzelman, and a third partner, Jeff Guerrero, along with a posse of volunteers, picked close to a thousand pounds of apples, which pressed about 2,000 gallons of juice. Various blends were pumped into the open-topped egg fermenters. At this point most cidemakers (and winemakers) would add sulfites to the juice, which would kill off the indigenous yeasts. From there they'd "pitch" a commercial yeast strain on this liquid blank canvas, which would quickly yield a very predictable, consistent result.

Consistent, or consistently boring? Overgrown Orchard doesn't add sulfites to their juice, simply allowing remnant apple skin and pulp to sink to the bottom of the tank, while the natural yeast devours the sugars, releasing CO<sub>2</sub> and ethanol. "When you do wild fermentation you're opening the door and inviting hundreds and hundreds of yeasts to the party," says Wash.

They don't leave the juice on these "lees" for too long, so after about a month, it's racked off into various used oak barrels to age further. Overgrown Orchard uses everything from old pinot noir and chardonnay barrels, to ones used to make whiskey, gin, and calvados. Their ciders pick up just a hint of those traits as they develop the phenols and esters that contribute fruit flavors without residual sweetness. The cider is carbonated in the bottle via the traditional méthode champenoise by adding a sugar syrup, or liqueur de tirage, to revive the yeast, which yields CO<sub>2</sub>.

Much like most natural wines, they're never the same from year to year, and they never stop changing in the bottle. Monument, named for the Illinois Centennial Monument in Logan Square, is their "middle of the fairway" cider; a highly acidic, creamy, effervescent blend. Each year they select a set of barrels that will archive this basic profile—but every year it's different.

The same is true with the much funkier, less carbonated Joujou, which is aged in calvados barrels and tastes a bit like a green Jolly Rancher. Resist is aged in whiskey barrels, and its cherry-graham cracker notes are underscored with a kiss of carbon. Black, a collaboration with brewer Ørkenoy, benefits

Black Educators Matter and is a combination of Winesap, wild crabapple juice, and a saison made from wild yeast harvested from a Yucatán cave. It's among the funkier things they've made, with huge hits of pineapple, strawberry, and orange.

"We get tons of acid," says Wash. "And we get huge fruit esters. So we get a lot of berry flavors, a lot of stone fruit, like peach. It's not sweet, but it's real fruit-forward with a perceived sweetness. Crisp, and not terribly different from northern Spanish wines or drier Austrian or German wines that lend themselves well to food pairings and patio crushing."

Wash, Getzelman, and Guerrero have released these and other new vintages each year since 2017—you can order many of them online. They've also appeared on a handful of restaurant lists and in shops like Bottles & Cans and Bitter Pops. One of their most reliable stockists is Logan Square cheese shop Beautiful Rind, though they're largely absent from the most obvious places you'd expect to find them. COVID interrupted their campaign of wine shop tastings. But even before that it

was a hard sell, because even sophisticated drinkers have a hard time wrapping their heads around the idea that it's just wine.

"I'll ask, 'Do you want to try some cider?' and it's, 'I hate cider. All I drink is wine.' Well, surprise. It is wine.' But that's not their fault. It's because 99.9 percent of all cider is made differently."

And that's another reason Wash and his partners won't be giving up their day jobs soon, even though there's lots of room for growth. When the orchard is up to full speed it'll produce some 10,000 pounds of apples each year, which will require more employees and more square footage. Wash's brother has set aside some space for the cidery in a newly constructed bay—but he wants rent.

For now Wash is practicing distraction. "He's like, 'Motherfucker, I'm gonna burn this shit. Get it out of my warehouse.' It's just, 'Dude, what a gift I'm giving you. One, you get to see your brother regularly, and two, this is a plumbing warehouse that smells like a beautiful winery. What's the problem?'" 

 @MikeSula

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What Greta said ...



Elias Majid at Eli Tea Bar © COURTESY ELIAS MAJID

## SOBER BARS

# Social and sober

Eli Tea Bar provides a place to gather without the booze.

By **TONY PEREGRIN**

**T**he “sober curious”—individuals who abstain from drinking to explore the positive effects of sobriety—have a new enclave in Andersonville. Eli Tea Bar, an alcohol-free social space, offers options for those rethinking their relationship with alcohol, including bubble tea, kombucha on tap, and more than 100 loose leaf teas and special in-house blends. Bar owner Elias Majid, a member of the LGBTQ community, presided over a soft opening of the bar early in December.

“I think there’s a constant yearning for that third place, that community space, for the LGBTQ community and often it’s limited to late-night clubs,” says Majid, a botanist who earned his degree at Loyola University before opening the original outpost of Eli Tea Bar in suburban Detroit nine years ago. “I think the marketing and the media for the LGBT community is solely focused on partying hard and that you have to be drunk

and you have to be high to be the life of the party. There are other ways to be the life of the party. There are other ways to meet people.”

The sober curious or “elective sobriety” movement is not new—sober bars first appeared in the late 19th century as part of the temperance movement. A driving factor in this renewed interest in safe sober spaces could be related to the significant spike in alcohol consumption during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to a report published in the November 2021 issue of the journal *Alcohol*, between March and September 2020, beer, wine, and liquor store sales totaled \$41.9 billion—20 percent higher than during the same months in 2019 and 18 percent higher than between August 2019 and February 2020. Some researchers suggest that this increase in alcohol consumption could be related to a rise in domestic violence and other dysfunctional behaviors.

For the sober-curious novice, having tea

or coffee in place of a good stiff drink could be a slightly daunting endeavor, but Majid, a nondrinker, encourages people to explore nonalcoholic beverages, which could actually lead to feelings of clarity and empowerment, particularly in social situations.

“Many people have the misconception that tea is weak or maybe low in caffeine, or they think the opposite—that tea is unusually high in caffeine. There’s so much more to the tea world than people think. There’s so much more than just a tea bag,” says Majid, a self-described tea ethnobotanist. Majid defines this as an individual that is “not only interested in the science behind tea and the processing behind tea, but also someone who is taking into consideration the cultural use of the teas.”

Majid asserts that food and beverage establishments likely do more than a physician, on an everyday level, to help bolster the public’s overall health and well-being.

“I think food businesses have a respon-

sibility to offer their customers healthy products. In our case, we avoid high-fructose corn syrups. We avoid food coloring dyes unless it’s plant-based such as crushed flowers. And then for things like our bubble tea, for example, we’re using fresh milk or vegan milk. Any customer can get anything with any vegan milk or if they want no sugar, we can do no sugar. And that’s dramatically reducing the calories, which is something that has hit a note with our customer base for sure.”

Eli’s Tea Bar will also feature kombucha on tap, a beverage associated with maintaining a healthy digestive system among other benefits.

“Kombucha is a fermented probiotic tea. It can be alcoholic, and it can also be non-alcoholic depending on the sugar level. So, you can actually go to bars and get a glass of kombucha instead of a beer. We are going to have kombucha on tap in a beer kegerator. There’ll be four different flavors. We’re sourcing it from Kombucha Brava in Evanston. However, in a year or two’s time, I do have plans for us to start fermenting our own kombucha and introducing that as well.”

One type of drink you won’t find on the menu at Eli’s, no matter any purported health benefits—mocktails.

“We are definitely avoiding the faux pas of creating mocktails,” says Majid. “All of our specialty drinks, our zero proof drinks that we create, are their own things. They’re not mocktails at all. Mocktails are boring because they are simply subtracting the alcohol. We give customers something enticing to try. Why not try rhodiola—it’s great for anxiety. Why not try lion’s mane—it’s good for your brain.”

The 2,000-square-foot Andersonville shop includes cafe seating, a walk-up window for low-contact to-go orders, and a small performance stage in the back room for drag bingo, DJs, open mikes, calligraphy workshops, and more. Majid says interest in performing at the Andersonville space has been “kind of crazy,” with more than 51 performers applying for a spot on the schedule.

“What attracted me to Andersonville was that it has a strong community customer base. Residents walk into downtown An-

ersonville, they frequent the shops, there is a strong sense of family and community. I honestly was looking between Andersonville and Boystown [Northalsted] and I feel like Boystown has lost some of that edge. I mean, if you walk down Clark Street in Andersonville on a Tuesday in the summer, there's people everywhere walking around."

While Eli's Tea Bar is the only active sober bar within the city of Chicago, numerous Windy City watering holes offer inventive, spirit-free beverages that could appeal to the sober curious, especially if the venue has something other than booze for patrons to focus on such as shuffleboard, trivia nights, arcade games, and live music. Other alternatives that offer a hybrid coffee/cocktail bar experience include the Golden Dagger near DePaul, and Cafe Mustache in Palmer Square. Slightly Toasted in the West Loop offers an all-day coffee shop and bar featuring responsibly sourced coffee and reportedly one of the largest whiskey lists in Chicago.

"We started off as a tea shop and then it became apparent that we were attracting

sober-curious people, people who just don't want to drink, people who simply want to socialize. And now we're actively marketing as a sober space," says Majid. "When sober bars started to become trendy again, I noticed that they tend to open with a pretty big press announcement and then they close. They're not sustainable."

Majid says Eli Tea Bar's enduring success is due, in part, to the convivial vibe of his sober space, a nod to the boutique coffee shop culture of the 90s, when people interacted with each other instead of staring blankly into the blue glow of smartphones and laptops.

"We'll have all sorts of programming activities that we'll use to kind of get people, gay or straight, to bump elbows," says Majid. "I think what we aim to offer is something new, but also familiar. We're not trying to be overly avant-garde about what we're offering. We're not a coffee shop, we're not a wine shop. We're something in between." 

 @tonycperegrin



 ELIAS MAJID

The fire burned for three days, killing hundreds, and leaving a thriving city in ruins. Risen from the ashes, Chicago rebuilt as an economic and architectural marvel. But just who benefited from reconstruction efforts?

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## 'WATCH ME'

# The flood that birthed Love Cork Screw wines

Négociant Chrishon Lampley turned a business loss into a trailblazing brand.

By JANAYA GREENE

**C**hrishon Lampley says she was a terrible writer when she started the blog Love Cork Screw in 2013: the Love section was about being a single woman who formerly owned an art bar, Cork had Lampley's varietal wine selections, and Screw was her take on current pop culture.

The year before, the highly successful art lounge that had included a bar of wines and drinks Lampley curated was forced to close, and she was devastated.

"I lost everything due to a bad flood that our insurance did not cover, and it was a really dark place in my life. But people would always come to me and say, 'Chrishon, you always know great restaurant picks.' 'You always know the coolest nightclub to go to.' Or, 'You always know what bottle of wine to bring to someone's house,'" she says. "So people kept bugging me after my gallery was closed, and calling me, and texting me, and I said, 'OK, I know how to get out to the masses, to the people that I've met here in Chicago by owning the gallery. How do I keep doing that?'"

The blog eventually turned into a radio show, and all the while was birthing Lampley's dream business: a wine company.

The following year the pieces started coming together, and her calling became clearer. Lampley already had years of experience in liquor and wine sales, and marketing for a local distribution company, not to mention her art lounge had won a best wine list award. She also realized she had a knack for tasting profiles and finding the perfect wine based on people's tasting palates.

"I was often [selling] on golf courses, at restaurants and nightclubs, and people would always tell me the same thing: they were tired of supporting the large-scale brands because you can get those wines everywhere. They wanted to really support small batches. They wanted to support local [liquor brands]. There are some great wineries that people didn't know existed in Illinois and in the midwest in general," she says. "I decided to do what everyone told me I could not do. Some people said, 'You don't have a vineyard. How in the world can you do that?' 'You didn't grow up in Napa [Valley]. How could you do that?' And I said, 'Watch me.'"

Today, Love Cork Screw carries a solid wine selection that's sold in 12 states and ships nationally. The brand attracted the attention of Target, and the wines are now distributed there as well as Whole Foods, Walmart, and

Chrishon Lampley @CHRISHONDEMAR

other retailers across the country. It even got the cosign of DJ Jazzy Jeff during the campaign for Dell Women's Entrepreneur Network's Dream Tech contest, for which it recently won first place. The lifestyle brand also sells candles that smell like merlot and body butters that carry the scent of chardonnay, two varieties Love Cork Screw does not have in its wine selection.

Still, \$40,000 worth of Dell technology, an upcoming HSN appearance, accolades, and wide distribution seven years later don't tell the full story of how Lampley, as a négociant, or wine merchant, built her company into what it is today. Even her 11 years in the wine industry weren't enough to convince many vineyards to believe in her vision.

"This is a very scary industry, for many reasons. One, it's a lot more technical and complicated than people think. We may make it look fun and sexy. People assume we're just going around drinking wine all day, but there are so many technical parts to it; there's so many legalities to it. Getting licensed is not the easiest thing to do," Lampley says. "The number one thing I would say is financially is the hardest part. Minorities getting in business and not being able to get financial backing is one of our largest problems. This industry is extremely expensive with a very low return on your investment."

At the start, Lampley was able to secure three vineyards to source her grapes and wine from, one in Oswego, Illinois, another in Michigan, and the last in California, by building on relationships she'd developed as an art gallery owner. She started with three basics: Head Over Heels Riesling, Good Times Good Friends Pinot Grigio, and We're Movin' On Up Cabernet Sauvignon, which were then only sold in Illinois and Ohio. Now Love Cork Screw sources from more vineyards nationally and internationally due to high demand. There's a Chilean sauvignon blanc on the way, and she'll soon be honoring her lineage with a new upscale reserve collection bearing her family's last name.

"I'm going to be sourcing around the world and I'm super, super excited to get that out to the masses. It means so much to me. Even the bottles and the advertisement are going to have my family on it: my grandparents, my mother, and father," she says. "It means the world to me to be able to carry on my last

name and to honor them. I look for the 'Lampley' to make huge, huge strides in the wine industry."

More than the reserve wine, the entrepreneur herself has already created a legacy.

"As an African American woman, I'm less than 0.0009 percent of this entire industry. Out of négociants, winery owners, and vineyard owners, there's literally I think 60 of us documented out of over 111,000 in the world, that are African American women," she says. "I am the first African American woman in the entire midwest to ever go national with a wine brand. So to do that and show other minorities and other business owners that you can do it has been an amazing thing. Love Cork Screw is bigger than me, way bigger than me."

"It takes time. You're not going to be successful overnight. It's impossible. A lot of people are scared off by this industry. Yes, it definitely has a stigma to it. Yes, it has an old world feel almost like a fraternity, like if you're not in this sector, you can't get in without being asked to get in. There are definitely a lot of parts of the industry that are difficult to get in, that are passed on from generation to generation. So to be an outsider coming into this industry is very difficult. It's very difficult being taken seriously, and definitely as an African American woman being taken seriously. There's plenty of obstacles that I think have deterred people for so long, but I'm hoping I'm one that can show that it takes time."

From finding the perfect sweet wines that midwesterners love to giving each wine a special touch with its name, Lampley has made Love Cork Screw wines stand out. Yes, wine is a competitive industry and yes, it's a risky one, but in making each varietal her own, Lampley has made her wines a success by showing that wine can be for everybody.

"Not everyone knows how to pronounce Bordeaux. Not everyone knows how to pronounce sauvignon blanc, Deonte, or care less to, but it doesn't mean they don't enjoy wine," Lampley says. "I want it to be fun. I want it to be whimsical. There are billions of dollars in this industry, and there's a place for everyone. I want my brand to be fun, but in addition to that, I want it to be approachable. I want to show people that you can make it in an industry that doesn't look like you and you can have fun with it." 📌

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# DRINKS



The woods behind my sister's apartment; inside Molly's apartment, featuring a chair that belonged to our grandmother. MOLLY PROUT

## ESCAPE

# Drinking and surviving it

On sharing a genetic predisposition to alcoholism

By **KATIE PROUT**

**T**he first thing my sister and I did the night my plane touched down in upstate New York was get wasted and run into the country dark. We drank a bottle and a half of wine with our Chinese food and wove each other's hair into tight fishtail braids. Then, we stuffed a backpack with essentials—our phones, two flashlights, a knife for protection, and a jam jar filled with the Jameson I'd bought her as a housewarming present—and

fled toward wildness and each other.

It was early September, lightless beyond the buzzy bulb of her landlord's garage. We pushed, hushed but laughing, through the tall pines and long shadows demarcating the yard from the property he rents to farmers. On the other side of the tree line was fallow land clotted with mud as thick as horse shit, red-black and laced with rivulets of the rainwater that had been falling until my arrival. We walked more, the hair on our arms feathery

from gooseflesh, passing the whiskey, until we reached an abandoned house, shingled and low-slung. Molly had seen it in the daylight, but she saved exploring it for when I got there, as a special treat. The door glinted with spiderwebs we traced with flashlight beams in our shaky hands, but it was unlocked. Inside, the walls were plastered with posters from 2011 that advised the workers who once slept here, their twin mattresses and cots now stripped of sheets and covered in dust, of their

OSHA rights. We whispered to each other. Because of who we were (two white women) we were playing with danger by breaking into property, rather than being in any real risk, and we knew it. Uneasy now with our trespass, we left.

Back outside, it started to mist. I suddenly needed to use the bathroom. Out of the dark, a blue porta-potty appeared. Inside was immaculate and even had toilet paper. "How did you *do* that?" Molly breathed, incredulous as she ripped on her Juul on the other side of the door. When we went a few days later to look for it in the daylight, it was gone.

Once refreshed, we cracked open our whiskey, each took a slug, and walked carefully along tractor tracks pooled with water. Mud sucked at our shoes, devouring us to the ankle. We heaved each other up and ran, our faces licked by the harsh tongues of stalks higher than the crowns of our heads. Above us, the night was moonless, but the stars spun. They watched us flounder through the mud and corn to a crick on the field's far side. Following the crick would lead us to a road, we hoped, but we weren't sure. There might be fences unseen, and dogs. Backtracking made more sense, but we'd already walked a mile and, though we'd followed the tractor lines, still didn't want to risk ruining anyone's crop with more footprints. I don't remember how we decided to go forward, only that we did, following the water where it wanted to go, which turned out to be under a road we tumbled out onto. Wet, scratched, thrilled, we walked each other home.

Molly is almost nine years younger than me, funnier and sluttier and better stacked. For a while, her ringtone was "Country Girl (Shake It For Me)." She can save a life and shoot a gun and has scars in the shape of braces on her knuckles from the time a girl in high school called our brother, who is disabled, retarded, and Molly, who was also in high school, beat her to shit. We shared a room from when she was a toddler until I left for college. One of the pleasures of my life these last few years has been getting to know her as her own person, beyond the milk-skinned baby girl I

## DRINKS

longed for after watching our mom pop out three boys, and beyond the dreadful teenager who screamed a lot when I came home from college. One of the many things we like to do together is drink.

My sister and I share a genetic predisposition to alcoholism. Maybe. Who actually knows what our genes carry, and scientific study of addiction, its causes and its care, has historically used a pretty narrow framework and lens. In the U.S., we largely leave people with addictions and substance use disorders to religiously assisted study and care. This abandonment means knowledge about alcoholism, for better and for worse, primarily exists in lived experience, folk understanding, and family lore.

For example: drinking is a sin. For example: it's wrong to drink in the morning but it's fine to drink at night. For example: liquor before beer. For example: one great-grandfather drank his way out of a professional football career, though his multiple head injuries probably didn't help, and turned to terrorizing his wife and kids until he died in his 50s. Another was too drunk for even the Catholic Church: his bones still reside on the wrong side of the cemetery, in the unhallowed ground saved for poor non-Catholics and suicides. A third, while courting his wife, showed up tanked at a church picnic. When she refused to see him, he drove his roadster on the wrong side of a freshly paved road all the way back home. When my mom was a kid, before the road was repaved, she could still see her grandfather's tracks.

Alcoholism is almost exclusively a male trait in my family, though there have been quiet rumors around of a few women, too. It's hard, however, to have room for our own problems when we're so busy trying to protect our men from their own. Again for example: my brother Hank, who I've written about before, started drinking in his early teen years and lately seems to be showing signs of brain damage associated with prolonged severe alcoholism in part associated with his other mental health problems. For decades, my parents and siblings have done everything we can

to keep him alive. I love him, and for so long, I've been afraid for him, but Hank and I have been increasingly estranged, which has allowed me to recognize how afraid I am of him, too. There's my brother Martin, alternately the sweetest and gentlest of my brothers and the most angry, who has had 11 traumatic brain injuries (again, football), two of which occurred as a result of his drunk driving, one of which left him with over 30 stitches in his scalp and a dislocated leg that almost popped out his back.

These are not minor problems. These are not low stakes. And yet, I drink, and so does my sister. Why? For one, it's fun. For two, unlike some of my other family, I don't have to worry about what she's going to do or say—to me, to others, or to herself—if she gets wasted. The third is harder to articulate, but I feel it deeply. It has something to do with the pleasure of fucking up, the sour gravel feeling of regret, and learning from that regret—go slower, do less, don't drink after donating a pint of blood.

I know how many drinks I had that night because I always count, partially because I'm traumatized by my family's history. Of course I want the spectrum between alcohol use, alcohol abuse, and alcoholism to be quantifiable. I want it badly, a binary of good and bad, healthy and unhealthy. Even though culturally we repeat stories to each other about how a glass of wine a day may be good for you, the reality is booze isn't nutrition or morality. There is no "good" or "bad": there are choices, experiences, and outcomes. Some of those outcomes are addiction. And even if I didn't know all that, I could look to my home: in my family, there is no rule or reason, other than some of us are cursed, and some of us aren't.

So again, why? For me, when I'm not just having a good time, drinking laps at the edge of a forest in my head where gender, violence, and autonomy grow entwined. My sister and I both have had periods where we've drunk too much. There was a terrible year in my 20s where I drove my body through Chicago like a drunk drives a car, crashing into others and watching what happened next with a muted disinterest. Molly has her own stories. There

are times when alcohol has hurt us, when our choices around alcohol have caused us harm, but there are many times when we don't drink, and there are many, many times when drinking has provided us with pleasure, good memories, and new experiences. Drinking, and surviving it, is some kind of promise that we're alive. For whatever reason, we're alright. Our drinking doesn't chain us halfway to our grave.

Years ago, I read the poem "Sylvia" by Gerald Stern. It's about his reckoning with his sister's childhood death:

Across a space peopled with stars I am laughing while my sides ache for existence it turns out is profound though the profound because of time it turns out is an illusion and all of this is infinitely improbable given the space, for which I gratefully lie in three feet of snow making a shallow grave I would have called an angel otherwise and think of my own rapturous escape from living only as dust and dirt, little sister.

In the decade and a half since first reading this poem, I've memorized it, never being able to articulate to myself why it means as much as it does to me. Thinking about that first night visiting my sister in her new life, drunk under the stars, it comes back. I don't know why our genes landed how they did, or why they're sick the way they are. I don't know why our brothers have made some choices and my sister and I have made others. I do know that their past isn't our future. My brothers aren't dead, but neither are we. I drink to our rapturous escape. **✎**

*Author's note: For readers who want to learn more about addiction, especially if you have a loved one you're trying to understand, the episode "Addictionology (ADDICTION)" from the podcast Ologies (featuring licensed mental health counselor and addictionologist Erin Parisi) was profoundly helpful to me. I wouldn't say it's a happy listen, but it is a hopeful one.*

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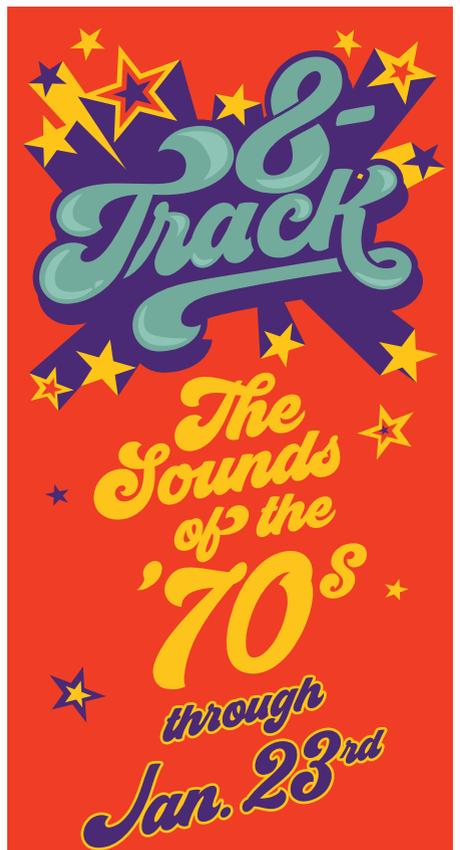
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AFTER-HOURS HISTORY

# Neo:

## where misfits fit in

The Lincoln Park club closed in 2015, after providing a sanctuary for generations of night crawlers—but its subcultural legacy continues to reverberate.

By LEOR GALIL

In summer 1979, Suzanne Shelton hatched a dream to open a punk dance club. She had two priorities: it had to play lots of new wave, and it needed clean bathrooms.

Shelton had been DJing at a failing Lincoln Park disco called Hoots, but she spent all her free nights at O'Banion's, a run-down gay bar in River North that DJ Nancy Rapchak had turned punk the previous summer. Shelton

didn't care much for disco, and it didn't help that she had to spin its commercialized hits over and over for work. But the music that Rapchak and her fellow DJs played at O'Banion's was another matter. "To this day there are some songs, I can close my eyes and I'm on the O'Banion's dance floor," she says.

As much as Shelton loved those songs—the Ramones' "Sheena Is a Punk Rocker," Ultra-

vox's "Someone Else's Clothes," Roxy Music's "Dance Away"—the state of O'Banion's itself put her off. "The place was such a dive," she says. "The ladies' room was out of order for six months, and they were not interested at all in fixing that. The men's room—we all probably needed typhoid shots from going in there." She had a hunch she could launch her own club devoted to punk rock's arty sibling, and make it a place where she wouldn't have to hold her pee to hang out. She even had a venue chosen—in fact she already worked there. In July 1979, she pitched the owners of

Hoots, Larry Acciari and Eric Larson, on her new-wave concept. They gave her three weeks to prove it could work. She did it in one night.

Shelton kicked off her experiment on July 25, the same night as a Blondie concert at Park West. Her sisters, Mary and Julie, and Julie's boyfriend Bob Felsenthal handed out flyers outside Park West for a new-wave party at Hoots—it was about half a mile north, down an alley at 2350 N. Clark. After the show, hundreds of Blondie fans walked over. "It was so packed that tables got ripped out of the floor," Shelton says. "They weren't staffed for it.

None of us knew what to expect. I was in the DJ booth freaking out—I had, like, 30 records.”

Acciari and Larson were impressed enough to give Shelton carte blanche to transform Hoots into a new-wave club. The place needed a new name, and Shelton and her friends drew up a list of possibilities. “We wanted it to be new and different, but ‘new’ is kind of a dumb name,” she says. By the end of the summer, they’d settled on the Latin for “new”: Neo.

Shelton’s vision for Neo lasted only a few years. She left in 1982, after Cal Fortis, future cofounder of Big Time Productions, bought the club from Acciari and Larson. (Fortis didn’t respond to my messages, so I’m not sure if he had any partners in the purchase.) But Neo kept its doors open for decades after new wave’s days as a hot trend ended. It endured for 36 years, finally closing in July 2015. It outlasted almost every alternative club of its era, in part because future DJs were able to expand on Shelton’s work.

In the 1990s, Neo earned a reputation as a dyed-in-the-wool goth cave, but by that point the club had already hosted DJs whose expansive tastes included any style of music

#### NOCTURNA

DJ Scary Lady Sarah spins current and classic goth, industrial, postpunk, darkwave, and more. Sat 12/11, 10 PM, Metro, 3730 N. Clark, \$15, \$12 in advance, 18+

#### INDUSTRIAL ACCIDENT: THE STORY OF WAX TRAX! RECORDS

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that could be called “alternative” (which, while never an especially precise category, did at least indicate a degree of subcultural affiliation in the 90s). Depending on the night, you could hear industrial, house, hip-hop, or grunge; Scary Lady Sarah, the DJ and Chicago goth eminence who cofounded the long-running series Nocturna at Neo in 1988, recalls DJs spinning “Smells Like Teen Spirit” twice in a single set at the song’s peak.

Sarah was a Neo regular before she began working there, as were many of the DJs I spoke to for this piece. Most look back on their time at Neo with a sense of belonging that verges on ownership, and that sensibility extended to many of the club’s patrons. “One of the

defining characteristics about Neo that I love the most: the people that came there were regulars,” says Jeff Pazen, who began DJing at Neo in the 1980s. “Like, Monday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. I’m willing to bet that 60 percent of the people that were there were there every single one of those nights. That was their home. That was their living room. They get together with friends, they’d all come in.”

Thirty-six years was long enough that some of the earliest Neo diehards could introduce their children to the club. “It probably happened a dozen times—twentysomethings coming up with their sixtysomething parents,” says Neo bouncer Brian James Dickie, who worked at the club from 2002 till its closure. “It’s physically the same place, but it means so many different things to both of those people. It’s really cool, seeing that one place can be a thousand different things.” Dickie saw at least one teenager’s birthday party at Neo, along with weddings and funerals. The club was usually 21 and up, but it could open its doors to everyone when rented during the day.

On June 27, 2012, Neo hosted a public memorial service for club regular Jamie Duffy, who’d overdosed on sleeping pills. He’d been an industrial-scene linchpin, serving as a recording engineer for several bands and playing guitar in Acumen Nation. The band’s front man, Jason Novak, helped organize a memorial concert called Cold Waves that September at Bottom Lounge; members of beloved Wax Trax! band Revolting Cocks reunited to headline.

The event has since grown into an annual festival of industrial and darkwave music; this past September, Cold Waves lasted three days at Metro and Smart Bar (plus a kickoff party on a fourth day) and included Belgian EBM pioneers Front 242, emerging Chicago acts Fee Lion and Pixel Grip, and early Neo DJ Bud Sweet. In 2017, a local nonprofit called Darkest Before Dawn was founded in Duffy’s memory, and since then Cold Waves has donated part of its proceeds to support DB4D’s mission of providing mental-health resources for nightlife-industry professionals.

The 2020 incarnation of Cold Waves was virtual, and its online programming included a stream of the new documentary *2350 Last Call: The Neo Story*, which recounts the club’s final week while excavating its history. Director Eric Richter had been pitching the documentary to distributors with no luck, and Cold Waves offered the public its first chance to see the completed version of *2350 Last Call*.

Richter used the money Cold Waves paid him to manufacture DVDs of the film. “My goal was to make it as cheap as possible, so as many people can see it as possible, and to have it be something that’s cool and not just on YouTube,” he says. “They asked me to be a part of their festival at a time that I was looking to make these DVDs, and it really helped put me over the edge to allow me to sell the movie for \$5.”

Richter’s briskly paced 46-minute documentary is a great portrait of Neo, full of character, but of course no one film could capture everything. “I think there’s another, like, 30 different Neo stories out there that hopefully will get made or read,” he says.

This story won’t count every ring in Neo’s trunk either, but I still think it’s worth telling now—not least because I see traces of the club’s legacy wherever I look. (I’m not even counting the Neo nights that took over Thursdays at Debonair Social Club after Neo closed.) DJ Scary Lady Sarah has kept Nocturna going, for example, and on Saturday, December 11, Metro will host the series’s last night of the year. The following Thursday, December 16, when House of Vans shows the 2018 documentary *Industrial Accident: The Story of Wax Trax! Records*, Neo regular Franke Nardiello (aka My Life With the Thrill Kill Kult cofounder Groovie Mann) will be one of the special guests providing commentary and participating in a Q&A afterward. Al Jourgensen of Ministry, who appears in the film, won’t be present, but he recruited one of the band’s early members over drinks at Neo. Thursday’s screening celebrates the streaming premiere of *Accidents and Outtakes*, a brand-new collection of footage not used in the original documentary.

As influential as Neo was, the most famous mark it’s supposedly left on pop culture is actually just an urban legend. The fourth Matrix film comes out this month, and Keanu Reeves will reprise his role as Neo—a character that many people over the years have claimed (or merely assumed) was named after the club. For a long time I believed it myself, partly because the Wachowski sisters are Chicago natives.

There’s no deliberate connection between the two Neos, but the attraction of the idea is easy to see. The Matrix films capture the seductive and sinister allure of industrial music, and Neo first meets Trinity in a dark club while a dance remix of Rob Zombie’s “Dragula” throbs in the background. The collective hallucination of a deeper bond between the

character and the club became part of Neo’s evolving story.

**H**oots opened in 1975 as a disco attached to a continental restaurant called Squash Blossom. In 1979, Acciari and Larson, who also owned the restaurant, turned it into a wine bar called Gitanes. Hoots was suffering, though, in part because Chicago had raised the drinking age from 19 to 21 in March 1979—presumably the disco’s clientele included a lot of people under 21. “The whole crowd at Hoots was just gone, overnight,” says Shelton, who turned 21 that month.

At the time, Shelton was a cocktail waitress at a Henrici’s restaurant, and a coworker told her Hoots was



An especially enthusiastic reveler on Neo’s final night  
 @GLITTERGUTS

looking for DJs. Shelton already knew the ropes; in her teens she’d had a summer gig DJing at a Downers Grove disco. “I liked the technical aspects of it,” she says. “I liked working with the dance floor, even though I didn’t really like the music.” She was also eager to get out of cocktail waitressing, so she gave Acciari and Larson a call.

“They were getting a little desperate,” Shelton says. All the same, they asked her to audition. She DJed without pay for three nights, then pushed them to hire her. A few

continued from 23

months later, she brought them her idea for a new-wave club.

Shelton's sister Julie remembers passing out flyers at Park West before that fateful Blondie concert. "There was a long line of people waiting to get in," she says. "We just went up to everybody and said, 'You know, there's this new new-wave punk club opening—it's right down the street, come after the show.'"

Joe Shanahan went to see Blondie with his roommate, and after the show they walked to the new club. "We wanted to be part of that—we wanted to see what it was all about," he says. "I could tell it was successful because it was very busy."

Acciari and Larson pulled busboys from the restaurant to work the bar at what would soon become Neo, attempting to manage a crowd larger than they'd ever seen in the space. "At the end of the night, I just kept apologizing to them for how trashed the place was," Shelton says. "They were like, 'No, it was more money than we've made, like, ever.'"

Hoots officially went new wave, and Julie Shelton and Bob Felsenthal set about redecorating. They put up leopard-print flocked wallpaper on the wall across from the bar, replaced the purple shag carpet on the other walls with less gaudy gray carpet, and hung a big plush toy of a shark above the dance floor. By day, Felsenthal worked in marketing for the recently established *Crain's Chicago Business*, and he pulled in a few of his colleagues to help create visual branding for the new club. To design a logo, he recruited a graphic designer named Ralph Burch.

"We had walked in with an all-caps, elegant Neo logo that we had been using, but it wasn't quite right," Felsenthal says. "He wanted to give it a bit of a punky edge. So he just wrote the *NEO* in big letters on an absorbent piece of paper, then photographed it and blew it up. And we're like, 'Wow, that's it.' The way the ink absorbed into this paper gave it those rough edges around." Julie Shelton took the new logo to a neon-sign company, which made the pink "Neo" sign that hung above the mouth of the alley at 2350 N. Clark till the club's final night.

Julie Shelton and Felsenthal also handled promotion for Neo, which included making flyers, print advertisements, and radio ads for Bobby Skafish's XRT new-wave show, *Big Beat*. Chicago promoters Jam Productions, who booked at Park West, began advertising for Neo at Park West and hooking Neo up with concert tickets to give away. The club ran ads in arty Chicago new-wave zine *Praxis* and

**"My mom likes to refer to Neo as her first child. In a very legendary sense, we always knew about it. It was this cool thing that happened that I always would picture in my head, even as a little kid."**

—Buck Foley, son of Neo founder  
Suzanne Shelton

above all in the *Reader*.

Felsenthal remembers one early Neo *Reader* ad that used a photo he took of Suzanne and Julie Shelton, inspired by the chic appeal of fashion designer Betsey Johnson. "It was just their legs—I think one was in pleather, and the other was in stockings coming out of a cool skirt," he says. "That photograph represented the new look, but also that Neo was a place that women felt comfortable, could be cool, and dance. But it wasn't the disco thing—it was a whole different thing."

Suzanne Shelton developed that whole different thing from Neo's DJ booth. She spun five nights a week, which meant she was constantly seeking out new records. Acciari and Larson gave her an extra \$30 per week to buy new music, and fortunately a great shop had opened in late 1978 around half a mile west of Neo: Wax Trax! Records, run by Jim Nash and Dannie Flesher. The store had the subversive sounds Shelton sought, and she developed a camaraderie with the owners and employees.

"It was a very sort of give-and-take relationship," Shelton says. "I'd go in and talk to Jim Nash and say, 'What's new that you think I might be interested in?' Then we'd look at it, he'd talk about it. Sometimes he'd play a couple things for me. Sometimes I'd tell him about stuff that I had heard about."

Neo's reputation quickly reached beyond Chicago. Within the club's first few months in business, Shelton got a call from Danny Heaps, who DJed at the Mudd Club, a New York venue inspired by Chicago's very first punk hangout, a former gay bar operating under the name La Mere Vipere. Heaps and promoter Mark Josephson were forming a record pool called

Rockpool for like-minded DJs (they would soon help found the New Music Seminar), and he invited Shelton to join. "The first year they sent everybody lists of what all the other DJs were playing," she says. "So we'd sort of feed off of each other and what each other was finding."

In the three years Shelton DJed at Neo, she became a crucial interlocutor connecting the city to the wider punk scene. She became a reporting DJ for *Billboard*—that is, the magazine printed her top cuts every week—and other Chicago DJs would follow her lead. Managers of new-wave and punk acts (including Duran Duran and the Undertones) befriended her, which meant she could get advance copies of singles to spin at Neo.

Of course, before Neo developed these connections to the national punk scene, it swiftly became a crucial part of the scene in Chicago—that community was still quite small, and it was chronically short on options for late-night entertainment. "What was cool was that [Neo] was open late—it had a 4 AM license," Shanahan says. At the time he worked in the service industry, and Neo's hours fit his unconventional schedule. "Sometimes I wouldn't get off work until midnight, one o'clock," he says. "I'd go to Neo and kind of close the place."

In 1980, former La Mere Vipere co-owner Noah "Noe" Boudreau started working at Neo as a manager and DJ. "He DJed Thursday nights, and the La Mere crowd really loved that," Shelton says.

Ken Ellis, a doorman from La Mere and O'Banion's, also took a shine to Neo. "The music was good; I saw a lot of faces that I knew," Ellis says. "By April of 1980, I signed

up—Noe was running the place, so I asked him if he needed any help. 'Yeah, sure.' Signed me up. Not too long after that, he signed up a bunch of other guys that worked at La Mere with us." Neo sometimes had as many as five people working security on a given night; in 1981 they'd be joined by a bouncer named Kimball Paul, a six-foot-three tai chi teacher with a soft spot for Roxy Music.

"It was fun," Shanahan says. "It became kind of a clubhouse for us for many years."

Neo's reputation also attracted punk celebrities passing through Chicago. In summer 1980, when David Bowie visited to star in a stage production of *The Elephant Man*, he spent some of his free nights at Neo. Shelton recalls that he came to Boudreau's Brian Eno night, which bore the tongue-twisting name "One Eon of Eno by Noe at Neo." Bowie helped burnish Neo's cachet—one night Iggy Pop joined him—but Chicago punks had already adopted the club as their own, and it thrived because it catered to them. "Sometimes I felt it was the only game in town," Shanahan says.

Chicago's early punk clubs tended to be ephemeral. La Mere Vipere was open only 11 months before it mysteriously burned in April 1978. Punk club Oz, which emerged from a Rogers Park gay bar called the Greenleaf shortly after the La Mere fire, moved twice before closing for good in the middle of 1981. O'Banion's lasted from summer 1978 till early 1982. Exit would break that streak: the Old Town punk bar opened at 1653 N. Wells in 1981, and remained in that location for more than a decade.

Other new-wave clubs launched not long after Neo. Ves Pavlovic owned a bar called Lucky Number at 950 W. Wrightwood in Lincoln Park, and after getting hooked on punk he decided to give it a makeover. He debuted Club 950 on April 30, 1980, with the first and only performance by Special Affect, a new-wave band featuring two future Wax Trax! stars: Franke Nardiello and Al Jourgensen. "I remember I was lucky enough to get to go see that show," says Glenn Russell, who would later DJ at Neo. "And I was not old enough to be there."

Russell was studying acting at DePaul when he started going to new-wave and punk clubs with a fake ID. He first went to Neo in 1979. "I wore my father's pointed black tuxedo shoes, and I had a polka dot skinny tie on," he says. "I'm sure I had a vintage jacket that I had gotten at a thrift store, and I probably had glasses and was smoking a cigarette because I wanted

to look as old as I could.” Kimball Paul let him in, and Russell parked in a corner, feeling a little intimidated in a room full of strangers and nervous he’d be found out as underage. Soon the music loosened him up, though, and he became entranced by the DJ: Suzanne Shelton.

Russell already had some experience DJing: after his family moved to Massachusetts in the late 70s, he worked a summer job spinning hits from the 50s and 60s at the Buccaneer Lounge in Agawam, Massachusetts. In 1984 he’d earn a spot on the roster at Neo, having built a reputation DJing at a series of clubs that were warming up to new wave—including Octagon, which had opened in July ’83 just north of Neo at 2483 N. Clark. Russell arrived at Neo shortly after Bud Sweet left, more or less replacing him.

When Russell was hired at the club, long-time Neo DJ Jeff Pazen had just started there. Like Russell, Pazen had begun going to the city’s punk and new-wave clubs before he was old enough to do it legally. He’d enrolled at the Illinois Institute of Technology in 1981, and he spun punk records at college parties here and there. When he got the opportunity to visit the north side, he’d make his way to Club 950. Pazen was drawn in by its video games, but he quickly gravitated toward one of the club’s DJs: Boudreau, who’d moved to 950 after getting fired from Neo in 1982.

Boudreau introduced Pazen to Mark Clifton, a record buyer at Wax Trax! by day who worked as 950’s musical director by night. In 1983, Clifton offered Pazen his first DJ set at the club. “He gave me a spot that coincided with my birthday—at midnight, I was going to turn 20 years old,” Pazen says. “So I’m sneaking in for my first night DJing under the auspices of being legal. I’m 19 fucking years old, playing records in a bar.”

If it seems like DJs bounced from club to club, that’s because they often did. Audiences did too, though unlike DJs they’d routinely visit several in a night. “You never almost never went to one club, you always went to a few—and that was super fun because you’d run into different friends,” Russell says. “Every night, I swear to you, every night was an adventure. And that was what was so much fun. You never knew who you’d run into or what was going to happen.”

Russell quit Neo in 1985 to work at Exit, but Neo hadn’t seen the last of him. One night when he and Pazen were booked at Exit and Neo, respectively, they decided to pull a midset switcheroo without telling anyone. At midnight, both DJs began playing the 12-

inch remix of The The’s “Uncertain Smile,” a ten-minute song that gave them just enough time to hop on their motorcycles and speed off to the other club. “He got to Neo as the manager was freaking out, trying to put a record on,” Pazen says. “I got to Exit as the manager was freaking out trying to put a record on. And we finished out each other’s nights. It was a riot. People were going back and forth—‘We can’t believe you did this!’”

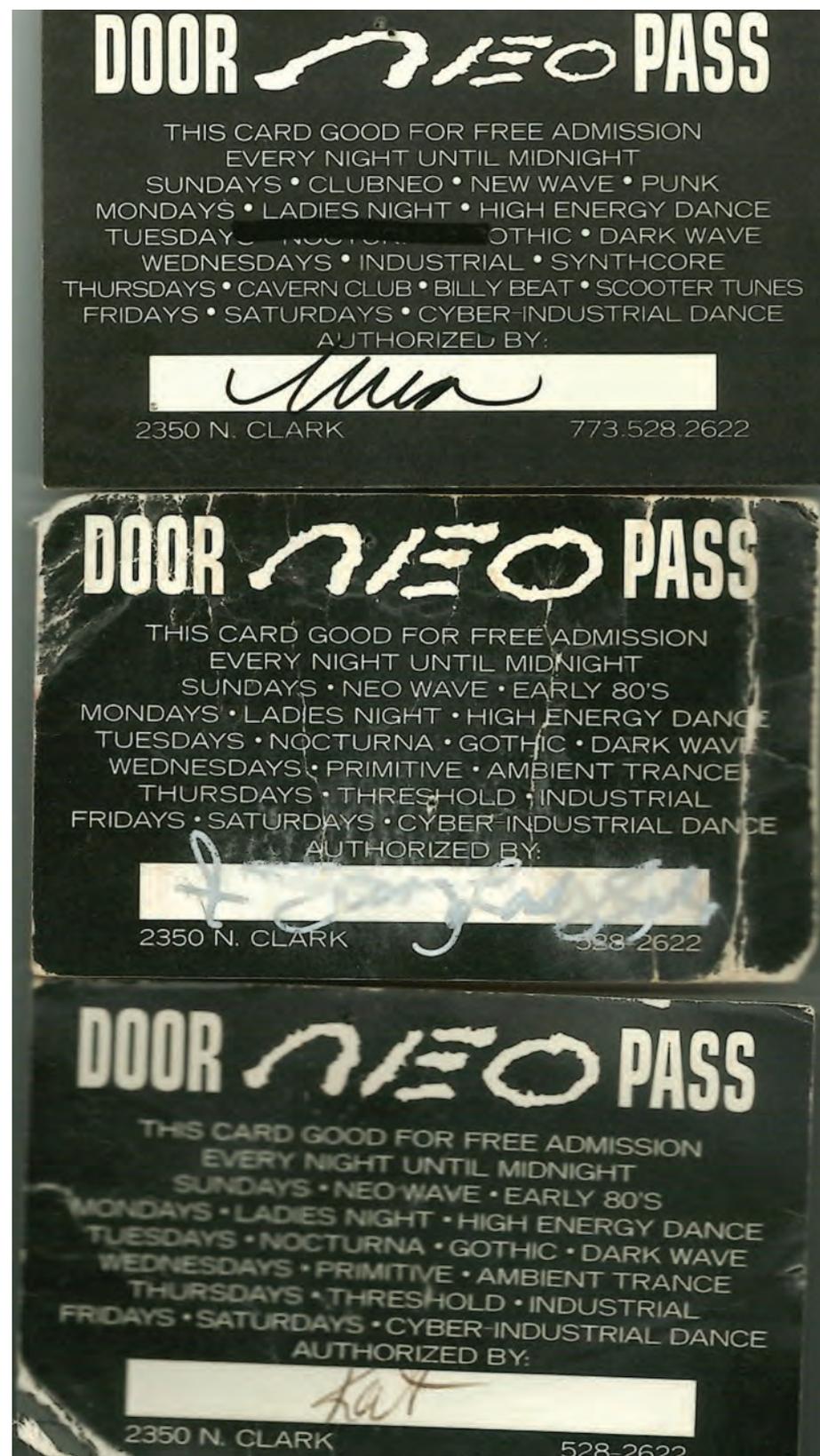
As stressful as that stunt surely was for Pazen and Russell’s bosses, at least the motorcycles stayed where they belonged. But on a quiet night in 1985, before Russell left Neo for Exit, he was playing the Jesus and Mary Chain’s “Never Understand” when Pazen pulled his motorcycle into the club. “I parked my motorcycle on the dance floor, and while he played ‘Never Understand,’ I just revved my motorcycle over the top of the Reid brothers going to town—and of course I filled the place with carbon dioxide,” Pazen says. “Not the only time my motorcycle was in Neo either.”

In the early 1980s, Joe Shanahan began throwing parties at his apartment near North and Wells in Old Town, and he’d DJ on a couple turntables in his living room. “Some of these parties would go late,” he says. “They’d go to like, eight, nine, ten in the morning, but we were all industry people—didn’t have regular jobs—or we were students.” Shanahan strung together music he’d heard at his favorite clubs, La Mere and the Warehouse. So when he got asked to DJ at Neo in late 1981, Shanahan did what he knew best: his sets included punk, disco, soul, postpunk, and new wave. He packed the dance floor, but management complained about some of his records.

“They were like, ‘Hey, this sounds like disco. This is sounding like what this place used to be. We’re a new-wave club. We don’t play that music,’” Shanahan says. “And I was like, ‘Oh my God. Now I know; I have to open my own club.’” In July 1982, Shanahan threw an opening party for Smart Bar with the godfather of house music, Frankie Knuckles.

After Acciari and Larson sold Neo in 1982, new wave’s grip on the club loosened. When Pazen came aboard in ’84, he had a lot of room to experiment, in part because he was DJing on Mondays—that was the club’s ladies’ night, and it initially only drew a few people looking for free drinks.

“I started doing all sorts of things during that time, but really just pushing on a certain sound—of course, with different genres, and I absolutely had a certain snob aspect,” Pazen



A collection of Neo passes, some of which are old enough that the club didn't feel the need to add the area code to its phone number. ©STEPHANIE MANIS

# DRINKS

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says. If you could hear it in the mainstream clubs on Rush Street or if it sounded “too pop,” he wouldn’t touch it. He felt confident enough in his skills that when a friend dared him to spin an hour of hip-hop at Neo, he spun 59 minutes—just to prove he could do it whenever he wanted. “He goes, ‘Another minute and you would’ve made 20 bucks,’” Pazen recalls. “I go, ‘Come back next week, I’ll take your money.’”

Within a few years, Pazen had made Monday nights a hit. “Monday night became a place where Prince came,” he says. “Monday night became a place where they were clearing out a table near the DJ booth for Jimmy Page. It really blew up.”

By the late 1980s, it’d been years since Neo had stuck to one definitive sound. Bill Saveley, who began DJing there in 1988, loved the subversive dance of Depeche Mode and New Order, the dour postpunk of Sisters of Mercy, and the cold synth pop of Soft Cell. “And when the industrial thing hit, and Chicago’s Wax Trax!, we played a lot of Ministry, we played a lot of Revolting Cocks, Front 242, that kind of stuff,” he says.

When Russell auditioned to work at Neo in 1984, he spun a few records of the kind of foreboding postpunk favored by UK label 4AD. “At the time I called it ‘death and horror,’” he says. “Which would later become goth.”

In 1988, Neo owners Cal Fortis and Ken Smith hired local architect and Neo regular Jordan Mozer to overhaul Neo’s interior. (The following year, Fortis and Smith would found Big Time Productions, which opened Crobar in 1992.) As Mozer recalls it, Fortis came up with the idea to model the club’s new look on Lower Wacker Drive.



“The appeal of Lower Wacker Drive is that it’s not Michigan Avenue, it’s not Wacker Drive—it’s Lower Wacker Drive, so you have to discover it, you kind of have to know about it, and there’s something underground,” Mozer says. “That’s the mythos of a club, right? That it’s underground, it’s a secret—it’s on the edge of things, and there’s something gothic-romantic about it.”

Mozer drew inspiration from gothic literature and *Blade Runner*—humans in the film dismissively call the replicants “skin jobs,” a term Mozer applies positively to his Neo renovation. “We were just reskinning it to give it a quick face-lift and change the mood.” The renovation wrapped up just in time for the November debut of Nocturna, which focused on goth music, death rock, and dark postpunk.

Nocturna cofounder Scary Lady Sarah first visited Neo in 1987, when she was 20 years old, but she’d been curious about the club since 1980, when she learned about it from Felsen-thal’s *Reader* advertisements. She went to Neo with a fake ID because she’d seen a *Reader* ad for an event called “Night Music” that listed



the kind of goth bands she loved. “I didn’t know a single person, and I started talking to one of the DJs,” Sarah says. “We just hit it off, right off the bat. We became instant friends.”

Sarah and that DJ, who went by Brother Tom, loved a lot of the same dark, ethereal music. They decided to collaborate on a series showcasing favorites from the 4AD label and relatively obscure acts such as 17 Pygmies. “Tom came up with the name,” Sarah says. “He said he’d always wanted to do something called ‘Nocturna.’” The series launched on a Tuesday; in its earliest incarnations, Tom and a few other folks would spin records while Sarah tended bar, though soon Sarah was tak-

ing turns on the decks herself. “Tom would DJ one night, one week, and I would bartend, and then the next week, we’d switch,” Sarah says.

Because one of them was always playing host rather than tethered to the turntables, Tom and Sarah could get to know their fellow goth fanatics and incubate a community. “A lot of times, we’d have 200 people in the room, which is shocking to me now,” Sarah says. “There was a tight-knit and pretty dedicated local goth scene back in those days.” In the 1990s, Chicago goths had a few places where they could spend their time and money, many of them in Lakeview; they could buy music and attend poetry readings at Armageddon Records (711 W. Belmont) or find new clothes and



get pierced at Medusa’s Circle (3268 N. Clark). “Even Pick Me Up Cafe, when they were open 24 hours, I remember reading a review saying, like, ‘Best place in Chicago to see a goth at any hour of the day,’” Sarah says.

The goth scene supported Sarah and followed her activities, in part because she was so dedicated to strengthening that scene. During Nocturna’s nine years at Neo, she also spun at other clubs, threw an annual festival called Saturnalia, and booked touring bands with money she made from a business she ran with her husband at the time, a relaxation and flotation center called SpaceTime Tanks.

“I was doing all this stuff, and putting it all into the goth scene, and not getting a lot back from Neo itself, aside from working there,” Sarah says. “Nocturna was kind of like the hub, but it paid very little.” She had started planning to open her own club—she had a promising lead on a former funeral home on Lincoln Avenue—when Neo fired her in 1997.

Fortunately at that point Sarah had already trademarked the name Nocturna. (Tom, by then living in Portland, Oregon, gave her his blessing.) But Neo’s ownership didn’t want her to use the name. “There was a lawsuit, and I won,” Sarah says. “It was a year that was incredibly, incredibly draining, exhausting,



Faces of Neo. From lower left to upper right: Trixie Longstocking, Eli Rasputin and Dragon, bartenders Dann Szymczak and Kitty Schultz, and someone known to the photographer only as “Bill” © SIMIN KOERNIG

financially challenging, and sad.” She continued to host Nocturna events, and she never set foot inside Neo again.

As a teenager in the 1980s, Lilly Wachowski went clubbing at Medusa’s, a Lakeview juice bar with strong ties to Wax Trax! Records and the house-music scene. In her early 20s she sought out venues and clubs with a more aggressive punk style, including Exit and Dreamerz in Wicker Park. She liked the Jesus Lizard, Public Enemy, and Rage Against the Machine, and her impression of Neo didn’t square with those interests. “I perceived that as being, like, a more affluent crowd, even though that was my perception as somebody that was more into angrier music,” she says. “All of the music that I was into was because I was an angry individual, because I was in this body that I wasn’t happy in.”

Wachowski was a fan of at least one band that had a place at Neo: Ministry (along with several other acts in that style) helped fuel her and her sister, Lana, through their writing sessions. “There’s so much action in those early scripts that we did that [the music] was just, like, propelling us along,” she says. “As a young writer, it’s like you have to overcome all of these insecurities in your writing and let yourself be dragged along in that propulsive state as a way to overcome that pain. Or it helped me, anyway.”

*The Matrix*, the second film written and ➔

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directed by Lana and Lilly Wachowski, came out in March 1999. (Lilly is not involved in the new *The Matrix Resurrections*.) Lilly knows that many people imagine *The Matrix* to have some sort of connection to the nightclub Neo, and she's willing to indulge them even though she never went there herself. "Art doesn't form in a vacuum," she says. "We're all influenced by everything that comes before us. I can't sit here and say for sure that the club Neo—'Oh, definitely not!' It's not like we said, 'Hey, we love that club, let's name that character this.' It was the name of a club, and we were writing a lot about underground scenes."

Wachowski encourages people to interpret her work how they will, with one big exception. "I want to put my foot down in terms of the alt-right and what they've done to the idea of red-pilling," she says. "That gross misinterpretation is something that really goes against the essence of the movie. So I'm happy to put my foot down every once in a while."

She's far more generous toward the people who've seen their favorite nightclub reflected in *The Matrix*. "I think human connectivity is where all of our movies have ended up going towards," she says. "All of our movies are, at their base, about love and human connection. The fact that people who went to this club are saying, 'They named it because of this,' I think that's cool. I like that."

In the mid-80s, Jeff Moyer went to Neo as often as he could to see his favorite DJs: Jeff Pazen, Bud Sweet, Bobby Shea, and Gil Burns. "They were all mentors to me when I started DJing," Moyer says. He liked to sit on a ledge that gave him a good view into the DJ booth, and in 1989 he found his way into it: Neo hired him, and he spun at the club for about a year and a half.

He was eventually fired—apparently the most common way for DJs to leave gigs at Neo. Because the club's cachet had begun to slip, Moyer says, management pushed him to play crowd-pleasing tracks that didn't fit his style. "You're playing this Wax Trax!-y industrial stuff, but they still want you to fit in the house music, and it was not really a good mix of genres," he explains. "I couldn't put it together very well at that point."

By 1996, according to a 2009 *Tribune* piece, Neo was operating only three nights a week, but Moyer still liked to hang out there whenever he had the time. He landed back behind the decks in 2000, and within a few years, the club's fortunes had rebounded under the lead-

ership of Scott Wilkins, who'd come aboard as manager in the early 2000s.

"I like to think that I was part of the resurgence, but to be honest a bunch of other places were closing," Moyer says. During that era, he was spinning on Saturdays. "It's more consolidating the crowd—they didn't have a lot of places to go anymore. Or maybe they liked what I was doing, and that made them go to Neo more."

Long-running new-wave party Planet Earth, launched in 1994 by future Late Bar cofounder Dave Roberts, made Neo a hot spot on Thursdays too. "There was a resurgence of people liking the 80s, so that for sure helped," Moyer says. "It's not like the place got cleaned up or anything. It was a dive, and it just got worse and worse."

In 2009, Suzanne Shelton connected with Wilkins and set about organizing a 30th-anniversary party at Neo. She tracked down DJs from the club's various eras, and when the event arrived, she brought her kids. "My mom likes to refer to Neo as her first child," says Shelton's son, Buck Foley. "In a very legendary sense, we always knew about it. It was this cool thing that happened that I always would picture in my head, even as a little kid."

When Shelton's children were young, she'd shared with them her love for punk, including "Sheena Is a Punk Rocker" and other songs that reminded her of O'Banion's. "I'll always think of my mom when I hear that song," Foley says. "Music always got her energized, and that's a song she would play when she was in a good mood. She'd do this thing where she'd ball up her fists and bounce around."

Foley played bass in local punk band the Infected, who in 2010 made the first of several appearances at Riot Fest. The festival hired Foley two years later. "I was the first non-intern," he says. "I was the second employee of the company." He started out working promotions and became a talent buyer for Riot Fest in 2014. "Probably 2015 is really when I came into my own as a talent buyer," he says. "I started feeling pretty confident about decisions and how to pursue certain acts."

In 2015, Foley brought Post Malone to Riot Fest for his first Chicago performance. He also booked the Village People in 2019, pushing even harder against the festival's public image as a nostalgia party for aging rockers. "Those of us who are driven to counterculture and things that traditionally haven't been cool at first, we just feel a little bit like outcasts," he



A dancer named Saro at Dave Roberts's Planet Earth new-wave night in 2005. © KIRK WILLIAMSON

says. "One thing that I did notice pretty quickly was the ability of music to bring people together. And that's something that I saw in myself directly from my mother."

Neo began to deteriorate in its final years—by then the major renovation in 1988 was decades in the past, and the owners weren't putting in more money for improvements. Fortis and Smith had moved their company to Miami, which couldn't have helped. "Pretty much we'd call someone in for the toilets," says bouncer Brian James Dickie. "But other than that, we were keeping the place together ourselves."

"There were always rumors of Neo closing or for sale," Moyer says. "None of those ever happened until it actually did get closed." Dickie says he found out Neo would shut down ten days before closing night, which arrived on July 30, 2015. DNAinfo reported that the landlord, John Crombie, had tried to negotiate a new lease with Neo's owners, but that the talks had fallen apart.

Thousands of people showed up for the club's final week, with lines stretching out the alley, north on Clark, and westbound around the corner onto Fullerton. Shelton and Moyer DJed closing night, and in the wee hours of July 31, Moyer selected the last song: "Dance Away" by Roxy Music. Beloved bouncer Kimball Paul, nicknamed the "King of Neo," had

died the year before, and he'd loved the band. Then Dickie told Moyer he could play one more cut, and he threw on Fugazi's "Waiting Room."

Moyer still considers "Dance Away" the final song played at Neo, though, because that's the choice he put careful thought into. "I couldn't listen to that Roxy song for the longest time," he says. "I'd be in the car and listening to Sirius XM, and every once in a while they'd play the Roxy Music song, and tears would be in my eyes."

In August, Metro hosted the Neo Reunion 2021. Shelton, Scary Lady Sarah, Moyer, Russell, and Saveley were among the DJs; part of the proceeds went toward Darkest Before Dawn. Because Shelton is in charge of organizing such reunions, they're mostly pretty stressful for her. "The only part of it, for me, that's fun at all is my hour that I get to DJ," she says. "When I look around the room and see how happy it makes people—I mean, I wish I could take you there for a minute, because you just look around the room, and people are so happy to be there with their people, hearing that music." ■

🐦 @imLeor



## THEATRICAL LIBATIONS

# Dramatic drinks, comedic cocktails

A Theater Wit bartender on creating show-themed beverages

By **KERRY REID**

There was a time when concessions at Chicago live theaters were pretty basic: water, soda, candy, coffee, tea, and maybe some beer in a can or wine in a box (depending on whether or not the venue had a liquor license). But as theater bars have expanded their range of legal booze options (or in the case of theaters like Steppenwolf and the Den, opened a separate bar/cafe where people can hang out), their bartenders have become more creative with themed cocktails. Even Chicago Children's Theatre gets into the act; the "tea" at their current show, *The Beatrix Potter Holiday Tea Party*, is actually (nonspiked, natch) chocolate milk.

Alexa Ulrich is the front-of-house manager for Theater Wit, where she oversees the bar operations as well as box office and other patron services. I caught up with her to get a little bit of insight into how she and her staff come up with their creative drinks menu.

**Kerry Reid: How long have you been working at Theater Wit and what brought you there?**

**Alexa Ulrich:** I've been at Theater Wit coming up on seven years, if you include COVID, since we were closed for such a long time. I actually started as a house manager. I was trying to go

Alexa Ulrich CLARE COONEY

Cocktail menu at Theater Wit JAY KELLY

to a show that I saw on the marquee. It was sold out, so I came back the next day to try to get in, and it was sold out again. It was closing, and I was so disappointed, because I felt like, "Man, I really wanted to see this show. It sounded like fun." And they were really nice and they felt really bad that I couldn't get in, so they asked if I wanted to see another show that was playing, which was *Mr. Burns*, the first time that they did it in 2015. They just redid the play for opening after COVID in August.

I started chatting with them. I had just moved to the city. I ended up getting a job house managing, and I didn't start bartending for a long time. Because the last person who got hired as a house manager had started bartending and loved bartending so much that she stopped being a house manager. So when I got hired, they said, "You have to be a house manager. You can't bartend, even though it's fun." I was house managing for a long time and became good friends with everybody. The bar manager at the time, Majel Cuza—she's the one who actually came up with the idea of doing fun show drinks. She always had awesome new beers and wines from local vendors, and she would make these cocktails based on every staff member. So everyone kind of got a cool drink. Majel got a job at a Shakespeare festival, and then the bar manager position was open. None of the bartenders were able to do it, so they were like, "OK, Alexa, we know we said you could never be a bartender, but we need a bar manager."

**What's your signature drink?**

Mine is called the Surly Shirley, because I wanted it to taste like a Shirley Temple. But all of our drinks are quite strong. We use a citrus vodka and some cherry liqueur, along with some other things.

**What's the process for coming up with special show-themed drinks?**

Usually when a show is going into rehearsals, we start to chat with them about themes and ideas from the show. Especially if it's one of our own produced shows, like *Mr. Burns*, we may already have something specific in mind. We kind of start experimenting based off of any ideas for flavors, or names of a drink. At this point we have a huge long list of all these

concoctions we've made.

For *Who's Holiday*, we were planning it over the weekend during previews because we usually have more hot drinks [in winter]. We do spiced apple cider and things like that. But with COVID, we haven't been able to let drinks into the theater. People want faster drinks, and so we decided to do a dessert shot drink [Cindy's Little Helper] for this show. We came up with a cherry chocolate drink with some touches like whipped cream to make it cute. Since it's about Cindy Lou Who all grown up, it's very silly.

A couple of drinks we just renamed for the holiday. Like *The Grinch*—we have a green drink. It's really Jeremy's drink [Jeremy Wechsler, Theater Wit producing artistic director]. Jeremy's Last Word, which has chartreuse in it to give it that crazy green color. In winter, it's called *The Grinch*.

Krampus Cranberry is always a fun one. We use Koval cranberry gin. We love Koval. We have a fun relationship with them. They're local, they're female-owned, and our bar is all female bartenders so we're like, "Yay, we love Koval."

**Do you do nonalcoholic speciality drinks?**

One of our staff members, Evan [Bell], we were trying to make him a cocktail and he said, "Well, I don't drink alcohol. Can my drink not have alcohol?" So we do make a cherry lime drink that is really like Evan's drink, the Belmont Red Lime, which can definitely be made with no alcohol.

**Themed drinks seem to be the norm now at theater bars. Do you think patrons expect it or look forward to trying them out?**

For *Mr. Burns*, we added a second show drink, which was a shot that people could take before going into the show. We made a Flaming Moe shot, which is a drink from the TV show. And people were excited; they come in and they're *Simpsons* fans and they recall that episode. We sold a lot of Flaming Moes.

You'll always see a section of staff-inspired cocktails. It's just fun to have everybody included and involved with making the drinks, and when we talk about them to patrons, we're able to say, "This is Rebecca's drink," or "This is Corrie's drink and she's right over there." It's just a nice way to have that little bit of community.

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# ARTS & CULTURE



CPL's headquarters near Washington and Michigan around 1900 (the Chicago Cultural Center is now in that building); Harold Washington Library Center became the central branch in 1991.  LEFT: LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, PRINTS & PHOTOGRAPHS DIVISION; RIGHT: COURTESY THE CITY OF CHICAGO

## MEMORIES

### Archiving the city's past

A newly digitized collection of images on CPL's website is a boon to historians.

By **MAX GRINNELL**

Cities change. As Chicago is a city and most certainly not exempt from this immutable law, I can tell you that Chicago will change in some fashion by the time you finish reading this piece. By the time you finish this sentence a family might have packed up their belongings in Chatham to relocate to an Atlanta suburb, another construction crane may make an appearance in River North, and perhaps a student at DePaul is planning to transfer out of state.

Taken cumulatively, these changes can be tremendous. Chicagoans and others make decisions individually and collectively that affect the tenor of the city and its community areas, culture, architecture, and in a very real way, the cadence of how people interact with each other in space and time.

What is the visual record of these changes? In recent years, there has been an exponential explosion of data visualization, infographics, TikTok, and countless other forms of expres-

sion that tell us about how Chicago is and how Chicago was. Everything ends up in the past tense—that is, in part, how history works.

When it comes to thinking about Chicago's past I do have more than a slight preference for photographs as a starting point for my own personal and academic excavations. Sure, a thousand words and all that jazz, yet there's something else to think about. What about the thousand-plus questions you can find in each and every single photograph? OK, a bit

of hyperbole, but after all these are Chicago photographs we are talking about.

And it was through a felicitous bit of Chicagoscrolling (much better than doomscrolling—thank you Lists feature) on Twitter that brought me to the wondrous Chicago Department of Urban Renewal Records's Photographic Negatives Digital Collection. This prodigious assemblage digitized by the Chicago Public Library's Special Collections and Preservation Division contains almost

## CHICAGO DEPARTMENT OF URBAN RENEWAL RECORDS: PHOTOGRAPHIC NEGATIVES DIGITAL COLLECTION

Available to view for scholarly or educational use at [chipublib.org](http://chipublib.org)

16,000 negatives organized by subject (think plywood, dwellings, light fixtures), community area, and date.

As I clicked twice on the collection site to peruse the Hyde Park photographs, I got a bit teary when I saw that there were over 1,200 items. My mind always meanders into nostalgia, and I remembered the uphill battle I faced when I was finding images for my book (*Hyde Park, Illinois*, published by Arcadia in 2001).

This visual treasure hunt led me to write letters to the *Hyde Park Herald*, the *University of Chicago [Alumni] Magazine*, the *Chicago Tribune*, and the *Chicago Sun-Times* gently pleading for readers to send me their images documenting Hyde Park history. I concluded most of these humble pleas with the phrase, “I have a particularly keen interest in items related to urban renewal.”

And after a few weeks, I began to receive replies in my mailbox on South Drexel. The first one came from a Very Important Hyde Parker who insisted that urban renewal was the best thing that ever happened to Hyde Park. Their letter to me concluded with, “Young man, it’s best to remember that progress has a price.”

There were promising notes as well. One woman whose father ran a pool hall on 55th Street offered me seven pages of handwritten memories detailing their time in Hyde Park from 1950 to 1965. Another woman wrote to me and invited me to come by her South Loop apartment to borrow her collection of informal portraits taken solely under the Metra (née Illinois Central) underpasses at 55th, 56th, and 57th Streets in the late 60s.

After a few months, I grew a bit despondent. I needed at least two dozen images documenting urban renewal in Hyde Park and my personal photographic cupboards were quite bare. On the same day, I received two most promising letters. The first was from an antiquarian bookseller in Washington, D.C. He had been a graduate student at the University of Chicago in the early 1960s and during his free time, he spent hours taking what he called “decay” shots. Essentially, it was a series of

photographs showing the demolition of structures along 55th Street, including the building that housed the Compass Theatre. These photographs were a gift from a stranger and I will never forget his kindness.

The second letter that day arrived from Paul Petrie, who lived a few blocks from me on Blackstone. Mr. Petrie wrote to inform me that he had hundreds of neatly organized photographs documenting buildings around Hyde Park and Woodlawn that had been demolished during the urban renewal process. When I came to his home to look through this cornucopia, I asked him how he acquired these images. He informed me that he had been the director of the University of Chicago’s real estate operations for over 45 years. When I asked him why he responded to my letter, he said, “Well, I just thought it was time someone else took a look at these.” A rather phlegmatic response was what I thought, then and now.

I’m thinking about Paul’s response as I pick up the phone to call Johanna Russ, the archivist at the Chicago Public Library responsible for processing this prodigious collection. I ask her how this collection came to the library and she tells me that it’s not completely clear. “Apparently, a former employee of the Department of Urban Renewal had tucked all of this stuff in a closet near his desk,” she says. The first thing that comes to my mind is when I heard years ago that Illinois Central railroad employees scavenged through dumpsters behind the former Illinois Central station near Roosevelt Road to preserve thousands of items unceremoniously dumped by the demolition company. A fortuitous bit of preservation, if you will.

Russ’s comment reminds me about the first time I ever heard about the Department of Urban Renewal. When I arrived in Chicago in 1994, the department had only been dissolved for two years. As their name suggests, the department was responsible for overseeing site clearance selection throughout the city and assigning rehabilitation funds. This process was far from equitable, and as James Baldwin (among others) noted, in many ways the process was seen as a form of “Negro removal,” complicit in forcing Black Chicagoans and countless others to move with little or no relocation support.

In a very real way, this collection is a visual reminder of that painful process, written into the fabric of communities including Lincoln Park, Woodlawn, Hyde Park, and the Near West Side. It is a collection that documents government-sponsored gentrification, cre-

ative destruction, and more broadly, the transformation of the built environment over a period of four decades.

It’s a lot to think about and as Russ tells me about the future plans for the collection, which include geocoding the photographs’ locations around the city, I ask her about her favorite photograph.

“The collection is so massive, it’s hard to pick just one,” Russ tells me. “One of my favorites is by Mildred Mead, a photographer whose work is especially striking. Mead does such a fantastic job capturing the people affected by urban renewal. This image was the only ‘people’ image by Mead that I saw in the digital collection, but it is indicative of the kinds of portraits Mead creates while also showing the backyard of a house targeted for improvement by the Department of Urban Renewal.”

As I hear this, I remember that I received a phone call from Mildred Mead back in 2000 when I started scurrying around looking for photographs of urban renewal for my Hyde Park book. We talked briefly on the phone and I told her I would call her back in a few weeks.

I ended up calling her back many months later. When I did, I learned she had passed away a few days prior. A door had closed.

Russ talked about Mead’s work while telling me about an undated photograph titled *5738 S. Blackstone-rear*. “The people she portrays are often children and either appear [as the girl in the photo] surprised to find a photographer watching them,” she said, “or once they realize they’re in the frame, they flash genuine smiles that make you want to know their stories.”

I think about what Russ says and I decide to tell her a bit about my quest to locate similar urban renewal photographs several decades ago. I tell her about wandering through city agency archives, my gentle pleas for yellowing ephemera, and my time spent with Paul Petrie.

Somewhat awkwardly, I add, “I suppose he’s dead now.” And I’m not sure why I felt the need to add this.

Russ asks, “I wonder what ever happened to his photographs?”

I have no idea. 📷

🐦 @theurbanologist

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A 2020 work by Andrea Bowers © JEFF MCLANE COURTESY MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART CHICAGO

## ART REVIEW

## Are neon signs really enough?

Artist Andrea Bowers's work at the MCA aims to agitate and organize.

By S. NICOLE LANE

There's a young person smiling, posing—hand on their hip—in front of a lit-up sign that reads: “EMPOWER WOMEN.” It intermittently flashes to include *ED*, making it “EMPOWERED.” The photo is snapped, the couple walks on. I've just entered Andrea Bowers's retrospective at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago.

Since the 90s, Bowers has been making work that nods at activism, joint action, and change on the west coast. In the exhibition catalog, curators Michael Darling (former chief curator at the MCA) and Connie Butler (chief curator at LA's Hammer Museum) write

that a variety of curators have been following Bowers's work for decades. And since she sprang on to the Los Angeles art scene, they've watched “her work mature and grow infinitely complex and political.” Bowers's work largely aims to educate, to invite viewers into a space where they can engage with various forms of advocacy. And the MCA made sure to include many examples—enough to dominate the entire top floor of the museum—of campaigning and activism in the styling of this exhibition.

The retrospective covers a slew of massive and diverse topics—immigration rights, an altar for missing Black girls in Chicago,

installations from environmental activists, love letters from Emma Goldman, Bowers's involvement with Occupy Wall Street, and reproductive rights.

Bowers is best known for photorealistic colored-pencil political drawings she created in the 90s and 00s. Rich in detail, these labor-intensive drawings depict subjects like a boy holding a cardboard sign that says “LIAR” on it. One drawing, titled *Ugly Americans*, features a man with an American flag painted on his face; he has an uncanny similarity to Trump, but is in fact a disgruntled football player. The intimate drawings are on a large-scale piece of paper, exemplifying the power of a person, no matter how small. These drawings would eventually propel Bowers into a wider view of community efforts and social practice. As Darling writes in the exhibition catalog, Bowers moved “even further away from the realm of theory and into one of action,” becoming involved in social justice movements, organizing, and protests.

In the mid-2000s, she moved away from her drawings and on to depicting 1960s and 1970s feminist protest buttons. Working with her colored pencils, she drew these buttons as wrapping paper patterns. The same issue Bowers focused on then—reproductive rights and abortion rights—has come up recently during COVID-19, as clinic access has been limited in many areas and new laws passed in Texas and Arkansas attack abortion.

In recent years, Bowers has started to work with cardboard as canvas. The large-scale piece, “Can You Think of Any Laws that Give Government the Power to Make Decisions About the Male Body?” is named after a quote by Kamala Harris during Brett Kavanaugh's confirmation hearing in 2018. “Can You Think . . .” is 108 by 78 inches and stitched together with cardboard and paint. The face of Harris is a stand-in for Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom and war. In this gallery are three other similarly sized cardboard paintings commenting on women's rights and other issues that smash sexism. When walking around the space, I see the skill of painting—many detailed in an ornate way—but cannot help but focus on the archival hell cardboard paintings must be. How do these images stay alive? Are they meant to deteriorate? What's the purpose of their deterioration if these social issues should be long-lasting, a fight that is far from over?

The following gallery space is dedicated to DREAMers, as pieces focusing on immigration rights and sanctuary cities fill up the walls. Each gallery you walk into has a new theme, and Bowers makes sure all social arenas are covered. There's a large cardboard drawing of a butterfly with the words, “MIGRATION IS BEAUTIFUL” in the middle of the monarch. When I visited the exhibition, this piece (titled *Papillon Monarque (Migration Is Beautiful)*) had another couple posing in front of it, staring into an iPhone, like the duo I saw upon entering.

Taking photos of these signs, of the artwork, of these messages is meant to be poignant. It's meant to say, “I care”; it's supposed to signify that yes, I too care about immigration and abortion rights and the environment and labor rights and Black girls missing in Chicago. Visitors take in the artwork behind their phone screen. The work in the exhibition serves as an Instagram backdrop for folks showing their followers that they are politically activated and charged. It reminds me of the influencers who were caught holding fake protest signs during the uprisings and folks who posed for photos—riding on the murder and injustice of Black people for clout. But here, influencers can simply visit a museum to flex their social warrior muscles. It's an influencer's heaven. Making an aesthetically pleasing sign that reads “sanctuary” makes me feel like I'm in Las Vegas—neon signs sprinkling knowledge with cheesy slogans that really, at the end of the day, don't do much.

The excess of language and phrases throughout these spaces make me just shy of uncomfortable. It's an exhibition for pussyhat wearers, for white feminists who want to show they care but miss the mark. This isn't to say, however, that Bowers's efforts are in vain. She's worked with collectives and groups over the years that create change. In 2013 during the Frieze Art Fair, Bowers wrote a protest letter to organizers expressing concern over fair labor rights.

On the flip side, it's especially jarring to see artwork focusing on labor rights and working conditions when not that long ago, the MCA's own staff wrote a letter of demands in response to the racism and exploitative labor practices enacted by the museum.

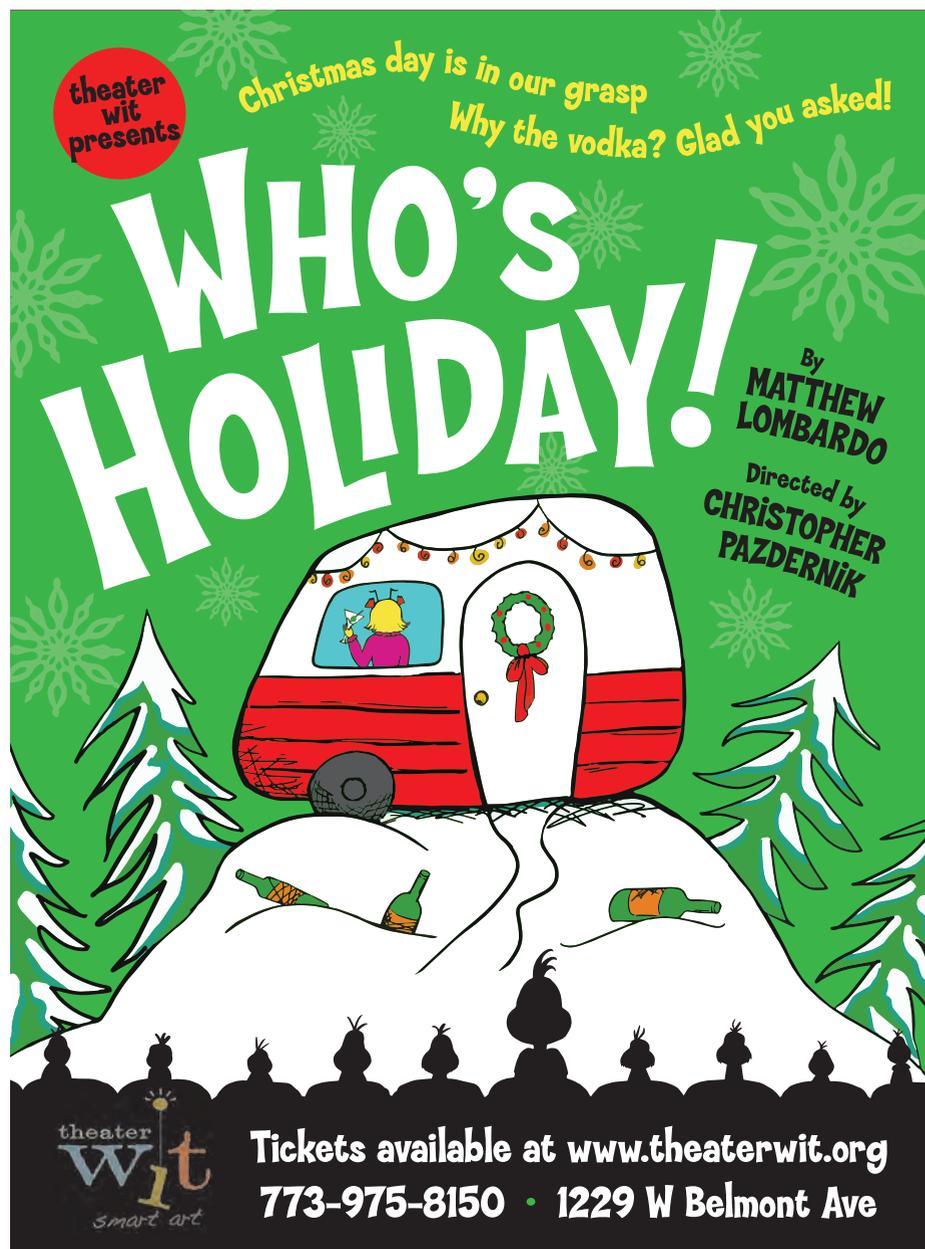
From textile work and video art, to protest signs and paintings, Bowers's coverage of all types of media is vast. The top floor exhibition

space is pulsating with color, text, and sound. But this begs the question—can a pretty picture really enact change? How much can a neon sign, or a butterfly drawing, convince someone to become politically active? How do we get off the couch and into the streets? Is it through a photograph, or a letter, or a video piece?

I hadn't stepped foot inside of the MCA since before the pandemic, before the uprisings around the country, and before Biden won the presidency, knocking Trump out of

the White House. Bowers's exhibition was conceived before the recent outcry surrounding racial injustice. Her retrospective illustrates the power of protest as well as the dismissal of it. Fighting for justice throughout history has looked eerily similar and inequality isn't solved through cardboard signs alone. It can be a snapshot or it can also be someone's entire life. It's up to the viewer to decide if they are convinced or not. 

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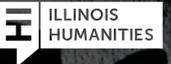
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# THEATER



## OPENING

### Joan-sing for the holidays It's a very Crawford Christmas with Hell in a Handbag.

Hell in a Handbag Productions' campy spoof of *A Christmas Carol* replaces miserly moneylender Ebenezer Scrooge with hard-hearted Hollywood icon Joan Crawford, played by author (and Hell in a Handbag artistic director) David Cerda. In Cerda's reworking of Charles Dickens's behavior-modification fable, Joan—a tyrannical, tough-as-nails diva who abuses everyone around her, including her loyal personal assistant (Ed Jones) and her talentless adoptive daughter Christina (Mark Barty)—is filming an MGM musical about the mother of Jesus (*Oh, Mary!*) when she is visited one drunken Christmas Eve by the real BVM (Sydney Genco) and warned to change her wicked ways. The supernatural intervention continues with appearances by the ghosts of Christmas Past (Tyler Anthony Smith as a Betty Boop-like 1920s starlet), Present (Danne W. Taylor as studio boss Louis B. Mayer), and Future (Caitlin Jackson in a delicious Bette Davis/Baby Jane Hudson caricature). Where Dickens's Scrooge was terrified by the thought of a lonely death, Cerda's gorgon-esque Joan is transformed by the prospect of a much worse fate: late-career stardom in C-grade sci-fi flicks and being played by Faye Dunaway in a screen version of Christina's tell-all memoir.

Directed by Derek Van Barham and performed in an upstairs assembly hall at Andersonville's Ebenezer Lutheran Church, this scrappy, gender-bending musical (with songs by Cerda and composer Scott Lamberty) has the handmade, good-natured feel of a church-school holiday pageant. The flying special effects by puppeteer Lolly Extract and the Jabberwocky Marionettes are especially fun. —**ALBERT WILLIAMS** **CHRISTMAS DEAREST** Through 12/31: Fri-Sat 7:30 PM, Sun 4 PM; Sun 12/19, 7:30 PM only; no performances 12/24-12/26, Ebenezer Lutheran Church, 1650 W. Foster, handbagproductions.org, \$32 advanced, \$35 door, \$50 VIP/reserved seating (includes drink ticket and goodie bag).

### RR Bedford Falls lives! American Blues revives George Bailey and Co.

Who needs four ghosts to remind you of the meaning of life when one angel (second class) can do the job? Frank Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life* by now is right up there with *A Christmas Carol* as a holiday classic delivering lessons about the importance of love over money. (Well, a Sam Wainwright waiting in the wings to bail you out never hurts, truthfully.) American Blues Theater has done their radio-play version of the story for 20 years, taking an enforced pandemic hiatus last season. It's back at Victory Gardens under Gwendolyn Whiteside's direction, and it retains every bit of the charm and warmth I remember.

Framed as a live 1940s radio show from WABT, the story of George Bailey and Bedford Falls (with a brief stopover in the hellscape known as Pottersville) unfolds briskly, with most of the actors playing multiple characters, in addition to reading "audience-grams" from patrons to loved ones. This year, they're also offering a "teacher tribute" to an educator at each show (perhaps a way of making up for George's rudeness to Zuzu's teacher). Most of the cast, including Brandon Dahlquist as George and Michael Mahler as the announcer, have done these roles many times before (Joe Dempsey stepped in for John Mohrlein as Clarence and Mr. Potter at the show I saw), and Shawn J. Goudie's live Foley effects are still highly, well, effective. Nothing here feels phoned in or phony; it all hits the seasonal sweet spot. Welcome home, George. —**KERRY REID** **IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE: LIVE IN CHICAGO!** Through 12/31: Thu-Sat 7:30 PM, Sun 2:30 PM; also Wed 12/22 and 12/29, 7:30 PM, Thu 12/23 and Fri 12/31, 4:30 PM, and Sat 12/11-12/8, 4:30 PM; no performances 12/24 and 12/25; Victory Gardens Theater, 2433 N. Lincoln, 773-871-3000, americanbluestheater.com, \$25-\$65.

### RR Knuffle kerfuffle A new kids' company makes a solid debut.

Mo Willems's 2004 picture book, *Knuffle Bunny*, spawned

### Christmas Dearest RICK AGUILAR STUDIOS

a series of spin-offs, including this musical by Willems and Michael Silversher, which marks the inaugural production of Young People's Theatre of Chicago under founder Randy White's direction. Trixie (Aissa Guerra), a toddler who hasn't quite learned to talk (but sure knows how to yell), goes to the laundromat with her dad, where she loses her beloved stuffed rabbit, triggering an emotional meltdown. Can Dad (Sam Shankman) figure out what's going on? Will Knuffle Bunny be saved? Will your kids be entertained? The answer (spoiler alerts!) in all cases is "yes"—the latter judged by the happy vocal reactions of the kids at the matinee I attended.

This production (which features the actors singing to prerecorded music) moves the action from the original's Park Slope in Brooklyn to Lincoln Park, with cut-out figures on Lauren Nichols's flexible set suggesting the statues in Oz Park, just down the street from the theater. But there's more than geographic relatability in this ingratiating show. Tuesday B. Perry's choreography and David Wisniewski's props (particularly a giant version of the title character) capture both the live-in-the-moment joy of Trixie and her parents and the scariness of embarking on the adventure of growing up together when you can't really tell each other what you need. It's a solid debut from YPT. —**KERRY REID** **KNUFFLE BUNNY: A CAUTIONARY MUSICAL** Through 12/19: Thu-Fri 6:30 PM, Sat 10 AM and 1 PM, Sun 1 PM, Greenhouse Theater Center, 2257 N. Lincoln, 773-404-7336, greenhouse theater.org, \$25, \$19 under 12.

### RR Christmas chapeau Northlight unwraps a different Dickensian tale.

In 1865, Charles Dickens, his mistress Ellen Ternan, and her mother were all on a train that derailed in Kent, England. Dickens used his hat to carry water to the survivors (and some that didn't make it). That grim footnote in history forms the basis for Michael Hollinger's *Mr. Dickens' Hat*, a play with music now in its world premiere at Northlight.

The hat now occupies a place of honor in a shop run by soon-to-be spouses Mrs. Prattle (Kasey Foster) and Mr. Garbleton (Mark David Kaplan); the latter

met Dickens when they were both boys laboring in a boot-polish factory. Their shop assistant, Kit (Cordelia Dewdney), has her own Dickensian tale, as her father is in a debtors' prison.

But it's Christmas, and neither sleet nor snow nor dastardly villains planning to steal the famed hat shall keep miracles from happening. Both Hollinger's script and David Catlin's staging feel a little slow to get going, with a little too much time spent establishing the eccentricities of the supporting cast. (Though Christine Bunuan as a bobby on the beat and a society lady, among others, is a standout, and the physical interplay between Kaplan and Nick Sandys as the would-be thieves is nimble and witty.) But when it settles into a rhythm, the story-theater dynamics (aided by Williams Boles's set with its backstage aesthetic and Jason Lynch's lighting), offer a quirky, yet comfortable, alternative to That Other Dickens Christmas Story. —**KERRY REID** **MR. DICKENS' HAT** Through 1/2: Tue 7:30 PM, Wed 1 and 7:30 PM, Thu 7:30 PM, Fri 8 PM, Sat 2:30 and 8 PM, Sun 2:30 PM; also Sun 12/26, 7 PM; Fri 12/24, 2:30 PM only; no performances Sat 12/25 or Tue 12/28, Northlight Theatre, 9501 Skokie Blvd., Skokie, 847-673-6300, northlight.org, \$30-\$89, \$15 students (subject to availability).

### Hothouse Shakespeare Twelfth Night returns to Lincoln Park Conservatory.

Midsommer Flight's production of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* is back at the Lincoln Park Conservatory, this time with an immersive "choose-your-own-path" twist. It's an exciting concept that could use some workshoping given the uniqueness of the greenhouse space and the inherent challenges already present in performing Shakespeare in a way that's relatable and easy to follow for a modern audience. Directed by Kristina McCloskey and associate directed by Stephanie Mattos, the performance begins with music, cast introductions, and rules of the road for the walkabout. Audience members then go their separate ways and can drop into a variety of scenes occurring in different areas of the space. Given that Shakespeare's already tough for many to follow, a more clear plot summary at the outset would be useful to help audience members understand which part of the story they're encountering.

To pivot to the acting, the production's gender-blind casting is intentional and deserving of praise for highlighting actor and character pronouns right out of the gate. The resulting performances are quite strong (my favorite is Lexy Hope Weixel as the goofy and blustering Sir Andrew Aguecheek), with multiple recently engaged understudies jumping in with gusto and minimal disruption to the overall experience. The casting (led by casting director Ben F. Locke) also deftly reveals and subverts any stale, internalized gender biases through which we view Shakespeare's plot points and relationships. With some additional tightening up of the run time and audience journey, a few more opportunities to shift protagonists, and more seating throughout (either static or portable), this production has the potential to surprise and delight. —**MARISSA OBERLANDER** **TWELFTH NIGHT** Through 12/19: Thu-Sun 7:30 PM, Lincoln Park Conservatory, 2391 Stockton, midsommerflight.com, pay what you can (suggested donation \$30). R

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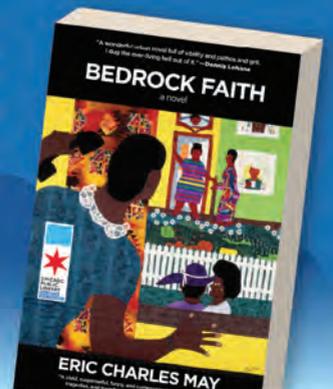
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## REVIEW

### Something's here: A *West Side Story* for a new generation

Spielberg's remake balances nostalgia with much-needed updates.

By SHERI FLANDERS

When Steven Spielberg announced his remake of *West Side Story*, collective eyebrows raised in crisp unison. First of all, did *WSS* need to be remade again at all? Could Spielberg successfully jump genres to direct a musical? And—other than the shameful casting choices of the original—was there anything to be improved upon in what is universally regarded to be one of the best depictions of a musical on film? The answers, surprisingly, were “yes,” “yes,” and “yes!” To the shock of many, the 2021 remake is a bona fide hit, improving on the original in unexpected ways, yet in one case, still repeating the mistakes of the past.

Spielberg wisely does not attempt to re-create the beloved 1961 original scene for scene, making the story his own. He smartly includes enough scaffolding from the original to satisfy die-hard fans, such as the iconic whistle at the

opening, and the colorblocked design of Maria's apartment, illustrating that even as an experienced filmmaker, he is humble enough to defer to perfection, and will hopefully spend his golden years exclusively directing musicals. The cinematography by Janusz Kamiński showcases countless exquisite, haunting visuals, immediately informing viewers that this isn't just a film—it's art.

The film isn't perfect by any means, but the new version rights many of the most egregious wrongs of the original, including wisely tweaking the more problematic of Sondheim's lines at the top of “America,” and casting Latinx talent for Latinx roles, most notably the angelic, golden-voiced Rachel Zegler as Maria. Tony Kushner's screenplay reinterpretation gives her character a bit more agency and depth, and Zegler is a joy to watch, making the most of every moment. Unfortunately, her costar Ansel Elgort as Tony has all of the charisma of a wet paper bag hanging from a fire escape, and the editor is forced too frequently to use awkward shots of the back of his head while singing swelling emotional phrases because—one presumes—nothing of interest is emoting on his blank face. One understands why Elgort was cast; his voice is lovely, and he's easy on the eyes, but the duo ultimately has no real connection or heat, and they are doomed to repeat the cardinal sin of the original—being completely upstaged by their supporting actors.

Ariana DeBose as Anita is the real star of

this film, chewing up every single scene and spitting it out with no mercy. Rita Moreno left big stilettos for her to fill, and DeBose honors her legacy with gusto and makes the role her own with every spin of her skirts. The devastatingly emotional “A Boy Like That / I Have A Love” scene becomes an absolute showstopper, entirely based on the weight of her performance. David Alvarez matches her pound for pound as the charmingly misogynistic boxer Bernardo, and it's a delight to watch them go round and round together. Scenes where characters speak Spanish without offering subtitles are an excellent and welcome touch.

Mike Faist is terrific as Riff, the waifish scamp with a big smile and cold, dead eyes, and a lack of a reason to live. Spielberg's greatest triumph lies in finding new context that wasn't included in Arthur Laurents's original book. One of the largest changes to the plot is a recontextualization of “Cool” (the original being one of the most iconic dance numbers ever set to film) in a way that makes more logical sense to the plot and adds a sobering realism to the vicious machismo of angry, racist, young men. The Sharks and Jets of the 2021 version are far more violent and brutal than the original, mirroring the intensity of the sublimely kinetic orchestral score. While most of Jerome Robbins's classic choreography is heartbreakingly jettisoned (and likely nearly impossible to re-create), Justin Peck does excellent work creating new choreography that is severely pared back, yet extraordinarily impactful.

Supporting characters like Chino (a layered Josh Andrés Rivera) receive more depth, adding more meat to the story. Anybodys (a plucky Iris Menas), initially little more than throwaway comic relief, now provides a refreshing nod towards transgender representation. The largest surprise is a perfectly recast Rita Moreno as Valentina, a newly created role (the widow of Doc, from the original) that is far more than a cameo, and allows Moreno to show off her still formidable musical talent. Her presence helps provide a warm and nostalgic handoff of a classic musical from one generation to the next. ■

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House of Gucci  
COURTESY UNIVERSAL PICTURES

NOW PLAYING

RR *Benedetta*

Blessed be Paul Verhoeven. The filmmaker known for his controversial commentaries of society and its ilk—*Showgirls*, *Starship Troopers*, and *RoboCop*, among others—is back with a blasphemous fury. Loosely based on the life of Benedetta Carlini (Virginie Efira), a 17th-century nun and mystic who was persecuted for having a lesbian relationship, *Benedetta* is a biting examination of Catholicism with a sly sense of humor. As a young girl, Benedetta is told she is the wife of Jesus,

who manifests himself in her surreal and brutally stylized visions. But there is a looming question of whether or not she is a fraud—or in fact a true vessel of God in the face of a soon-to-be plague-torn village. Her rise to the top of the convent is buoyed by a budding relationship with novice Bartolomea (Daphné Patakia) who, with the help of a sacrilegious sex toy, fuels the mania and fervor of the women around them. Throughout his career, Verhoeven has been fixated on societal structures—whether it be capitalism, the military, or the Catholic church—and how they work to remove any individuality or humanity in order to more easily control those at the bottom.

*Benedetta* is no exception, highlighting the hypocrisy and rot at the core of religion, the rampant repression of carnal desires, and the ostracization of anyone outside the margins of godliness. —CODY CORRALL 131 min. Music Box Theatre, AMC Theatres

*Death of a Telemarketer*

*Death of a Telemarketer* feels like a phone call that could have been a text. The film follows adept telemarketer Kasey (Lamorne Morris), who is willing to do whatever it takes to make a sale. And when a contest with a lofty commission prize pits him against office rookie Barry (Woody McClain), he does the unthinkable, reaching out to people on the dreaded “Do Not Call” list. More than money-hungry, Kasey is hoping to cover the loan he took out to pay for his girlfriend Christine’s (Alisha Wainwright) engagement ring. Enter Asa (Jackie Earle Haley) and Jim (Haley Joel Osment), a father-son duo who don’t take kindly to solicitation and aren’t afraid to act out the sort of revenge fantasy telemarketing can often evoke. Despite the stellar cast and their willingness to go there, the storyline, which seems entirely spent early on, is not enough to sustain the run time successfully. —BECCA JAMES R, 88 min. In select theaters and VOD.

RR *House of Gucci*

*House of Gucci* should be called *House of Gaga*. The Ridley Scott-directed film follows Patrizia Reggiani, an outsider from humble beginnings who marries into the infamous Gucci family. As expected, Gaga plays Patrizia, a woman with unbridled ambition, perfectly. The cast is, of course, stacked, and the Guccis are rounded out by the husband Maurizio (Adam Driver), the father-in-law Rodolfo (Jeremy Irons), the uncle Aldo (Al Pacino), and the cousin Paolo (Jared Leto). For the most part, that doesn’t matter, though, because while *House*

of Gucci promised a look into the namesake’s unraveling, which is billed as “a reckless spiral of betrayal, decadence, revenge, and ultimately murder,” it’s surprisingly a slog. That is, save for the soundtrack and every acting decision Gaga makes, including the slightly off-putting and somewhat amusing sex scene. The rest, however, is left struggling to find its footing as it oscillates between soap opera and prestige drama. —BECCA JAMES R, 158 min. Wide release in theaters.

*Wolf*

In *Wolf*, Jacob (George MacKay) is a young man who believes he is a wolf trapped in a human’s body. After being sent to a clinic to cure his species dysphoria, he and his fellow patients are subjected to a series of bizarre and increasingly dangerous treatments. After befriending and falling for a mysterious girl, Wildcat (Lily-Rose Depp), Jacob is forced to make a choice between his true nature and love.

The philosophies and methods of the facility’s head, The Zookeeper (Paddy Considine), often explode into humiliation and torture for our characters. Patients are caged, walked on leashes, and forced to enact the traits of their animals (attempting to fly, climbing straight up a tree), only to be chastised mercilessly when they fail. Screens are a constant presence, a supposed reflection of our humanness, which blare out the pseudo-philosophical musings of The Zookeeper.

Coming in at a brisk 98 minutes, *Wolf* feels a bit underdeveloped, but writer/director Nathalie Biancheri successfully creates an uneasy surrealism that looms over the scenes. And for his part, MacKay’s presence and physicality is perhaps one of the most compelling aspects of the film. Overall, though, it doesn’t feel like there’s truly much to unpack in *Wolf*’s atypical coming-of-age tale. —ADAM MULLINS-KHATIB R, 98 min. Wide release in theaters. R

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### CHICAGOANS OF NOTE

## Aline Kaze, aka DJ Bonita Appleblunt

“Why I DJ, or what I try to evoke while I’m playing whatever event I’m part of, is that feeling like when you’re at a house party.”

### As told to LEOR GALIL

*Aline Kaze is a freelance audio engineer and DJ affiliated with multidisciplinary arts platform AMFM. Kaze, who performs as DJ Bonita Appleblunt, has spun records around the city with the likes of EvieTheCool, DJ Skoli, Ron Trent, Duane Powell, and Ryan, the Person. Earlier this year Ace Hotel Chicago booked Kaze for a monthly residency; their next set at the Ace is Thursday, December 23. Kaze turns 26 on December 10.*

I started out as a kid playing piano, and then choirs. Then I moved here—went to school here for audio production, and now I’ve been a DJ for the past five, six years.

[I’m from] Toledo, Ohio. Ohio is not that great. Toledo is all right—go Mud Hens! I moved here in 2014.

I used to get roasted a lot for the type of music I listen to. Toledo, it’s diverse, but there doesn’t seem to be a lot of cultural intermingling, or people being aware of music from different places.

My family, they’re East African—I’m a first-gen. I grew up listening to lots of different types of African music from different countries. I don’t know what it is about African immigrants specifically, but they listen to a lot of country—it’s a specific thing that I’ve been finding out. There’s a lot of country, rock ‘n’ roll, a lot of different things that my mom would listen to; I would just go through her tapes and CDs. Then once I started being on the computer a lot more, I would listen to a lot of stuff on Soundcloud. I would spend a lot of time at the library.

When I finally started to explore for myself, that’s when I started to find my music. Some stuff I still have—sometimes still play out—that I found as a shorty. Once I started to build my own music library, I could find more of my sounds.

I moved here literally one month after I graduated high school. I don’t know if that was smart, but I was like, “What is the soonest I can start?” They said, “How is July 8th?” I said, “Yes, I will be there.” I went to Illinois Institute of Art—I don’t think the Chicago location exists anymore.

I dropped out. It just wasn’t exactly what I thought it was going to be, and ever since then I’ve just been doing more freelance audio work. Like, AMFM used to be out of this spot in Pilsen—before AMFM had their own space,

they started somewhere else, and then I started doing live sound there, and then eventually DJing also.

One of my other friends, he used to canvass—like street canvass and stuff. And Ciera [McKissick, AMFM founder] walked up—I guess they knew each other already—she walked up, and that’s how we got acquainted. I was like, “Oh hey, what’s up?” She’s like, “Hey, I’m Ciera, I’m from Milwaukee.” And she invited me to the [AMFM] jazz series, and then ever since then it’s been history.

There’s a lot of organic meetings like that, to be honest with you. Meeting friends of other friends, just being out—just basically vibing with someone, like, “This song is fire.” Just appreciating whatever art is there and becoming friends from that. I’ve met a lot of good friends from gigs. The first gig I ever had was with DJ Skoli, and that’s my best bro, for sure.

I don’t ever want to be one of those Chicago transplants that are like terrible people—so I’m maybe a little bit too aware of, like, my presence within the community. I’m trying to make sure I’m not overstepping and just not overstaying my welcome. But I think just recently I was like, “Oh damn, I’m really—I’m in it. I’m actually a part of this community.” ‘Cause I think before then I was like, “I’m not from here; I wish I was.” But yeah, I’m just trying to provide good things for this community that I spend so much time in and the city that I’ve come to love.

For me, why I DJ, or what I try to evoke while I’m playing whatever event I’m part of, is that feeling like when you’re at a house party. Growing up, my parents would go see their friends and there was a bunch of food, and drinks were everywhere, and they’d have sparkling cider, and everyone—adults, kids—were all in the same room, dancing and having a good time. So I’m just always trying to invoke that energy whenever I DJ. So just trying to make that happen, if that makes sense.

[This city] is really rich in artistic talent and culture and spirit. People are very strong. I just would want people to know this is really a great city, and it’s way more than what certain media outlets would like folks to think. Shout out Chicago, all day. 📍

🐦 @imLeor

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## MUSIC

ALL AGES FREE

## PICK OF THE WEEK

Chicago electronic group Courtesy go pop but stay weird on *Check the Milk*

COURTESY THE ARTIST

**COURTESY, SMUT, FETTER**

Fri 12/10, 10 PM, Empty Bottle, 1035 N. Western, \$10. 21+

**CHICAGO GROUP COURTESY HAVE ALWAYS** staggered and glitched across the line between experimental and pop electronics. Their first album, 2011's *Idmatic* (Tape Deco), recorded by members Drew Ryan and Kirk Rawlings in Memphis and Chicago, is filled with ambient drone and feedback noise but also illustrates their pop sensibilities; on "Sisters," for instance, percussive clang turns into a slinky new-wave club beat. The band's embrace of accessibility intensified on the 2018 EP *Hey* (Moon Glyph), where they briefly expanded into a trio with the addition of Doug Malone, and that trend has continued ever since. On Courtesy's latest album, *Check the Milk* (Seasick), they explore a downshifted psychedelic trip-hop sound that's practically radio ready; it'd be easy to imagine Billie Eilish singing the stoned, burping "Zapps," if the lyrics focused more directly on love and pain and a bit less on "polyunsaturated magic beans." The track "LeBron James" opens with an ice-pick-to-the-eye blast of power-electronics feedback before grooving up on a spooky dance-floor sway and grind that's reminiscent of Tricky, and "Dig Up My Luv" mixes new age synth washes with retro-disco boogie that makes you wonder what ABBA would sound like if they'd been influenced by Chicago experimental electronic groups. Though Courtesy have gotten somewhat more user-friendly over the past decade, their left turns on *Check the Milk*—the free-jazz interpolations on "King Clave," the minute of silence in "Remainder"—should reassure true believers they're still odd. —NOAH BERLATSKY

CONCERT PREVIEW  
FRIDAY10

**COURTESY** See Pick of the Week at left. Smut and Fetter open. 10 PM, Empty Bottle, 1035 N. Western, \$10. 21+

## SATURDAY11

**WIKI X NAVY BLUE** Semiratruh opens. 9 PM, Sleeping Village, 3734 W. Belmont, \$20, \$18 in advance. 21+

New York is an ever-present character on Wiki's latest full-length, *Half God*. The rapper's third studio album offers rich vignettes from his life set against the backdrop of his hometown and its narrative: snapshots of the nascent stages of a new romance, scenes from his Lower East Side neighborhood, observations of the gentrifiers who threaten the city's grit and charm.

On his previous albums—2017's *No Mountains in Manhattan*, 2019's *Oofie*, and his 2014 project with the now-defunct trio Ratking, *So It Goes*—Wiki often set his raps in sparse, abstract production. But on *Half God*, his slick voice and typical stream-of-consciousness flow are ferried by the warm, mellow beats of producer and MC Navy Blue. Wiki questions the actions of New York's interlopers and makes it clear that to him community is paramount: "What I can't understand and get through to me is / After all the schooling you did, don't know what community is?" he raps on "The Business," over Navy Blue's buzzing keys and heady loops. Another thing that sets *Half God* apart from its predecessors is the theme of time. Pandemic lockdown allowed Wiki the chance to catch his breath and focus as he saw his city literally come to a standstill. "I'm writing and I'm pacing / Looking at the cityscape / Is it a simulation? / In the middle of the city in isolation," he raps on "Roof." Later in the song he proclaims, "Living in the Big Apple, isn't it amazing?" amid serene piano and humming strings that combine in something like a lullaby. Together, Wiki and Navy Blue create hypnotic raps and production whose incisive portrayal of New York feels like it can transport you there. —TARA C. MAHADEVAN

## WEDNESDAY15

**METZ** *Preoccupations and Facs* open. 9 PM, Metro, 3730 N. Clark, \$26, \$22 in advance. 18+

The best thing about Metz might also be the worst thing about Metz. The Toronto-based trio have been cranking out high-volume noise rock for more than ten years. Their music is solid, reliable, and interesting—and like Nirvana before them, they begin with a subversive sound, then add enough melody and take away enough grime to make it appealing to a whole lot of people. But the downside of Metz getting this good at making noise rock for the everyman is that there's very little variation between their releases. Hell, they've honed their approach to such



Wiki (left) and Navy Blue JACOB CONSENSTEIN

tight tolerances that there's often little variation between their songs.

When you put on a Metz record, you know what you're going to get. Their fourth full-length, *Atlas Vending* (released by Sub Pop in October 2020), isn't much different from its predecessors: it's got layers of distorted guitar and bass, angular rhythms, and the gloriously bombastic drumming of Hayden Menzies (the longtime star of Metz's show). But a few elements make it stand out against the rest of the band's catalog: singer-guitarist Alex Edkins occasionally steps back from his throaty yell to deliver a Britpoppy vocal hook, and the production by Uniform's Ben Greenberg makes it their clearest, best-sounding album yet. *Atlas Vending* is pure Metz—it's not full of surprises, but it unquestionably rocks, and it reminds us how valuable reliability is. Touring for this record was pushed back for obvious reasons, and a couple days after Metz finally did hit the road last month, someone broke into their trailer and stole almost all their gear. You should absolutely go to this show, and not just because Metz are an excellent live band—if you buy a bunch of merch, it'll help them get back on track after such a devastating blow. —**LUCA CIMARUSTI**

**RICO NASTY** *Rico Nasty vs. Danny Brown in a Red Bull Soundclash. 7 PM, Radius, 640 W. Cermak, \$22.50. 17+*

On her 2020 debut album, *Nightmare Vacation* (Atlantic), punk-pop rapper Rico Nasty introduced her versatility to new listeners while showing longtime fans that signing to a major label wouldn't jeopardize the playful mix of genres and vocal approaches she's flaunted since she hit the music scene in 2014. Songs such as 2016's nursery-rhyme-like "Hey Arnold" (which undoubtedly helped Rico expand her audience via snippets of its viral video) and 2017's slower "Once Upon a Time" (from her fourth mixtape, *Tales of Tacobella*) have earned the rapper a reputation for keeping people guessing about what she'll explore next. Rico's got a song for nearly every mood on *Nightmare Vacation* too; she rages on "Smack a Bitch," then brags about the lovers she can pull on "Pussy Poppin (I Don't Really Talk Like This)." In October, the DMV artist (the District, Maryland, and Virginia) teamed up with southern powerhouse Flo Milli for "Money," a play on 2 Live Crew's 1986 hit "We Want Some Pussy"—it's a fun reminder that the rapper does what she wants, which might include seeking "the bag" from potential suitors even

though she has plenty of her own cash.

This fall Rico has been on the road with Playboi Carti as an opener on his King Vamp tour, where her unpredictable sound and vibe have often gone unappreciated by his crowds; she was booed at a Los Angeles show, and an audience member threw a bottle at her in Portland, Oregon. She's been vocal about the emotional toll of such mistreatment. In a since-deleted tweet, she wrote, "Crazy how I wanted a tour bus my whole life and now I just be on the tour bus crying myself to sleep every night." One can only hope that following this tour, Rico Nasty will be able to take time off to recharge, so she can return to the stage in front of fans who'll feel her power, enjoy her eclectic stage presence, and most importantly recognize her worth as a human being deserving of respect. In the meantime, Chicagoans have the perfect opportunity to show her some love: she's bringing her energetic live show to Radius, where she'll go head-to-head with Detroit rapper Danny Brown in a Red Bull Soundclash. —**JANAYA GREENE**

**NITA STRAUSS** *Black Satellite, Marc Rizzo, and Acraacy open. 7 PM, Reggie's Rock Club, 2105 S. State, \$25, \$22 in advance. 17+*

Los Angeles-based guitarist Nita Strauss has made her name as a session player and composer of music for video games and indie film. She's also been Alice Cooper's guitarist since 2014, and as she fought her way up through the competitive world of studio musicians and hired guns, she became the first woman to have her own signature Ibanez guitar model. In 2018 Strauss released her debut solo album, a collection of instrumentals called *Controlled Chaos* (partly funded by Kickstarter and released on Sumerian after the funding goal was met). It's a high-and-tight blast of crisp, nimble classic metal, and Strauss spends most of her energy building up badass riffs in songs structured so well they stand up just fine without vocals, even when her traditional hard-rock sound leads you to expect them. "Lion Among Wolves" and "Our Most Desperate Hour" are especially well designed, and if you like metal ballads, "Here With You" and "Hope Grows" are both lovely.

Last month, Strauss released her latest single, "Dead Inside" (Sumerian), featuring vocals from David Draiman of Disturbed. While Strauss doesn't sing, she conveys emotional intensity through her playing, underlining Draiman's voice with a challenging presence and then earning the spotlight when it's her turn to shine. Though the track is the first

time she's included a singer in her solo work, it masterfully demonstrates the dynamics of the relationship between a front person and a lead guitarist. By the end of November, "Dead Inside" had become the first single by a female solo artist to reach the top ten on the *Billboard* Mainstream Rock Airplay chart since 1995, which is fantastic news for Strauss and a scathing indictment of *Billboard*. I've been writing about women in rock since the 90s, so I can attest that it's remarkable for a woman to crack the chart barrier as a guitar-wielding nonsinger—and that women who've mastered instruments other than the voice aren't as rare as *Billboard* might make them seem. —**MONICA KENDRICK**

## SATURDAY 18

**CAE MONÆ** *Pixel Grip (DJ set) headline; Rita Lukea (solo set), Cae Monæ, Club Music, and None of Your Concern open. 9:30 PM, Hideout, 1354 W. Wabansia, \$15. 21+.*

Cae Monæ's existence is her art. Whether she's taking over an Instagram square with her face abstracted by embellishments and makeup or adorning herself in a custom outfit and commanding a stage with iPhone beats, she demands consideration. And why shouldn't she? She's a Black trans woman, so invisibility isn't an option for her. It'd be reductive to say her work is about her identity, but the two are nonetheless inseparable. On her latest EP, October's *Get Out* (billed to just Monæ, as she sometimes appears), she draws on house and trap, genres pioneered by women, queers, and sex workers—especially women, queers, and sex workers of color. "Get Out" underscores a woman screaming "She's not a Christian!" with pummeling electronic beats, and "Cut My Dick Off" punctuates hip-swinging rhythms with a maniacal laugh. This isn't music about "resilience"; it's about having a target on your back but making it fashion. Whether operating in the audio realm or the visual one, Monæ is always creating unfamiliar and hauntingly interesting collages: a fresh song, an unusual outfit, a new self.

A longtime fixture in Chicago queer nightlife, Monæ has attracted increased attention from the city's postpunk scene via recent collaborations with local queer darkwave trio Pixel Grip. She raps on the Pixel Grip track "Demon Chaser" (from their latest album, *Arena*, released in May on FeelTrip), and in its video she appears as the demon the band members chase—which feels like a metaphor for the danger and excitement of pursuing things coded as both queer and bad. At a sold-out show at Sleeping Village on Halloween, Pixel Grip opened with an artful video installation condemning the police and a justice system that disproportionately incarcerates people of color—especially trans sex workers. Then, as "Demon Chaser" began, Monæ appeared in a long black dress and loose black vest emblazoned with "Black Trans Power." She stole the show with a heady mix of attitude and energy, and the crowd melted with excitement as they screamed with her, "Black! Trans! Power!" At this concert, Monæ is billed as one of the openers for Pixel Grip's headlining set, but they're sure to feed off each other even if they don't share the stage at the same time—they make for an infectious combination. Pixel Grip lean heavily into a sound that fuses industrial and

Hi-NRG while embracing an electro-BDSM aesthetic, and their work with Monæ, onstage and off, underscores the plurality of how queerness can be exhibited—and invites consideration of how queer artists can work together to acknowledge and manage risk. —**MICCO CAPORALE**

## TUESDAY 21

**HAMID DRAKE & MICHAEL ZERANG WINTER SOLSTICE DUO** See also *Wed 12/22 and Thu 12/23. 6 AM, Links Hall, 3111 N. Western, \$35. 18+*

**HAMID DRAKE & MICHAEL ZERANG** See also *Wed 12/22 and Thu 12/23. Drake and Zerang play in combos with members of Les Sangliers: first Drake, pianist Christine Wodrascka, and bassist Joshua Abrams; then Zerang, reedists Dave Rempis and Keefe Jackson, and drummer Peter Orins. 8 PM, Constellation, 3111 N. Western, \$17. 18+*

Six years ago, I characterized Hamid Drake and Michael Zerang's winter solstice concert series as "an anchor, a beacon, and a seasonal tradition in its own right." The two drummers began performing as a duo at Links Hall in 1990; surrounded by percussion instruments from around the world, they would begin by candlelight, then play until the sun rose in the early hours of the shortest day of the year. As befits an endeavor involving musicians who spend the rest of the year immersed in jazz and other forms of improvised music, each concert's exact content is different, but the hour and the setting always infuse the event with a redemptive, spiritual air. As the years passed, the series expanded to include several successive morning concerts each year, plus evening concerts that showcase Zerang and Drake's respective projects. Not even the pandemic could totally disrupt this tradition, but just as 2020 was like no other year, their concert was like no other show in the series; they streamed it from a lake-front apartment with windows looking east over the water. This year, the duo return for three morning concerts at Links Hall starting on Tuesday, December 21. That evening at Constellation, Drake and Zerang will each play a set with members of Les Sangliers, an ensemble convened by the Bridge, a network that has fostered exchanges between French and Chicago-based improvisers since 2013. On the evening of Wednesday, December 22, the duo will reconvene at Constellation to perform one long set with the Fresh Palette Ensemble, a pan-generational collective that includes Angel Bat Dawid, Jason Adasiewicz, Zahra Glenda Baker, Jason Stein, Mai Sugimoto, Joshua Abrams, and Tatsu and Kioto Aoki. The evening concerts promise to foreground the restless artistic growth that Drake and Zerang have pursued throughout their careers; the morning performances will reunite them with a community of listeners who are ready for a bit of sonic healing after two long and dreadful years. —**BILL MEYER**

## WEDNESDAY 22

**HAMID DRAKE & MICHAEL ZERANG WINTER SOLSTICE DUO** See *Tue 12/21. 6 AM, Links Hall, 3111 N. Western, \$35. 18+*



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Ledward Kaapana,  
Herb Ohta Jr.**

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Hamid Drake (outside) and Michael Zerang © MARC POKEMPNR

continued from 41  
**HAMID DRAKE & MICHAEL ZERANG** See Tue 12/21. *The two percussionists perform with the Fresh Palette Ensemble, which consists of bassist Joshua Abrams, vibraphonist Jason Adasiewicz, taiko drummer Kioto Aoki, shamisen player and conduction leader Tatsu Aoki, vocalist Zahra Glenda Baker, clarinetist and keyboardist Angel Bat Dawid, bass clarinetist Jason Stein, and reedist Mai Sugimoto. 8 PM, Constellation, 3111 N. Western, \$22. 18+*

THURSDAY 23

**HAMID DRAKE & MICHAEL ZERANG WINTER SOLSTICE DUO** See Tue 12/21. 6 AM, Links Hall, 3111 N. Western, \$35. 18+

ALBUM REVIEWS

**NOIR DISCO, NOW! 2073**  
Terrible  
[noirdisco.bandcamp.com/releases](http://noirdisco.bandcamp.com/releases)

Noir Disco's new debut album, *Now! 2073*, belongs to a proud tradition of art-rock. Siblings Nolan and Carter Dickson lead the Chicago group, and their music draws on specific reference points from a lifetime of shared music nerdery. On *Now! 2073*, the band take inspiration from 70s classic rock, 80s European new-wave pop, and 00s Brooklyn post-punk to convert anxious energy into dance beats, guitar snickers, and synth outbursts. On "21st Century Hipster Man" they reimagine the title and multipart structure of a 1969 King Crimson classic as the product of improvisation in a Logan Square home studio. The lyrics are snarky, poking fun at anyone who mistakes cultural consumption for a personality, but the music conveys the joy the group takes in unfettered creation—it's audible in the gear-shift tempo changes, sick fuzz-bass fills, and vocal *na na nas*.

Noir Disco's lyrics seek unusual perspectives on the mundane. Taking inspiration from David Byrne, they choose generic topics such as food and music to show how societal norms and personal neuroses can complicate everyday experiences. On "Hungry," the lyrics gesture at self-care by insisting, "Aren't

you hungry for what they have? / It's OK to eat a home-cooked meal"; meanwhile, the discordant guitar parts and Carter's snotty vocals make the simple act of dining sound like an impossible task. This approach isn't foolproof: on "Los Angeles," their critique of the city as full of fakes is ironically superficial, though their enthusiasm often helps elevate their observations. "Television," which incorporates the HBO show-intro sound and a sample of former Fox News host Bill O'Reilly saying "Fuck it, we'll do it live," works much better: the song simulates the sensory overload of a million streaming programs available at all times so successfully that it feels like a necessary jolt of sanity to shout "We know it's a lie" along with the Dicksons. By the time we actually see the 2073rd installment of the compilation series *Now That's What I Call Music!* (which Noir Disco jokingly reference in their album title), popular music might sound nothing like *Now! 2073*, but its tunes about petty annoyances and small pleasures will remain as relevant as they are now. —**JACK RIEDY**

**JEFF PARKER, FORFOLKS**  
International Anthem/Nonesuch  
[intlanthem.bandcamp.com/album/forfolks](http://intlanthem.bandcamp.com/album/forfolks)

With credits as diverse as Chicago postrock collective Tortoise and free-jazz band Ernest Dawkins's New Horizons Ensemble, guitarist and composer Jeff Parker owns a unique vocabulary. He's been able to muster expressions of self within groups and as a bandleader across 30 years of work, and now he offers a new solo dispatch, *Forfolks*. "Suf-folk" employs guitar loops piled one upon another, cascading with Parker's melodic and rhythmic ideas and becoming a fully realized guitar symphony when he solos atop them. It's a method Parker employs across *Forfolks*, an album named for a tune he wrote and recorded while working with drummer and bandleader Ted Sirota in 1996. Parker recontextualizes other pieces he created as a member of rock-leaning acts, casting a fingerpicked calmness over something that might have initially been intended to function with a backbeat. He reimagines "La Jetée"—a composition whose history dates back to 1997, when members of Tortoise and Chicago Underground Orchestra first convened as jazz-fusion group Isotope 217—by giving it more of a definite shape than it's previously had, turning it into a somber ballad that closes the album. There's also an interpretation of Thelonious Monk's "Ugly

Beauty" where Parker delicately treads the jazz pianist's progression, turning in something just as tender and thoughtful as the original but augmented with the long tones of studio magic. Nels Cline could be considered a sensible point of comparison to Parker; both guitarists forged careers rooted in jazz, then spiraled out to encompass a mix of styles, including avant-garde rock and quieter, moody experiments. Where they diverge, though, is musical personality. Cline continues to exert a cool downtown New York vibe, even when accompanying the relatively bucolic Wilco, but Parker's voice is broader; he built the tracks on 2020's *Suite for Max Brown* around grooves summoned from elemental funk and R&B. Throughout *Forfolks*, Parker makes the point that he can access just about any approach to playing his instrument, writing music, and working in the studio. —**DAVE CANTOR**

**DAN SARTAIN, ARISE, DAN SARTAIN, ARISE**  
One Little Independent  
[joindansartain.bandcamp.com/album/arise-dan-sartain-arise-2](http://joindansartain.bandcamp.com/album/arise-dan-sartain-arise-2)

It took only the opening bars of the first Dan Sartain record I heard, 2006's *Join Dan Sartain* (released on the illustrious Swami Records), to hook me on the music of the Alabama songwriter. His sharp, sometimes dark lyrics, his soulful and magnetic voice, and his ability to spin timeworn styles such as blues, rockabilly, and punk into something fresh and new gave me plenty to love. In an era saturated with bands embracing retro sounds for fashion's sake, Sartain stood out as the real deal, drawing a cult following and making fans of fellow punk-inspired troubadours such as Mike Ness, John Reis (who owns Swami and plays in Rocket From the Crypt and Hot Snakes), and Jack White (who put out the 2010 Sartain single "Bohemian Grove" on Third Man). His work has sometimes been described as "unhinged," a label often applied to artists who walk their own path even within obvious trends. Sartain's musical adventurousness led to some unexpected gems, including 2012's Ramones-steeped *Too Tough to Live* and 2016's underrated *Century Plaza*, where he temporarily put down his guitar in favor of dark synths.

Sartain died in March 2021 at age 39, but not before completing his tenth album, *Arise, Dan Sartain, Arise*. The record surveys some of the best parts of his 20-year career with an eclectic mix of rockabilly, punk, country, and surf while showcasing his outsider storytelling, which mingles wit, tenderness, anguish, and dejection. "I Don't Care (Oh La La La)" decries fakes and liars against an infectious catchy refrain; the fiery guitar lines on "Rooster in the Henhouse" fuel a southern gothic vengeance tale; and "I Heard Laughing" channels Buddy Holly with a devilish, paranoid snicker that underlines its fraught lyrics about score-settling and everyday pain. *Arise, Dan Sartain, Arise* would still be a compelling listen if Sartain were here to see its release, but the fact that he's not makes it even more painfully clear that he was not only a gifted songwriter but also a musician who could connect American music styles from different decades while offering a unique perspective on what makes their legacies great. All proceeds from the album will benefit a trust fund set up for Sartain's young daughter. —**JAMIE LUDWIG**



1-15 REBIRTH BRASS BAND



2-17 YOLA  
jac ross



3-22 ST. PAUL & THE BROKEN  
3-23 BONES: THE ALIEN COAST TOUR  
presented by 93XRT



3-25 GALACTIC  
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the undercover dream  
lovers, das kope

2-22 SERPENT WITHFEET  
DEACON'S TOUR  
apollo mighty  
presented by CHIRP radio

1-12 ZOË KEATING

2-4 RAILROAD EARTH

1-14 NEAL FRANCIS  
dos santos  
presented by 93xrt

2-10 JAMESTOWN REVIVAL  
robert ellis  
presented by 93xrt

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they hate change

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emily jane white

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RANDOLPH & MORTIMER PRESENTS  
KOOL KEITH

THU 12/16 THE SNOW ANGELS  
FUTURE BARTENDERZ  
HOOVER & HARLEY AND THE BOYS

SUN 12/12 WHITNEY

SUN 12/17 CHIRP RADIO WELCOMES  
THE SUEVES (RECORD RELEASE)  
SPREAD JOY • HAPPY DAY • CHIRP RADIO DJs

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SAT 12/18 FREE  
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## NEW

**Adult., Kontravoid, Spike Hellis** 5/20/2022, 10 PM, Empty Bottle

**Advance Base, Al Scorch** 12/18, 9 PM, Hungry Brain

**Almafuerte, El DJ Rebel X** 12/16, 7 PM, FitzGerald's, Berwyn

**Ángela Aguilar** 4/24/2022, 8 PM, Rosemont Theatre, Rosemont

**Aquadolls, Sitting on Stacy** 4/3/2022, 7 PM, Beat Kitchen, 18+

**Josh Berman Trio** 1/23/2022, 9 PM, Hungry Brain

**The Bridge featuring Les Sangliers** 12/17, 9 PM, Hideout

**Bright Eyes** 3/26/2022, 7:30 PM, Chicago Theatre

**Emily Cavanagh, Carl Banks** 12/16, 7:30 PM, Schubas, 18+

**CharlestheFirst, Ivy Lab, Integrate, Jon Casey** 2/26/2022, 8 PM, Riviera Theatre, 18+

**Circle With Lines, Elif Geris, Fruit Leather** 1/4/2022, 8:30 PM, Sleeping Village

**Club 90s presents Taylor Swift** 12/19, 7:30 PM, House of Blues, 17+

**Joanna Connor, Funky MoJo Daddy** 12/16, 8 PM, Kingston Mines

**Joanna Connor, Vino Loudon** 12/17, 7:30 PM, Kingston Mines

**Shemekia Copeland, Sammy Miller & the Congregation** 12/16, 7 PM, City Winery

**Barns Courtney** 4/7/2022, 8 PM, Park West

**Dabin, Rome in Silver, Skybreak** 2/25/2022, 11 PM, Concord Music Hall, 18+

**Ernest Dawkins: Redefining Frederick Douglass with Khari B., Kevin King, Corey Wilkes, Ben LaMar Gay, Steve Berry, Will Faber, Alexis Lombre, Junius Paul,**

**and Isaiah Spencer** 12/17, 8:30 PM, Constellation, 18+

**Dead Villains, Ricky Liontones, Los Black Dogs** 12/22, 9 PM, Cobra Lounge, 17+

**Del Amitri, Kris Dollimore** 4/11/2022, 7:30 PM, the Vic, 18+

**Elijah the Boy, Mir Fontane, Mac Dee** 2/4/2022, 8:30 PM, Reggies Rock Club

**Kurt Elling** 12/19, 5 and 8 PM, City Winery

**Pete Ellman Big Band** 12/17, 7 PM, Reggies Music Joint

**Eyehategod, High Priest, Guest, Something Is Waiting** 12/20, 7 PM, Cobra Lounge

**Fifth Season featuring Ben Zucker, Mabel Kwan, Eli Namay, and Adam Shead** 1/8/2022, 8:30 PM, Constellation, 18+

**Fit for an Autopsy, Enterprise Earth, Ingested, Signs of the Swarm, Great American Ghost** 1/7/2022, 6 PM, Reggies Rock Club, 17+

**Glad Rags, George Arthur Calendar** 1/8/2022, 8 PM, Sleeping Village

**Haim, Sasami** 6/3/2022, 8 PM, Huntington Bank Pavilion

**Jmsn** 12/31, 9 PM, Chop Shop

**Jack Johnson, Durand Jones & the Indications** 6/30/2022, 7:30 PM, Huntington Bank Pavilion

**Just Friends, Graduating Life, Bears in Trees** 3/26/2022, 7 PM, Cobra Lounge

**Kat Von D, Prayers** 3/16/2022, 7:30 PM, Park West

**Kayzo, Kai Wachi, Ray Volpe, Reaper** 2/25/2022, 10 PM, Radius Chicago, 18+

**Melvin Knight, Sophia Cruz** 12/21, 9:30 PM, Hideout

**Knuckle Puck, Hot Mulligan, Meet Me @ the Altar, Anxious** 3/18/2022, 6 PM, Concord Music Hall

**Kyle, Col3trane, Leven Kali** 2/15/2022, 8 PM, House of Blues, 17+

**Laser Spectacular featuring the music of Pink Floyd** 12/18, 8 PM, Patio Theater

**Lil' Ed, Vino Loudon** 12/18, 7:30 PM, Kingston Mines

**Lotus** 1/14/2022-1/15/2022, 9 PM, Park West, 18+

**Michael McDermott** 12/20-12/23, 8 PM, City Winery

**Menzingers, Oso Oso, Sincere Engineer** 4/10/2022, 7 PM, Concord Music Hall, 17+

**Roya Naldi** 12/16, 8 PM, Hungry Brain

**Phantom Planet** 3/4/2022, 8 PM, House of Blues, 17+

**Ross From Friends** 3/5/2022, 9 PM, Chop Shop, 18+

**Silverio, Los Marafackas** 12/17, 9 PM, Cobra Lounge, 18+

**Skerryvore** 1/14/22, 8 PM, Szold Hall, Old Town School of Folk Music

**Jacob Slocum's Rose Window featuring Jacob Slocum, Lenard Simpson, Dustin Laurenzi, Katie Ernst, Quentin Coaxum, Zara Zaharieva, Joshua Ramos, Julius Tucker, and Samuel Jewell** 1/7/2022, 8:30 PM, Constellation, 18+

**Snow Angels, Future Bartenderz, Hoover and Harley & the Boys** 12/16, 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle

**Sports** 3/10/2022, 8:30 PM, Lincoln Hall, 18+

**Styx, REO Speedwagon, Loverboy** 6/4/2022, 6:45 PM, Hollywood Casino Amphitheatre, Tinley Park

**Telefon Tel Aviv, Chachuba, Relativity Lounge, R34L** 12/18, 9 PM, Chop Shop

**Think Floyd USA** 2/5/2022, 8 PM, Park West

**This Wild Life, Broadside, Home Team** 2/14/2022, 8 PM, Bottom Lounge, 17+

**Keith Urban** 9/24/2022, 7 PM, Hollywood Casino Amphitheatre, Tinley Park

**Valerie June, Chastity Brown** 5/18/2022, 7 and 9:30 PM, Maurer Hall, Old Town School of Folk Music

**Eddie Vedder & the Earthlings, Glen Hansard** 2/9/2022, 7:30 PM, Auditorium Theatre

**Walker, Part Time Love Affair** 1/6/2022, 8:30 PM, Sleeping Village

**Wonder Years, Spanish Love Songs, Origami Angel, Save Face** 3/4/2022-3/5/2022, 5:30 PM, Concord Music Hall

**Work Party, Abandoncy, Nerver, Virgin Mother** 12/17, 6:30 PM, Subterranean, 17+

**"Weird Al" Yankovic, Emo Philips** 7/15/2022-7/16/2022, 8 PM, Symphony Center

**Yungblud** 2/27/2022, 7 PM, Aragon Ballroom

## UPDATED

**Baynk, Nasaya** 3/11/2022, 7:30 PM, Concord Music Hall, lineup updated

**Brett Dennen, Heavy Hours** 3/4/2022, 8 PM, Park West, lineup updated, 18+

**Elle King, Fancy Hagood** 3/11/2022, 7:30 PM, Metro, lineup updated, 18+

**Dillon Francis & Yung Gravy, Valentino Khan, Kittens** 1/14/2022, 10 PM, Radius Chicago, lineup and start time updated, 18+

**La Luz, Mamalarky, Tino Drima** 3/9/2022, 8 PM, Lincoln Hall, lineup updated, 18+

**Manchester Orchestra, Foxing, Michigander** 3/9/2022, 7:30 PM, Riviera Theatre, lineup updated, 18+

**The Marias, Evann McIntosh** 2/24/2022-2/25/2022, 7:30 PM, the Vic, lineup updated

**Nora En Pure presents Purified featuring Nora En Pure, Eli & Fur, Cassian, Paige** 1/21/2022, 9 PM, Radius Chicago, lineup and start time updated, 18+

**JP Saxe, Victoria Canal** 2/12/2022, 6:45 PM, Metro, lineup updated

**Trans-Siberian Orchestra** 12/23, 3 and 8 PM, Allstate Arena, Rosemont, show added

**Travis** 4/16/2022, 7:30 PM, Park West, canceled

**Whiskey Myers, Read Southall Band** 4/1/2022, 8 PM, Riviera Theatre, lineup updated, 18+

## UPCOMING

**All Them Witches, L.A. Witch** 12/16, 9 PM, Metro, 18+

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**An Aylor Xmas featuring Mars Williams, Josh Berman, Jim Baker, Brian Sandstrom, Steve Hunt, Kent Kessler, and Peter Maunu** 12/17, 9 PM, Hungry Brain

**Beach Bunny, Miloe, Jodi** 12/18, 7:30 PM, Riviera Theatre

**Boy Harsher** 12/30-1/1/2022, 9:30 PM, Empty Bottle

**Teri Bristol, Psycho-Bitch, T Mixwell** 12/18, 10 PM, Smart Bar

**Maurice "Mobetta" Brown** 12/18, 9 PM, Martyrs

**Josh Caterer Trio, Sunshine Boys** 12/16, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston

**Daley** 12/18, 7 PM, the Promontory

**Deadbeats Tour featuring Zeds Dead** 12/17-12/18, 9 PM, Aragon Ballroom, 18+

**Dikembe, Signals Midwest, Lettering** 12/17, 8 PM, Burlington

**Brett Eldredge** 12/17-12/18, 8 PM, Chicago Theatre

**Samantha Fish, King Solomon Hicks** 12/19, 7:30 PM, Park West

**Flat Four** 12/15, 7:30 PM, SPACE, Evanston

**Friko, Sick Day** 12/17, 8 PM, GMan Tavern

**Get Real (Green Velvet, Claude VonStroke, Cajmere, and Pedro de la Faydro)** 12/30, 9 PM, Radius Chicago, 18+

**Goose** 12/30-12/31, 9 PM, Riviera Theatre, 18+

**Henhouse Prowlers featuring Tim Carbone, Mighty Pines** 12/29, 7:30 PM, Park West, 18+

**Holiday of Horror featuring Macabre, Jungle Rot, Neuro-morphic, Fonzie & the Dago Tees** 12/18, 6:30 PM, Reggies Rock Club, 17+

**Holly, Rich Robbins, Living Thing** 12/17, 9 PM, Sleeping Village

**Honey Dijon** 12/18, 11 PM, Radius Chicago, 18+

**Houndmouth, Ona** 12/17-12/18, 8 PM, Thalia Hall, 17+

**I Fight Dragons, Schaffer the Darklord, Fantastic Mammals** 12/18, 9 PM, Lincoln Hall, 18+

**Into It. Over It., Mock Orange** 12/29-12/30, 8 PM, Sleeping Village

**John Summit** 12/30, 10 PM, Concord Music Hall, 18+

**Katie God Bandz, Dae Jones, Sherri Jae** 12/21, 9 PM, the Promontory

**Luttrell** 12/18, 10 PM, Concord Music Hall, 18+



## GOSSIP WOLF

A furry ear to the ground of the local music scene

WHEN METALLIC HARDCORE masters **Harm's Way** dropped their second full-length, *Isolation*, in 2011, Gossip Wolf hailed the "chug-o-riffic" album for its "circle-pit-ready brutality"—and the band have gone on to build a worldwide fan base and sign to Metal Blade. In November, **Closed Casket Activities** (who originally put out *Isolation*) released a tenth-anniversary edition with four new remixes, including a thumping version of "Breeding Grounds" by **Justin Broadrick** and a majestically icy take on "Pretender" by **Petbrick**. (A double LP version is available for preorder and due to ship this month.) On Sunday, December 19, Harm's Way celebrate at **Subterranean** by playing a set that includes the entire album.

This year Chicago-based music writer **Tara C. Mahadevan** (a Saint Louis native and *Reader* contributor) won a grant from Saint Louis arts organization the **Luminary** to fund **Search Party**, a magazine focusing on the city's Black and POC artists. Several Saint Louis expats based in Chicago appear in its pages, including Adrian O. Walker, Karlie Thornton, Julian "Logik" Gilliam, and DJ Police State. *Search Party* debuted last month, and its team hosts a Chicago release party at **Young Chicago Authors** (1180 N. Milwaukee) on Sunday, December 12, with DJ sets by Thornton (aka K.Tea), Police State, and Big Esco.

Last month, Chicago rapper **Matt Muse** launched the third-annual **Love & Nappy-ness Hair Care Drive**. Muse and his volunteers will collect sealed natural hair-care and personal-hygiene products to donate to **Saint Leonard's Ministries**, who run a west-side transition home for the formerly incarcerated, and to **Ignite**, which operates shelters for unhoused youth. You can donate at six locations (including the Silver Room, Semicolon Bookstore, and Build Coffee) till Friday, December 17. That night, Muse performs at **Metro** with Jamiela Woods and theMIND; part of the proceeds goes to the drive's beneficiaries.

—J.R. NELSON AND LEOR GALIL

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

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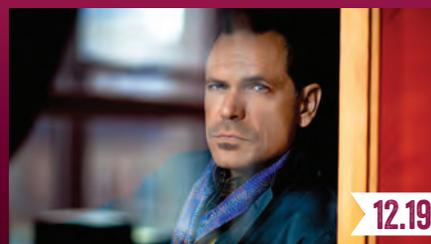
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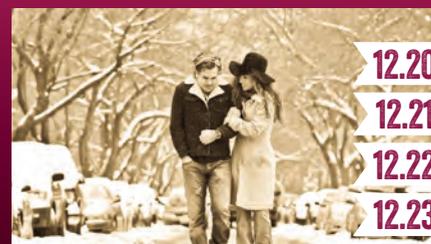
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## SAVAGE LOVE

### Don't get your straight friend a shiny latex gimp suit

Why shareabortionpill.info matters now more than ever

By **DAN SAVAGE**

**Q:** I'm a fan from Italy, so please excuse my English. I've been in a hetero relationship with my boyfriend for seven years, we're both around 30, and we love each other and blah blah blah. Sex is very good but quite standard since we have no particular kinks or fetishes. I always reach orgasm before penetration, but only with fingering. It turns me on when he goes down on me, but it doesn't "do the trick." After I come, I feel something is missing if we don't have penetrative sex that ends with him coming inside me. But because that part isn't a lot of fun for me—being penetrated doesn't make me come, and I'm being penetrated after I come—I usually urge him to come quickly, which is a

bit frustrating for him. Is it weird that I need this kind of "closure" to sex? Is it weird that I want him coming inside me under these conditions? Where does this need come from? I'm sure you'll have a great answer! —**WEIRD ORGASMIC NEEDS DEFY EASY RATIONALES**

**A:** You're in a better position to judge where this need of yours comes from—and you're most likely in the missionary position (not that there's anything wrong with that!)—but if I were to hazard a guess . . .

Sex meets our physical need for touch, for pleasure, and for release, WONDER, but it also meets emotional needs. And sometimes what a sex act and/or an eroticized act symbolizes is just as or more important than how it

feels. It means something to you—something important—when your boyfriend comes inside you during PIV intercourse. And since your boyfriend comes inside you after you've already come—usually after you've asked him to hurry things along—it's not about your pleasure in that moment. It's not about how it *feels*, WONDER, it's about what it *means*. Your physical needs have already been satisfied; your boyfriend got you off with his fingers. But sex doesn't feel real and complete for you until your boyfriend comes inside you. In the moment—in those moments—it's more about what's going on between your ears, i.e., more of what sex means than how it feels.

Seeing as you read my column, WONDER, you must know (I hope you know) that

✍ JOE NEWTON

two or more people can have a satisfying and meaningful sexual encounter that leaves them feeling connected and satisfied without anyone being penetrated during PIV or PIT or PIB and without anyone coming inside anyone else. Indeed, a person can have a meaningful sexual encounter that leaves them feeling satisfied without coming at all.

But if you want to shake things up with the boyfriend—if you occasionally wanna give your boyfriend a chance to enjoy fucking you without being hurried along—you could always wait to come until after he does. Now, you're a grown-ass, sexually active, 30-year-old-or-thereabouts citizen of the European Union, WONDER, and I'm guessing this may have already occurred to you. But I'm going to toss it out there just in case: Let your boyfriend go down on you until you're completely turned on, then let him take his time fucking you until he comes, and then—and only then—let him finger you until you come.

**Q:** I'm a 60-year-old gay man with a 35-year-old straight male friend—and no, this letter is not going where you think it's going. We have become best friends without benefits. We have a lot of common interests, and we enjoy doing things together on the weekend. I've never gotten any indication that he has any sexual interest in me and I'm not going to ruin our friendship by making sexual advances to him. Last year I went through a very difficult time personally, involving an illness and multiple deaths in my family. He was there for me completely—really, above and beyond anything I could have expected. I would like to get him a gift to

express my gratitude for his support and I can afford to be extravagant. The problem is, I don't want to get him something extravagant if there's a risk my generosity might be interpreted as a come-on. Our friendship works because we respect each other's boundaries, and I don't want him thinking I've suddenly tried to cross one. So, here is my question: What does a 60-year-old gay man give a straight man half his age that will convey appreciation for his support during a difficult time in my life but will not convey a desire for sex? Or is there such a gift? —**FULLY RECOVERED AND THANKFUL**

**A:** It's easier for me to rule things out than it is for me to rule things in, FRAT, seeing as that, save for his age and straightness, I know next to nothing about your friend. I mean, you already know not to get your straight friend a pricey leather sling or a shiny latex gimp suit, right? You don't need me to tell you that, do you?

So, besides pussy, what does your straight friend like? Does he like football? Get him a pair of tickets to see the team he crushes on hardest and encourage him to take a friend (or a date) that shares his passion for that kind of straight bullshit. Does he like video games? Get him one of those giant TVs straight gamer boys like to play games on. Does he like going places and is he fully vaccinated? Get him airline vouchers and give him enough cash to cover a nice hotel and food and tell him to go have a great fully vaccinated vacation on you. Or maybe there's something he needs rather than wants—kind of like you needed emotional and logistical support during your illness and family tragedies? If he needs his credit cards paid down, pay 'em down. If he needs his car paid off, pay it off.

And if you're worried that he might misinterpret your generosity as a come-on or as a precedent (that lavish gifts will keep coming) or as a burden (that you expect lavish gifts in return), address all those possible misinterpretations in the card: "You were such a generous and giving friend during an extremely difficult time in my life and I wanted to do something special for you—just this once—to thank you. I hope we will always be friends."

Finally, FRAT, there's also the option of giving him something reasonable—maybe tickets to a football game counts—and then writing that straight boy into your will. He definitely won't think you're trying to get into his pants after you're dead.

**Hey, everybody: Fuck Alito and fuck Thomas and fuck Roberts and fuck Kavanaugh and fuck Gorsuch and fuck Barrett. Fuck anyone who would force a woman to give birth against her will. But while SCOTUS may be able to reverse Roe v. Wade and allow Republican-controlled state legislatures to ban abortion in most of the United States, we don't have to return to the days when women who needed abortions—and trans and nonbinary folks who needed abortions—couldn't get them safely. Abortion pills (Mifepristone and Misoprostol) are safe and effective, they can be safely self-administered, and they can be purchased online for around \$100. For more information, go to shareabortionpill.info. Stock up so you have them on hand if you or your friends or your family members or your coworkers or your neighbors ever need them. 📌**

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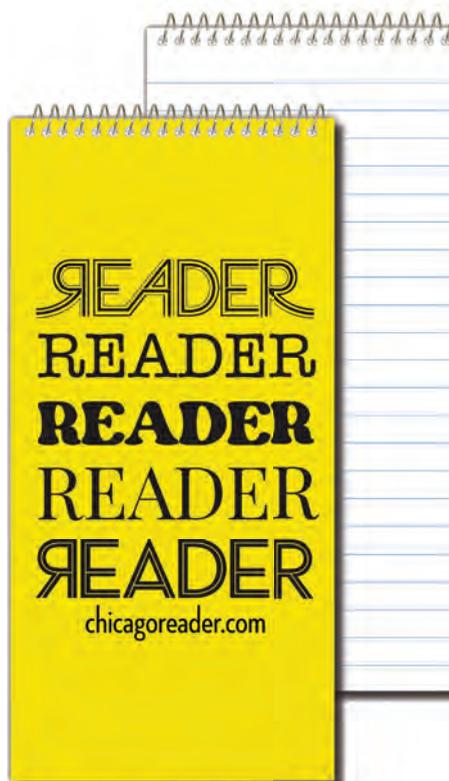
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## froSkate

Safe space for BIPOC queer skaters

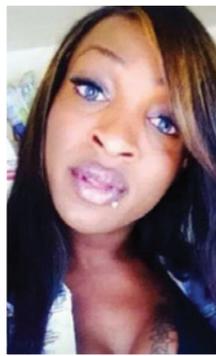
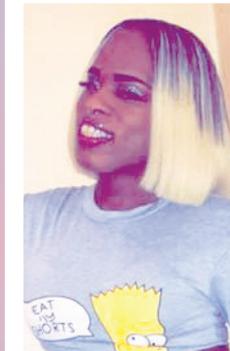
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# LONGTIME ADVOCATE GREGG GONSALVES

## talks activist roots, Larry Kramer and COVID

BY ANDREW DAVIS

When it comes to dealing with HIV/AIDS, few people have been on the front lines—in the areas of activism, research and instruction—like Gregg Gonsalves.

Gonsalves, a MacArthur fellow, is an expert in policy modeling on infectious disease and substance use, as well as the intersection of public policy and health equity. His research focuses on the use of quantitative models for improving the response to epidemic diseases. For more than 30 years, he worked on HIV/AIDS and other global health issues with several organizations, including the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP), the Treatment Action Group, and the AIDS and Rights Alliance for Southern Africa.

He is currently an associate professor at Yale School of Public Health and an associate professor at Yale Law School.

**Windy City Times: You have been involved in activism for quite some time. What propelled you to go in that direction?**

GG: Gonsalves: I graduated high school in 1981—when the first case of HIV/AIDS/GRID appeared in gay men. My coming out in young adulthood was at the dawn of this epidemic.

In the first few years of that decade, I was in college but then I dropped out. Then, when hanging out in Boston, I met somebody. We started dating and then one night, he came over and was drunk—and he said, “We gotta break up.” After a half-hour or so, he said, “I’m HIV-positive.” I said, “You know what? We’ll get through this together.” But this was before the internet; information was from the newspaper or the library, which I couldn’t go into because I wasn’t a student anymore—so the first place I got information from was [activist organization] ACT UP Boston. It was also around the same time Queer Nation was exploding around the country.

It was thrilling. Yes, it was scary because AIDS was there—but, all of a sudden, I had found my people. There were people who cared about social justice, LGBT rights and AIDS. I was hooked—so much so that when my partner went to New York for law school, I stayed in Boston with ACT UP and Queer Nation.

[Eventually,] I follow and join ACT UP New York, and my whole life became consumed with activism. That’s how it started.

**WCT: I’ve had some people in the HIV at 40 series talk about the day they found out about their HIV status. Could you take me back to the day you found out?**

GG: It was ‘95 or so, and my cousin was dy-

ing of AIDS in New York. I was in ACT UP and was HIV-negative, or so I thought. I went to my physician, Dr. Joseph Sonnabend, to get my test results. Joe called and said, “I’m coming over.” I thought, “This can’t be good.”

We came over and said, “You’re positive.” This was right before protease inhibitors come down the line, and my cousin is deathly ill. It was my old apartment that I lived in with David Barr on Second Avenue and 12th Street, in New York. A couple friends came over and we talked, and that was it. And then I had to tell my conservative Italian-Portuguese Catholic family, and come out as an HIV-positive gay man.

Within a year, protease inhibitors were on the scene and I signed up for a clinical trial. I seroconverted at the right time.

**WCT: Did finding out you were HIV-positive affect your approach to activism in any way?**

GG: Not really. I was so identified with my friends, who had HIV, and was working so diligently on HIV-treatment stuff that it hadn’t occurred to me that anything was different.

**WCT: I know you deal with health equity. For our readers, can you discuss the difference between equity and equality?**

GG: Oh, God. [Both laugh.] Anyone who does this for a living would probably yell at me, but inequality is two doesn’t equal three; it’s a statement of facts, like “John makes less money than Sandra.” Inequity has a justice component and a value judgment; there’s something wrong with an imbalance.

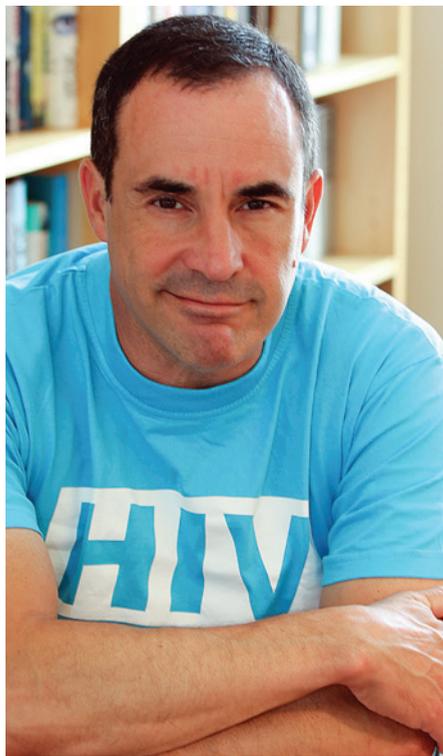
**WCT: So inequity would have a tie to activism?**

GG: Yes.

**WCT: As you know, activist giant Larry Kramer passed away last year. What do you think he meant to activism, and what did he mean to you?**

GG: He was a complicated guy. I wasn’t in ACT UP from the beginning, so I didn’t know him in his foundational role. I only knew him when I joined ACT UP in New York, and then he split off to found TAG [Treatment Action Group]. Larry was very angry at us. Larry was angry at lots of people at lots of points in his life.

My colleague, Mark Harrington, and I, recommended that there should be a reorganization of how NIH does AIDS research. Larry and Martin Delaney wanted something on a larger scale, like the Manhattan Project. Mark and I wanted a leadership change with research at NIH; Larry was livid. We were still friends enough that he invited us out to his place—and he’s yelling at us across his kitchen table, saying, “I want to flush your head down a toilet.”



Gregg Gonsalves. Photo courtesy of Gonsalves

stration put into the vaccine was critically important. I did affect everyone, as you said; the disparities or inequities between who COVID kills and who gets it are not equal. But it affected enough people in power that it became a national priority.

**WCT: Regarding AIDS, it seems people of color are still disproportionately affected. Why do you think that is?**

GG: I [recently] wrote a piece for The Nation that deals with white supremacy and the history of race in this country. I wrote, “The fact that more people of color are dying from COVID-19 is not surprising.”

The HIV epidemic is another case in point, but you can go back in history to Jeffrey Amherst saying we should give smallpox-infected blankets to Native Americans to kill them. There’s a historian named Jim Downs who wrote a book called [Sick] from Freedom about how, at the end of the Civil War, freed slaves were stricken with smallpox—but nobody ever wrote about it because of who it was happening to. I looked at some medical records a few years ago and realized that there’s a smallpox epidemic in the Southwest that nobody talks about. We talk about Tuskegee, but we don’t talk about the gas riots in El Paso [a 1917 event sparked by a requirement that Mexican immigrants take kerosene delousing baths and get vaccinated]; that policy lasted until the ‘60s. If you’re wondering why African Americans are infected with HIV and die of diabetes and other diseases, look at healthcare and race.

**WCT: Well, we’ve covered the past and present, so let’s talk about the future. On a certain level, there seems to be some apathy regarding HIV/AIDS. Where do you see AIDS activism going?**

GG: Because of COVID, I’ve been thinking a lot about this. A lot of activists from the old days and the young ones now are working on COVID vaccine access as well as PrEP. If we want to deal with HIV, we have to deal with the rest of the shit we’ve been talking about, right? We need to consider the COVID and HIV epidemics as one piece of the puzzle, but there’s also police violence. The Black Lives Matter movement is a public-health movement. We have to think about climate change; mosquito patterns come up from the Gulf Coast and now we’re going to have malaria back in the United States.

The environmental movement, the fight for racial justice and more are all part of the same thing, and a huge movement is needed. Rich people are always going to get what they need. This is the moment of truth.

**WCT: Is there anything you wanted to add?**

GG: Any of the achievements we’ve made, we fought for. They didn’t come because someone thought we were deserving. We just have to be vigilant, and steel ourselves for the next challenge.

So he could be incredibly cruel and, in a way, he disowned some of the [people] who went to found Treatment Action Group—but, years later, he turned out to be very generous. I ended up going back to college in my 40s and ended up applying here at Yale; Larry wrote me a recommendation. The second-to-last time I saw him was at a party/reunion and I said I hadn’t the Broadway revival of The Normal Heart. And he said, “Closing night’s next week. Why don’t you come with me?” So I went to the closing night. The weird thing was that I was there 25 years after seeing it in the West End, in London. I was listening to everyone crying and I was thinking, “This was history”—and no one in that room knew it. I blew Larry a kiss and walked away. It was probably the last time I saw him, and it was a long time ago—more than a decade.

Everybody’s complicated, but he was more complicated than most.

**WCT: As you know, there is no AIDS vaccine. Does that surprise you?**

GG: What surprised me was that we had a COVID vaccine in under a year. I write a column for The Nation magazine, and one of my first was, “It’s 40 years later and we don’t have an AIDS vaccine. Don’t get your hopes up about a COVID vaccine.” Eight months later, we had a COVID vaccine.

It’s turned out to be a very difficult and technical project to make an AIDS vaccine—and who knows if we’ll ever have one? It’s remarkable: We spent a lot of money on it, and a lot of research has been instrumental in developing a COVID vaccine.

**WCT: In a way, I wasn’t surprised about the development of a COVID vaccine. There was a whole “moral” aspect in the ‘80s to AIDS; COVID immediately affected everyone.**

GG: Yeah. I think the science had progressed that made the achievement possible. I hate to say it, but I think the dollars the Trump admin-

# House of Chanel

creates charitable foundation to promote community service across ballroom scene and beyond

BY MAX LUBBERS

Almost 50 years after the founding of House of Chanel, the ballroom house is creating the Chanel Cares Charitable Foundation to give back to the community.

The foundation will organize community engagement projects, including an upcoming toy drive and holiday dinner. With an official launch planned for January 2022, overall queen mother Tatyana Moaton said that Chanel Cares was born out of a continued push for service.

"When I say service, this is not just us taking the talent from the community, but truly making an intentional investment within the community," she said. "We are not an organization only existing in name."

Because of that, Moaton said House of Chanel members will be required to complete volunteer hours. Later on, she hopes that Chanel Cares can provide microgrants to community-based organizations.

This effort is rooted in the rich history and values of the house, Moaton said. Founded in 1974, the House of Chanel is one of the longest-standing ballroom houses. It also has never closed or merged with another house.

"There are not many houses around that can say that," she said. "Chanel Cares is showing that we're continuing to evolve and continuing to be that beacon of light for those marginalized and ostracized within their communities."

Moaton said the new foundation aligns with the start of House of Chanel's story. After pioneering icon RR Chanel asked to join the House of Dupree, ballroom legend Paris Dupree told him he needed to win a trophy first. Yet when Chanel



Chanel Cares held its first event on Nov. 28, coming together to cook for houseless people. Photo by Max Lubbers

came back with an award, Dupree still laughed in his face.

"This was during the height of the AIDS epidemic, and people were feeling like this is the only place that we can kind of find some solace and community," Moaton said. "Even within [the ballroom scene], people were still being ostracized, and so he started the house."

Now, she said she's proud to add Chanel Cares as the next chapter of history. Legendary overall father Derrick Barry said the foundation fits into the overall vision of the house. That's something Barry takes incredibly seriously.

He said he always looks for opportunities to take the house to the next level. But he also understands that he is one of only a few people to hold his title in the lifetime of the house, and so he wants to make past generations proud with every decision he makes.

"This is something that we've never done before and I feel like it will help us take a step into the forefront," he said. "Ballroom is going more mainstream, and as an overall father of one of the oldest ballroom houses, I want to be sure that we can stay innovative, be excited, and keep the flow going."

They can do all that while also caring for the community, he said. At its core, ballroom was built on shade. But it was also built on people who came together to make new families and care for one other after being cast out from society.

According to Moaton, the house empowers its members to be good citizens and strive for excellence in all areas of life.

"Ballroom happens for a moment maybe once or twice a month, but then life happens," she said. "We are always supposed to be good stew-

ards of our community by advocating for those issues that we are passionate about."

In particular, Chanel Cares will focus on social services and public health, Barry said. That includes promoting HIV prevention and care, as well as mental health care.

With a holistic viewpoint, Chanel Cares will advocate for resources surrounding health, like housing, food security and education.

"In this day and age, a lot of house parents are just worried about the kids competing and not worried about their mental health situations or their physical health," Barry noted. "It's important that we bring those kinds of issues forward."

This type of care isn't new for House of Chanel, Barry said—both he and Moaton are heavily involved in their children's lives. But they hope to spread this emphasis on health to the entire community. This work will not be exclusive to house members, he said. They want to involve people in the ballroom scene as a whole as well as partner with community-based organizations.

As they plan their first events and gear up for a full calendar of projects next year, Barry said they hope the announcement of Chanel Cares will make people excited to participate in community service in the long term. And with more than 10 chapters, some international, the House of Chanel will create a broad impact, Moaton said.

For its first event, Chanel Cares fed people experiencing homelessness at Breakthrough Urban Ministries on Nov. 28. As they plan further events and gear up for a full calendar of projects next year, Barry said they hope the announcement of Chanel Cares will make people excited to participate in community service in the long-term. And with more than 10 chapters, some international,

the House of Chanel will create a broad impact, Moaton said. See <https://breakthrough.org/>.

"Chanel Cares is showing that we're going to put our mouth and our minds and our hearts to work in the same places we've committed ourselves," she added. "We want to give more to ballroom than take from it."



Derrick Barry and Tatyana Moaton. Photo courtesy of Barry

# Remembering Chicagoans lost to ANTI-TRANS VIOLENCE

BY MATT SIMONETTE

Transgender and gender non-conforming (TGNC) Chicagoans have not escaped the epidemic of violence that has faced so many TGNC people in the United States.

A group of Windy City Times fellows, as part of a project conducted in partnership with the Field Foundation, profiled a number of local TGNC individuals who lost their lives to such violence in the past 10 years. We have also included a report on what local authorities say they are doing to address this violence that looms

as a threat for so many in our community.

Windy City Times is aware that this list is by no means exhaustive. Much violence against TGNC goes unreported and, even when it does, there are few guarantees that authorities and media will properly identify a victim as being part of the TGNC community.

Constructing a well-rounded profile for several of these Chicagoans has been equally challenging. While some of these individuals were well-remembered members of their families and communities, others preferred—or were forced by their circumstances—to live lives that were relatively quiet. The passage of time can be equally

difficult a challenge to overcome; some may not have had social media pages memorializing them, and the friends and loved ones who remember them best may have dispersed over the years.

When Transgender Day of Remembrance is observed each year, people are all urged to say the name of the victims who have fallen to anti-TGNC violence. With this project, Windy City Times hopes to go beyond just the names and create, when possible, richer portraits of these persons whose lives were lost in this violent pandemic.

## CIARA MINAJ CARTER FRAZIER

BY MAX LUBBERS

“And hold that pose for me.” That’s what Ciara Minaj Carter Frazier’s family would hear in the middle of the night, as Ciara was up late vogueing, said her sister Lunetta Frazier.

“We definitely miss her, listening to that,” she said. “Dancing, vogueing through the kitchen, through the house.”

Before her death in 2018, Lunetta didn’t know a world without Ciara. Her very first memory is of Ciara being born—they’re two years and seven days apart, she said.

“She would always give me a real tight hug,” she said. “To know that I won’t have that hug again, or our kids won’t....It’s hard to put into words.”

Years after Lunetta went to the hospital for Ciara’s birth, she said Ciara returned the favor. When Lunetta had her son in 2009, Ciara was one of the first people to hold him. From that point on, Ciara was a patient and fun aunt.

“These kids would go back and forth over a toy, and she would be gentle about that,” Lunetta said. “She would just start singing, ‘Let it go, let it go!’ And she’d give them some other stuff to play with.”

It hurts to know that she won’t be there to see the kids grow up, Lunetta said. But each Christmas, their dad buys a gift for the kids on behalf of Titi Ciara, Lunetta said—she is certainly not forgotten.

To Ciara, her family mattered more than anything. Lunetta said she had tattoos of the initials of her mother, dad, siblings, niece and nephews. And she was a fierce protector.

When they were kids, Lunetta said she was scared that a ghost would be outside the bathroom. Ciara’s room was across from hers, so Lunetta would throw her shoes down to her door and wait for her to come out before she walked down the hallway. In those moments, Ciara would always make her feel safe, she said.

As they grew up, it was always clear that Ciara would become Ciara, Lunetta said. At 15 years old, Ciara started working in a cafe that did outreach for LGBTQ+ teens. And after leaving home at 18, she came out when she came back to visit.

“We accepted it, because we knew her truth,” she said. “I could see how it was liberating for her.”

Her name came from her favorite singers: R&B princess Ciara, rap boss Nicki Minaj and Queen B Beyoncé Carter. She took her style seriously, too, Lunetta said. One of her signature looks was her lashes. It used to be difficult to buy long lashes outright, so she would get two or three packs and glue them together, Lunetta said.

Lunetta and her sisters now run a company called Queen Litt, selling lingerie, lashes and can-

Ciara Minaj Carter Frazier.  
Photo courtesy of Destinii Jones

dles. They have a fluffy, long lash named after Ciara, as well as a candle. The scent is modeled after Chanel No. 5, a nod to how Ciara walked in ballroom categories for the House of Chanel.

Ciara’s unique style also drew inspiration from Nicki Minaj, said her friend Destinii Jones. The first time they met around 2009, she had hair like Minaj: black with a bang, pink tracks in the back. Later on, Frazier would use Minaj for inspiration in some of her ballroom looks.

“No matter what, Ciara was herself and you couldn’t help but respect that,” Jones said. “I liked her drive.”

But Jones said that a lot of people didn’t understand Ciara, and she wishes that people wouldn’t prejudice her. That’s something that Ciara faced both in life and after her death, she said.

“I just wish they really would have seen her for her spirit and her character versus how she looked,” she said. “I’m not saying that my friend was ugly, because she was beautiful. But a lot of people don’t understand the life of what it’s like to be a Black transgender woman, and they judge us before they meet us.”

If someone knew Ciara, they would love her, Jones said. Whenever the Mariah Carey album *Memoirs of an Imperfect Angel* plays, Jones thinks about Ciara. That was Ciara’s soundtrack, Jones said, along with Nicki Minaj. And to Jones, Ciara was the real angel.

“She was just always so protective of me,” she said. “I would have a pocket full of money and Ciara would have a pocket full of money but she would make sure I wouldn’t have to spend anything. She really showed me love.”

That’s just what Ciara was like, Jones said. Her friendships meant much to her, and there wasn’t anything she wouldn’t do for them. It’s this girl that Jones chooses to remember.

“That was someone who was proud of me and supported me,” Jones said. “People and police might think of her as just another dead transgender (woman) but we have relationships with people. We have bonds. Whoever took her life, I want them to know what they took from us.”

Ciara was a friend. She was a sister, a daughter and an aunt. She used to sing and laugh, dance and vogue—over the tracks of R&B, through the houses of family and friends and across the ballroom scenes of Chicago and Minnesota. In the memories of her friends and family, that’s how she will stay: smiling, sweet and confident, and always, always, holding that pose.





**Tiara Richmond/Keke Collier, 2015.**  
Photo from Facebook

# TIARA RICHMOND/ KEKE COLLIER

BY CRIS VILLALONGA-VIVONI

Tiara Richmond, also known as Keke Collier, was killed on Feb. 21, 2017, after being shot while sitting in a car with a man in Englewood. She was only 24 years old and was the second Black transgender woman killed in Chicago over six months.

Richmond grew up on the South Side of Chicago and attended Dyett High School. From 2013-2015, she studied at the BIR Training Center to be a medical assistant and she was looking for a job just before her death.

Richmond's relationship with her family is unclear; however, it seems that she had a lot of love for them. According to LaSaia Wade, CEO of Brave Space Alliance and who was in contact with them following the murder, they accepted her when she came out as trans.

She was incredibly close to her mother, Marilyn Maria Wilson, who passed away in 2015. Richmond was grief-stricken and would often turn to her social media, writing long paragraphs sharing her feelings and crying for her mother.

Richmond had also just become a new aunt to three baby nieces.

She was a popular girl, with over 1,200 Facebook friends, several of whom were active commenters on Richmond's posts. From responding to rants to hyping her up, Richmond's friends evidently loved and cared for her.

Her Facebook photos, which mainly consist of mirror selfies, are a testimony to Richmond's confidence. She was strong-willed, emotional, fun and an avid personality quiz-taker.

Richmond was also artistic, and she often posted red, glitter collages of her friends, partners and family. She would post the collages with numerous red hearts and the person's name in cursive. She used her creativity to express her love for those closest to her.

"She loved to dance all the time," Retta Collins, a decade-long friend of Richmond, told the Chicago Tribune. "She was always the life of the party. Even when we got into fights, she didn't want to fight."

**Richmond's family and friends were not available to comment. This information comes from her memorial Facebook page and other articles written on her. Persons who would like to share further details of Tiara's story should contact [cvillalonga.vivoni@gmail.com](mailto:cvillalonga.vivoni@gmail.com).**

# T.T. SAFFORE

BY CRIS VILLALONGA-VIVONI

Jalayah Armstrong can still remember how brightly T.T. Saffore smiled.

"Silly T.T.," Armstrong called her.

Saffore's "magic"—that jokester smile—would bring Armstrong solace regardless of what was going on around them. Saffore's loud, sweet, echoing laugh had the same effect.

"No matter what she was going through, she had always been a person that smiled," Armstrong said. "She'd be going through hell, but she still had a smile."

In 2016, Armstrong stood with 30 other West Garfield Park community members looking at the glowing candles on the asphalt arranged to spell out, "R.I.P. T.T."

Saffore, 28, was killed on Sept. 11, 2016. Her body was found along railroad tracks, with her throat cut. She was one of two Black trans women murdered in Chicago within six months and the 20th known transgender person to be murdered in the country that year.

Saffore grew up in West Garfield Park with her siblings and father. Her older brother, Jermaine, told Windy City Times in 2016 that Saffore was the "baby of the family." Their father passed away sometime before the murder. The family was not available to comment for this story.

Armstrong described Saffore as so "full of life" and a "beautiful person." She was always complimenting people and was ready to help anyone.

Saffore was known for her sharp wit; it wasn't uncommon to hear people laughing in her presence. She would crack jokes with everyone even if the situation she was in was terrifying. Armstrong recalled how Saffore's smile and laughter helped her through their time incarcerated together. Somehow, Saffore made things feel easier.

"I was crying, didn't know what to do. Thought it was the end of the world," Armstrong said in an interview with WBEZ Chicago in 2016. "She was there to just keep me going through my days with jokes. Even though she didn't have much, she gave. She sent me snacks, little cookies and cakes. It's just the small things that count. She had a heart."

Saffore loved "girly things," Armstrong added. Namely, she loved to change up her hairstyle, often dyeing her hair different colors. She could also never leave home with her shimmery, glitter lip gloss.

"I will always remember her as a happy person," Armstrong told Windy City Times in 2016. "I will always remember her smile."

**People who would like to share their stories about Dejanay can contact [cvillalonga.vivoni@gmail.com](mailto:cvillalonga.vivoni@gmail.com). WBEZ's report is at <https://bit.ly/3172NBA>.**



**Lilly Wachowski portrait of T.T. Saffore.**  
Photo by Andrew Davis

# TIFFANY GOODEN

BY MAX LUBBERS

When Tiffany Gooden was killed in August 2012, she was only 19 years old. Almost a decade later, her murder remains unsolved—but there’s more to her than the details of her death, according to her friends and family, who remember her as being both smart and courageous.

Gooden is well-loved by her mother, who spoke with Windy City Times in 2012, asking to be identified as “Mary.” At that time, she told WCT that Gooden graduated at the top of her class in a three-month educational program.

“I was so proud,” Mary said. “But what with peer pressure and neighborhood pressure, the streets were calling.”

Eisha Love, Gooden’s friend, said that Gooden stayed to herself on “the stroll,” where trans women on the West Side of Chicago gathered. But Love also said that Gooden’s personality stood out.

“Despite what people thought of her, and the experiences and lifestyle she had to live, she still carried on stuff in a way where it was like: ‘I’m me,” she said. “(She faced) the fact that others may look and judge, but she still held her head high.”

Love also said that Gooden was brave, and would stand up for girls who were in danger.

“We was always out, having fun, trying to hype each other up just to keep going for the night, because we knew going out was really dangerous,” Love recalled. “She had a fun, courageous personality.”

Love and Gooden had each other’s backs. They typically spent time together after nights of working. One night, a group of men tried to attack them, and Love hit one of the attackers with her car as she fled. When Love went to the police, she was arrested with charges of aggravated battery, and later, first-degree attempted murder.

After that, Love was cut off from Gooden. Later that year, Gooden was found dead. Four months before Gooden’s murder, another trans woman from the West Side, Paige Clay, was killed.

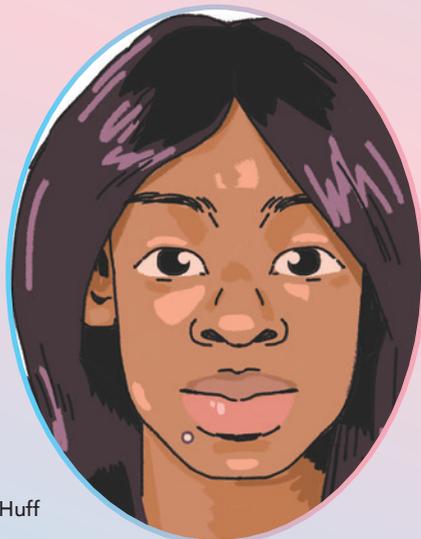
Mary told WCT that, at that point, Gooden was frightened, and she began to only go out on the stroll when the sun began to rise in the morning.

Gooden also told her aunt of plans to return to school. She wanted to help out and support her family, who were coping with the death of her grandmother.

Mary said she and Gooden spent time together on a Saturday morning, just like they usually did. But just after midnight that Sunday, Gooden suddenly left the house. Realizing something was amiss, Mary began searching for her and filed a missing person’s report — on August 14, she heard the news of her murder.

“I just remember (her) smile,” she said. “After that, I never seen my child again.”

**Windy City Times made many attempts to contact friends and family members of Tiffany Gooden, but understands we could not reach everyone. Those who can speak to her memory—or know of someone else who can—can email [by.max.lubbers@gmail.com](mailto:by.max.lubbers@gmail.com).**



Tiffany Gooden.  
Illustration by Amber Huff



Tyianna Alexander.  
Photo from Facebook

# TYIANNA ALEXANDER

BY MATT SIMONETTE

Chicagoan Tyianna Alexander, also known as Davarea Alexander, was the first trans woman to die by murder in the city in 2021. She was 28.

Alexander was shot to death the morning of Jan. 6 at the 800 block of West 57th Street, according to reports. A man who was with Alexander, Brandon Gowdy, 31, was also shot in the incident and taken to University of Chicago Medical Center where he later died.

Alexander was misgendered in early reports. Her death has remained unsolved as of publication. A few months before her death, Alexander posted on social media that her car had been shot at several times.

In a remembrance of Alexander published in March by AIDS Foundation of Chicago (AFC), Alexander, who lived with her mother, was remembered as “the life of the party.” She was an aficionado of Chicago House music and loved to dance, and sometimes used the moniker Barbie the Dance Diva. That love of dance was seemingly infectious throughout her family; on December 21, Alexander live-streamed her young niece’s Tik Tok-themed birthday party, roaming through the party with her phone as girls joyously danced in celebration.

“Her energy was intoxicating,” Alexander’s friend, Beverly Ross, said in the AFC remembrance. “I think that’s what’s going to be missed most. She was a sweetheart. She loved everybody, and everybody loved her.”

A graduate of Harper High School, Alexander also worked in various retail and restaurant positions.

A funeral for her took place Jan. 14 and 15, while a balloon release and a remembrance was also held Jan. 8, just two days after her death.

The notice for that latter, impromptu gathering remembered her as, indeed, “the life of the party”: “Please come out to help us celebrate the life of Barbie the Dance Diva, who loved, cared and laughed with everyone.”

**AFC’s article about Alexander is at <https://tinyurl.com/33c29x5d>. To share any anecdotes or memories of Alexander, contact [matt@windycitytimes.com](mailto:matt@windycitytimes.com).**

# SELENA REYES-HERNANDEZ



Selena Reyes-Hernandez.  
Illustration by Amber Huff

BY HENRY ROACH

Selena Reyes-Hernandez, 37, lived on the Southwest Side of Chicago in the Marquette Park neighborhood. She was an artist and used the stage name Selene Maldonado.

In the early hours of May 31, 2020, an 18-year-old man shot Reyes-Hernandez to death in her home when he learned she was transgender. When she said she was transgender, he left, only to return an hour later with a handgun, detectives reported.

Reyes-Hernandez had spent the day before with three friends, attending a birthday party before having drinks at a friend's home, prosecutors said. Around 5 a.m. on May 31, Reyes-Hernandez dropped a friend off at home, about 25 minutes before she met her killer.

"May our memory of Selena Reyes-Hernandez show your gorgeous wide smile rather than the cruel smirk of your killer," one Twitter user shared in June 2020. "She was an artist. Her stage name was Selene Maldonado. Fly, Selena, Fly #ProtectTransWomen."

The person tweeting did not know Reyes-Hernandez personally, but was in contact with some of Reyes-Hernandez's friends, she told Windy City Times.

"Selena should still be here today," said Tori Cooper, Human Rights Campaign director of community engagement for the Transgender Justice Initiative, in a statement following Reyes-Hernandez's death. "Our continued failure to support and empower transgender, non-binary and gender non-conforming people is as inhumane as it is unacceptable. We need to take action now as a community and as a country that takes us towards racial justice and trans liberation."

According to the Transgender Law Center, Reyes-Hernandez's family didn't want to recognize or acknowledge their trans daughter. They buried her in Mexico under her deadname. The Chicago medical examiner, police and media also deadnamed and misgendered Reyes-Hernandez in their initial reports.

Pittsburgh Lesbian Correspondents, Pittsburgh's oldest LGBTQ+ blog, posted a remembrance of Reyes-Hernandez in June 2020.

"Rest in power, Selena," the posting said. "There is progress towards justice, but we cannot change the facts of your burial. Posts like this one will say your name so your memory will live on. You deserved a long life far from this violence. I hope we learn more about your lived life. You are not erased."

**Windy City Times attempted to reach out to sources who knew Reyes-Hernandez personally, but they declined to comment or did not reply by the time of publication. Those who knew Selena Reyes-Hernandez and would like to speak about their memories of her should contact [s3d5w4@u.northwestern.edu](mailto:s3d5w4@u.northwestern.edu).**

## TRANS OMNIBUS PROJECT

# Advocates: Black and Latinx trans women are more vulnerable to violence; holistic approach needed

BY KAYLEIGH PADAR

At least 50 trans or gender-nonconforming (TGNC) people have been murdered in the United States in 2021, making it the deadliest year on record for that demographic, according to the Human Rights Campaign.

Most of the people killed this year and in past years were Black and Latinx transgender women.

Of the 10 murders of Black trans women that have taken place over the years in Chicago that Windy City Times profiled, only two cases—the murders of Dejanay Stanton and Selena Reyes-Hernandez—involved the arrest of suspected offenders. The other eight cases remain open and unsolved.

Channyn Lynn Parker, the director of strategic partnerships at Howard Brown, said the violence Black trans women experience is just one symptom of the systemic injustice BIPOC TGNC people

face.

Research from the National LGBTQ Task Force showed Black transgender people have an extremely high unemployment rate, at 26%, four times the rate of the general population. They're more than five times more likely to experience homelessness than the general population and eight times more likely to live in extreme poverty, with a household lower than \$10,000, the research showed.

Parker explained these disparities in living conditions make BIPOC TGNC people more vulnerable to violence.

"We have a tendency to think very myopically about the murders of trans women as violence perpetrated against them through brute physical force," said Parker, who formerly worked as an advocate for LGBTQ+ people impacted by crime. "But there are much larger issues at hand. Those are the systemic injustices you see folks facing,

Center on Halsted, which provides LGBTQ+ sensitivity training for CPD officers.  
Photo by Andrew Davis



like unemployment, a lack of housing, a lack of affirming resources."

Caitlin Tupper, the director of the Anti-Violence Project at Center on Halsted, works to help connect victims of crime and their families to resources, whether that involves law enforcement or linkage to health care.

Tupper explained "there are so many different barriers" for BIPOC LGBTQ+ people and their families who try to access resources after experiencing violence.

On top of the trauma people face after experiencing a crime or losing a loved one, people often fear discrimination when dealing with law enforcement or accessing other supportive resources, Tupper said.

This fraught relationship with law enforcement can make crimes against TGNC people more difficult to solve because "a lot of solving homicides

has to do with community cooperation," CPD Officer and LGBTQ+ liaison Megan Woods explained.

To improve the relationship between the Chicago Police Department and the LGBTQ+ community, six LGBTQ+ liaison positions were created in June.

"There are wounds caused by historical treatment from the police onto the community, and we're here to—I mean, we can't go back in time—but we can make sure moving forward we build bridges and close those service gaps," CPD Officer and LGBTQ+ liaison Phoebe Flores said.

These liaisons work to connect members of the LGBTQ+ community to law enforcement and other resources. A large part of the liaisons' work involves making themselves visible to LGBTQ+ people.

"The biggest thing is just to be seen in the community and to be recognized so they see that

# TIARA BANKS

BY HENRY ROACH

On April 21, 2021, transgender woman Tiara Banks was killed in her car in the West Pullman neighborhood of Chicago. According to local news reports, Banks, 24, was sitting alone in her Ford Fusion when a person approached and shot her multiple times.

"Losing yet another member of our community to senseless acts of violence against transgender people, particularly Black transgender women, is both painful and incredibly frustrating," said Tori Cooper, Human Rights Campaign director of community engagement for the Transgender Justice Initiative, in a statement the week after the incident.

"At just 24 years old, Tiara had her whole entire life ahead of her and, instead, we are remembering her because of the ongoing fatal violence against transgender people. We must continue to urge everyone to call an end to the alarming rate of fatal trans violence," Cooper said.

Beverly Ross, a Chicago LGBTQ+ health advocate, said that Banks lost her mother, father and a sibling, Ross said, "but she still had family support" for much of her life. Banks is survived by a transgender sister who goes by the name Peaches, Ross said, noting that Banks and Peaches were "similar" to one another.

"At this time, I just think we have to figure out: How do we navigate these spaces and help girls be more safe in these practices and this work that we involve ourselves in?" Ross said.

Howard Brown Health also acknowledged the loss of Banks in a Facebook post the week following her death.

"We are feeling the effects of anti-trans hate in the loss of yet another member of the transgender community here in Chicago," Howard Brown officials wrote. "We must continue to fight against systemic transphobia and racism that is stealing the lives of our transgender siblings."

A visitation was hosted for Banks the evening of May 2, 2021 at Higgins Family Funeral Home, according to the funeral home's website. A wake and celebration of life followed the next day at Resurrection House Baptist Church in Dolton.

**At this time, not much else is known about Banks' personal life. Those who knew Tiara Banks and would like to speak about their memories of her should email [s3d5w4@u.northwestern.edu](mailto:s3d5w4@u.northwestern.edu).**



**Tiara Banks.**  
Photo courtesy of Human Rights Campaign

they have representation," Woods said. "And you can see there's a huge difference in the way they speak with me or other liaison liaisons than just a regular beat cop on the street because it's more of a comfortable relationship."

Liaisons help victims of crimes or their families navigate the criminal justice system by checking in with them, offering updates on ongoing investigations and connecting them to outside resources, like LGBTQ+ affirming healthcare and therapy.

"The whole idea is that we don't want the trans community to feel like they don't have access to everything that everyone else in the city has access to when it comes to anything that the police do," Woods said.

LGBTQ+ people can also choose to file police reports or share information about an ongoing investigation with the liaisons if they feel uncomfortable going to another member of CPD. In part, this is to help increase community cooperation so police can more effectively solve investigations.

"We're just here as another avenue of communication in a way to disseminate such information that allows the LGBTQ family to feel more comfortable," Flores said.

Liaisons also partner with various LGBTQ+ organizations like Center on Halsted to share additional resources with people who come to CPD and to make the criminal justice process more accessible to those who seek community resources first.

Tupper said this partnership has been particularly helpful because speaking with liaisons that are part of the LGBTQ+ community "alleviates some fear" for those who are hesitant to go to the police.

Center on Halsted also provides LGBTQ+ sensitivity training for CPD officers. Earlier this year, CPD adjusted its policies so that officers are re-



**CPD LGBTQ+ liaisons.**  
Photo by Michael Milstein

quired to address TGNC people by their names and pronouns and prohibited from stopping someone solely due to their gender identity, among other things.

CPD largely investigates the murders of TGNC people the same way it investigates other murders, unless they're specifically labeled a hate crime due to the way Illinois laws are written, CPD Deputy Director of Community Policing Michael Milstein said.

Parker said she thinks the police should approach murder investigations in a way that acknowledges that discrimination against TGNC people plays a part in any violence done to them.

"In a perfect world, our investigations are handled with more equity," Parker said. "And the police force, as I see it, when it comes to investigations, the government has a very one size fits all approach to things, and with all of the investigations that they have, well, people are going to get lost in the shuffle."

The "one-size-fits-all" approach Parker described also makes it difficult to record how many TGNC people are affected by crime because crime reports label everyone as male or female based on how they identify, without additional information about their gender identity.

Milstein said CPD takes every homicide seriously and investigates each case "to the best of our ability."

"There are always going to be barriers at some points just based on the individual and their background," Milstein said. "A challenge, to be frank, is that right now we have seven hundred homicides this year so far, so it's hard to keep up with every single one."

Parker said she's noticed an increased "pressure" on law enforcement and other systems to address violence against BIPOC TGNC people in recent years. Though she said more representation in the police force is helpful in achieving justice for TGNC victims, more needs to be done

to improve the resources available for people while they're alive.

"We have the LGBTQ flag on the doors and we can say trans-affirming space all day long," Parker said. "But if these spaces aren't actually consulting with community members to determine what trans-affirming actually means, then they're just spaces projecting onto the community their own idea of trans-affirming."

Tupper agreed that addressing violence against TGNC people involves reforming society as a whole. This includes creating more options for victims of crime that are separate from the criminal justice system but also addressing the dominant culture's perception of TGNC people, she said.

"We need to create more equitable opportunities for folks to be able to access care and housing and employment," Tupper said. "All of that is really important to prevent violence from occurring as well and just continuing to reduce stigma and transphobic rhetoric. These things are creating this environment where we're not valuing trans folks and it's actively harming them." As a part of this work, Center on Halsted tries to "combat erasure" of violence against TGNC people by honoring the names of those murdered and creating spaces to "combat isolation and show folks they're not alone in their experience," Tupper said.

"We can name the violence that's happening and how horrific it is and how we need to continue to do more work to protect the community," Tupper said. "And we also want to affirm and celebrate folks while they're here too. We want to highlight trans brilliance and trans creativity and trans wellness."

"Every year on Trans Day of Remembrance, we read off the names of people who've died," Parker said. "I look forward to a day where we don't have to read off names anymore."

# DEJANAY STANTON

Dejanay Stanton, 2017.  
Photo from Facebook

BY CRIS VILLALONGA-VIVONI

Although Darius Stanton had not seen his sister, Dejanay, in 12 years, he can clearly remember how Dejanay's laugh would fill up a room. It would echo and bounce off the walls. He remembers how infectious her humor was, especially whenever they watched any of Tyler Perry's *Madea* movies.

Darius Stanton's funniest memory with his younger sister was when they attempted to play a baseball game with a basketball with some friends from their neighborhood in Englewood.

Dejanay was up to bat. But she unfortunately was so into the game and wanted to "swing [the bat] so bad" that she accidentally whacked herself in the follow-through.

"Just wishing I could speak with you," Darius wrote on a recent post on Dejanay's Facebook memorial profile.

Dejanay was murdered on Aug. 30, 2018. She was found with a gunshot wound to the head in an alley by people who earlier had heard the shots. Her death was ruled a homicide.

According to the Human Rights Campaign, Dejanay was the 18th transgender person murdered in 2018 in the United States.

When news of her death broke, social media erupted as friends and family shared memories and expressed their grief. Local LGBTQ+ organizations also offered their condolences.

"She was so sweet," wrote LaSaia Wade, CEO of Brave Space Alliance, on a Facebook post about Dejanay. "Every time you saw her, she had a smile on her face. She was just trying to live her best life as a young girl."

Dejanay was a Chicago native, born and raised in Englewood with her mother, two sisters and two brothers. She came out to her family as trans in 2008 after she had run away from home, Darius said. After a lot of questions and a deep conversation, their family accepted her.

He described his sister as honest—brutally so.

Growing up, Dejanay would often snitch on Darius whenever he was up to no good. He chuckled to himself as he described how one time she caught him sneaking back into the house. He had gone out to hang out with friends and, to his surprise, Dejanay and their mom were patiently waiting for him at the kitchen table. They then proceeded to "grill" him on his whereabouts.

"I don't know where she got [her tattletale habits] from," Darius said.

Regardless of her snitching, Darius said he, Dejanay and his other siblings were very close and loved passing the time with each other.

Dejanay was incredibly fashionable, according to Darius and always dressed up regardless of her where she was going. Donning athleisure, a long weave, a large purse, and colorful Jordans, she loved to show off her body and often shared full-body photos on her Facebook.

"Fashion is what she made it," he said, adding that she always "looked nice."

Dejanay was also unbelievably kind.

"She was just really willing to help people [in the neighborhood] out," Darius said. "That's where we come from, and we need to extend a hand to others—that's what she was doing."

When Darius moved away from Chicago, Dejanay cared for their mother, who was frequently ill.

She was an active trans advocate and Darius believes that if she were still here, she would be fiercely fighting for her and her trans sibling's rights.

Dejanay's memory and "pure spirit" continue to live on through the people she had touched. Her memorial Facebook profile continues to be a digital platform on which family and friends can share in their grief.

On Oct. 28, Dejanay's birthday, her profile flooded with messages and photos as people shared their love for who she was and grieved for what she could've been.

"Sis was so pretty and sweet as pie," one person wrote. "Sweet voice always smiling. Keep resting and watching over us is I miss u so much."

Her mother, Valerie Griffin, posts about Dejanay on Facebook almost every day.

"Not a day goes past to my stomach and heart doesn't ache because you are not here with us in physical form," she wrote on one of the multiple posts dedicated to her. "But I do give the Lord thanks and praise for giving me the 24 yrs. of enjoying your presence. Happy birthday my diva. Mommy loves you."

Her posts are just glimpses into the depth of her grief, a digital chronology of her pain.

A few days before Dejanay's birthday, Griffin wrote, "1,095 days that you have been gone, Dada. Missing you is very HARD."

Outside of cyberspace, Dejanay's family and friends gathered for an outdoor vigil on the third anniversary of her death. They had created a massive banner in her honor. Decorated with her selfies, the trans flag colors and white doves, the attendees took photos with it as if attempting to get one last picture with Dejanay.

On her Facebook, one person wrote, "3 yrs later, we still say your name Dejanay Lanorra R.I.P."

**People who would like to share your stories about Dejanay should email [cvillalonga.vivoni@gmail.com](mailto:cvillalonga.vivoni@gmail.com).**



# COURTNEY ESHAY KEY



Courtney Eshay Key.  
Photo from Facebook

BY HENRY ROACH

Courtney Eshay Key, 25, was a loyal and outspoken friend. She loved to make jokes, wear colorful wigs and invite friends to cook for her. In late 2020, she confided to a friend at a party that she was ready to set new goals for her life.

Then, on Christmas 2020, Key was shot and killed in the street around the corner from her mother's house, where she had spent the holiday, according to the Chicago Tribune. Her death was ruled a homicide, but police identified no suspects. Key's friends and family believe the murder may have been a hate crime.

"Nobody ever expected it to happen," Nathaniel Porter, Key's best friend, said. "It was devastating."

Porter said Key loved to spend most of her time with family and friends. She would visit her nieces, nephews and cousins at her mother's house, which was close to where Key lived. Key's family supported her and accepted she was trans, according to a Chicago Sun Times interview with Brave Space Alliance Director LaSaia Wade.

Key also spent a lot of time with her "Kors Family" on the South Side, a group of closely-knit LGBTQ+ friends who called each other family. The Kors family was a "foundation" for Key, Porter said.

"She was the Chicago mother for the Kors Family for a while," Porter said. She was always welcoming and comforting to other group members.

Key was also a giver and extremely loyal, Porter added. Porter recalled Key letting him stay at her place when he was struggling with employment and other issues. Key's apartment was in a convenient location for Porter to travel downtown for interviews.

She was high-energy, bright and spirited. "Any time you came around her, she would just want to laugh and have fun or put a smile on your face," Porter said.

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# PAIGE CLAY

BY MAX LUBBERS

Paige Clay could turn anything into a runaway.

One time, she strutted up and down the middle of a street, feet sashaying on the yellow lines and cars driving past her in both directions. The wind blew her around like she was a supermodel—and she looked like one, too, according to her friend Zy'Aire Kyng.

"She was a very upbeat person," he said. "To know her definitely was to love her. She pretty much got along with everybody. I called her short and feisty—she wasn't really one you could push over. She had a big personality."

Even if Clay was in a room full of six-foot-tall people, you couldn't miss her, Kyng said. And often she would be surrounded by friends with her infectious joy drawing in people.

When Clay was murdered in 2012, Kyng organized an event calling for justice at TaskForce Prevention & Community Services, an agency serving LGBTQ+ youth on Chicago's West Side. The room was packed, he said. It was clear how many people loved and missed her.

One of the people who misses her every day is her sister, Toya Cole.

"We was like Bonnie and Clyde. Our bond was unbreakable," she said. "No matter how many years we was apart from each other, we could just meet up and get right back on point with our relationship."

Cole said they had a rough childhood, becoming wards of the state and moving from foster home to foster home. But through it all, she remembers how Clay would always be willing to spend time with her, whether they had tea parties or played with Barbies.

As they got a little older, they were adopted by Cole's aunt, who wasn't accepting of the LGBTQ+ community, Cole said. As Clay began figuring herself out, she started clashing with Cole's aunt, she said.

When Clay was about 11, Cole's aunt admitted her into Hartgrove Behavioral Health System, Cole said. After that, Clay ran away multiple times, finally leaving for good around the time she was 16.

Cole said that she is also a part of the LGBTQ+ community, so she and Clay connected over that.

"I explained to her, what don't break us will only make us stronger," she said. "They do not define who you are. Love yourself. 'I love you, I accept you.' That's all that matters."

But once Clay ran away, she lost contact with her, only seeing her occasionally. The last time Cole saw her was the Thanksgiving before she was killed.

"We understood each other," Cole said. "Our last Thanksgiving with each other was the best thanksgiving. We sat around the table, cracked jokes, brought up old memories...And in a blink of the eye, all that was gone."

They exchanged numbers after that night, planning to celebrate their birthdays together. But the following April, Clay was murdered. She was 23 years old.

It would take months for Cole to be informed of Clay's death. It was only by coincidence that

Continued from page 12

Beverly Ross, a lifelong friend, emphasized Key's sense of humor: "She loved, loved to joke."

Ross knew Key from childhood, since Ross's aunt lived in a neighborhood in the Woodlawn area near Key. "As a child I used to come over and visit my aunt. And Courtney, 'Eshay,' was basically their baby of the Black neighborhood," Ross said.

Those around Key knew she identified as a queer person, Ross said, adding that Key was navigating life as "a young person that was very open about who they are at a young age."

Ross, who was older than Key, said she was honored and happy to be around at the time Key was growing up.

"Courtney was just another teen adult growing up in the city of Chicago, trying to navigate life and what that looks like," Ross said.

One of the last times Ross saw Key was at a friend's birthday party, where Key was helping out. Key told Ross that she was ready to "elevate her life." She wanted to look for a job and start escorting. She wanted to spend more time with Ross's close-knit circle of friends, which was a "different type of environment" than Key was around at the time. She wanted to return to school and pursue gender-affirming surgery.

"We were ready to help her. We were ready to pull her in the right directions," Ross said.

Porter also witnessed Key's desire to set new goals for herself.

"She was progressing. We were still in our building stages in life," Porter said. "She was on a path of growing. She wanted more. She wanted to learn how to do makeup. She just wanted to be an adult. She wanted to learn the ins and outs of the world."

Though Key was close to her friends and family, she was careful around strangers, Porter said. She was aware of the dangers she faced as a trans woman in Chicago, so she didn't hang out with strangers or in random spaces.

"She was a short girl. She doesn't bother anybody. She's always minding her business. She's . . .

Paige Clay.

Photo courtesy of Zy'Aire Kyng

Cole's uncle saw Clay's father and heard the news. That broke her heart, she said.

"She was my baby," she added. "Everybody say they got a rider, they got somebody that's there for them that always had their back. This girl always had my back. Whether I was right or wrong, she was stepping for her sister."

She said that Clay was the type of person to come to someone's rescue—and to keep her promises. When they were children, Clay told Cole that she'd get her name tattooed on her. Years later, when Cole saw her again, there it was: "Toya" tattooed on her neck.

"In all honesty, it meant everything to me," she said, "Because we been through a lot as children."

While Clay was the big sister to Toya, she was like the little sister to a group of her friends. Khomeini Wajd, Eric Haywood and Kyng all met her around when she was 15 or 16, and they looked after her like she was family.

Kyng said that she helped him become the man he is today—she was the person to give him confidence to embrace his sexuality.

But Clay wasn't always confident, Wajd said.

"When I first met her, she was just so quiet and nonchalant," Wajd said, "But when she started coming around more gay people like her, she opened up more. She was happier, she was laughing all the time."

When Clay transitioned, Kyng said, it was like she found herself and became the person she really wanted to be. He recalled her putting a lot of care into her appearance and fashion, turning thrifted finds into classy looks.

Clay was also well-known in the ballroom scene, walking in multiple categories. Her ballroom name was Fendi, Kyng said, and she walked for the House of Evisu, according to a 2012 Windy City Times article.

Wajd said that Clay loved to vogue, and that it seemed to get her mind off the hardships she experienced. He said that Clay, despite all she went through, stayed sweet.

"I really wish people knew the love and caring person she was, how she been to hell and hot water all her life and she never let none of that get her down," he said. "She still lived her life. She didn't become sour to everybody just because everybody treated her the way they treat her."

**Windy City Times made many attempts to contact friends and family members of Paige Clay. Those who would like to speak to her memory—or know of someone else who would like to—should email by [max.lubbers@gmail.com](mailto:max.lubbers@gmail.com).**



. . . made sure that she's always been in a safe space," Porter said.

Porter said that to have little to no information about the murder 11 months after it occurred is devastating. "She was my sister as well as a best friend, so for me not to know anything still to this day, it breaks my heart," he said.

When she wasn't with her family or friends, Key would be home, watching movies or singing along to Beyonce, Porter said. Her favorite Beyonce album was "Four." Key also loved soul food, especially baked macaroni and candy yams. She wasn't a great cook, so she loved to invite friends to cook for her.

Key was also "upfront," Porter said. People never had to question where they stood with her, because if Key had a problem, she would address it directly without animosity. She was outspoken about her feelings.

Porter's favorite memory of Key is when he and Key went downtown a few summers ago to enjoy the weather and go shopping.

"She looked very good. She had her hair done, she had her nails done and everything. She had a little makeup on," Porter said.

Key bought shoes from the Gucci store and posed for a picture Porter took near a fountain. The two were in their "true element," Porter said. "Just me and her, enjoying each other's company."

Since Key's death, Porter has spoken to numerous news publications about her life.

"I've tried to represent her in the best way that I could. . . . She was one of the coolest, most loving, most beautiful, most loyal, most energetic, caring [people]—just all-around an amazing person," Porter said.

He added, "She was honestly one of my best friends. And I don't think I'll ever meet anybody like her, or ever encounter anybody on this earth like her. Just a true, beautiful person inside and out."



# froSkate

creates safe  
space for BIPOC  
queer skaters to  
'fall, laugh, shake  
it off'

BY KAYLEIGH PADAR

The organization froSkate—which hosts skate park meet-ups for the “non-traditional skate community”—launched in spring 2019 after a group chat of BIPOC queer skateboarders “got too big,” according to founder Karlie Thornton.

“It was just that the community really needed this kind of space,” Thornton said. “I started to skate in 2019 and really just wanted friends and people who looked like me to skate with, so that I didn’t feel alone or uncomfortable being the only girl.”

The “bread and butter” of the group is meeting up to skate. BIPOC, queer and femme skaters of all skill levels meet at various parks around the city twice a month, both to practice tricks together and get to know each other. No experience is required to attend.

“It’s just such a jam, you roll up and everyone just looks so cool,” Thornton explained. “I always say you’re guaranteed to make at least one or two new friends. It’s something you can come alone to. I take a lot of pride in making sure people feel included because a lot of us are shy and battling nervousness ourselves.”

Thornton’s background in community organizing and entrepreneurship helped her to get things off the ground, but she said the group “grew rapidly” because there was such a desire for this sort of space, which didn’t exist in Chicago.

In addition to meetups, froSkate donates skateboards and other equipment to people who can’t afford them. The group also participates in food and supply drives on the South Side and speaks on panels about racism and other issues

facing the city, among other activist efforts.

“We really want to create a community space and that oftentimes goes beyond just showing up and skating together,” Thornton said. “We definitely want to make sure our community has what they need in terms of skateboarding resources, especially since one of the biggest barriers for getting more Black and Brown people into skating is the cost of it.”

Though the group started with just a few friends and their boards, froSkate meetups currently average 25 to 30 people. At their last meetup of the season, over 100 people showed up. The organization’s Instagram account, where information about upcoming events is shared, has more than 15,000 followers.

“It’s hard to say [how many people are involved] because there’s no pressure to show up to every meetup,” Thornton said. “A lot of times we see familiar faces at meetups and we also see a lot of new faces each time.”

Jasmine Parks, a musician and froSkate’s executive assistant, explained that learning to “take up space” became easier when she started spending time skating with people who looked like her.

Parks started skateboarding as a means of transportation but said it has become much more for her since she got involved with froSkate. At meetups, she prioritizes learning, whether that means landing new tricks or “becoming a better person,” Parks said.

“At one point, I was so scared of my skateboard, like it was bigger than me, but I had to have a moment with myself to realize I have to overcome those fears,” she explained. “To have people around me who are also overcoming those fears, who are falling and laughing and shaking

it off, that’s even more encouragement to keep going.”

Parks’ favorite parts of the meetups are when everyone lines up to try a trick together.

“It’s like, everyone sees someone and thinks, ‘Oh, that’s cool, I bet I could do that,’” Parks said. “Having a line of five or six people back to back trying a trick until we all hit it is my favorite part because we’re all just trying to encourage each other.”

Thornton agreed and said she loves when people are trying things outside of their comfort zone, because they feel supported and are then able to “learn and grow from that moment.” For example, at a recent meetup, several skaters tried a “rock to fakie” which is a trick where you go up a ramp, hit the top and come right back down.

“For some people, it was a trick they wouldn’t even think about trying, but they tried it,” Thornton said. “And quite a few of them actually made it or at least now know what to work on more. But they wouldn’t have ever tried it if we weren’t all there, pushing them.”

Thornton emphasized that having a group of similar people creates the necessary, supportive space required for learning any new skill.

“If you’re in a room of people who don’t look like you, it’s uncomfortable and you feel nervous,” she said. “It’s important to have these spaces where people feel comfortable enough to learn and to fall so people can take that with them when they go skate on their own.”

Even for seasoned skaters, “sometimes it’s just nice to skate with a whole bunch of Black and Brown people,” Thornton added.

**Those interested in joining can visit <https://www.froskate.com>.**

# Holiday 2021

SATURDAY · DEC 4TH  
9PM TO 3AM  
DILF: FELIZ  
NAVI-DADDY  
TOYS FOR TOTS

SATURDAY · DEC 11TH  
12PM TO 3PM  
DOGGY DAYS  
WITH SANTA

SUNDAY · DEC 12TH  
3PM TO 9PM  
WORLD'S SHORTEST  
BAR CRAWL

FRIDAY · DEC 17TH  
9PM TO 2AM  
GRRR: JINGLE BEAR  
ONESIE PARTY

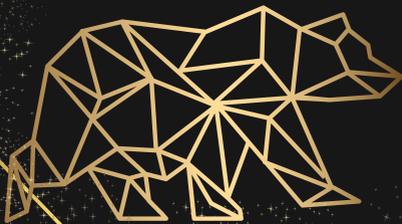
SATURDAY · DEC 18TH  
9PM TO 3AM  
SLOPPY  
OTTER XMAS

SUNDAY · DEC 19TH  
9PM TO 1AM  
JOLLY OL'  
BEARAOKE

WEDNESDAY · DEC 22ND  
8PM TO 10PM  
POLAR BEAR  
TRIVIA

FRIDAY · DEC 24TH  
3PM TO 2AM  
SATURDAY · DEC 25TH  
12PM TO 3AM  
OPEN

FRIDAY · DEC 31ST  
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Wed Dec 15 8pm-11pm Wil's Winter Workshop Ornament Decorating

Sun Dec 19 2pm-6pm Sunday Social Slay Ride Drag & Burlesque Revue

Thurs Dec 23 9pm-1am Thirsty Thursday Karaoke Bradley K's Holiday Heauedown

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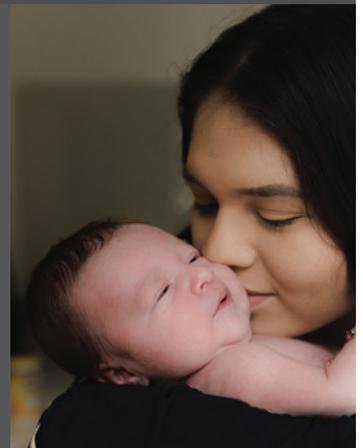


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**Left: Dairen Marion-Burton at his ribbon-cutting ceremony. Below: Darien Marion-Burton, the president-elect of the chamber's Board of Directors, stands with Executive Director Liz Holt.**

Photos courtesy of Darien Marion-Burton

## Oak Park-River Forest Chamber of Commerce elects first Black LGBTQ president in organization's history

BY MAX LUBBERS

In November, the Oak Park-River Forest Chamber of Commerce elected Darien Marion-Burton to serve as the organization's first Black LGBTQ president.

Marion-Burton will begin his role in January 2022 and said he's excited to bring a fresh perspective to the chamber. Often, chambers of commerce are stereotyped to be stuffy, conservative groups, Marion-Burton explained. He wants to change that perception.

"It's just a group of business owners who got together that want to advocate for their businesses, that want to build community, and that really want to make a change here locally," he said. "I think we're going to be able to connect better with our community and we're going to be able to be more inclusive."

As a Oak Park community member through and through, it means everything to Marion-Burton to take on this role, he said. Today, he lives just four blocks away from where he grew up as a child. He still regularly passes by the well-loved restaurant Buzz Cafe, where he worked when he

was a teenager, and he said he values all the time he's spent in the town.

"I always kind of felt this sense of community, and that this was my space and these were my people, even if they didn't necessarily look like me or have (the) same socioeconomic backgrounds as me," he said. "It's really affirming now to be leading such an important organization in our community."

Growing up, Marion-Burton always envisioned himself becoming a leader in Oak Park. But to achieve this feat at age 28 is something he couldn't have imagined, he said.

He also hopes that his young age will help him create a "cool and collaborative" chamber of commerce, especially as Oak Park increasingly draws in a younger demographic of people.

"I have the ability to see things very differently than somebody who's maybe 40 or 50, in terms of what the broader issues are," he said. "Especially for our business owners who are just starting out and maybe don't have that brick-and-mortar location yet, [I can know] what they're experiencing."

His own history as a business owner will also

aid him in the role, he added. As the founder and owner of the marketing agency D.M. Burton, he helps businesses grow and thrive every day. He began the company in 2018, about a year after he started to become active in the chamber.

Since then, he's served on the chamber's Golf Outing Planning Committee, hosted the Inside the Chamber Podcast and chaired the Business Spotlight Soiree, which celebrated local businesses for their adaptability through the COVID-19 pandemic.

Marion-Burton said he owes much of his own success to the chamber, and he wants to pass that on to others. As part of that effort, one of his first goals as president is to create a Black, indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) affinity group for business owners.

"I started my business with \$3,000 in my bank account and a handful of connections and we've grown to almost a quarter of a million dollar

firm in three years," he said. "It's because of the chamber, from the people I've met to the connections I've made, to the coffees I've gone to. I wouldn't be sitting here today if it weren't for this organization."

He also said he's ready to dive into some of the challenges facing businesses, including the lasting effects of COVID-19 on small businesses and the retention problems that much of the workforce is facing.

People have stayed incredibly resilient through these issues, but he said he wants the chamber to provide further support for the community. So he also plans to create an employee-sharing program and workplace development program.

"So many times that we've looked at employee and employer relations, it's kind of this 'us versus them' mentality," he said. "We need to create something that's balanced for everybody."

As he plans out his goals and prepares for the role, Marion-Burton said he's been surprised by the number of people telling him how much he's inspired them. But he also realizes the significance of being elected.

Even something as simple as being himself can break boundaries. Marion-Burton recalled one time where someone made a comment about his painted nails, which he said he was able to shut down pretty quickly. These small interactions can sometimes create a big impact—and he hopes to continue to have these conversations and create progress as president.

"Being the youngest, the blackest and the gayest president has really opened my eyes to the change that I'm making by simply existing and bringing all my identities to the table," he said. "I think that being able to have that experience, being young and living in a business I just started three years ago, is going to allow me to take a unique lens."



# AIDS Garden Chicago supporters, CDPH official commemorate World AIDS Day with event

BY CARRIE MAXWELL

AIDS Garden Chicago supporters and the Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH) commemorated the 34th annual World AIDS Day on Dec. 1 at the Belmont Yacht Club with a sneak preview. The 2.5-acre AIDS Garden Chicago is located adjacent to the Belmont Yacht Club and is set to open in next spring. This site was previously occupied by the now-defunct historic LGBTQ gathering spot Belmont Rocks.

According to a press release announcing this event, AIDS Garden Chicago's mission is to "remember the more than 35 million people who have died of HIV/AIDS since 1986, acknowledge those who continue to live with the virus, celebrate what a community can achieve when it unites and acts up against a common threat, highlight the fact that the battle against the disease continues and commit to Getting to Zero new HIV infections."

Two years ago, a 30-foot Keith Haring sculpture, "Self Portrait," was unveiled as the garden's anchor piece. The site will also have areas dedicated to reflection (Ginko Reflection Grove), education, honor and pride. Additionally, the Chicago

Parks Foundation has recently launched the AIDS Garden Story Archive portal on the organization's website.

Speakers included Chicago Department of Public Health and LGBTQ Health & Outreach Liaison Antonio King; Chicago Ald. Tom Tunney; AIDS Foundation President/CEO John Peller; former state Rep. and current AIDS Garden Chicago Board Chair Yoni Pizer; Chicago Parks Foundation Executive Director Willa Lang; and Design Workshop landscape architect and AIDS Garden designer Manisha Kaul.

Tunney recognized the fellow elected leaders—state Sen. Sara Feigenholtz, state House Majority Leader Rep. Greg Harris and state Rep. Margaret Croke—who are supporting the garden. He also spoke about the 15 year effort to make this garden a reality.

Peller spoke about the Getting to Zero Illinois initiative to end the HIV epidemic by 2030 and the fact that HIV cases are going down overall, however, more work needs to be done to reduce the number of cases among Black and Latinx Chicagoans. He added that having the federal government "back at the table" with the Biden administration's commitment to end the HIV/AIDS

epidemic by 2030 is helping with these efforts.

King asked for a moment of silence for all the lives that have been lost to HIV/AIDS since the epidemic began. He spoke about the origins of the Getting to Zero Illinois initiative that started in 2016 and what the CDPH has been doing to especially help the community during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Pizer recognized the community partners and how exciting it is to see this garden come to fruition.

During the garden tour, Kaul spoke about how the design layout will help "everyone come together [to] reflect, heal and celebrate" in this soon-to-be dedicated space. She also outlined where each section will be located, including the two entrances to the garden.

Lang outlined some of the features of the garden including the Ginko Grove of Reflection, Unity Garden, Sunrise Garden of Healing, donor wall at the main entrance and Celebration Plaza where Haring's sculpture is located.

AIDS Garden Chicago's community partners include Tunney's office, Chicago Parks Foundation, Chicago Park District, AIDS Foundation Chicago, Alphawood Foundation Chicago, Beaumier Donor Advised Family Fund, Center on Halsted, Design Workshop, The Elizabeth Morse Trust, Friends of the Park, Howard Brown Health, Keith Haring Foundation, The Legacy Project, Mariano's, The Moth, Outspoken, Rosenthal Fine Art, Inc., TAWANI Foundation, Walgreens, U.S. Rep. Mike Quigley, Feigenholtz, Harris, Croke and Pizer.

See [aidsgardenchicago.org/](http://aidsgardenchicago.org/).

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As the world continues to grapple with the lasting effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, some BI-POC LGBTQ+-led bars and community-building organizations have adapted by implementing increased safety protocols and strengthening their commitments to mutual aid.

#### Nobody's Darling:

Nobody's Darling, an LGBTQ+ bar owned by two Black women, Angela Barnes and Renauda Riddle, opened in May amid the pandemic. This means the owners have always had to grapple with safety protocols to mitigate the spread of COVID-19.

"We have to listen to the CDC, we have to listen to our state and local leaders, and be responsible," Barnes said.

Nobody's Darling requires people to wear masks to enter and when moving around the bar, but people are allowed to remove them while drinking. Vaccinations are required among the bar's staff, and they also wear masks while working. The space is cleaned frequently, and extra masks and hand sanitizer are available. People who have symptoms of any illness are encouraged to stay home.

"If there are members of our community, meaning the LGBTQ+ community, who are more at risk and there's something we can do to support equity in terms of keeping them safe, then certainly those spaces we're providing for our community should be supportive," Barnes said.

Although Nobody's Darling requires its staff to be vaccinated, the bar doesn't require guests to provide proof of vaccination (unlike some other LGBTQ+ spots), so as to avoid creating a false sense of security.

"I'm not qualified, and our staff isn't either, to determine whether or not a vaccine card is legitimate," Barnes explained. "We're relying on people to take some ownership and not be around people if they're not feeling well, but to create a situation where we say, 'okay, we checked your card, now everyone in the bar is safe, I just don't think that makes a lot of sense.'"

But Barnes is keeping an eye on COVID-19 trends and would consider hiring a separate company to check vaccine cards if positivity rates rise or if it's recommended by officials.

Nobody's Darling hasn't taken part in promoting mutual aid because specific needs haven't been brought to their attention, Barnes said.

"I mean, we've only been open since May, but say one of our regulars or someone in the community brought up something where we could show support, we'd be open to doing that," she added. "Those types of things are important because we are a gathering place."

For more information about Nobody's Darling: <https://www.nobodysdarlingbar.com/>

#### Molasses:

Molasses is an organization dedicated to creating "community and opportunity for Black trans and gender-variant people and queer people of color through cultural work, coalition-building, and linkage to (self)care," according to its website.

In the past, Molasses planned in-person events, but the collective has stopped planning in-person gatherings due to safety concerns



Molasses 2021.  
Photo by Choya Webb

# SAVING SPACE

## BIPOC LGBTQ+-led orgs and spaces adapt to continued effects of COVID-19

BY KAYLEIGH PADAR

The Blaq Agenda x Reunion Chicago Queer Care Day.  
Photo by Jaclyn Rivas



brought on by the pandemic.

Organizer Choya Webb said the few events Molasses has hosted since March 2020 were outside and guests wore personal protective equipment, adding that organizers have tried to prioritize their own well-being and rest as they too continue to endure the effects of the pandemic.

Molasses has nevertheless increased its work around providing material resources to the BIPOC LGBTQ+ community, including care packages, defense tools and monetary aid.

"Organizers were reactivated around mutual aid and racial justice in April and May of 2020 due to state violence layered with an ongoing pandemic, so a lot of our work moved into more material resources of care and mutual aid for Black and brown trans and queer folk," Webb said.

The organization also worked with Howard Brown to create some public health public service announcements addressing vaccine hesitancy.

Webb explained there have "always been layers" of mutual aid and activism in Molasses' work. The group's projects have simply shifted in response to the pandemic's effects on people's lives.

"Our mode of creating joyful spaces for Black trans folk, and by extension, many other communities, is event planning—but that in itself was in service to mutual aid and activism," Webb said. "Our intention is to ensure Black trans people have their needs met while also showcasing the talent and power of Black trans artistry."

For more information about Molasses, visit <https://www.molasseschicago.com/>

#### The Blaq Agenda:

The Blaq Agenda is a "social experiment indexing Black queerness" that hosts events and releases content created by Black LGBTQ+ people about their experiences, according to its website.

Member Elijah McKinnon said COVID-19 has made those in the organization "even more intentional about the gatherings we host."

The Blaq Agenda recently planned a series of

events called “Queer Care Day” where attendees can attend a yoga class then explore a market full of queer BIPOC creators offering nail art, tarot card readings and haircuts, among other things.

Before committing to any event, The Blaq Agenda “extensively discusses” wellness and protection plans specific to the venue and type of gathering, McKinnon explained, adding,

“Each initiative is different, so we take a custom approach to developing wellness and protection plans that keep our communities feeling brave and cared for while we share space.”

These precautions include requiring proof of vaccination or negative COVID-19 test results upon entry, providing COVID-19 surveys for contact tracing and reducing event capacities. The Blaq Agenda also provides masks and hand sanitizers for event guests.

Like Molasses, the Blaq Agenda has always been involved in activism and providing aid to those in the BIPOC LGBTQ+ community. These efforts are constantly changing as the group works to “amplify the direct needs of the communities we serve,” McKinnon said. She noted that the organization sees mutual aid as “just one way to “create equitable opportunities for the communities that we serve. ... It is important for us to build in coalition with organizations and initiatives that believe in alternative ways to provide a continuum of care for Black, queer and gender expansive people.”

For more information about The Blaq Agenda: <https://www.theblaqagenda.com/>

Nobody's Darling.  
Photo by Carrie Maxwell



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# Inequality won't end on its own. Help AARP Disrupt Disparities.

Longstanding racial, social and economic inequities have produced vast disparities that affect the lives of many older people of color. AARP Illinois is collaborating with racial equity organizations and our state's elected officials to "Disrupt Disparities." Together, we can create an Illinois where every senior has economic stability, health care resources and digital connectivity.

Learn how AARP is working to make Illinois more fair at  
**[DisruptDisparitiesIL.com](https://DisruptDisparitiesIL.com)**

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