

REALTOR

‘For me, home is the people’

On his third studio album, *Few Good Things*, Saba reimagines failure and abundance as he draws on ancestral lessons to build new worlds.

By JANAYA GREENE 40

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A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

"SABA'S RELEASES are such special moments for Chicago and the west side," *Reader* contributor Tara C. Mahadevan posted to Twitter this week. His previous album, 2018's *Care for Me*, claimed the top spot when we polled 57 local critics about their ten favorite Chicago records of the 2010s—and Saba has three releases among the 338 on the combined list. His third studio album, *Few Good Things*, arrives on Friday, and it seems sure to continue his remarkable run.

The *Reader* first covered Saba almost eight years ago, when he was 19 and still living in Austin, where he was raised. Much of what we've written lately about him and his crew, Pivot Gang, has foregrounded loss: Saba's cousin, Pivot cofounder John Walt, was stabbed to death in 2017, and that same year the crew helped launch an arts nonprofit to build on his legacy. This past summer, Pivot DJ and producer Squeak

was fatally shot. But *Few Good Things* isn't first and foremost an album about surviving grief. Saba also draws on his experiences to help himself understand failure as something he can define out of existence and abundance as something he can find anywhere. It's a record that uses intergenerational dialogue to create a through line that connects past, present, and future: honoring your roots, cherishing what you have, and imagining a world that could be.

Our staffer Janaya Greene, who talked to Saba for this issue, discovered him at about the same time the *Reader* did. Though she writes for the paper consistently, this interview is her first cover story here, and her thoughtful questions will help you feel like you know Saba's music as well as she does. —**PHILIP MONTORO, MUSIC EDITOR**

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CITY LIFE

STREET VIEW

And then there's mauve

Stylish people and shops with neutrals that are anything but vanilla

By ISA GIALLORENZO

With all the snow we've been having, it's hard not to look around and be inspired by beautiful shades of neutral colors. That was the case with Christian Zamarriego, 31, who was photographed at the Garfield Park Conservatory during a particularly snowy day. "I felt inspired to wear neutral colors that matched the weather. We live a few minutes down the street from the conservatory, and I just wanted cozy vibes," says Zamarriego, whose love for neutral tones is connected to his native southern California. "I grew up going to the desert quite often, and neutral colors remind me of those fond memories," he says. There's also a practical side to his penchant for neutrals: "Neutral looks—especially monochromatic ones—typically make an outfit come together with not a lot of effort," he says. His partner, Mycah Murdock, 28, wanted to be comfortable and warm, while still wearing an outfit that matched her energy that day: "I belong in neutral tones. I feel safe, calm, and beautiful in them. Though the colors are often subtle, I think strong statements can be made in neutral-toned outfits—particularly monochrome neutral-toned looks," she says, in agreement with Zamarriego.

Also covered in neutrals, Naomy Valbuena, 19, was enjoying the wintry local landscape while gliding away at the ice skating ribbon downtown. She was going for a 70s-inspired look that day, decked out in all kinds of cozy textures and earthy tones. A visitor from Miami, Florida, Valbuena planned most of the outfits for her trip and chose the one in the photograph for "an active day out." Another out-of-towner, Julia Boccabella, 22, planned her outfit as well. Originally from Chicago and now living in Denver, Boccabella usually favors an "indie sleaze" aesthetic, but decided to gloss it up that morning she was photographed: "This outfit is a lot more refined than I normally am! I had it ready since I knew I



Mycah Murdock and Christian Zamarriego © ISA GIALLORENZO

was heading to brunch the morning after a night out. I wanted to stay warm, so the fuzzy hat was a must," she says. Boccabella claims to love colors, but prefers neutrals: "They're so flattering and versatile, which is perfect for me since I'm always on the go. I love that they're so classic and effortlessly chic," she says.

Another advantage to neutrals, according to Agriculture Custom Clothiers owners Milton Latrell and Christopher Brackenridge, is that they provide a blank canvas for pops of color brought by all kinds of accessories. "Neutrals really expand the range of a wardrobe and add a lot of versatility to it," says Latrell. Speaking of blank canvases, Brooklyn, New York, dweller Naama, 22, picked her outfit to match all kinds of imagery: "I style my outfits themed on where I'm going—that day we were heading to the Art Institute of Chicago. I love taking pictures at museums, so I opted for an all-white

outfit to not detract from the artwork," she says. Naama also praises the flexibility neutral shades offer: "I love how forgiving neutral tones are. Neutral tones for my wardrobe allow me to match multiple items together, repeat outfits, and lessen the time spent styling outfits," she says. Some of Naama's style references are light academia, cottagecore, and Parisian and Scandinavian fashion—all very neutrally-toned.

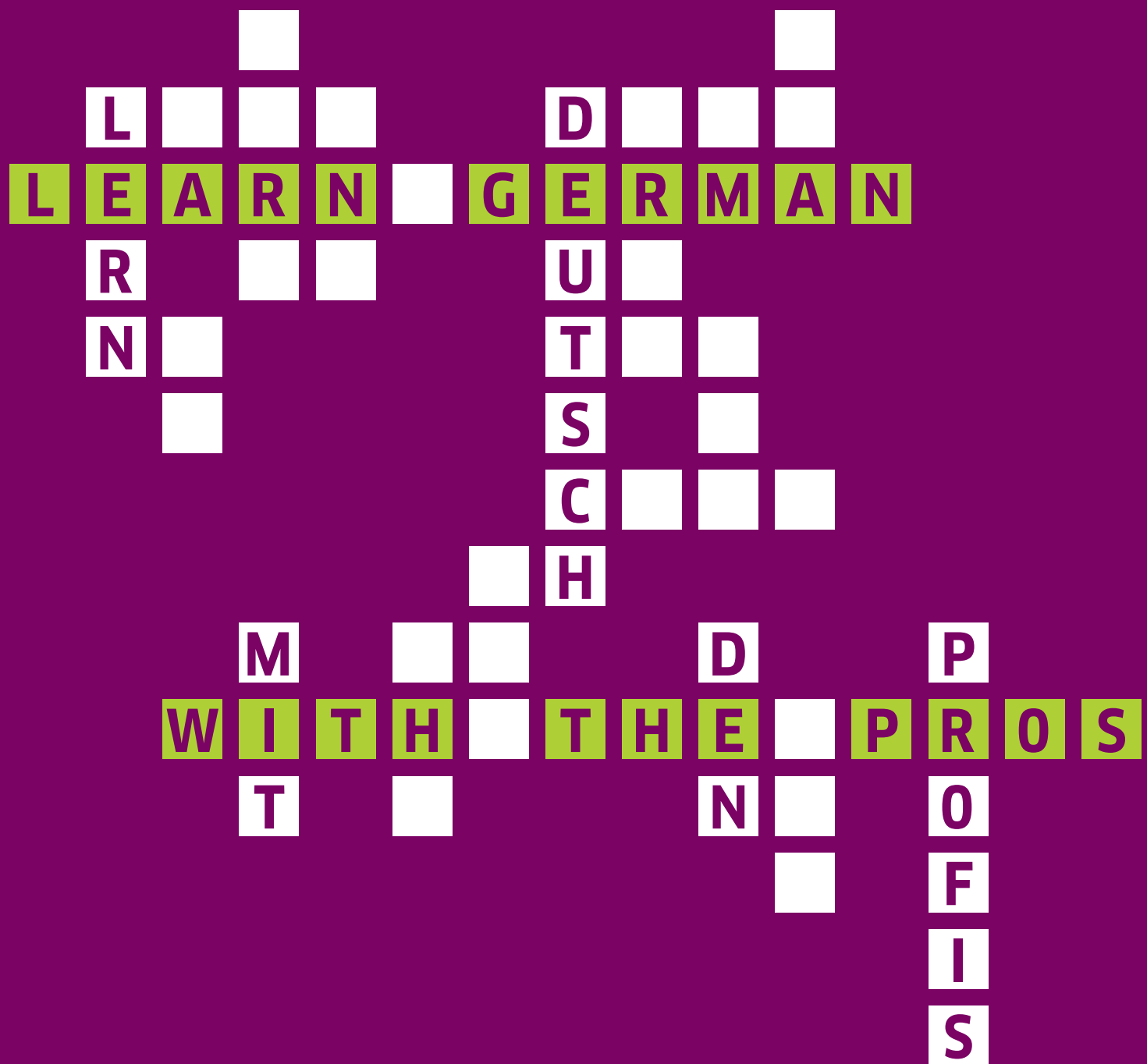
Even for those that usually subscribe to a more vivid aesthetic, neutrals certainly have their value. The owners of two of the coolest (and most vibrant) stores in the city, Sasha Hodges and Adrienne Hawthorne, share why they can sometimes open an exception for more muted tones. "We usually highlight bright colors and patterns at Kokorokoko [vintage shop], but there are a lot of beautiful pieces in cream, beige, and tan on our racks as well. Many of our customers are inspired



Naama © ISA GIALLORENZO



Naomy Valbuena © ISA GIALLORENZO




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CITY LIFE

continued from 4

by the late 90s minimal aesthetic, or the 70s revival from the same time period, which lean heavily on earth tones,” says Hodges, who owns her boutique with Ross Kelly. A seasoned wardrobe stylist as well, Hodges suggests playing with texture and different tones when going for a head-to-toe neutral look. Neutrals remind her of the Olsen twins, Yeezy, and Halston—a big inspiration for Calvin Klein, whose collections defined minimalism in the 90s. Another “colorful maximalist,” Adrienne Hawthorne of Ponnopozz says she has lately been enjoying neutrals: “They’re calming and perfect for the winter weather outside . . . they’re a good base to play from,” she says.


At the Weaving Mill, where their main focus is thoughtful in-house design of woven apparel while partnering with social programs and promoting artist residencies, an attention to detail makes their neutral garments pop. “I think playing the temperature of ‘neutrals’ is the most interesting and fun thing to do,” says Emily Winter, who runs the studio. “Weaving is all about color relationships and figuring out how those little tweaks in value and temperature can either kill a pattern or make it sing,” she says. With some considered choices, neutrals can clearly make a statement on their own, or be the basis for bright splashes of color. One thing is certain: no wardrobe is complete without at least a few trusty neutral pieces. 

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Julia Boccabella  ISA GIALLORENZO




Clockwise from top left: Chunks Checker Claw (\$18), Baggu Duck Bag in Trippy Checker (\$34), Vintage Royalty earrings (\$46), Room Shop Giant Satin Scrunchie (\$25), Baggu Duck Bag in Natural Grid (\$34), Bodacious Arches in Polka Dot by Night Moves Atelier (\$48)  COURTESY PONNOPOZZ



Clockwise from top left: vintage shearling bucket hat (\$48), sunglasses (\$15), vintage scarf (\$12); vintage Avenue Fashions blouse (\$58); vintage cream and black mini bowling bag (\$34); vintage Diane von Furstenberg striped sweatshirt (\$48); vintage tan wool bowler hat (\$22); vintage silk turtleneck (\$76); vintage Campus velour sweatshirt (\$58); vintage Missoni turtleneck sweater (\$108)  COURTESY KOKOROKO



Clockwise from top left: wool gradient scarf (\$75), wool hat (\$65), wool Window Coat (\$390), Binder Paper cotton-blend shirt (\$65)  COURTESY THE WEAVING MILL



Millyrock the Model in two looks available from Agriculture Custom Clothiers. Left: Agriculture Luxury Collection puffer jacket (\$1500), sneakers (\$225), and backpack (\$350) with turtleneck (\$90) and trousers (\$149). Right: Dobbs hat (\$125), cardigan (\$225), Romeo merino sweater (\$135), trousers (\$139), and Mezlan boots (\$375).  @MORE KREATIVE PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY AGRICULTURE CUSTOM CLOTHIERS

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POETRY CORNER

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By River Coello

i.
amaru, otorongo, kuntur, qori q'inti
sanar es cortar: abandono, a veces,
del linaje completo, convertirse
en parte de inti y pachamama en vez.
a veces sanar es recordar cómo
volar desde hucha hacia sami; flotar
en amarillos, rojos, blancos pétalos:
abundancia, amor, claridad. despacha
tu alma a lo divino entonces, y quema
y arráigate y fluye. desde ukhu pacha,
en kay pacha, hacia hanan pacha, con fe.
a veces sanar es cortar tu pelo,
bailar con vientos del ocaso púrpura,
serlo todo, todes, todas las veces.
yaku, wayra, nina, pacha

ii.
leer acerca del biomimetismo
me lleva a aquellos días en la granja:
moviéndome yo con el universo,
despertándome con el sol, durmiendo
mansamente, luchando por mí mismo,
regresando a mi nido al lastimarme.
hoy me sé mudar con las temporadas,
colecciono mucho más que de mozo
y escucho atentamente, uso mi voz
para exaltar el poder de los coros;
cosecho familia al regar confianza.

River Coello (they/she/he) is an Ecuadorian-American artist and facilitator. Their writing celebrates nonconformity and tradition, employing magical realism, immortalizing spiritual discoveries, revisiting ancestral memories, and documenting personal shifts. They have recently toured with their multilingual and multimedia poetry books, *faith/fe* (2021) and *self/ser* (2019), published by Homie House Press. River humbly bows to their Manteño and Huancavilca (Inca) ancestors.

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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Lauren Reese and Elmer Fajardo at Finca El Pinal, Honduras  LAUREN REESE

DRINK FEATURE

Anticonquista Café roasts the only farm-to-cup coffee in Chicago

The owners grow and harvest the beans high in the mountains on the Guatemala-Honduras border, then roast them right here in Chicago.

By **MIKE SULA**

Last week, 1,900 pounds of catimor arabica coffee beans were sun-drying on a patio high in the mountains of Chiquimula, Guatemala, near the Honduran border. By the time you read this, a quarter ton's worth will have been milled, hand-sorted for defects, and shipped via FedEx directly to their owner in Chicago, Elmer Fajardo of Anticonquista Café.

Fajardo is one of the owners, anyway—of

the beans, the farm, and the roasting machine, which for now does its work at the shared Kitchen Chicago. His wife, Lauren Reese, is an owner of the enterprise too, and so are his brothers Emilio and Melvin, and sister Lilian back on the farm. But Anticonquista has one singular aspect. It's the only coffee roaster in Chicago—and one of very few in the country—that is fully owned and operated by the

people who grow, harvest, and process their coffee beans on their own land. By mid-March, Fajardo and Reese will have roasted this year's first batch and bagged it for their CSA and farmers' market regulars—but hopefully also for visitors to their new brick-and-mortar cafe in Hermosa.

The long, sordid history of coffee production is rarely glorious when it comes to

people on the ground planting, harvesting, and processing it. Fajardo, who's 28 and grew up in tiny Aldea Valle de Jesús in Chiquimula, has firsthand experience. The ninth of 14 siblings, he helped his father grow coffee on one of three family farms on both sides of the Guatemala-Honduras border from the time he was seven.

When Fajardo was a teenager his father decided to sell unprocessed coffee cherries to a co-op because it was cheaper than continuing the laborious process of de-pulping, washing, and drying beans on their own. "I always thought we were not receiving enough money even though we worked hard the whole year," says Fajardo. "A lot of the time we didn't have enough by the end of the year to continue." Older siblings in Chicago sent money back to keep the farm afloat, but after they returned home to the village, he set out to do the same.

He came to Chicago in 2011 when he was 17 and was shocked to see the price a cup of coffee commanded in cafes—money not reflected in the income of Fajardo's family or even growers who had fair-trade relationships with U.S. importers. "I was thinking, 'Where is the money going in the supply chain?' I knew for sure my family and friends weren't receiving it."

Fajardo wondered why he couldn't bring his own family's beans to market directly, and not long after he and Reese got together, they began to figure out a way to do it. Reese took point on navigating the byzantine licensing and export regulations, while back on the farm the family returned to hand processing in order to ship green, ready-to-roast beans to Chicago.

They put together a business plan in 2018, but setbacks abounded. First the pandemic delayed their spring 2020 launch. They received their first shipment of beans that September and began selling whole bags at farmers' markets via a tricked-out bicycle cafe, La Bici, but then in December they had to suspend sales while Fajardo recovered from COVID.

Meanwhile hurricanes Eta and Iota caused problems back on the farm; it's impossible to navigate the steep muddy roads to access the plants after even moderate rains, and coffee cherries will over-absorb water, split open or fall to ground, or become susceptible to fun-



You can get Anticonquista Café from their CSA or at the Logan Square Farmers Market. LAUREN REESE

gal diseases like coffee rust. They lost about 50 percent of their 2020-2021 harvest due to problems resulting from the hurricanes.

Still, Anticonquista imported some 1,450 pounds of beans last year, broken up into batches, which they roasted and released gradually. (Unless you have a CSA subscription, you'd better get to their biweekly appearances at the Logan Square Farmers Market early before they sell out.)

Last Christmas the couple returned to the farm—for Fajardo it was his first time seeing his family in ten years. The visit coincided with the 2021-2022 harvest, which roughly spans November to March each year, usually broken up into four small harvests, or cortes, as the cherries ripen.

Reese, who serves as the company photographer, has exhaustively documented on Instagram the process of de-pulping, washing, drying, milling, and sorting coffee beans, along with other aspects of life on the farm, which also grows oranges, avocados, chamomile, and

four different banana varieties, plus grass to feed the cows whose milk acts as a deterrent to bacterial and fungal infestations.

This spring Reese and Fajardo plan to maintain their mobile-coffee-vending schedule but are giving brick-and-mortar life a go too. By the time the first beans of the season arrive they plan to announce an opening date for the shop. Nicknamed La Montañita for “little mountain,” at first it’ll just sell packaged beans and cold brew, but as COVID relaxes they plan to introduce an extended menu and invite a variety of pop-ups to round out the experience, along with educational programs like bean-sorting workshops to give customers a hands-on feel for what it’s like to grow coffee.

“People don’t realize how much unpaid labor happens at the farm level,” says Reese.

“I want people to appreciate the work that farmers do to bring good coffee to them,” says Fajardo.

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NEWS & POLITICS



Richard Irvin, whose campaign for governor is an experiment in whether money alone wins you a victory CITY OF AURORA

POLITICS

Profiles in cautiousness

On MAGA's issues, including abortion, Irvin and Bourne are too cagey to take a stand.

By BEN JORAVSKY

It's been over two weeks since Aurora mayor Richard Irvin announced he's running for governor, making him a front-runner for the Republican nomination.

And yet he still hasn't mentioned the T word.

That's T as in Trump. Donald Trump to be exact—the man MAGA loves to love. Though, come to think of it, I haven't heard Irvin mention Junior, Ivanka, Eric, Tiffany, or Ivana Trump either.

For what it's worth, Ivana's my favorite Trump. 'Cause she took Donald to the cleaners on their divorce. Just saying, big feller.

Irvin also hasn't mentioned any of Trump's wacky themes. Like the presidential election was stolen, even though it wasn't. Or the insurrectionists should be pardoned, even though they were whacking cops with hockey sticks and fire extinguishers.

As for overturning *Roe v. Wade*—church-mouse silence on that. Even though Irvin's running mate, state representative Avery Bourne, has been a crusader to make abortion illegal in Illinois. More on that later.

In short, Irvin is running a classic duck-and-dodge campaign—racing like Dale Earnhardt Jr. away from contentious issues that could get him in trouble with either MAGA or the state's sane voters.

Future political scientists will want to look at Irvin's campaign as the ultimate experiment in whether money alone wins you a victory, even if you hide from the principles you supposedly believe in.

In this case, the money comes from Kenneth Griffin, the richest man in Illinois, who's pledged to spend tens of millions of dollars to unseat Governor Pritzker, a man he obviously despises.

Griffin has let it be known that he's backing Irvin, which is why Irvin's viewed as the front-runner for the Republican nomination.

As far as I can tell, the governing passion in Griffin's life is making money. As such, he seems to be against any initiative that would make him pay more in taxes so it can be spent on social programs that he won't directly benefit from.

To this point, he spent about \$50 million to defeat the Fair Tax initiative that would have raised taxes on billionaires and cut them on most everyone else.

That fight pitted lefties on the margin like me against billionaires like Griffin. He paid for anti-Fair Tax commercials so hilariously dumb that I declared: no way will Illinois voters be gullible enough to fall for this crap.

Alas, Illinois voters, you proved me wrong again. My side got clobbered.

Obviously, Griffin must think Irvin represents his best chance to unseat Pritzker. A tough-on-crime Black Republican, Irvin is a former cop who declares in his commercials that “all lives matter.”

Just so MAGA understands where he stands on that whole Black Lives Matter thing.

On other MAGA issues, though—silence, which brings us to abortion.

Choosing Bourne as his running mate was clearly Irvin's way of telling anti-abortion voters that he's with them.

After all, Bourne, a downstate Republican, is a legislative sponsor of the Born Alive Infant bill. That one would “provide that a live child born as a result of an abortion shall be fully recognized as a human person and accorded immediate protection under the law.”

Basically treating an abortion as murder.

She's also the sponsor of the Ultrasound Opportunity Act, which mandates “that at any facility where abortions are performed, [a physician] . . . shall offer any woman seeking an abortion after 8 weeks of gestation an opportunity to receive and view an active ultrasound of her unborn child.”

Clearly there are some mandates that MAGA loves—especially if they're messing with the minds of women seeking abortions.

Bourne is also one of several sponsors of a bill that would repeal the Reproductive Health Act, which was passed in 2021 and signed into law by Governor Pritzker. That law pretty

much guarantees access to abortion in Illinois even if *Roe v. Wade* is overturned.

So if Bourne gets her way, and *Roe*'s overturned, it's really only a matter of time before Illinois goes the way of Texas on this issue.

And yet there's no mention of abortion—even indirectly—on the Irvin-Bourne campaign website.

In contrast, Irvin's Republican opponents address abortion on their campaign websites. Apparently, they're not as ashamed of their MAGA roots.

The website of state senator Darren Bailey says: “As a man of faith, Darren is proudly pro-life and will always stand up to protect the rights of the unborn.”

And Gary Rabine's website says: “Gary is Catholic and pro-life.”

And Jesse Sullivan writes: “Jesse's faith has taught him the sanctity of life and the need to protect our most vulnerable, including the unborn.”

And Mancow writes: “Moوو.”

I know—too easy. Just so you know, radio personality Erich “Mancow” Muller claims he's running for governor. But he hasn't put up a website.

All in all, it's pretty obvious that the guys advising Irvin—aka the best Republican strategists Ken Griffin's money can buy—learned a lesson or two from the Bruce Rauner debacle.

Back in 2014, Rauner defeated Governor Quinn running as a pro-choice “fiscal conservative.” Meaning, he promised to cut taxes and obliterate collective-bargaining rights while keeping abortion legal.

That enabled him to pick up a lot of swing voters in Lake and DuPage counties.

Once in office, however, MAGA hammered Rauner when, squirming all the way, he made good on his campaign promise and signed HB40, a reproductive rights bill.

Signing that bill prompted ultra conservative Jeanne Ives to run against him in the Republican primary. He beat Ives but never quite recovered from a bruising fight.

Obviously, Irvin and his strategists realize abortion is a volatile wedge issue for Republicans. If they go like Rauner, they lose the MAGA base. If they go like Ives, they lose the suburban swing voters.

Oh, what are two powerful, ambitious pols like Irvin and Bourne supposed to do?

Apparently, pretend the issue doesn't exist.

It will be interesting to see how long they can get away with it.

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Shirley Temple Black and Bill Robinson White, 1980 © 2021 THE ROBERT H. COLESCOTT SEPARATE PROPERTY TRUST / ARTISTS RIGHTS SOCIETY (ARS), NEW YORK

erudite, and deadly serious. Eye candy, but not for kids.

Think bare-bottomed, flag-waving beauty queens and iconic images from the pages of art history, repopulated with characters from a minstrel show. Tom with a hard-on for Huck.

You won't want to miss it.

Colescott was a painter, but in 1976 he wrote, produced, and starred in *Dulacrow's Masterwork: A Mockumentary Film*, which is what's running on that lobby video screen. A send-up purporting to expose the hidden origin of Eugène Delacroix's famous 19th-century painting *Liberty Leading the People*, it runs about 40 minutes and is worth sitting through. But my guess is you won't, at least not on arrival, because from that lobby you can see directly into the gallery where Colescott's popsicle-hued, nearly life-size canvases are beckoning.

As in the Western art canon (a critique of which is the point), there are a whole lot of unclothed women here. Walk in and you'll be confronted with Colescott's versions of the Judgment of Paris and the Three Graces—either of which can stop you in your tracks. But take a right and keep going: the exhibition spans work from the late 1940s to 2002, and it's hung in generally chronological order. If you start in the far-right gallery, you'll see the young artist working his way through various styles, including abstraction, before he went to Paris in 1949 to study with Fernand Léger and began to hone in on something more meaningful to the public.

Eventually, Colescott's own uniquely American experience would become central to his work. He was born in 1925, to parents of mixed racial heritage who'd moved from the New Orleans area to California, where they identified as white. Colescott fought in World War II, and then attended college, earning bachelor's and master's degrees in art from UC Berkeley. It wasn't until the late 1960s, after spending time as an artist in residence and visiting professor in Egypt, that he began to identify publicly as Black. His older brother, Warrington Colescott Jr., an accomplished printmaker and longtime professor at the University of Wisconsin, never did, and this difference apparently caused a permanent rupture in their relationship.

By the 1970s, Robert Colescott had taken the representation of Black people in history and

culture as his major subject, fearlessly appropriating and subverting sentimental fictions like Aunt Jemima and Uncle Tom (in Colescott's hands, a pedophile), and riffing on the Western art canon with parodies of famous paintings that include blackface caricatures. In one of the most effective of these cultural appropriations—a lushly painted 1980 version of a movie still, *Shirley Temple Black and Bill Robinson White*—the racial identities of the two characters are simply reversed.

In the 1980s, Colescott, who had five wives and six marriages (one a repeat), turned, in part, to more autobiographical subject matter. The six large paintings spread across the main wall of the central gallery depict the artist himself, at work or struggling to work, often distracted by one or another pair of breasts or buttocks, mostly pink or peachy. But it was never only about him (even in those images). Other work from that decade includes, for example, the chaotic *School Days*, in which a student levels the barrel of a gun directly at the viewer while a skull-faced figure of Justice balances the life of a Black boy against a pile of cash, and a woman, likely a mother, mourns over the body of a young man who's taken a bullet to the heart.

Colescott represented America in the 1997 Venice Biennale, the first Black American to solo at the U.S. pavilion. But his fierce, bullet-to-the-heart satire also brought him a lifetime of criticism from every quarter, including from African Americans. Now, as Lowery Stokes Sims, who curated this exhibit with Matthew Weseley, has pointed out, Colescott is recognized as a forerunner to artists like Kerry James Marshall, Kara Walker, and Kehinde Wiley. In the richly illustrated exhibit catalog Sims and Raphaela Platow edited, Sims notes that "his career has never been more relevant than at this present moment in time."

"Art and Race Matters: The Career of Robert Colescott," through 5/29, daily 10 AM-5 PM, Chicago Cultural Center, 78 E. Randolph, chicagoculturalcenter.org, free.

Daniel Schulman, DCASE Director of Visual Arts, Gallery Talk, Wed 2/16, 12:15 PM, free.

"It's the satire that kills the serpent, you know...": Robert Colescott and the Art of Racial Irony, a virtual conversation with Duke University's Richard J. Powell, School of the Art Institute of Chicago's Jefferson Pinder, and University of Chicago's Tina Post, Thu 2/17, 7 PM, free.

@Deannaisaacs

CULTURE

Offense intended

Robert Colescott's provocative career gets a retrospective at the Cultural Center.

By DEANNA ISAACS

A couple of couches and a video player have been set up in the little balcony lobby outside the fourth floor exhibition hall at the Chicago Cultural Center. If you plop down there for a few minutes before entering the galleries to see "Art and Race Matters: The Career of Robert Colescott," a retrospective spanning five decades of the late artist's work, you'll see Colescott making mincemeat of art critics, art history, and anyone who presumes

to explain, describe, assess, or pontificate about art.

So I should probably stop right here and get to the point about this show, which was organized by the Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati: it's thoroughly offensive.

As Colescott, who died in 2009, would have intended.

It's also both painterly and cartoonish, full of raucous color and raunchy humor, satirical,



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Established in part by the Elizabeth Morse Charitable Trust and the Elizabeth Morse Genius Charitable Trust, the Exhibition Innovation Fund has provided additional funding for *City on Fire: Chicago 1871*.

CHICAGO PARK DISTRICT The Chicago History Museum gratefully acknowledges the support of the Chicago Park District on behalf of the people of Chicago.



Raúl Vega retired January 28 after more than two decades as a Cook County circuit judge, the last three as the presiding judge of the court's domestic violence division.  VERONICA MARTINEZ FOR INJUSTICE WATCH

COURTS

Cook County Judge Raúl Vega retired under a cloud of allegations

By KELLY GARCIA

This investigation was a collaboration between the Reader and Injustice Watch.

Elizabeth Francy first encountered Cook County Circuit Judge Raúl Vega when her contentious divorce and child custody case was transferred to his courtroom more than a decade ago. She said Vega often yelled at her in court and appeared to treat women differently than men. She and other women with cases in his

courtroom also said they were told to wear skirts or “dress pretty” to appease him. Francy said his handling of her family’s case did irreparable harm to her and her children.

“It is not a system designed for anyone to be at their best,” she told Injustice Watch and the *Chicago Reader*. “But Vega makes it that much harder.”

Chief Judge Timothy Evans quietly announced in December that Vega was retiring after almost 20 years on the bench, the last

three as the top judge of the court’s domestic violence division. A few days later, a possible reason emerged: his fellow judges on the court’s executive committee had referred him to the state body that investigates judicial misconduct for a comment he allegedly made to another judge.

The press release from Evans’s office included no details on what Vega allegedly said or to whom. Nor did it clarify whether Vega’s retirement was related to the allegation. Phone calls

to Evans’s office and three of the presiding judges led to dead ends.

Illinois’s judicial accountability system and Evans’s silence make it likely that the public will never know the details of the allegations against Vega. Complaints made to the Judicial Inquiry Board are confidential, and the board was forced to drop any investigation when Vega officially stepped down last Friday.

“No one gets a hard landing in Cook County,” Francy wrote in a text message to Injustice Watch and the *Reader* after learning of Vega’s retirement.

Instead, Vega will get a pension of more than \$14,000 a month for the rest of his life.

For the past several months, Injustice Watch and the *Reader* have been investigating allegations about Vega’s behavior in the courtroom and the experiences of women who encountered him there. Our investigation uncovered accusations from women that Vega mistreated them, found concerns about his temperament raised by attorneys and former staff members, and highlighted examples of Vega making questionable decisions that were reversed by the Illinois appellate court.

All the advocates we spoke to emphasized that the issues in Cook County’s domestic violence courthouse go beyond one judge. Accessibility to court services for survivors seeking legal protection has worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic, advocates said, while domestic violence-related homicides in Chicago—which disproportionately affect Black people—have increased.

But the advocates said Evans’s decision to promote Vega to lead the domestic violence courthouse, despite warning signs about his alleged treatment of women in his courtroom, illustrates the problems with a system that lacks concern for survivors facing court proceedings. Evans’s spokesperson did not respond to most of our questions for this story. Vega also declined to comment for this story.

The survivors we spoke with denounced a judicial accountability system that they said allows judges to protect their own and will allow Vega to retire without facing consequences for his alleged actions.

“It’s his turn to be held accountable to the

NEWS & POLITICS

same thing that everyone else in this world is held accountable to,” said Francy. “Misogyny in his courtroom has been rampant for years, and it’s time that Cook County does not allow it to happen.”

Before becoming a judge, Vega was an attorney in private practice with a few connections up his sleeve. A decade into his career, Vega was working as an attorney for the Chicago City Council committee tasked with overseeing the sale of city property. The alderman who chaired the committee at the time, Luis Gutiérrez, simultaneously hired Vega to be the treasurer for his congressional campaign.

Vega was twice implicated as an associate in scandals involving Gutiérrez. In 1991, the *Chicago Tribune* reported that Gutiérrez had accepted campaign donations from a city contractor who had been granted city land by the alderman’s committee and whose lawyer happened to be one of Vega’s associates. The contractor’s lawyer told the *Tribune* his association with Vega had nothing to do with his client getting the land and Vega said the contributions did not violate any ethics laws.

Gutiérrez also got in trouble in 1998 for underpaying his property taxes. He said he had provided his tax paperwork to Vega, who was then his personal attorney and accountant. But Gutiérrez told the *Chicago Sun-Times* that he wouldn’t dismiss him.

Despite the scandals, Vega was elected as a Cook County circuit judge in 2002. A year later, he was assigned to the domestic relations division, where he heard divorce, child custody, and domestic violence cases.

That’s where Francy’s case began in 2004, in the same way most cases of domestic violence begin in Cook County: with an emergency order of protection. During the first few years, the judge on her case was Grace Dickler, who ordered a 63-page divorce decree and permanent restraining order against Francy’s ex-husband. Francy said Dickler was one of the first people who genuinely believed her when she spoke about the abuse she was enduring from her then-husband.

But things worsened in 2010 when Francy’s drawn-out child custody case was assigned to Vega after she filed for permission to leave the state for a job. Meanwhile, Dickler was appointed to preside over a new division and courthouse dedicated solely to domestic violence cases.

Francy said Vega’s demeanor was the polar opposite of Dickler’s. Instead of treating her

like a victim of abuse, she said his official rulings characterized her as a cold, uncaring woman who was trying to keep her ex-husband from their children.

Misogyny was also rampant in his courtroom, Francy said. On one occasion, she said, her attorney suggested she wear skirts because “Vega doesn’t like women that wear pants.” Francy also said she overheard Vega complimenting young women in his courtroom for wearing skirts. She, too, initially began changing her appearance, but near the end of her case she stopped showing up altogether because she felt Vega was not going to give her fair treatment.

Alisa Holman said she had an eerily similar experience in Vega’s courtroom.

In 2013, Holman’s ex-husband filed for sole custody of their ten-year-old daughter in Vega’s court. A friend who worked as a paralegal and was familiar with family court told her to “dress up, look very pretty, and smile” to counteract what she perceived as Vega’s bias against women.

“So, I did,” Holman said in a phone interview with Injustice Watch and the *Reader*. “I changed my appearance, and I remember on one occasion I was sitting up front in the courtroom and I don’t know if (Vega) remembered me from another hearing or thought I was an attorney, but he winked at me.”

Like most survivors of domestic violence, Holman initially represented herself in court. Without an attorney, she wasn’t able to understand the court proceedings. She was eventually able to find an attorney, but by then Vega had granted her ex-husband temporary custody of their daughter until matters were sorted out.

She remembers feeling terrified every time she went to court, thinking that she could lose her daughter for good.

She said Vega humiliated her in open court several times. She recalled one time when Vega learned that she was engaged to her boyfriend and asked to see her engagement ring. When she told him she didn’t have a ring, Holman said Vega jokingly asked others in the courtroom if they would get married without a ring.

“Just to be talked to and treated the way that I was, to not have a voice, even now, it hurts,” Holman said. “It was so traumatizing.”

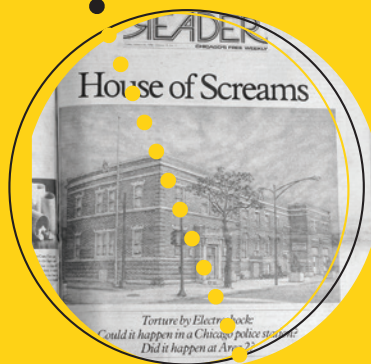
Holman and Francy both wrote online about their experiences with Vega, hoping to bring attention to his alleged behavior. Francy’s post on the Robing Room, an online forum that allows people to evaluate judges anonymously,



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continued from 15

was one of more than 70 between 2008 and 2021 that accused Vega of being incompetent, disgraceful, biased, or sexist. Many of the anonymous claims mirror Holman's and Francy's allegations: that Vega makes sexually inappropriate comments in court, is biased against women, and puts the survivors at increased risk of violence.

Red flags about Vega's alleged demeanor on the bench were also noted over the years by fellow judges and lawyers. Injustice Watch and the *Reader* reviewed three dozen cases where litigants in Vega's courtroom appealed his decisions to a higher court. In a half-dozen of them, the appellate court reversed Vega's rulings in full or in part. In one 2015 case, for example, Vega implemented a child custody agreement without the consent of either parent and without an evidentiary hearing. According to court records, Vega said, "at this point someone needs to make a decision" and "I'm making the decision." The appeals court overturned his decision.

When Vega ran for retention in 2014, the Chicago Council of Lawyers noted that he had a reputation for being "hard-working" and "knowledgeable," but also said some lawyers reported that he "can become short-tempered on the bench." The council rated him as qualified for retention and he won with 75 percent of the vote. The Chicago Council of Lawyers did not respond to our request for comment about his evaluation.

A few years later, he got a big promotion.

In 2018, Evans promoted Vega to presiding judge of the domestic violence division, putting him in charge of overseeing 12 judges and the operations of the domestic violence courthouse. In a statement at the time, Evans said Vega had "developed a broad base of knowledge and insight about the law" and that his "experience and commitment to justice and fairness" would serve him well in his new role.

But one of Vega's former top staffers says his promotion was a change for the worse.

Leslie Landis served as the domestic violence courthouse administrator for over a decade, working directly under three different presiding judges. In her role, she worked closely with all the judges in the division. She said she also made it a priority to coordinate partnerships with advocacy organizations.

But that changed when Vega became the presiding judge, Landis said. With the two previous presiding judges, Grace Dickler and

Sebastian Patti, "the advocacy community had pretty good access and open, working relationships," she said. "But (Vega) just shut all of that down."

Landis said Vega kept a tight rule on the domestic violence division. He cut all lines of communication between her and the advocates, she said, and tracked her whereabouts by requiring her to report her activity in half-hour increments.

He kept a hammer on his desk where a nameplate would usually be, Landis said—a concerning image in a courthouse where women who have experienced violence and abuse came in everyday seeking help and protection. When Landis suggested that Vega remove it from his desk, she said he mockingly asked her, "Oh, is it a microaggression?" He eventually moved the hammer to the back of his door, she said.

She alleged he often yelled at her in public and described his behavior toward her as a "campaign of abuse, threats, embarrassment, and humiliation."

His behavior, she says, wasn't a secret. After a year of working under Vega, Landis said she complained to Evans. He offered to transfer her to his office, where she worked until her retirement last August.

After Landis left, the relationship between the advocates who work out of the domestic violence courthouse and Vega worsened, Landis and several advocates told us.

According to e-mails obtained by Injustice Watch and the *Reader*, the new courthouse

administrator, Shirley Grau, chastised advocates and court staff in late March 2020 for proposing a plan to shift to remote operations in response to the COVID-19 pandemic without Vega's approval. Grau did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

In response to the e-mail, Loretta Line, the administrator for the suburban division of the courthouse, wrote that it was "a sad day at the Chicago DV Courthouse when the attempts of

"No one gets a hard landing in Cook County."

—Elizabeth Francy

the (domestic violence) agencies housed in the courthouse to assist the public remotely, during a pandemic, are faced with such fierce admonishment."

A year later, Amanda Pyron, executive director of The Network, a nonprofit that works with survivors of domestic violence, spoke during a Cook County Board of Commissioners meeting about a mother with a child who was turned away from the courthouse at 3 PM in 90-degree weather because of confusion about the restarting of in-person hearings stemming from Vega's orders. "I just don't understand how 3 o'clock in the afternoon is too late for a survivor of domestic violence to get justice," Pyron said. Evans later overturned Vega's order.

In early August 2021, advocates took their concerns about Vega directly to Evans during a live talk show at the Hideout in Chicago with the *Reader's* Ben Joravsky and Injustice Watch senior reporter Maya Dukmasova. Evans rarely speaks publicly about his colleagues, and until this point, had not done so regarding Vega.

Near the end of the show, an attorney in the audience who represents survivors in domestic violence court said Vega was "a consistent obstacle to survivors of gender-based violence" and asked Evans if he would consider removing him as head of the domestic violence division. As chief judge, Evans has the power to remove or reassign judges in any of the court's divisions.

"I hate to even think about removing a judge, but yes, ma'am," Evans said in response. "I think he's a decent guy, but somebody said to me there may be some misogyny going on, and I can't tolerate that in my court."

Evans's office did not respond to repeated questions about his comments at the Hideout. He wouldn't remove Vega as presiding judge until four months later.

When he finally did reassign Vega to nonjudicial duties in late December for the alleged comment he made to another judge, it was after he had already announced that Vega would be retiring January 28.

The advocates and women who spoke to Injustice Watch and the *Reader* about their experiences with Vega said they are relieved that he will no longer be serving as a judge and presiding over the domestic violence courthouse. And they are optimistic about the possibility for structural change under the new presiding judge of the domestic violence division, Judith Rice. A former prosecutor and the first female commissioner of both Chicago's Department of Water and Department of Transportation, Rice is the first Black person to lead the domestic violence courthouse.

Pyron hopes that Rice will build on the successes that advocates have achieved in the past year—such as 24/7 access to the courthouse for people filing emergency orders of protection—and make other changes to support survivors that she said wouldn't have been possible under Vega.

But she and others were frustrated by the lack of transparency about what Vega allegedly said to his colleague and the system of judicial accountability that allows him to retire without facing consequences.

"I would hope that if this comment that was made by Judge Vega to another judge was seen to have an undue effect on justice to survivors of domestic violence that it would be made public," Pyron said. "Because survivors have a right to know if a person presiding over their case was biased against them, was sexist or a misogynist." ■

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JUDICIAL

El juez del condado de Cook, Raúl Vega, se jubila bajo una nube de acusaciones

Vega, ex juez principal de la corte de violencia doméstica del condado de Cook, enfrentó acusaciones de maltrato de mujeres en su sala de tribunal.

POR KELLY GARCIA


Este artículo fue elaborado en colaboración con *Chicago Reader* y *La Raza*. Traducido por Claudia Hernández, *Borderless Magazine*, con el apoyo del Amplify News Project del Institute for Nonprofit News.

El ex-juez superior de la división de violencia doméstica del Tribunal de Circuito del Condado de Cook se retiró la semana pasada bajo una nube de acusaciones de mujeres sobre su comportamiento en la sala de juicio y de sus compañeros jueces sobre comentarios inapropiados que supuestamente dijo a un colega.

El juez de circuito del condado de Cook, Raúl Vega, se jubiló el 28 de enero después de más de dos décadas como juez, la mayoría de ellos escuchando casos de divorcio y custodia de menores. Durante los últimos tres años, fue el juez presidente de la división de violencia doméstica de la corte.

Durante los últimos meses, Injustice Watch

y *Chicago Reader* han estado investigando acusaciones sobre el comportamiento de Vega en la sala de juicio y las experiencias de las mujeres que tuvieron contacto con él ahí. Nuestra investigación descubrió acusaciones de maltrato de mujeres, así como inquietudes sobre su temperamento planteadas por abogados y ex miembros del personal, y destacó

Alisa Holman dijo que recuerda una vez en la sala del tribunal de Vega cuando él la volteó a ver y le guiñó un ojo. Fue una de las muchas veces que dijo que Vega le faltó al respeto.  VERONICA MARTINEZ FOR INJUSTICE WATCH

ejemplos de Vega tomando decisiones cuestionables que fueron revocadas por la corte de apelaciones de Illinois.

Luego, a finales de diciembre, el juez principal del condado de Cook, Timothy C. Evans, destituyó a Vega de su cargo y lo remitió al organismo estatal que investiga la mala conducta judicial por un comentario que supuestamente le hizo a otro juez. El comunicado de prensa de la oficina de Evans no incluye detalles sobre lo que supuestamente dijo Vega o a quién.

El sistema de responsabilidad judicial de Illinois y el silencio de Evans hacen probable que el público nunca sepa los detalles de las acusaciones contra Vega y que no será sancionado por ellas. Las quejas presentadas ante la Junta de Investigación Judicial son confidenciales, y la junta se verá obligada a abandonar cualquier investigación ahora que Vega ha renunciado oficialmente.

En cambio, Vega, de 65 años, recibirá una pensión de más de \$14,000 mensuales por el resto de su vida.

Las mujeres y los defensores con los que hablamos dijeron que estaban aliviados de que Vega ya no sea juez. Pero dijeron que la decisión de Evans de promover a Vega para dirigir el tribunal de violencia doméstica en primer lugar a pesar de las señales de advertencia sobre su supuesto trato a las mujeres en su tribunal ilustra los problemas con un sistema que no se preocupa por los sobrevivientes que enfrentan procesos judiciales.

El portavoz de Evans no respondió a la mayoría de nuestras preguntas para esta historia. Vega también se negó a dar un comentario para esta historia.

Antes de convertirse en juez, Vega fue abogado de un comité del Concejo Municipal de Chicago presidido por el concejal Luis Gutiérrez y también tesorero de la campaña del congreso de Gutiérrez.

Vega fue elegido juez de circuito del condado de Cook en 2002. Un año después, fue asignado a la división de relaciones domésticas, donde escuchó casos de divorcio, custodia de menores y violencia doméstica.

El prolongado caso de custodia de los hijos de Elizabeth Francy fue asignado a Vega en 2010. Francy dijo que en lugar de tratarla

como una víctima de abuso, los fallos oficiales de Vega la caracterizaron como una mujer fría e indiferente que intentaba mantener a su ex-marido alejado de sus hijos.

“La misoginia en su sala del tribunal ha sido rampante durante años”, dijo Francy a Injustice Watch y al *Reader*.

En una ocasión, dijo, su abogado le sugirió que usara faldas porque “a Vega no le gustan las mujeres que usan pantalones”. Francy también dijo que escuchó a Vega felicitar a las mujeres jóvenes en su sala del tribunal por usar faldas. Ella también comenzó a cambiar su apariencia inicialmente, pero cerca del final de su caso dejó de aparecer por completo porque sintió que Vega no le daría un trato justo.

Alisa Holman dijo que tuvo una experiencia similar en la sala del tribunal de Vega.

En 2013, el exesposo de Holman solicitó la custodia exclusiva de su hija de 10 años en la corte de Vega. Una amiga que trabajaba como asistente legal y estaba familiarizada con los tribunales de familia le dijo que se “arreglara, se viera muy bonita y sonriera” para contrarrestar lo que ella percibía como el prejuicio de Vega contra las mujeres.

“Entonces, lo hice”, dijo Holman en una entrevista telefónica con Injustice Watch y *Reader*. “Cambié mi apariencia, y recuerdo que en una ocasión estaba sentada al frente en la sala del tribunal y no sé si (Vega) me recordó de otro tribunal o pensó que era abogada, pero me guiñó un ojo”.

Ella dijo que Vega la humilló en el tribunal público varias veces. Recuerda una vez cuando Vega se enteró de que estaba comprometida con su novio y pidió ver su anillo de compromiso. Cuando ella le dijo que no tenía anillo, Holman dijo que Vega preguntó en broma a otros en la sala del tribunal si se casarían sin anillo.

“El hecho de que me hablaran y me trataran como lo hicieron, no tener voz, incluso ahora, duele”, dijo Holman. “Fue tan traumatizante”.

Holman y Francy escribieron en línea sobre sus experiencias con Vega, con la esperanza de llamar la atención sobre su supuesto comportamiento. La publicación de Francy en Robing Room, un foro en línea que permite a las personas evaluar a los jueces de forma anónima, fue una de más de 70 entre 2008 y 2021 que acusaron a Vega de ser incompetente, deplorable, parcial o sexista.

A lo largo de los años, otros jueces y abogados también señalaron señales de alerta sobre el supuesto comportamiento de Vega en el tribunal.

En un caso del 2015 que fue apelado ante la Corte de Apelaciones de Illinois, Vega imple-

mentó un acuerdo de custodia de menores sin el consentimiento de ninguno de los padres y sin un tribunal probatorio. Según los registros judiciales, Vega dijo, “en este momento alguien necesita tomar una decisión” y “yo estoy tomando la decisión”. La corte de apelaciones revocó su decisión.

Cuando Vega se postuló para la retención en 2014, el Consejo de Abogados de Chicago señaló que tenía reputación de ser “trabajador” e “informado”, pero también dijo que algunos abogados informaron que “puede volverse irritable en el tribunal”. El consejo lo calificó como apto para la retención y ganó con el 75% de los votos. El Consejo de Abogados de Chicago no respondió a nuestra solicitud de comentarios sobre su evaluación.

Unos años más tarde, consiguió un gran ascenso.

En 2018, Evans ascendió a Vega a juez presidente de la división de violencia doméstica. En un comunicado en ese momento, Evans dijo que Vega había “desarrollado una amplia base de conocimiento y perspicacia sobre la ley” y que su “experiencia y compromiso con la justicia y la equidad” le serían muy útiles en su nuevo cargo.

Pero uno de los ex altos funcionarios de Vega dice que su ascenso fue un cambio para peor.

Leslie Landis se desempeñó como administradora del tribunal de violencia doméstica durante más de una década, trabajando directamente bajo tres jueces presidentes diferentes. En su función, dijo que coordinó asociaciones con organizaciones de defensa que trabajan para apoyar a los sobrevivientes en el juzgado.

Pero ella comentó que eso cambió cuando Vega se convirtió en juez presidente. Cortó todas las líneas de comunicación entre ella y los defensores, dijo, y rastreó su paradero al exigirle que informara sobre su actividad en incrementos de media hora.

Ella alega que él a menudo le gritaba en público y describe su comportamiento hacia ella como una “campaña de abuso, amenazas, vergüenza y humillación”.

Su comportamiento, dice ella, no era un secreto. Después de un año de trabajar con Vega, Landis dijo que se quejó con Evans. Le ofreció trasladarla a su oficina, donde trabajó hasta su jubilación en agosto del año pasado.

A principios de agosto del 2021, los defensores expresaron sus preocupaciones sobre Vega directamente a Evans durante un programa de entrevistas en vivo en Hideout

en Chicago con el lector Ben Joravsky y la reportera principal de Injustice Watch Maya Dukmasova.

Cerca del final del programa, un abogado de la audiencia que representa a los sobrevivientes en la corte de violencia doméstica dijo que Vega era “un obstáculo constante para los sobrevivientes de violencia de género” y le preguntó a Evans si consideraría destituirlo como jefe de la división de violencia doméstica. Como juez principal, Evans tiene el poder de remover o reasignar jueces en cualquiera de las divisiones de la corte.


“Odio siquiera pensar en destituir a un juez, pero sí, señora”, dijo Evans en respuesta. “Creo que es un tipo decente, pero alguien me dijo que podría haber cierta misoginia y no puedo tolerar eso en mi corte”.

La oficina de Evans no respondió a las repetidas preguntas sobre sus comentarios en Hideout. No destituiría a Vega como juez presidente hasta cuatro meses después.

Cuando finalmente reasignó a Vega a funciones no judiciales a fines de diciembre por el supuesto comentario que le hizo a otro juez, fue después de que ya había anunciado que Vega se jubilaría el 28 de enero.

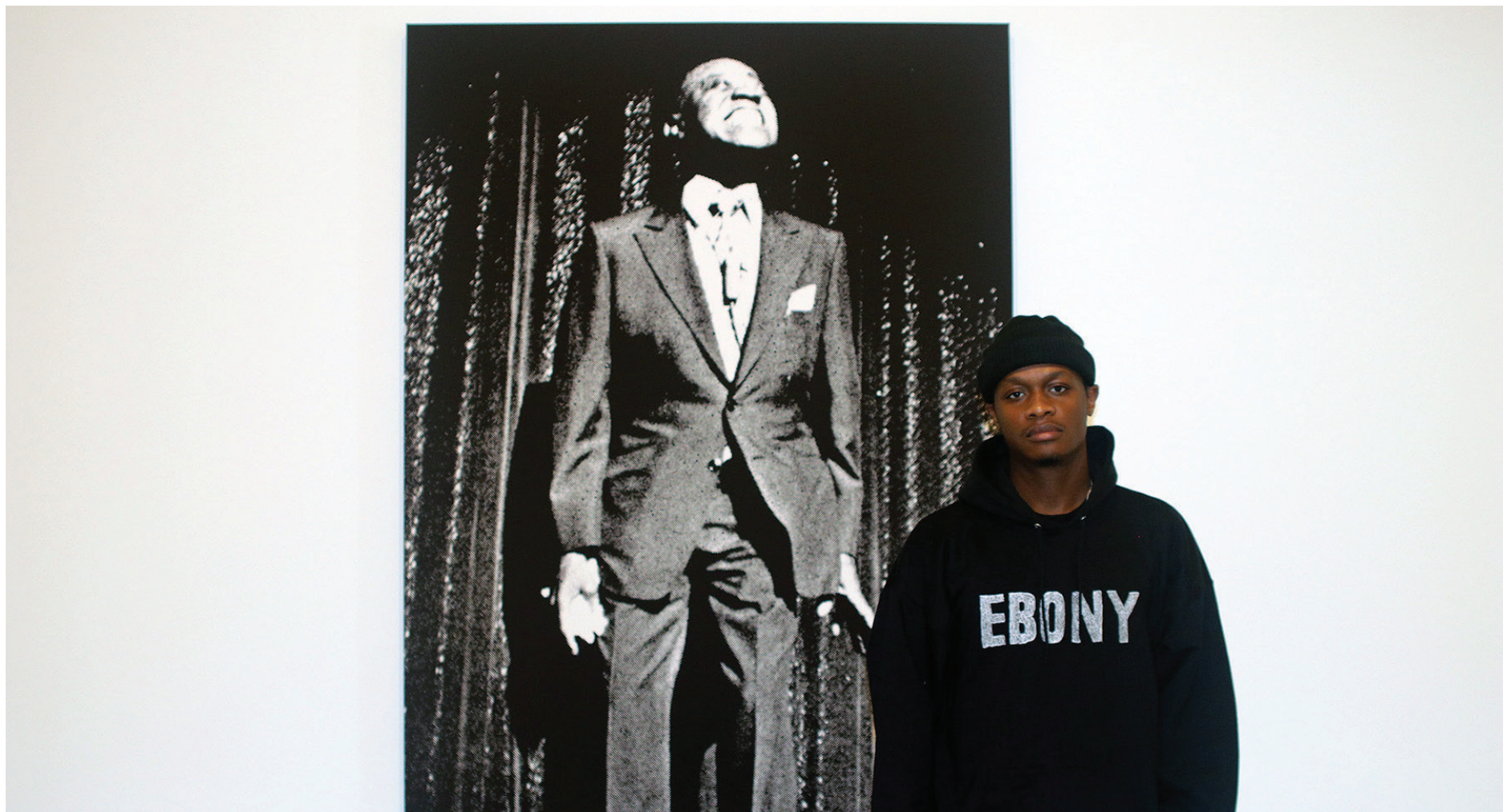
Las activistas y las mujeres que hablaron con Injustice Watch y *Reader* sobre sus experiencias con Vega dijeron que están aliviadas de que ya no se desempeñe como juez ni presida el tribunal de violencia doméstica. Y son optimistas sobre la posibilidad de un cambio estructural bajo la nueva jueza presidente de la división de violencia doméstica, Judith Rice. Exfiscal y primera mujer comisionada del Departamento de Agua y del Departamento de Transporte de Chicago, Rice es la primera persona negra en dirigir el juzgado de violencia doméstica.

Pero Amanda Pyron, directora ejecutiva de The Network, una organización que trabaja con sobrevivientes de violencia doméstica, dijo que ella y otras personas estaban frustradas por la falta de transparencia sobre lo que Vega supuestamente le dijo a su colega y el sistema de responsabilidad judicial que le permite retirarse sin enfrentar consecuencias.

“Espero que si se considera que este comentario que hizo el juez Vega a otro juez tiene un efecto indebido en la justicia para los sobrevivientes de violencia doméstica, se haga público”, dijo Pyron. “Porque los sobrevivientes tienen derecho a saber si una persona que presidió su caso tenía prejuicios contra ellos, era sexista o misógino”. 

 @_KellyGarcia_

ARTS & CULTURE



Artist Adeshola Makinde ARIONNE NETTLES

ART FEATURE

Black joy ‘Is where it’s at!’

An exhibition that pays homage to the legacy of Johnson Publishing

By **ARIONNE NETTLES**

When artist Adeshola Makinde thinks about the work in his current exhibition, it’s a giant, larger-than-life canvas image of the legendary Louis Armstrong—Makinde’s largest-scale piece he’s done to date—that rises to the top of his favorites list.

“To me, [Armstrong] represented unrelenting optimism, amidst what I could imagine was pretty, pretty unbearable things that he had to deal with going to certain clubs he went to, at the height of which he was doing his thing,” he says. “So, I wanted to show that in the show.”

The title of the piece is *What a ___ world!*,

as a play off Armstrong’s famous song, “What a Wonderful World.”

“[The piece is] kind of asking that question as to: ‘Is it really?’ That piece means a lot to me.”

The exhibition, “Is where it’s at!,” is the first in a new collaborative series spotlighting the importance of Black space, Black art, and Black artists. Throughout 2022, Rebuild Foundation and Anthony Gallery will showcase work at the Stony Island Arts Bank that is from both emerging and established artists whose work surrounds Black identity.

Makinde’s exhibition is the first of this

partnership, and Isimeme “Easy” Otabor, who is the founder of Anthony Gallery, says it’s “a dream” to be able to uplift artists in this way.

“IS WHERE IT’S AT!” WORK BY ADESHOLA MAKINDE

Through 2/27: Thu-Sun noon-6 PM,
Stony Island Arts Bank, 6760 S. Stony
Island, 312-857-5561,
rebuild-foundation.org

Theaster Gates, founder and executive director of Rebuild Foundation, says he’s excited to provide a platform for artists such as Makinde


to display their “creative ambition.” And for Makinde, this opportunity to show his work in the Arts Bank—a place he says is “inextricably linked to Black excellence”—is an honor.

“When people are viewing the show, I want them to feel proud of what they’re seeing, especially Black people viewing the work,” he says.

Makinde’s inspiration for the exhibition’s title came to him while watching a then-26-year-old Nina Simone perform during *Summer of Soul (...Or, When the Revolution Could Not Be Televised)*, which is a documentary on the 1969 Harlem Culture Festival.

ARTS & CULTURE



Collage work by Makinde incorporates archival source material from Johnson Publishing  ARIONNE NETTLES

"I honestly just wanted to have an accompanying visual element to that feeling that I felt watching that performance—all the Black faces that you saw in the crowd were extremely joyful and just in community and happy to be there," Makinde says. "I wanted to create a body of work that, I think, is a good visual representation of that feeling."

One of Simone's songs she sings is "Young, Gifted and Black," a tribute to her friend, the playwright Lorraine Hansberry, who—before she died in 1965—told a group of young writers: "Though it is a thrilling and marvelous thing to be merely young and gifted in such times, it is doubly so, doubly dynamic—to be young, gifted and black."

Simone's song was a dedication to this, ending with: "Oh, but my joy of today / Is that we can all be proud to say / 'To be young, gifted and black / Is where it's at.'" Hearing this song performed by an outspoken risk-taker like Simone and then seeing how her performance affected the audience inspired Makinde.

"I wanted to say something," he says. "Finding an overarching theme that I think connects all the pieces was what I was aiming for. And, honestly, the 'Is where it's at!' kind of came to me out of the blue as I was watching that, kind of something I stumbled upon, and I really dove into that once I discovered it."

The works in the show themselves were created over multiple years (since 2019) and include many archival prints on canvas and mixed-media collages, which pay homage to *Ebony* and *Jet* magazines, and the legacy of


Johnson Publishing Company as a recorder of Black life—and also, Black joy.

"Once I was able to figure out the feeling and the mood that I was trying to portray in the show, a lot of the source material that I was finding really was easy to find, honestly," Makinde says. "[For] a lot of the newer collage work in the show, I went towards more 70s-era *Ebony* because it felt like a more joyful, green time, in the way that the imagery was shown."

And with the abundance of source material that Johnson Publishing magazines provide, Makinde is still sorting through everything he's found so far.

"It's just endless, in terms of the amount of source material," he says. "There's still so much stuff on my table that's just scattered about that I'm still going to use . . . and to give a new light to that—a part of my art practice is trying to do that."

As visitors to the Stony Island Arts Bank view the strong images of Black pride—especially the collages with sayings such as "Dare to be more" and "We don't owe nobody nothin'"—Makinde wants the pieces to feel familiar, but also, be thought-provoking and a way to start conversations.

"I just want people to take in the work, make their own conclusions as to what things might mean to them," Makinde says. "But the point of this show is to just show what Black people have offered to the world, especially in terms of culture and everything in between." 

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ARTS & CULTURE

“DEVOTION: TALI HALPERN”

Exhibition ran through 1/30 at Happy Gallery Chicago, 902 N. California, [instagram.com/happygallerieschicago](https://www.instagram.com/happygallerieschicago). For more of Halpern's work, go to their website, tali.rocks

ART REVIEW

A genderqueer Bugs and a very sexy duck

Tali Halpern's exhibition at Happy Gallery made the world a little more hot and bothered.

BY MICCO CAPORALE

Bugs Bunny has a luscious ass. We've all seen it—the way he goes from a stretch of fur to curvaceous provocateur with just a few outfit and attitude swaps. It's one of the things that makes the character so iconic. There's something so sincere about the way he's able to embody a range of roles without mocking anyone except his oppressors. His power to evade capture by shifting personas is also what makes him meaningful to queer artists, like Tali Halpern, whose collage show “Devotion” at Happy Gallery (curated by Magnet Freda) made liberal use of him and other cartoon characters from yesteryear to grapple with the question: What does it mean to be an artist today devoted to the queer underground?

With much of the work created since the pandemic started, the Chicago-born, LA-based Halpern revealed a struggle reconciling the person they were raised to be with the person they are now, as well as the world that now exists versus the world that they strive for. The result was both exuberant and chaotic.

To create this noisy sense of collision, they used materials such as colored pencils, gouache, marker, glitter, candid photos from both their childhood and adulthood, vending machine temporary tattoos, puffy retro Disney stickers, and cutouts from old fetish magazines. The result was a rich personal lexicon that eschewed “good taste” and refinement while rooting itself in a sense of nostalgia, affordability, and self-reflection familiar to anyone right now who's interested in pleasure, power, and resisting the Disneyfication of the world while having been raised on Disney.

In *Butch Bugs*, a Bugs Bunny sticker raises cat's-eye glasses to give the viewer a teasing



Dykey the Duck: Magica de Spell by Tali Halpern and Eve Kujo [MICCO CAPORALE](https://www.instagram.com/micco_caporale)

Spell—a collaboration with artist Eve Kujo—which sets four Polaroids of Halpern cosplaying as a very sexy duck (think a hot cousin of Donald) inside a halo of matte gouache psychedelic geometric patterns. You're sucked into a trippy world that's both playful and uncomfortable for the ways it's childish, ridiculous, self-aware, and hot.

Most of the work was like this, save for two paintings made pre-COVID-19. Those were detailed gouache portraits from 2018 when Halpern was still living in Chicago: one, a self-portrait, and the other of underground techno DJ and Smartbar resident Ariel Zetina. Each image is rendered with a sense of intimate precision—a shaky matter-of-factness that offers the firmest, most unvarnished clue into what Halpern's world is like beyond their collages. They're not representative of the show as a whole, and yet they offer a sense of literal and figurative realism absent from what *feels* real or sincere about the smattering of cartoons, embellishments, and advertising cutouts throughout the gallery. If the collages are drag performers, the paintings are the civilians beneath the makeup.

What really completed the show, though, was Halpern's journal from the pandemic, which rested on a pedestal in the center of the room like an exhibition catalogue absent any overwrought essays. Instead, there were scraps of thoughts, expressed through a mixture of writing, drawings, and collaging, more frenzied and less precise than what appeared on the gallery walls. You witnessed Halpern struggling with things like life under lockdown, the day-to-day weight of an eating disorder and a body that doesn't feel like home, what to do about friends whose actions don't align with their expressed values, processing the George Floyd protests and feeling frustrated by other white people, and the unsexy parts of being an artist like applications, residencies, self-promotion, invoices, and constant rejection. Despite it all, they returned to the ritual of creation, grounding themselves in a process that was as much self-excitation and documentation as it was world-building. In this sense, they remained devoted: to themselves, their desires, their community, their art.

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ARTS & CULTURE

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LOCAL PUBLISHING

It came from the south side

Local book reseller It Came From Beyond Pulp ventures into publishing.

BY SALEM COLLO-JULIN

When do you cross the line from casual collector to full-on vintage reseller? For Michael W. Phillips Jr., a south side-based film programmer and copy editor, the moment happened in 2019 when he started posting books for sale on Instagram under the name It Came From Beyond Pulp. A more robust eBay store followed, and suddenly a hankering for 70s and 80s sci-fi (and their artful paperback covers) turned into a part-time business.

Phillips is used to working in multiple venues simultaneously. He's worked in various capacities in the Chicago film world, from being the founding director of the Black Cine-

ma House to serving as the first film programmer of the Chicago International Movies and Music Festival. In 2011, he founded South Side Projections, a film-presenting organization that specializes in screenings shown around the south side accompanied by conversations about complex social and political issues. Through it all, he's been on several film festival juries and also makes the occasional music or performance video for local musicians.

Somehow he finds time to read voraciously, and the lure of sci-fi novels, especially the classic paperbacks with speculative art, is hard to pass up. It Came From Beyond Pulp's web presence includes the odd review from Phillips

(right now it's heavy on classic *Twilight Zone* episodes) and a link to a YouTube channel where Phillips has compiled recordings he has digitized from 60s and 70s records that included stories and novels read by the original authors, including Ursula Le Guin reading two of her stories, and Arthur C. Clarke reading his story "Transit of Earth," a tale perfectly written for the audio book format with its diary-like structure.

And if that weren't enough, It Came From Beyond Pulp has jumped into the world of short-run publishing with three chapbooks currently available. The imprint started in 2020, when Phillips worked with Bram Stoker prize-winning author Kealan Patrick Burke and Chicago illustrator Corinne Halbert on *Distinguishing Features*, a 32-page booklet originally sold in an edition of 200 (all paper copies are now sold out, but it remains available in e-book format). Another horror-themed chapbook followed last year with writer Cynthia Pelayo's *Snow White's Shattered Coffin* (illustrated by Chicago artist Vheto Gutierrez Vazquez).

This month's forthcoming *Stoopin: A Bronzeville Twitter Project* is based on a series of Twitter observations by its author, Chicago musician Lloyd Brodnax King, and Phillips found and commissioned local comic book artist Daimon Hampton to collaborate with King's words and illustrate the volume. While *Stoopin* isn't sci-fi, it does explore a different kind of horror—the heartbreak of watching your neighborhood rapidly changing around you.

@hollo

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Inside the exhibition 📍 LUDVIG PERES

FEATURE

A love letter to Ravi Shankar

Chicago's South Asia Institute celebrates the famed sitarist with the "Ragamala to Rockstar" exhibit and must-see films.

By KATHLEEN SACHS

“What Andrés Segovia is to the guitar, what Pablo Casals is to the cello, so Ravi Shankar is to the sitar. The master. The one who you might say revolutionized the instrument.” This is how Chicago legend Studs Terkel began a 1983 radio broadcast on which Shankar appeared. Among other subjects, the two luminaries of their respective crafts discussed Richard Attenborough’s 1982 film *Gandhi*, for which Shankar and George Fenton composed the

music and received an Academy Award nomination for Best Original Score (they lost to John Williams, however, for *E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial*).

Film lovers are likely familiar with Shankar owing to his collaborations with directors such as Attenborough and Indian masters Satyajit Ray (Shankar composed the music for the Apu Trilogy) and Mrinal Sen (*Genesis*), and, less auteur-adjacent, for composing the scores to Conrad Rooks’s cult classic *Chap-*

paqua and Ralph Nelson’s *Charly*.

An exhibition at the South Asia Institute—which opened in late 2019, just several months before the start of the pandemic, and is, per its mission, dedicated to cultivating the art and culture of South Asia and its diaspora—features framed record sleeves for soundtrack albums to these and other films that Shankar scored. Titled “Ravi Shankar: Ragamala to Rockstar,” the exhibition includes many more artifacts of said rockstar’s life and career,

helping shed new light on Shankar for those both familiar and unfamiliar with this virtuoso of North Indian classical music, once dubbed “the godfather of world music” by Beatle and friend George Harrison.

“He was a giant,” echoes Afzal Ahmad, president and cofounder of the South Asia Institute. “[Shankar] worked with different well-known artists, [like] the Beatles . . . He’s got a very wide appeal. Very well-recognized. A very well-respected person. He was one of



Ravi Shankar  FRANCESCO SCAVULLO

those guys who built bridges to interact with other people. But he never really changed his style of playing. He kept it very pure. It was [a] northern Indian, Hindustani-style playing.”

Ahmad cofounded the South Asia Institute with his wife, Shireen, who serves as the organization’s vice president. Much of the artwork currently on display on the building’s second floor is from the couple’s personal collection. The masterful canvases, which range in style from traditional to avant-garde, provide an interesting backdrop for events held in this part of the Institute.

A few weeks ago I had the pleasure of attending a concert there, by Grammy-nominated sitar player Gaurav Mazumdar, a protege of Shankar’s. Mazumdar (who lived with his guru for several years) performed an array of ragas, with Hindole Majumdar accompanying him on the tabla (hand drums). Ragas themselves

are as beguiling as they are sublime: The *Encyclopædia Britannica* defines them as a “melodic framework,” but in the aforementioned interview with Terkel, Shankar expanded on this definition, saying, “We specifically use the word raga for the melody forms we have. It’s very hard to explain, exactly, a raga. It’s not a scale, and it’s not just a key or a melody or a song. But it is something which is very precise.”

This was the sixth of several events in support of the exhibition. For the opening in November, Shankar’s wife, Sukanya, appeared in conversation with Mazumdar and another of the exhibition’s curators, Brian Keigher, who’s also a friend of the Shankar family. (Some of whom are stars in their own right: The Shankars’ daughter, Anoushka, followed in her father’s footsteps and became a sitarist, and the singer Norah Jones is her half sister from

one of Shankar’s previous relationships.)

Just as Shankar provided the music for several films, several films have been made about the music legend. Four of these have screened as part of the exhibition programming: Howard Worth’s 1971 documentary, *Raga: A Journey into the Soul of India* (narrated by Shankar and originally released by the filmmaking subsidiary of the Beatles’ Apple Records); two relatively short works, Alan Kozlowski’s *Sangeet Ratna* (2013) and Stuart Cooper’s 1974 concert film *Ravi Shankar’s Music Festival from India*; and Kozlowski’s *Tenth Decade: Live in Escondido*, another concert film recorded in 2011, a little over a year before Shankar passed away.

Passion was also the impetus behind the exhibition itself. Everything on display belongs to Keigher, a Chicago native now living in Boston who’s been producing Indian classical concerts and music programs for over 25 years. He was the world music buyer at Chicago’s Tower Records and later the program coordinator for the city’s Department of Cultural Affairs; he recently retired as artistic director of the World Music Institute. He also cofounded and curates Ragamala, an annual celebration of the music he so loves and the eighth edition of which took place on the exhibition’s opening night.

“It’s a love letter to Ravi and all that he’s done,” Keigher says about the exhibition. “To be able to bring Ravi’s wife out and officially open it was a blessing, and [to] have her see things she’s never [seen] before . . . It was really nice to be able to do it properly, and then do it in my hometown. And then be able to do it and really showcase what [the South Asia Institute cofounders] have built, with this new organization and new institution, which I think is very vital for Chicago . . . there’s nothing like this in the city.”

A focal point of the exhibition is one of Shankar’s sitars, which was custom made for him and is featured in several of the photos on display—he even played it during some of his visits to the Chicago Symphony Center. The rest of the exhibition is composed of pictures, posters, advertisements, books, newspaper and magazine clippings, and albums, plus a large screen onto which footage of Shankar is continuously projected; all of these help illu-


minate the trajectory of the maestro’s career, starting with his involvement as a child in his brother’s touring dance troupe.

Of especial interest to museumgoers might be the ephemera surrounding Shankar’s legacy as something of a pop-culture icon. As one placard declares, “Shankar was the only musician to perform at all three of the decade’s most famous music festivals[:] Monterey International Pop Festival, Woodstock, and the Concert for Bangladesh.” With the latter, “he helped create the modern day all-star benefit concert,” intended, at the time, to raise awareness of the horrific famine then occurring in Bangladesh. This event grew out of his close friendship with Harrison, who also showed up to support the opening of Shankar’s Kinnara School of Music in Los Angeles.

Shankar achieved a unique level of success—throughout the exhibition, his name is featured on posters with the likes of Jimi Hendrix, the Beach Boys, Janis Joplin, and the Grateful Dead (it’s a who’s who of famous musicians, including The Who)—and he capitalized on this to elevate other Indian musicians and even purveyors of other Indian art forms. Yet for helping to bring these figures to Western audiences, Shankar was sometimes criticized in his home country.

“He really was one of the first to kind of kick down the door,” says Keigher. “But I love that he kicked down the door and tried to bring as many other Indian artists and art forms along with him as well. It says a lot about him as a character. Very giving and very humble in a lot of ways.”

The sentiment of wanting to connect people, to each other and to other modes of creativity, is at the heart of the exhibition. “The main reason for choosing him was the fact that, here was a man 50 years ago building bridges between people through his music, very much similar to our mission here and what we want to do,” says Shireen, “[building bridges] through art and music and literature . . . communicating our heritage.”

On Saturday, February 19, at 4 PM, the South Asia Institute will host the final event connected to the exhibition, a virtual discussion between Chicago-based music writer Aaron Cohen and Oliver Craske, author of the exceedingly thorough biography on Shankar, *Indian Sun: The Life and Music of Ravi Shankar*. The exhibition runs through Saturday, March 5. The South Asia Institute is open Thursday through Saturday between 11 AM and 6 PM, with free admission every Friday. Tickets are available on the institute’s website. 



PERFORMANCE

Eiko Otake invites herself (and others) to the dance

The choreographer turns 70 with two Chicago engagements.

By **IRENE HSIAO**

In performance, Eiko Otake frequently manifests as a ghost: wailing and yelping, biting at the leaves of plants and knocking fences to the ground, staggering and distressed by the contours of what detail, dust, or detritus she encounters, an insolent energy that demands attention, even as she is able to recede into weightless relation with wind and water, shadows and moths. A solo artist since 2014, after a 41-year career in partnership with Takashi Koma Otake as performers Eiko & Koma, Eiko Otake returns to Chicago for consecutive engagements at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and the Dance Center at Columbia College that reflect on time, place, and memory through video and site-specific performance. Here she discusses life, death, and a lifetime of inviting herself to create.

I don't have an artist studio. I create on the site. I can't set up a performance in my everyday life. That has to come with the presenters and the curators. What I can do when I'm not performing is edit videos. I have 48 external drives. It's a lot, right?

I used to call [video] my unemployment project. [Performers] don't have much control. Our schedule works by invitation. If we get invited, we create our own project. Sometimes we invited ourselves to make a video, because in the 80s [the National Endowment for the Arts began] a program called Dance on Camera. So we got a series of grants, \$5,000, \$3,000, just enough to pay our living, and we created those pieces. I also did lectures. Especially with my language skill, I don't want to compose only by speaking. I would ask how long? Fifty minutes? I would create a 50-minute video that composes my point of view. I didn't want to pay \$50 an hour for hiring an editor, so I've learned how to do it. In the middle of the night, I can be doing this for many hours without paying myself or paying anyone else.

Originally this was just a teaching residency. But what do I do with all the footage in the drives? If I have a dinner guest, I want to show some of them, but of course it's kind of an imposition. That was why I said to the school, 'Your gallery is open at the beginning

Eiko Otake WILLIAM JOHNSTON

of the semester—the students haven't created any work to show. So instead of going to the classrooms and giving speeches, can I be in the gallery? I will bring all my drives and [the SAIC] have lots of projectors—it's a resource I don't have. And students can come in here.'

I'm trying to create a window in the gallery because that gallery is windowless. In the gallery, usually you put this on this wall, that on that wall—usually you try to make the focus good, the placement good. But what if I disturb that? I can shift the projector so the video breaks to the next room. The focus gets blurred. I can go into the projection. I'm using my being in the gallery to disrupt the gallery-ness. I only have ten days' residency; the show will not stay. So why would I make something so perfect? I'm just trying to explore, and I'm going to create a video of how I disrupt that space. The first thing I want to do when I arrive is to shoot me, with a projector. So I will record empty gallery-ness. And I may use that video also in the exhibition.

I'm calling this the beginning of my ten-year project. I'm becoming 70 on February 14. This is an age I am still healthy and can still perform. But at 70, you never know how long. And I never wanted to perform just for the sake of performing.

Not everything is to remain. I can project it instead of waiting for someone to see it and go, 'Oh those are amazing works!' That's just waiting to be discovered. I have never done that. You can wait for a museum curator to knock on

I Invited Myself, Vol. 1 and The Duet Project: Distance is Malleable
I Invited Myself Through 2/3 SAIC community only; public hours, 2/4-2/5, 11 AM-5 PM, SAIC Galleries, 33 E. Washington, saic.edu, free; *The Duet Project: Distance is Malleable*, Fri-Sat 2/11-2/12, 7:30 PM, Dance Center of Columbia College, 1306 S. Michigan, 312-369-8330, dance.colum.edu, \$30 (\$15 industry, \$10 students).

your door, or you can just go ahead and do it yourself. So I am choosing the latter, because I never waited for an important person to come; I've always shown our work. I was just in Stockholm, and somebody took my class in 1973. She must be at least as old as I am—I was only 21, it was the first class I ever taught! It was not in my thinking—master class? Who? But it was [an] invitation, so I did it, and one

person remembers.

Certain artists have a value that can add to people's communicable ideas. When we talk about Steve Paxton or Anna Halprin, we know what we are talking about. I admire that. Becoming age 70, I should not be worried about what's the next piece. I should be tending to my trajectory, selecting what's in this world. I want to have older pieces be a part of other people's experience. My experience is, if I show the work, somebody takes note. This is my attitude to life.

In *The Duet Project*, from the beginning, I thought not only would I work with people who are living, I would continue to work with [the] dead, including my grandfather, whom I never met. He was a painter. To work with his work, I get to know him and his work much better, just as with living people. I have two friends who died, then my mother died a few years ago. Some people I don't just let disappear from my life—I work with their life.

[Among the living], I bring [choreographer, performer, teacher, and curator] Ishmael Houston-Jones: similar age, different colors, we both improvise. And I have two young people, [trans artist, performer, and writer] Iris McCloughan and [interdisciplinary artist, singer/songwriter, and producer] Don-Christian Jones. Both of them used to be my students. The first time I did my solo, I hired Iris as my dramaturg because I didn't have anybody to talk to. Iris knew Eiko & Koma's history and also what I do as a soloist. So Iris has become important to me because they have been almost everywhere I have been as a soloist. This time they said 'I don't want to be just a dramaturg, I want to perform with you!' So they made themselves my duet partner.

I brought [DonChristian Jones] to the Rauschenberg residency, which usually has an older crowd—this skinny, African American person, so much younger than the more established artists. I know his history, he knows my history. They are people I trust. I have had honest, even difficult, conversations with each one. I got to know each person more, and by doing so, I got to know myself.

The themes of *The Duet Project* are time and differences: age, race, upbringing, gender. Dead people don't talk back. Living people talk back. And the kind of people I work with do talk back. This project is a way of living: How do you make a friend? What does it mean to be friendly? And how do you treat collaborators with respect?

@IreneCHsiao



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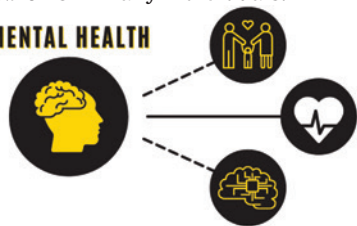
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THE CONVERSATION ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH

How and why it's important to talk about mental health

It's undeniable, mental health is a key part of our overall health and wellness. According to mental health.gov, one in five American adults experience a mental health issue. Mental health is a result of our environment and our biology and as such, our emotional health is a result of our life experiences both good and bad. The combination of these factors as well as family history and brain chemistry can contribute to the existence of underlying and unaddressed mental health problems in many individuals.

MENTAL HEALTH



So what can we do today to help improve our mental health wellness? Well, one sustainable and accessible treatment starts by simply talking about it! According to Banyan Mental Health, talking about feelings and emotions can make us feel less alone and can help relieve stress just by speaking it out loud. Although many of us are not used to talking about these things, learning to have proactive conversations about mental health could make a huge impact in someone's life. And according to The National Alliance on Mental Illness, seeking help through support systems for our physical and mental well-being helps us address and prevent crisis situations.

So how do we Spark the Conversation about mental health? Let's check in with Alia Reichert from the Spark initiative who guides us through some common ways to talk to others about mental health.

Q: How can we start this complicated and personal conversation for ourselves?

Alia Reichert: Talking about feelings and thoughts can be scary. Start by writing them down in a journal, record what you want to say on your

phone, or even talk in front of a mirror for practice.

Q: How should we have this conversation with someone else?

AR: There will never be a perfect time and that's OK. Start by stating a fact that you've noticed about your friend or family member. For example, "I've noticed you haven't been playing your music lately, how are you? You don't seem like yourself."

Q: If I talk about mental health or dark thoughts, will it cause that person to act out or harm themselves?

AR: No, according to the National Institute of Mental Health, asking someone directly if they are planning on harming themselves can help to identify if they are at risk for a serious mental health crisis such as suicide.

Q: What is the most important thing to remember when talking to others about their mental health?

AR: The most important things are the ability to listen, to not interrupt, to not diagnose (unless you are a medical professional), and to not judge the person or the feelings being shared.

Q: What if I've talked and still feel like harming myself, or my loved ones are threatening self-harm after talking?

AR: If you feel friends, family members, or yourself are a risk, immediate action should be taken by dialing 911 and requesting a crisis intervention officer or mobile crisis team. In non-immediate situations, you can text, call, or chat the National Suicide Hotline at their updated three-digit dialing code 988.

Talking about our personal thoughts and feelings is hard. The fear of being judged or labeled is real. These stigmas prevent us from speaking our truths and keep us silent. It is imperative that we rewrite the narrative and allow ourselves the ability to discuss our feelings and emotions without fear. We all have thoughts that can get us down, but the more we share with others, the more we realize we are not alone. Be well, be open to listen, be supportive, and Spark the Conversation.

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Is a medical cannabis card right for you?

Dr. Consalter is an Illinois MD based in Chicago who specializes in integrative treatments such as cannabis-based internal medicine for patients who struggle with severe chronic pain and mental health conditions. He's seen the first hand beneficial effects medicinal cannabis has had on his patients and believes it will continue to provide great hope as effective treatment in the future of medicine.

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The list of qualifying conditions to become a medical cannabis patient can be found on the IDPH website, but the most common conditions are chronic pain, migraines, PTSD, cancer, Crohn's disease, and fibromyalgia. If you currently use recreational cannabis for treatment to help with conditions that qualify for a medical card, you may benefit from becoming a medical cannabis patient! Illinois medical cannabis patients

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GROWING FOR GOOD with Green Thumb

Philadelphia Lawyers for Social Equity: “People change—criminal records should too.”

Featuring Andrea Lindsay, lead investigator and mitigation specialist at PLSE

Q: What is the difference between someone getting their record expunged and being pardoned? In Illinois I know of organizations providing pro bono expungement support but don't hear about support for pardons. I'm not aware of social equity organizations doing large-scale pardon work. Are there roadblocks that make the pardon process more complicated?

Andrea Lindsay: Expungements are a legal proceeding and can only erase crimes that you were not convicted of: not guilty verdicts, dismissals, withdrawals, and things like that. If you have convictions, for the most part, a pardon is a necessary step to getting your record erased. In general, a pardon is a type of executive clemency, a formal recognition from the governor that you have been forgiven for the crime.

When PLSE started out more than a decade ago, we only offered services for expungements, but we soon realized that—with Philadelphia being one of the most heavily incarcerated and poorest big cities in the U.S.—almost all our clients still had one or more convictions holding them back. This led to the creation of the Pardon Project, which helps low-income Philadelphians prepare their pardon applications and provides support throughout the entire process, which can take more than two and a half years from start to finish.

While we're starting to see some success in Pennsylvania, so much of that is specific to our state's context—the laws and regulations about the process, as well as the specific people making those decisions. One major barrier is that

the process is different state by state as well as at the federal level, which makes it hard to coordinate a uniform national, or even regional, response promoting clemency. One thing that's been working well in Pennsylvania is that we're encouraging people to look at pardons as a broad community investment tool, rather than simply a matter of individual forgiveness. Pardons allow people to get better paying jobs, loans, and other opportunities for which they're otherwise already qualified, and that benefits all of us.

Q: On a job, rental, loan, passport application, kids daycare form, and so many others, if a past “offense” is expunged, may one check the “No” box? What about if they were pardoned?

AL: The first question depends on whether you have any convictions or not. In Pennsylvania, if you never pleaded guilty to nor were found guilty of any charges and you get an expungement, you're good to go. On the other hand, even if you get parts of your record expunged, you'll still have a criminal record for any convictions until you receive a pardon. A pardon in Pennsylvania allows you to expunge those convictions and check the “No” box when asked if you were ever convicted of a crime.

This, too, varies state by state. In Illinois, convictions that you've had pardoned are only eligible for an expungement (resulting in a totally clear record) if it is explicitly stated as one of the conditions, but it's still an important tool for restoring many civil rights.

Q: PLSE recently started a Marijuana Amnesty Program. What does that landscape look like in Pennsylvania?

AL: While our services are general, meaning we can help people with a wide variety of criminal record histories, we launched our targeted Marijuana Amnesty Program in October 2021 to greatly increase the number of marijuana-related cases reaching the Board of Pardons. The Board of Pardons is the first gate before reaching the governor's desk on the road to clemency in Pennsylvania, and they introduced an expedited review program for nonviolent marijuana-specific convictions in 2019. This program, which allows a qualifying case to be heard in less than a year rather than over two, is an important first step, especially in a state where recreational marijuana is still criminalized. At the same time, we also wanted to make sure that the people most targeted by the failed war on drugs are at the forefront of these initiatives because of its ongoing devastation in primarily Black and Brown neighborhoods here in Philly.

As an example, in a ten-year period ending in 2019, there were roughly 57,000 new convictions—saying nothing of the number of arrests—for marijuana-related offenses across Pennsylvania, and those numbers are still growing. Yet we also know that, until very recently, there were less than 100 people from Philadelphia with marijuana-related convictions

who had applied for a pardon in the last five years. PLSE's Marijuana Amnesty Program seeks to change that by reaching people where there is the greatest need so that pardons aren't something obtainable only to the historically advantaged, but rather a crucial component of racial and economic justice.

Q: Is there anything our readers can do to help U.S. citizens get the right to vote while incarcerated?

AL: This is such an important question! The laws vary state by state, but even in states like Pennsylvania, where incarcerated people are able to vote unless they are serving time for a felony, and where there are no other restrictions on voting even for those on probation or parole, there is a huge information and accessibility gap. So many people (1) don't know they even have the right to vote, or (2) don't know how to exercise their rights even if they know they have them, especially while incarcerated. I recommend connecting with local organizations doing this work on the ground, since they're going to be the experts on local laws and regulations to help people exercise their existing rights, and that work naturally makes connections to the national landscape and the movement to end felony disenfranchisement more generally.

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This is a paid sponsored content article from Green Thumb Industries.

Andrea Lindsay, MSW, is the lead investigator and mitigation specialist at Philadelphia Lawyers for Social Equity (PLSE). In addition to her research challenging Pennsylvania's felony murder rule and mandatory life sentences, she also directs PLSE's special projects.

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REVIEW

History is *Relentless*

Tyla Abercrombie's 1919-set play fits our current moment.

By **KERRY REID**



Relentless from TimeLine Theatre BRETT BEINER PHOTOGRAPHY

The year 1919 is having a theatrical moment this season in Chicago, even with Steppenwolf postponing the world premiere of Eve L. Ewing's *1919* (which was originally slated to open this week as part of the Steppenwolf for Young Adults series) until fall of 2022. That watershed year in American history comes to complicated and compelling life in TimeLine's world premiere production of Tyla Abercrombie's *Relentless*.

Abercrombie, who has won national attention for her starring role in the Showtime series *The Chi*, was supposed to see her play on its feet with TimeLine back in 2020, but the delay has only made it feel even more vital and timely. The references to the 1918 influenza pandemic (which was still going strong in 1919) and the growing "Red Summer" of Black Americans fighting back against white supremacy (in Chicago, but also in Elaine, Arkansas, where Black sharecroppers protesting their economic exploitation were massacred; in Washington, D.C.; and many other cities) fits well with our own era of COVID-19 and the protests against police killings in the wake of the murder of George Floyd.

Set in Philadelphia (with flashbacks to a

Maryland plantation before and after the Civil War), *Relentless* (directed by Ron OJ Parson) centers two sisters who have come from Boston to clear out the house of their late mother, Annabelle Lee, a former enslaved woman who became a midwife to the community after moving to the City of Brotherly Love—which had its own race riot in 1918. Janet (Jaye Ladymore), the oldest, is unmarried and a nurse, while Annelle (Ayanna Bria Bakari), the youngest, is married to Marcus (Travis Delgado), a successful doctor.

At the outset, Annelle tries to coax Janet to join them for dinner with Franklin (Xavier Edward King), a politically engaged friend and, in Annelle's words, "a mulatto." But Janet is more interested in staying home and reading through the trunkful of journals their mother left behind, which distresses Annelle greatly; she sees it as a violation of their mother's privacy. Over the course of nearly three hours, the outlines of their mother's life as the enslaved companion to a young white woman, Mary Anna (Rebecca Hurd), as well as a few secrets of their own, come to the foreground.

But the play isn't just about exploring the past; it's about pondering what the future

might hold in an age of both unrest and promise. In 1919, women are on the verge of getting the right to vote, but that mostly means just white women, of course, even though Ida B. Wells refused to stay at the back of the line during a segregated suffrage march in Washington in 1913. Black men proved their mettle as soldiers in WWI, only to come home and face lynch mobs. Even Franklin's financial success—he owns a wine company—faces the looming threat of Prohibition.

It's a fascinating era, and one that we don't often see from the point of view of characters like the ones Abercrombie has created, compared to the stories told onstage and on film about Black people trying to survive in the Jim Crow south. The characters in *Relentless* aren't facing the grim economic deprivation that drove the sharecroppers in Elaine to organize. But the relative comfort that they enjoy (some of it rooted in complex relationships to white people) doesn't save them from the dread of knowing that they can be targeted at any time in a country so thoroughly saturated in white supremacy and violence.

As Janet delves deeper into her mother's story, we learn more about Zhuukee, as An-

nabelle Lee was named by her own mother on the plantation. Demetra Dee as Zhuukee/Annabelle Lee embodies the split in identity and history for Black Americans in more than name. At one point, Mary Anna gives her a locket with a photo of Annabelle Lee's long-dead mother inside it. Annabelle Lee stands holding that photo up to a mirror, seeing the reflection of herself looking at the face of the woman who gave up her life to save her daughter. But Mary Anna wants to see the locket closed around Annabelle Lee's neck (it's a choker, naturally) as a reminder of her own white largesse. It's a brilliant encapsulation of how even white people who believe that they're "good" compared to those around them practice erasure of Black people's lives.

The show is a little slow to take off in the first act, with the badinage between the two sisters feeling slightly self-conscious. But as the story unfolds, Abercrombie shows us more and more of how their familial roles (Janet the steadfast politically engaged one, Annelle the seeming party girl/socialite) are also just inadequate reflections of who they really are, and what their history might be pointing them toward. Both Ladymore and Bakari find deep resonant notes as they come to grips with what that future might hold. Delgado and King also peel back the polished white-tie outlines of their characters to show that becoming successful Black men in their communities has also come by way of facing anguish and loss at the hands of whiteness.


Relentless is the first in a planned trilogy by Abercrombie. Right now, Donja R. Love's *Fireflies*, part of his trilogy of plays about Black queer love in U.S. history, is at Northlight Theatre (see feature and review this issue), while Goodman presents a revival of August Wilson's *Gem of the Ocean* (also reviewed this issue), set in 1904 and chronologically the first in his monumental Century Cycle on Black lives in the 20th century. Abercrombie's big-hearted and complex portrait of "Black Victorians," particularly Black women, standing on the verge of great change, as well as Parson's vibrant cast, provides a sturdy foundation for her further explorations.

@kerryreid

FIREFLIES AND QUEEN OF THE NIGHT

Fireflies, through 2/20: Wed 1 and 7:30 PM, Thu 7:30 PM, Fri 8 PM, Sat 2:30 and 8 PM, Sun 2:30 PM; also Tue 2/8, 7:30 PM and Sun 2/20, 7 PM; Northlight Theatre, North Shore Center for the Performing Arts, 9501 Skokie Blvd., Skokie, 847-673-6300, northlight.org, \$30-\$89 (\$15 students, subject to availability). *Queen of the Night*, through 3/13: Tue-Sat 7:30 PM, Sun 3 PM; also Sat 2/12 and Wed 2/16, 2 PM only, no shows Tue 2/8-2/15; Victory Gardens Theater, 2433 N. Lincoln, 773-871-3000, victorygardens.org, \$29-\$62.



travis tate and Donja R. Love  COURTESY VICTORY GARDENS THEATER/NORTHLIGHT THEATRE

PLAYWRIGHTS TO WATCH

Exploring the intersections of Blackness and queerness onstage

travis tate's *Queen of the Night* and Donja R. Love's *Fireflies* get local premieres this month.

By KERRY REID

In a recent *New Yorker* essay on Charles J. Shields's new biography *Lorraine Hansberry: The Life Behind 'A Raisin in the Sun'*, Blair McClendon notes that the editors of *The Ladder*, the first national lesbian publication, tried to persuade the playwright to publicly come out after the success of her Broadway play. "Hansberry said that, as a Black lesbian Communist, she had been forced to decide 'which of the closets was most important to her,'" writes McClendon.

Two plays by Black queer artists now making their local debuts—Donja R. Love's *Fireflies* at Northlight Theatre, and travis tate's *Queen of the Night* at Victory Gardens—center queer Black lives in ways that Hansberry could not. (Of course her early death at 34 means that we will never know how she might have addressed her queerness in later works.)

Love's play, set in the early 60s, shows the effects of homophobia as well as racism on a couple involved in the civil rights movement, while tate's is a contemporary look at a father

and his queer son trying to get closer during a camping trip. But while the timeframes are different, both playwrights have created worlds where two people in settings somewhat isolated from the public world (a kitchen in Love's play, a distant campsite in tate's) have to be truthful with each other, no matter how painful it may be.

Love's play is part of a trilogy called, appropriately enough, *The Love* Plays*, each set during a different era in Black American history. *Sugar in Our Wounds*, produced locally by First Floor Theater in 2019 (directed by Mikael Burke, who also directs Northlight's *Fireflies*), traces the romance of two enslaved Black men during the Civil War. The third play, *In the Middle*, which hasn't yet been produced in Chicago, is set during the Black Lives Matter movement.

"I started with *Sugar in Our Wounds*, which explores queerness during the time of enslavement. And I thought that would be its own piece, right? A standalone," says Love. "And

I remember I was actually talking to my husband. He literally reads every draft of everything of mine, God bless him. And so we were walking to the market not too far from where we live and we were talking about *Sugar in Our Wounds*, just the characters, the world. And I remember I stopped in my tracks and I was like, 'Oh my gosh. I actually think that this piece is in conversation with other pieces that are holding space for love during pivotal moments in Black history.'"

The inspiration for tate came in part from an episode of NPR's *Code Switch*. "I was listening to this story, and they were talking about Blackness in nature and this group that started to encourage Black communities to participate in hiking, and foraging, and camping, and other activities that are mostly white spaces. So I just felt like that was a cool idea and it kind of sparked something in general," they say. "I kind of wanted to write a play where two people were from different generations that may be starting from far away from each other but have to cross a plain to get to a little bit of understanding between each other."

In *Queen of the Night* (directed by Victory Gardens artistic director Ken-Matt Martin), father Stephen and son Ty—the former recently laid off from a factory, the latter an artist—go on their camping trip before attending the wedding of Ty's brother, a successful corporate lawyer. This isn't a play about coming out and being disowned by family, but rather a story about the two men trying to find ways to connect despite their differences. (One of the issues is the lingering resentment Ty and apparently also his brother hold about their parents' divorce.)

They fish, they drink, they argue—but as tate notes, "I was interested in a story where two people are fighting to get to understanding, rather than maybe destroying each other. Kind of going in a different direction from the more traumatic or tropes that involve lots of trauma or violence."

Violence is present in the background of *Fireflies*. Olivia Grace stays home writing speeches for her minister husband, Charles, who is a leader in the civil rights movement. It's 1963, right after the murder of four Black girls in the bombing of Birmingham's 16th Av-


enue Baptist Church, and Charles's own safety is threatened every time he goes on the road. Olivia is also pregnant, and doesn't want to be. As she writes in a letter to God, "Please take this baby back. It has no place in this world. I wish it did, but it's colored so it won't. So you have to take this baby back. You have to."

Tensions between Olivia and Charles ratchet up when she receives a message from the FBI, playing recordings they made of Charles having sex with another woman. (This plot development mirrors Coretta King receiving a package containing an anonymous letter and tapes of his alleged affairs.) Charles finds the letters Olivia wrote to Ruby, another woman in the movement, which make it plain that her desires are for women (or at least one particular woman), not her husband.

Though it's set nearly 60 years ago, Love thinks that Olivia's isolation will speak to audiences now. "I find myself thinking about Olivia. She's spent so much of her time in the house, which we all know about now. Like a few years into this pandemic, we understand being in the house and what that does to one's mental state."

The isolation in *Queen of the Night* is one of the things tate finds to be key to their characters' opening up. "They're in the middle of nowhere, maybe, or in a campsite far from where they're supposed to end up. It pressurizes, but I think nature—all the elements of sound, and trees, and the other animals there—that helps to reflect the emotionality of the characters and helps to also really create the story too."

For his part, Love, who is living with HIV, has found a way to create community with his Write It Out! workshop, created in 2020 for other playwrights with HIV, and with his Learning to Love playwriting fellowship, which put four Black queer playwrights between the ages of 18-35 together in an intergenerational collaboration on a one-act play about self-acceptance and love, with mentorship provided by an older queer writer.

"What I think about is, one thing we know for sure is that there are individuals in this world who do not see themselves reflected. There are individuals in this world who just by the very nature of the cards that they've been dealt, the identities that they exist in, will have a harder time existing than others," says Love. "And so with that being said, I firmly believe that if you have the access, if you have the resources, if you exist in a space to shift that in any way, we absolutely have to." 

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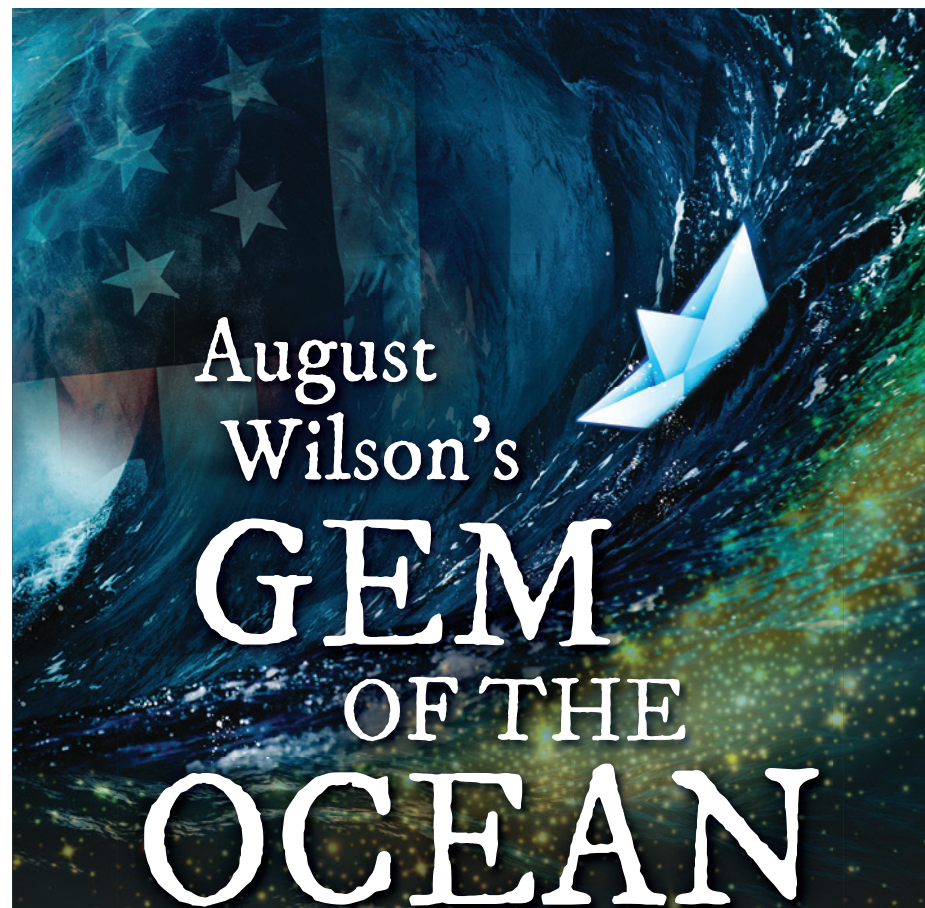
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Oregon Shakespeare Festival's Nataki Garrett on digital theater, her new film, and making space for Black women in the arts

By **SHERI FLANDERS**

When theaters across the globe shut down (the first time) because of COVID-19, theatermakers sprang into action because the show must go on . . . somehow. For many, that meant stepping a toe into the waters of cinematic arts. Fortunately for Oregon Shakespeare Festival (OSF), they had already plunged headfirst into the deep end, and this year premiered a short film at the Sundance Film Festival.

Artistic director Nataki Garrett explains, “Sharriifa is the reason we started doing films. Before the pandemic I had considered this digital exploration as another means of exploring the work we do performatively at

[the] Shakespeare festival. It wasn’t new, it wasn’t invented before the pandemic. But the pandemic forced us to shut down our primary mode, which is live. So I asked Sharriifa Ali, who is the director of a play called *The Copper Children* written by Karen Zacarias that we had premiered, opened and closed in six days, and I asked her to be our in-residence artist for . . . we didn’t know what it was at the time! We ended up calling it O!”

Garrett provided director Ali with cash, space, and a platform to work. Her first film was called *Ash Land*. The second that premiered at the 2022 Sundance Film Festival was called *You Go Girl!*, and is written by Ali,

Kamilah Long, and Courtney Williams, and follows a Black stand-up comedian on an emotional journey while hiking through the gorgeous Oregon forest.

OSF’s exploration into the digital realm continues with a collaboration with Black Lives Black Words, and with a foray into the Metaverse. Says Garrett, “In November we launched the first annual Quills Fest which is the intersection between theater and XR technology.”

When asked about the current creative debate as to whether or not a filmed play is still a play, Garrett opines, “A play on a computer or streamed on your television is still a play. It still speaks to the world in the way that a play does. A film is a completely different way of performing a story. And so we can have both.”

While OSF’s bold new digital future is sunny and optimistic, it didn’t always seem this way. Even though Garrett was appointed in 2019, she still has yet to experience her first full season. Just six days into the 2020 season, the repertory theater had opened five shows at once; they received the mandate from the governor to close everything down because of COVID. Garrett reflects, “What a humbling year 2020 was.”

The \$44 million theater was forced to issue millions of dollars in refunds, and eventually laid off 80 percent of their employees (roughly 500 people) with a small severance of two weeks of pay and health care. “It wasn’t enough, but that was all we had access to.”

But as it turns out, Garrett personally had access to plenty of resources. She went to work and raised \$19 million through a combination of sources including the CARES Act, foundations, and individual donors, and she started a professional nonprofit theater coalition to lobby for federal funding.

However, in many ways, the miraculous financial turnaround might be the easy part. For Garrett, as one of only three Black women nationally in a leadership role at theaters of OSF’s size, time will tell if Garrett’s and other Black leaders’ appointments have a happy ending. In the Sundance premiere of *The Master* starring Regina Hall, the horror elements were far less scary than the elite machinations of being one of a handful of Black faces in a Predominantly White Institution.

Says Garrett, “I was having this conversa-

tion recently with Dominique Morriseau . . . and she said there’s an expectation to be able to siphon off the nurture of Black women and to deny the qualities of power.” Garrett recognizes that fear of racism and discrimination can make marginalized folks hesitant to step foot into theaters, especially in the predominantly white state of Oregon. Part of her mandate is to provide multiple access points to the work to provide safety. She challenges that theater is a “brave space,” not a “safe space.”

“Theaters historically have not been very welcoming to young BIPOC people, to trans people, but that doesn’t mean that those people don’t want to go to the theater. It just means that sometimes you are sitting next to somebody who is sneering at you because they claim that you don’t belong in that theater. And sometimes their audiences can be a hindrance. And sometimes they’re not. Sometimes you just imagine that’s happening.”

But sometimes it’s happening. Shortly after Garrett came to OSF, one of her visiting artists was detained by the police. “My first year, one of our actors found himself handcuffed to the grate of the floor of a jail cell after walking home at night from a bar.” Another actor received death threats in 2016.

Changing culture requires shifts in thinking as radical as adapting to virtual reality. Garrett reflects on an experience of her own when she found herself sitting next to a chatty 16-year-old Puerto Rican teen during what might have been his first foray into the theater. She had to adjust her worldview to create space for him. Garrett reflects, “I’m not going to be the lady that says ‘shush.’ Even though you’re talking all the way through . . . I had to create something in myself that shifted the rules of engagement so that I could benefit from that exchange.”

Recognizing that those with privilege shoulder the lion’s share of work in order to provide a safer experience for everyone, Garrett starts with reframing the rules of engagement. “At my theater, I have to make sure that my known audience, the older white affluent audience, recognizes that their role is also to be ambassadors. I really hated it when I was a young person and I was in rooms with these older white people in the theater and they’d be like, ‘Welcome to our place.’ And it really just rubbed me wrong because I was like, ‘OK, this is just yours. Where’s mine that I could welcome you into?’ As opposed to, ‘Here is a place for all of us.’” ■

Twitter @SheriFlanders



OPENING

RR The movement at home
A Black civil rights minister and his wife
confront secrets.

Donja R. Love's *Fireflies* (the second in his trilogy, *The Love* Plays*, each focusing on a different era of Black American history: see feature in this issue) is at once brutal and hopeful, the hate and violence-soaked former threatening throughout to extinguish the hard-won gleam of the latter but never quite succeeding.

It's 1963 when we meet Olivia (Chanell Bell) and Charles (Al'Jaleel McGhee). He's "the face of the (civil rights) movement," a preacher with the charisma of a modern-day Moses and a similarly patriarchal mindset. But it's Olivia's words that fuel his galvanizing sermons. She writes his speeches even as she struggles with something akin to PTSD. Olivia sees skies seared by fire and swarms of fireflies, hears bombs drop, and speaks of being suffocated by choking smoke.

On an interpersonal level, the couple has challenges that many long-term couples face sooner or later. But as director Mikael Burke's staging for Northlight shows so clearly, Charles and Olivia are also bearing the weight of systemic racism buffeting them from the outside. *Fireflies* unfolds in the days after the Klan bombed Birmingham's 16th Street Baptist Church, murdering Denise McNair, Cynthia Wesley, Carole Robertson, and Addie Mae Collins. Charles has been asked to deliver a eulogy; the toll of the task shows in Bell and McGhee's intensely rendered performances. McGhee gives Charles the ferocity of a warrior. And when Bell's Olivia finally gives voice to her own words, her power shines with a light that not even bombs can break. Yet Love also makes space for joy, respect, romance, and the foundational

premise that the civil rights movement—long, bloody, exhausting, crushing, and often seemingly endless—remain a steadfast march, inching toward righteousness.

—CATEY SULLIVAN *FIREFLIES* Through 2/20: Wed 1 and 7:30 PM, Thu 7:30 PM, Fri 8 PM, Sat 2:30 and 8 PM, Sun 2:30 PM; also Tue 2/8, 7:30 PM and Sun 2/20, 7 PM; Northlight Theatre, North Shore Center for the Performing Arts, 9501 Skokie Blvd., Skokie, 847-673-6300, northlight.org, \$30-\$89 (\$15 students, subject to availability).

RR Where it began
Gem of the Ocean opens the world of
August Wilson.

August Wilson's Century Cycle (also known as the Pittsburgh Cycle, though *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* is set in Chicago) remains one of the monumental achievements in American drama. Chuck Smith's current Goodman revival of *Gem of the Ocean*, chronologically the first in Wilson's decade-by-decade exploration of Black American history in the 20th century, takes us on a journey every bit as sorrowful and profound as the one Citizen Barlow (Sharif Atkins) makes to the City of Bones—a mystical place in the center of the ocean, built from the remains of those Africans who died in the Middle Passage.

But the genius of Wilson, which Smith (who served as dramaturg for the Goodman's 2003 world premiere of *Gem*) understands well, is that his characters exist in several places simultaneously: past and present, myth and reality, cities of bones and cities, like Pittsburgh, of steel and blood and turmoil. And all those places matter.

Citizen's first name reflects one of Wilson's key dilemmas: how do Black Americans find their place as citizens of a nation that enslaved them and continues to deny them their full rights and humanity? He comes

to the home of Aunt Ester (Lisa Gaye Dixon), the sage woman who is allegedly almost 300 years old and whose presence is felt in nearly all the plays in the cycle (she dies in the 1980s-set *King Hedley II*). But she's a central presence here as she guides Citizen toward an understanding of his destiny. In Dixon's performance, she's also funny, warm, and a bit of a trickster. The rest of the cast, especially Atkins and Sydney Charles as Black Mary, Aunt Ester's surrogate daughter; A.C. Smith as Eli, her loyal lieutenant; and James A. Williams as Solly Two Kings, the classic Wilson vagabond outsider with hardwon insight on his side, flesh out this epic story with urgency, wit, and a sure hand with Wilson's poetic vernacular. —KERRY REID *GEM OF THE OCEAN* Through 2/27: Wed 7:30 PM, Thu 2 and 7:30 PM, Fri 8 PM, Sat 2 and 8 PM, Sun 2 PM; also Sun 2/6 and Tue 2/15, 7:30 PM; no show Wed 2/2 or 2:30 PM Thu 2/10, Goodman Theatre, 170 N. Dearborn, 312-443-3800, goodmantheatre.org, \$25-\$80.

RR Heights of illusion
Kayla Drescher stands tall at the Magic
Lounge.

The sight is already a bit of a tell: steps away from boutiques, antiques, bars, and restaurants, a cramped and dingy laundromat with no hot waft of Breeze or Bounty stands unattended, garments whirling entropically, no clean to be achieved. A pink phone with no dial tone, a bell with no service, and yet an intermittent stream of chic folks congregate, then vanish. No one is wearing their laundry day togs. No one has any quarters.

To those who wend their way beyond this façade, a surprising experience awaits in the Chicago Magic Lounge: a speakeasy where the secret is not what spirit hovers in your glass but what sorcery occurs in the space surrounding it, whether it's close-up magic at

Fireflies ■ MICHAEL BROSILOW

the intimacy of your table and the bar or the spectacle unfolding onstage. Locked in the library are tomes of magic lore. On the wall, an autographed photo of Houdini gazes at us with a Mona Lisa smile.

In addition to featuring Chicago practitioners, the Magic Lounge hosts magicians in residence on Wednesday nights—thus are we graced with Kayla Drescher: *Magic in Heels*. Drescher, who is based in Los Angeles, has a sweetness and a brisk improvisational style that make for an entertaining and unthreatening encounter with mentalism, mathemagic, and illusions. Best is what she conjures out of those brave enough to meet her onstage—better than a card trick are the spontaneity of astonishment and those little feelings that accompany us where we let them be: love, trust, and willingness to believe. —IRENE HSIAO *KAYLA DRESCHER: MAGIC IN HEELS* Through 3/30: Wed 7 PM, Chicago Magic Lounge, 5050 N. Clark, 312-366-4500, chicagomagiclounge.com, \$45-\$50.

Secret, but saggy
An Agatha Christie adaptation misfires at First Folio.

Note to would-be play adapters: Agatha Christie's second published detective novel, *The Secret Adversary* (1922), is in public domain. That means you can pretty much do whatever you want with this text, and still call it an "adaptation." This is pretty much what First Folio executive artistic director David Rice does here. Extremely loosely based on Christie's novel, Rice's version retains the protagonists, the male and female detective team of Tommy (Andrés Enriquez) and Tupence (Melanie Keller), and a few elements of the original plot, most notably a search for a stolen treaty. But Rice also shovels in additional characters, new plot turns, and lots of witty banter (much of which falls flat). He also shoves the time of the story forward to 1929, seven years after the publication of the original novel.

These additions do allow Rice room to deepen Christie's trademark paper-thin characters. Still, the end results are disappointing. The show is a saggy bag of meandering scenes, straight-up misfires, and drawn-out dramatic buildups that don't pay off. It is hard to tell if the fault lies with Rice's baggy script, with director Brigitte Ditmars's leaden-paced production, or with the show's many dispirited performances. Many in the cast seem miscast or underrehearsed—or both. The choice to have actors double and triple roles feels like an attempt at Charles Ludlam-esque camp but only adds a layer of confusion to a play that doesn't need it.

Worse still, whenever a scene does manage to end on a dramatic note, the mood is squashed by Christopher Kriz's goofy but plodding music, which plays during the show's endless scene changes. Sadly, the real star of the show is Angela Weber Miller's inventive scene design. Rice's sprawling adaptation requires a bazillion different settings, and Miller has a set piece for each of them. Which means the most entertaining part of the production comes from watching tables and chairs and moving walls being put into place, or being whisked away for the next lifeless scene. —JACK HELBIG *THE SECRET COUNCIL* Through 2/27: Wed 8 PM, Thu 3 PM, Fri 8 PM, Sat 4 and 8 PM, Sun 3 PM, First Folio Theatre, Mayslake Peabody Estate, 1717 W. 31st, Oak Brook, 630-986-8067, firstfolio.org, \$49-\$59 (\$44-\$54 seniors, \$20 students). ■

REVIEWS

Sundance at home, again

Bite-size film reviews from 2022's virtual film festival

By **JOSH FLANDERS** AND **SHERI FLANDERS**



I Didn't See You There 📺 THROUGH MY LENS

All That Breathes

A soaring visual masterpiece, *All That Breathes* follows brothers Saud and Nadeem who rescue birds (kites) falling out of the smoggy New Delhi skies. With outstanding cinematography and poetic voiceovers offering profound observations, director Shaunak Sen alternates between close-ups and wide angles, adjusting viewpoints to examine the interconnectedness between animals, people, and the ever-growing toxic city. Amidst social unrest in the streets, the brothers recognize their fight to save kites is a symbol of something larger, a fight against a waning compassion for all that breathes. Winner of the World Cinema Grand Jury Prize: Documentary. **-JF**

I Didn't See You There

Director Reid Davenport wanted to make a film about how he sees the world, so with a handheld camera or one mounted to his wheelchair, he examined perspectives on disability. A circus tent across from his Oakland, California, apartment launches him into musings on the history of the freak show and how he is often seen or not seen. His cinematography offers not only a first-person view but often mesmerizing, repetitive patterns that reflect the often frustrating encounters with oblivious able-bodied strangers. **-JF**

Last Flight Home

This film is an intimate, powerful look at a Jewish family saying goodbye to its patriarch, as told by his daughter, director Ondi Timoner, who chronicled her father's journey to medically end his life. *Last Flight Home* is an

emotional and important film about life, love, family, and autonomy, as well as how we let go of regret, capturing a journey we will all take yet seldom discuss, in a country that does not value dignified end-of-life decisions. **-JF**

We Met in Virtual Reality

The first full-length documentary shot entirely in VR by director Joe Hunting, this film feels as organic as any physical production. All the subjects appear as their avatars—Jenny teaches ASL, DustBunny teaches dance, while DragonHeart and IsYourBoi find long-distance love. It captures the adventurous thrills and surprising intimacy of this escapist frontier, exposing the honesty, community, and real-life connections formed during the pandemic. The film shows us a beautiful new way for people to make authentic friends through otherworldly virtual bodies; I began skeptical of it and quickly got emotional witnessing people sharing, teaching, and finding a place to belong. **-JF**

Free Chol Soo Lee

Free Chol Soo Lee is an enthralling documentary that follows the story of a Korean American man falsely arrested for murder in 1973 and sentenced to life in prison. The film recounts his struggles, efforts by pan-Asian American activists to free him, and his subsequent missteps once he is freed, as a popular leader of a movement he never started. Directors Julie Ha and Eugene Yi craft a powerful indictment of systemic racism and the criminal justice system, while providing Lee a chance to have agency and tell his story through his

own words, powerfully narrated by Sebastian Yoon, himself a former inmate. **-JF**

My Old School

“And I would have gotten away with it if it hadn't been for those damned meddling kids!” sums up this quirky flick. Alan Cumming with a twinkle in his eye plays the true story of Brandon Lee, a Scottish grown man who voluntarily went back to Hell high school. Told through the eyes of his jovial classmates and augmented with whimsical animation and pop music, this fun comic-tragic tale of arrested development unravels to reveal the unexpected legacy Lee left behind with his classmates, and his bizarre reasoning for embarking on one of the most absurd long cons in history. **-SF**

Piggy

Like *Carrie* for Gen Z, this satisfying Spanish-French coming-of-age horror flick has buckets of blood, revenge, and teenage angst. Laura Galán is outstanding as Sara, an overweight teenage girl struggling to cope with vicious bullying. Director Carlota Pereda has a gentle touch, allowing the tale to unfold so gradually that we barely notice the moment when Sara indulges her rage, allowing it to flow outward instead of inward. A meditation on the banality of horrible people, *Piggy* is an instant horror classic. **-SF**

Aftershock

The United States has the highest maternal death rate of any industrialized nation, and the death rate for women of color is astronom-

ical. Directors Paula Eiselt and Tonya Lewis Lee paint a sobering portrait of tragedy and resilience, following fathers-turned-activists in the wake of the deaths of their partners that could have been prevented. A must-see. **-SF**

The Territory

Fewer than 200 of the indigenous Uru-eu-wau-wau people remain in the Brazilian rainforest, continuously attacked by deforestation. When settler Sergio says, “They don't create anything, they just live there” as a justification for illegally encroaching on their land, the moral hollowness of capitalism lands like a sick thud. Tech-savvy 19-year-old newly elected Bitate and aging activist Neidinha are the last line of defense between survival and genocide. **-SF**

Honk for Jesus. Save Your Soul.

Director Adamma Ebo eviscerates the megachurch community in this take-no-prisoners satirical mockumentary. Regina Hall plays Trinitie, the First Lady of the church, married to a disgraced pastor (Sterling K. Brown) as they hilariously and desperately try to hold onto the members of their congregation—and the last scraps of their dignity. Trinitie's motivations for clinging to the doomed marriage and church that she has every rightful reason to leave remain as opaque as the clown make-up she dons in the end. **-SF** 📺

🐦 @joshua_flanders, @SheriFlanders

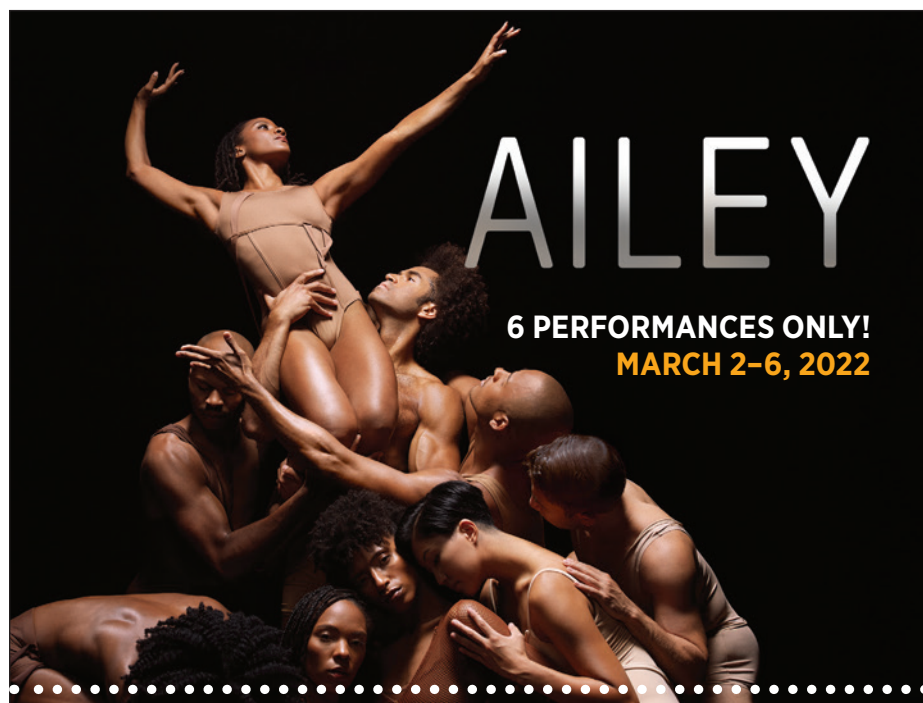
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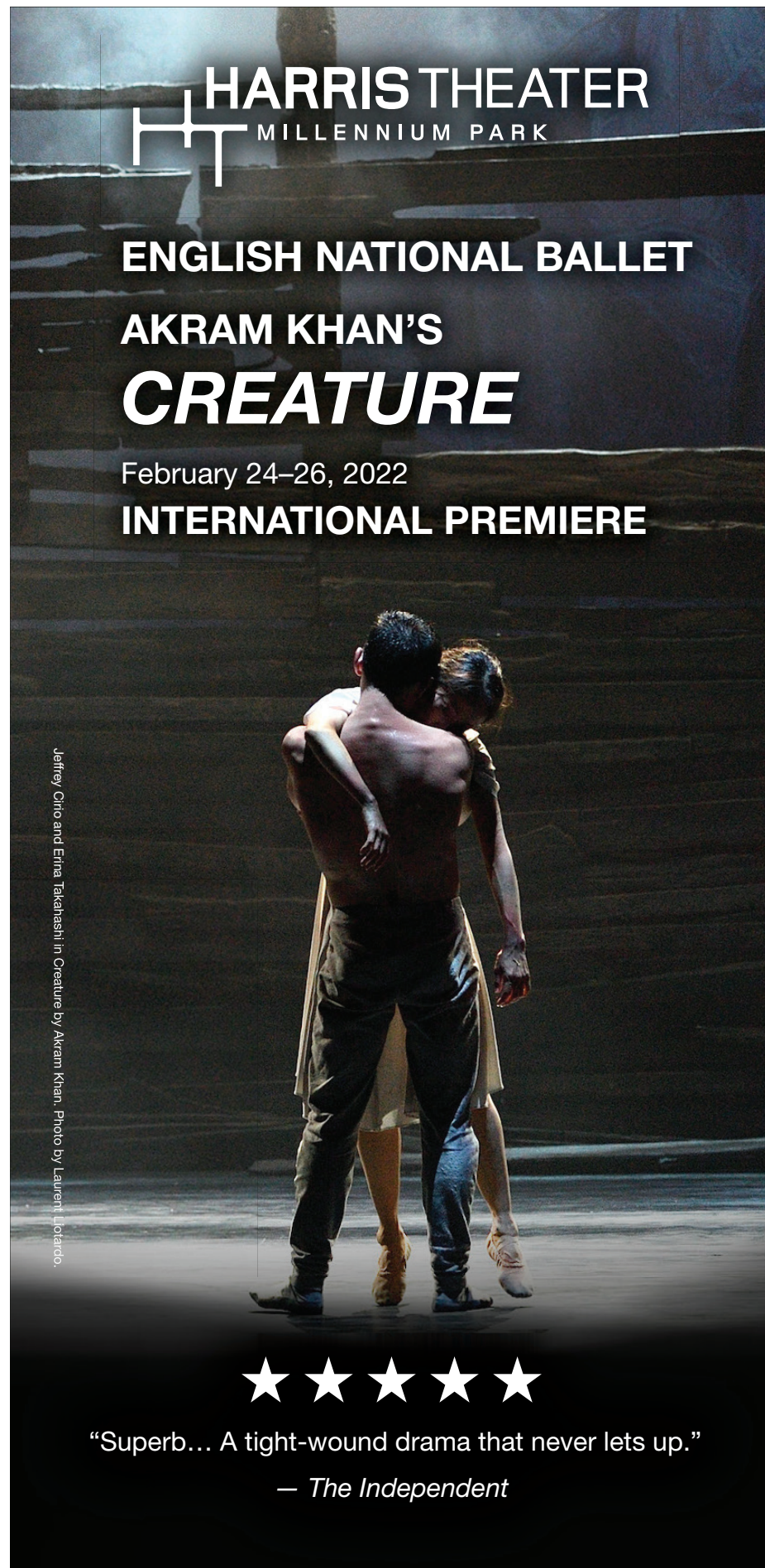
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"Superb... A tight-wound drama that never lets up."
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NOW PLAYING

RR *Below the Fold*

Below the Fold is a matter-of-fact procedural that'll feel familiar. The title is a reference to news deemed less noteworthy, relegated to the lower half of a newspaper where it isn't instantly visible. Enter veteran reporter David Fremont (Davis DeRock) and new reporter Lisa (Sarah McGuire), former flames who are assigned to revisit a cold case on the cusp of its tenth anniversary. Set in Skidmore, Missouri, the film feels like an homage to David Fincher as the reporters traverse a moody rural landscape searching for answers à la *Zodiac*. The case at the center of the film is about, you guessed it, a missing girl, and when new attention reveals harrowing information, it sends David and Lisa on an all-consuming pursuit for the truth, which may be in reach. Twists and turns abound, and while they're as expected as the rest of the beats in *Below the Fold*, they're also engaging enough to entertain. —**BECCA JAMES** 92 min. [Wide release on VOD](#)

Clean

This grim movie presents Adrien Brody's character, a garbageman named Clean, as the wronged party in an unforgiving world. His tearful nights, plagued with regret over the fallout of a violent past, punctuate dull days of trying to be good. In between trash routes, he brings prepared lunches to his irresponsible neighbor's granddaughter Dianda (Chandler DuPont) and refurbishes cast-off scrap to sell to a pawnbroker played by RZA. The lonely martyr on the fringe that is Clean finds a nemesis in the practical, God-fearing street kingpin Michael, portrayed with trademark ugly panache by Glenn Fleshler, whose seafood market moves drugs through fish guts. Festering beneath these foes on the moral hierarchy are the awkwardly dimensionless,

mostly Black inhabitants of the neighborhood stoops, who corrupt Michael's son and terrorize Dianda, earning them the business end of Clean's weapon of choice, a wrench. Michael's wrongdoing faces its restitution another way, as Brody the Carhartt-jacketed avenger of humanity solders together a shotgun-bazooka to raise hell with, the stuff of a painful montage that ends with Clean blowtorching a cigarette aflame.

Every great actor wants his chance to be Clint Eastwood, and for Brody, this is that movie. He cowrote and coproduced it, the Buick Grand National is the actor's personal car, and the film even features his original score, crude rolling hi-hat and kick action (the stylings, say the credits, of "Brody Beats") that's of a sonic piece with the thud of Fleshler's ball-peen hammer against an unfortunate middleman's skull and the many awful bludgeonings of Brody's wrench. Sadly, these stark textures never redeem the film's tired savior narrative, which would-be poignant moments gesture toward inverting—"It's hard to tell who's the saved, and who's the savior," says Brody's voiceover, as his garbage truck labors up the street toward Dianda's bicycle—to no avail. —**MAX MALLER** 94 min. [Wide release in theaters and on VOD](#)

RR *Introduction*

Most filmmakers start small and aspire to more elaborate productions and thematically richer narratives. On the contrary, South Korean writer-director Hong Sang-soo has been working backward from that notion; his films seem to get increasingly shorter, with his first feature from 2021 (*In Front of Your Face* is the second) and 25th overall having a run time of just over an hour. Hong, however, has indulged in a sort of filmic maximalism, releasing between one and three films a year for the past several years. But they're beginning to feel as spare narratively as they are in length; one

Introduction THE CINEMA GUILD

wonders whether there just isn't much there—if what you see is what you get, albeit in a highly satisfying way that only a master like Hong can achieve—or whether it's just the filmmaker himself who knows the significance of what's occurring on-screen. This centers on a young man who's present in all three of the narrative sections, which take place across an unspecified amount of time: In the first, he goes to visit his doctor father and flirts with his father's receptionist; in the second he follows his girlfriend to Berlin, where she's gone to live with her mother's friend while she attends school; and, finally, he shares a meal with his mother and the actor who'd been visiting his father in the first sequence. There's very little substance, with only a meager bit of exposition providing any kind of through line, yet the film confounds in its modest ambitions. It was shot in black and white; though not unusual for Hong's films, this is the first on which he's also served as cinematographer. In Korean with subtitles. —**KATHLEEN SACHS** 66 min. [Gene Siskel Film Center](#)

RR *We Need to Talk About Cosby*

From pudding pops to prison time—those of us who are Gen X and older could have never envisioned this particular hellscape for America's dads. Enter W. Kamau Bell with his four-part series *We Need to Talk About Cosby*. Bell's documentary is pitch-perfect, centering the more than 50 survivors of Cosby's abuse in multiple shocking interviews. The narrative doesn't shy away from Cosby's acclaim and beloved status—nor should it. Like a twisted episode of *Picture Pages*, it shows us how the bedrock of trust from his family-friendly image (read: nonthreatening to white people) and numerous good deeds allowed a brazen predator to exploit women in plain view.

The documentary explores the debauchery of the Hefner Playboy empire, casual drug use, and fear of

Cosby's wrath—after all, he had the power to make or break careers (and did), even perversely having women brought to *The Cosby Show* tapings to assault while on his lunch break. Kamau's playful directorial choices mercifully help brighten the tenor of the series. This is important because these women deserve to be heard after being ignored for decades.

Extraordinary audio and video clips show Cosby hinting at his misdeeds, including his stomach-churning praise for Spanish fly, and a bizarre anti-drug kids comedy album that has . . . let's just say, aged poorly. Bell rightfully understands that there is no true closure to this sordid tale, and the joke's on all of us: we're all stuck in a culture that lets monsters get their way. —**SHERI FLANDERS** TV-MA, four hour-long episodes. [Showtime, wide release on streaming platforms](#)

RR *The Worst Person in the World*

In *The Worst Person in the World*, director Joachim Trier and writer Eskil Vogt partner again for the third film in their loose "Oslo Trilogy." Julie (Renate Reinsve) is a young woman in Oslo coming to terms with her own interests in life while trying to navigate romantic relationships. It's the stuff of narrative drama for generations past and generations to come, but *The Worst Person in the World* deftly toes the line between romantic dramedy and a coming-of-age story, without too deeply falling into the tropes of either.

In a relationship with successful comic book artist Aksel (Anders Danielsen Lie), who is 15 years her senior, the ever-uncertain Julie finds herself questioning her future. When a serendipitous encounter with local barista Eivind (Herbert Nordrum) occurs, Julie's life is shaken up, forcing her to choose between the staid and steady life she has and a leap into the uncertain.

The film is broken into a series of chapters that serve as little slices of pivotal moments of Julie's relationships. Arguments and conflict are of the common variety—the age difference between Julie and Aksel, the desire to have or not have kids, motivations for next steps in careers. This is the stuff of daily life, of questions in relationships many of us have experienced, yet within the context of the well-crafted film, they feel more poignant and relatable than mundane and well-trodden. Trier utilizes an entire bag of cinematic tricks and stylistic flourishes that in the hands of a less adept director could easily come across as overly cute or gimmicky. In combination with Trier's stylistic choices, Reinsve is magnificent in her depth of emotional output. She truly inhabits the role and is well deserving of any awards consideration this season.

The Worst Person in the World comes together stunningly; it's a poignant and moving story of trying to find our place in the world and the difficult realizations of the pieces of ourselves we leave behind when life moves us to a different path. In Norwegian with subtitles. —**ADAM MULLINS-KHATIB** R, 127 min. [Landmark Theatres, AMC Theatres](#)

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‘For me, home is the people’



Saba releases *Few Good Things* this Friday, February 4. © QURISSY LOPEZ FOR THE CHICAGO READER

On his third studio album, *Few Good Things*, Saba reimagines failure and abundance as he draws on ancestral lessons to build new worlds.

By JANAYA GREENE

In late 2014, I was incredibly homesick: I’d just left Chicago for college out of state, and I was struggling to adjust to a new campus and an immediate world that looked vastly different from what I was used to. Treated like an outsider, I yearned for pieces of home. Luckily Soundcloud recommended *Comfort Zone*, the second mixtape by Chicago rapper Saba, which detailed his surroundings and experiences growing up in Austin and finding his voice. As he talked about his native west side, I was transported to my own neighborhood on the far south side; I felt moments of ease as I rediscovered my own personhood, even on unfamiliar public buses.

My connection with *Comfort Zone*, as well as with Saba’s later projects, is something I share with many other people. Since 2014, Saba has released *Bucket List Project* (2016), *Care for Me* (2018), and a long string of singles, all of which have touched the masses in myriad ways. On Friday, February 4, he drops his third studio album, *Few Good Things*—and like much of his music, what it makes clear more than anything is his immense love for Chicago and his complicated relationship with the city that helped him blossom.

How do we continue to love and nurture a place that’s not just given so much to us but also taken so much away? How do we commit to a path of growth when grief feels incomprehensible, insurmountable, and never too far from another visit? We dream and we hold onto the small joys and wonderful people that make each new day at least a little worth it.

Janaya Greene: Congratulations on the album. It’s really beautiful. You worked on *Bucket List Project* in LA. On the *Few Good Things* track “One Way or Every N** With a Budget,” you speak about how you spend a day at home, which is now in LA. Was moving there mostly career driven?**

Saba: It was only career driven. To be honest, I don’t even like to say that I live here. I always say I’m back and forth between Chicago and LA. I think with as much time as I spend in Chi-

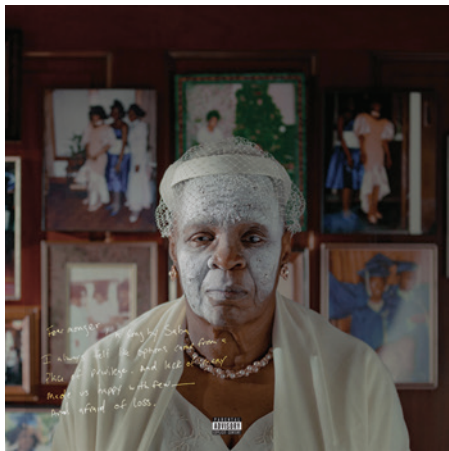
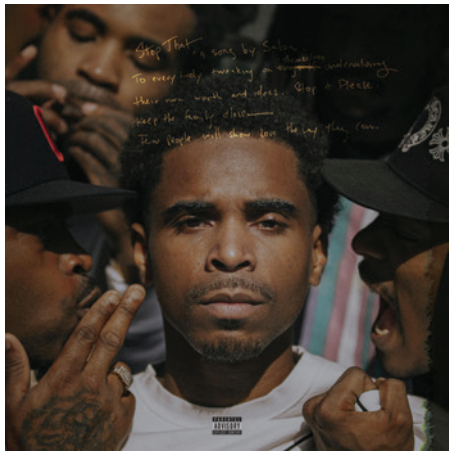
cago—like, there was a month where we just went to Chicago literally every weekend. Because things like that happen, it’s hard to feel so rooted in LA that I don’t consider myself to still be in Chicago. But I think because this is where I’m paid, to have a roof over my head, then I guess technically I live here.

“Survivor’s Guilt” is one of my favorite songs on the album. I think it’s really different from a lot of your other work. How long have you known G Herbo?

I met G Herbo in 2015. I was opening the show for him and Twista. Him and his whole entourage, they just showed us a lot of love. They made us feel real comfortable and at home backstage. Twenty-fifteen was a very different time, where nobody really knew who I was. So it just seemed like it went more into his character. It felt like it wasn’t no egos and nothing backstage—everybody was welcome. Since then we stayed in tune, and we got to reconnect. I’ve been trying to do a record with him for a long time, so I was glad we were finally able to work it out for this album.

Your grandfather tells a story that’s interwoven throughout the album. What was the importance of including him and his story?

The album for me acts kind of like a generational dialogue. As I was writing a lot of the songs and thinking of the stories that I wanted to share—before I even thought of the concept to involve my grandfather—he’s somebody who I was thinking of. My grandparents in general—because as I’m getting older and as I’m experiencing more things and more life, I’m realizing a lot of things that I’m experiencing now, they experienced in the 60s and 70s, in very different ways than what’s happening right now. I wanted to talk to him and learn from him and just give perspective. We started having open discussions, and I told him I wanted to interview him and learn some of our family’s history. I don’t want to take that for granted while I got them here. I want to get as much information out of them as I can.



At left, art for the *Few Good Things* singles “Stop That” (top) and “Fearmonger.” At right, a still from the *Few Good Things* short film, directed by C.T. Robert. COURTESY THE ARTIST

Where is he from in the south?

He’s from Houston, Texas. In that clip [at the end of “Survivor’s Guilt”], he’s referring to a woman who was in Chicago, who was hiring his mom. And she told his mom that she would give her a train fare to go back if she didn’t like Chicago. That’s how my family ended up in Chicago in the first place. I thought it was important to include that, based on how much of our roots are in Chicago—it was cool to get the story of how we even got there.

That’s so interesting that he’s from Houston, because I’m so used to so many of our great-grandparents being from really small, more rural towns. Maybe Houston now is different from what it used to be.

My grandma’s from a rural town in North Carolina, so, you know.

It’s a range. A lot of people, Black people especially, will relate to “Fearmonger”—being financially responsible for loved ones and always fearing not having enough,

especially when you’re barely making it. You also talk quite a bit about abundance on the album, and not just financially but the abundance of your family and all Black folks just existing, given our history with enslavement.

To me, you’ve conjured or created abundance in your life through your music, even before fame. Would you agree with that? Do you think you’ve learned that from your loved ones, even if the abundance in their lives looks different from yours?

Yeah, absolutely. It’s a feeling. It’s a fleeting feeling, but you know it when you’re experiencing it. Sometimes you take it for granted, because I don’t think abundance is based on reach or on success. Abundance can just be in the company that you have and people that are around. Throughout the album, we kind of explore that concept, because it’s not just money and success that you can take for granted. You can take people for granted; you can take a time period for granted. With the way the last couple years have worked, we all realized that we’ve taken everyday things for granted.

Those are some of the concepts when I think of abundance, where my brain kind of goes.

Also through dreaming, you’ve created abundance. It felt like you were imagining a lot on the album, especially in “Make Believe.” Is it still important for you to dream, even with how far you’ve made it?

Absolutely. That’s what the life-changing element for me has always been. Being able to look at a situation and able to be in a situation, and just using your imagination to create a new reality. I think the older we get, the less imaginative we become, the more we get complacent with where we are in life, and we kind of stop reaching for those stars. For me, I never want that to change. So this album also works in a sense to just remind myself of that. Being imaginative—it’s so easy for that shit to get lost. But the older you get, the more pressures of the world, the more people expect something from you.

When I think back to when I was like, five, six years old—before we experienced a lot of the more negative aspects that come with

adulthood—it’s like, man, we used to dress how we wanted to dress, we used to listen to what we wanted to listen to, and we were so much more in tune with ourselves. Everybody was creative and an artist, and everybody had these huge dreams of being an NFL player, astronaut, president, or some crazy shit, and nobody was there to tell them that they couldn’t do that. That’s the space that I like to try to keep myself in.

In “A Simpler Time” and “Soldier,” it’s really clear that you’re thinking about the future and dreaming of a more fruitful world for possibly your children one day—kind of pulling from those cherished moments that you talked about. When I talk to my friends, we always talk about how, no matter where we live, no matter where we are in life, if we have kids, we want our kids to grow up in better circumstances than we did—but we still want them to be very Chicago and understand our Chicago, if we can help it. What are three things that will be nonnegotiables for the world you’d create for your kids one day, if you were able to craft it to

continued from 41
your imagination?

First, it would be based on that last question, where we keep them creative and able to be as imaginative as possible—inspiring and encouraging all acts of imagination. Safetiness is pretty nonnegotiable—growing up in a safe environment, where they don’t have to feel that pressure of “Will I make it home?” and shit like that, that kids shouldn’t even really ever have to think about. Lastly, this is some real parent shit, but I would definitely have to limit the amount of screen time. That would be a rule, because I think that that works in a similar way as putting false expectations, putting false negativity—just like unnecessary opinions—into children. So those are the three things that I think when I think of being a parent one day or anything like that. Those things that just keep circling in my mind.

When you rap about kids, are you rapping from the perspective of family members? Or are you literally thinking about a family one day?

I’m not rapping from the perspective of family. I’m rapping as myself and imagining the world. When [Pivot Gang] wrote “Soldier,” that was November of 2020. It was a time when everybody’s getting up with their family, they’re going back home, but everybody’s scared out of their mind of going home. It had me thinking about if I decide to one day start a family, what that would even look like. Especially since we were already worried before there was a whole extra pandemic on top of that.

We’re all human and have had moments where we feel like we failed. In “If I Had a Dollar” we see you also have had your moments. I don’t think many supporters would look at you and necessarily think of your failures instantly. What do some of those failures look like?

“If I Had a Dollar” offers perspective on failure, because I think all failure *is* perspective. If you believe you failed, then you failed, and if you believe that you didn’t fail, then you didn’t fail. I think more often than not, failure leads you to your next victory, so it’d be hard to really view failure as failure and not just like lessons or steps that get you to where you want to be.

When I think of my career, I think people

don’t necessarily realize how nuanced even the idea of victory and failure is in something like art. It’s hard to really quantify if you’re doing well or not. People look at certain things, and they’re like, “Oh, this person, they’re touring, or they have a career,” and like, that’s cool. They are a success, but you don’t really know how that person sees themselves. Where they are now could be super far from where they want to be, and they might look at that as failing. It’s really just perspective. In that song, that’s kind of the whole point of it to me, to kind of break it down. I don’t view myself as having a lot of failures. That’s not to say they didn’t happen, just more so to say that I just don’t view them as failures.

The lyrics “Take a loss, take a win, take a breath, take it in,” to me, that’s a very strong meditation. Is this how you meditate? Do you meditate? What does meditation look like for you outside of music?

I wish I meditated. I usually meditate when I’m flying. Certain things that give me slight anxieties and shit like that, I’ll throw the Calm app on, listen to the beach or something like that, and just have to kinda calm my body down.

It’s not only flying. There are a few moments where I do have to do that, but I think I meditate more out of necessity and not out of just practice. When I think of my goals for the person I would like to become, I would like to meditate as practice as I wake up every day or every other day—to actually practice meditation.

I want to send my condolences to you and your loved ones regarding Squeak’s passing. [Editor’s note: Squeak was a DJ and producer in Saba’s crew, Pivot Gang, and younger brother of Pivot rapper Frsh Waters.] Are you comfortable answering where you were in working on the album when he passed?

I’m down to answer it, but I just want to make sure that this article doesn’t become that. I’ll get asked questions like this in the interview, and then the whole headline kind of becomes that. I don’t mind sharing that because honestly, to me, it’s a great story. Squeak heard this whole album in full. The only thing that wasn’t there yet was the G Herbo verse. He got to hear all of this shit. It was done. It was supposed to come out way, way earlier. His passing is actually the reason why we did delay it.

But yes, Squeak got to hear all of this shit,

and it was a really beautiful moment that’s gonna live with me forever. It was last summer. The album’s been done for so long, and it’s just been trying to figure out everything else to accompany the album and doing all of the behind-the-scenes stuff to make sure that it comes out right, which is just a part of doing it independently. I tried to allow myself the proper time so that it doesn’t feel like less than, just because it’s independent or whatever. Squeak was able to hear all of this shit. Squeak was in the studio with me when we were mixing and mastering it. So you know, he is well aware of what I feel is about to happen.

Thank you for being transparent about that. In “2012” and in “An Interlude Called ‘Circus,’” there’s a lot of reminiscing about your life before fame. Grief is often talked about regarding losing people, but rarely talked about is the grief of growing up, the grief of change, the grief of new levels. What I love most about the album is you’re open about grieving certain time periods in your life, and you paint them vividly. Music is a clear outlet for how you move through grief; is music the only way you move through grief?

I honestly don’t know the answer to that. That’s a tough one for me to answer. I don’t understand grief. I think because of the type of music that I make, I’m asked a lot about grieving, but I don’t fully understand it, so I couldn’t tell you more. Even the way you worded that question was better than what I could say.

I noticed that the album has more features from artists that aren’t Chicago based, in comparison to your previous projects. Can you walk me through how you selected the folks you wanted to include on the album?

A lot of my albums have been made in solitude. Just me and the two producers that have been working on it. But for this one, after *Care for Me* came out, I started coming to LA and just taking sessions with people that I was a fan of. So for me, it’s more of some fan shit, where I want to celebrate and elevate and work with people that I am a fan of. I finally had the resources, the capabilities, the outlets, the connections and relationships to get people that I look up to and people that I’m a fan of on songs—it’s just like, at the first opportunity to do something like that, I’m biting at that. So that’s how we were able to pull that shit off.

Would you say being in LA allows you to make those connections a little bit easier? Would it have been more difficult to get those features if you were still in Chicago?

It probably would have been more difficult to get in the studio with people. But I think honestly a lot of these people that are on the album I’ve had a relationship with for years now, and it was just a matter of the proper time and the proper alignment to get the record done. But a lot of features that are on there, I don’t know that there’s anybody that I haven’t known for at least two or three years—maybe with the exception of some of the legends, like Krayzie Bone and Black Thought. I still haven’t met Krayzie yet, but I did meet Black Thought. I met him out here. Everybody else I think could’ve happened in Chicago.

How did the idea for the *Few Good Things* short film come about?

Honestly I’ve been trying to do a short film for almost as long as I’ve been writing and recording music, so it’s been a long-awaited opportunity for me. Some of my favorite artists always made albums accompanied by short films, and I wanted to take a crack at it. I always had ideas that I wanted to see visually expressed in my own work.

Like I say, the album had been done for a while, so we finally had the resources, time, and opportunity to build the rest of the world out. I connected with the director [C.T. Robert] in 2019. We’ve been working closely probably for a year to two years on it. It was a part of the album-making process, to be honest. Every time I made a song, he got it immediately with an explanation of what everything meant. We talked nonstop for months to outline and get the story together. Going into it, I knew I wanted to do a short film for the album, so there was always a visual element to lyrics that I knew I had to write.

I really connected to it. When we think about home, we often think about the home we grew up in, which is a lot of times our grandparents’ house. That’s where we think of when we think of safety and community. You talked a bit about growing up and life changing, and how our grandparents went through the same things we’re going through now at a different time period. Has your concept of home changed? How do you stay connected to home, even though you may not be able to physically go into your



Saba in Los Angeles: “There was a month where we just went to Chicago literally every weekend,” he says. “It’s hard to feel so rooted in LA that I don’t consider myself to still be in Chicago.”

📍 QURISSY LOPEZ FOR THE CHICAGO READER

grandparents’ home any longer?

For me, home is the people. That’s what makes it feel at home. The neighborhood I’m from in Chicago, a lot of my high schools closed down, one of my middle schools was closed down, my barber shop is closed down. A lot of my history in the city is leaving, but the people that made those places are still here. I think of people a lot of times when I think of home, and the good thing about people is you can just pick up the phone. I talk to all of my people in Chicago as much as I can.

The film shares how your family had to sell your grandparents’ home when your grandmother passed away. A lot of Black people are experiencing this as we grow up and as our elders pass—we become left with the decision of whether to keep it, sell it, what can you do with it, if you can do anything with it at all. Is home ownership more important to you?

It’s for sure important to me, because we grew up with that [home]. My grandparents had their home. My grandfather, his mom had her home. I grew up in a home. I didn’t move around a lot as a kid. I grew up with my grandparents. Having that—part of it safety, part of it security—it’s just your staple. You get to be in the community. You get to know, work on, and have your plot of land. That is important, especially when you think of renting. A lot of times you’ll be renting and paying more [than a mortgage]. It’s like subscription-based things. You can buy this in full right now for \$200 or you can give us \$5 a month for the rest of your life, you know? It is important, and I feel like our generation is kind of realizing and finally being in positions to get land of their own.

We could talk all day about the evolution others feel in your music. What evolution do you feel in *Few Good Things* as a musician?

I focused a lot on this album on being my truest and purest self, without trying to think of outside influence, outside suggestions, out-

side criticism, outside anything. I didn’t really consider the fan base at all making this album. I just made this album for myself, which is also to be honest how *Care for Me* was constructed as well. With doing that you get something that’s so personal, and so authentically you that it’s automatically super original.

If you become more fearless with every risk that you take sonically, you become more fearless when you’re experimenting and you hear something work. I never want to contribute to the noise of modern-day career. I want to be myself and do what I like and try to give people my authentic work and hope that that is enough. On this album you can really feel that. It’s not a lot of shit coming out that sounds like it, in my opinion. My hope is that more artists are making their own music and coming up with their own sounds and not trying to just follow what everybody else is doing—it’ll inspire more people to do that, and then we can have options.

What are a few good things that are keeping you in a positive and centered space right now, if you’re in that space?

Honestly, the space that I’m in right now is like a cloud. With everything, I’m in a limbo with the album done. Now I’m just waiting for it to be [February] fourth, to be honest.

It’s interesting being asked that. A few good things keeping me in whatever space this is is not really a thing, more so a concept or idea—but I would say a sense of community. When I think of how I’m able to just be in whatever mindset or whatever space that my body is in at the moment, I think a lot of times when I feel like I’m going off the rails in whatever way, it’s my community that usually is able to bring me back to it. Speaking of communities, I’m doing this album right now, and all of Pivot Gang is doing something right now. We are all about to be dropping and doing stuff at the same time.

We have a really deep-rooted community even out here, man—Chicago is so deep in LA right now. My space right now is very rooted in community. 📍

🐦 @janayagr

PICK OF THE WEEK

Isaiah Collier & the Chosen Few take an intergalactic jazz journey on *Cosmic Transitions*

Isaiah Collier © SPENCER PORTER

KAMAAL WILLIAMS, ISAIAH COLLIER & THE CHOSEN FEW

Thu 2/3, 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle, 1035 N. Western, \$25, \$20 in advance. 21+

IN FALL 2019, WTTW arts producer Marc Vitali profiled young jazz visionary Isaiah Collier, who has become a vital force in the Chicago scene. “We should not let anything limit us,” Collier said. “People say the sky’s the limit, I don’t think that’s true either. There’s a whole galaxy above all this atmosphere. No matter how far we go, there’s still something else.” Still in his early 20s, Collier is an accomplished multi-instrumentalist, though he focuses on saxophones. He’s already done considerable exploring with his backing band the Chosen Few, whose lineup on the 2021 album *Cosmic Transitions* consists of drummer Michael Shekwoaga Ode, upright bassist Jeremiah Hunt, and pianist Mike King. As the Bandcamp notes for the album point out, Collier and the band recorded his five-part suite *Cosmic Transitions* on September 23, 2020, at Rudy Van Gelder’s famous New Jersey studio—countless jazz luminaries have recorded there, including Collier’s idol John Coltrane, and the Chosen Few’s session fell on the day Coltrane would’ve turned 94. Collier guides his unit through passages tense and acerbic enough to throw every knobby detail into sharp relief, and he’s just as assured when he allows that agitation to dissolve into restrained and mellow complexity. Halfway through the suite’s third part, King gathers his piano notes around Hunt’s lissome, corkscrewing bass line, while Ode’s controlled drumming nudges the number toward a smeared crescendo. Collier’s horn makes its elegant entrance near the end, providing sweet relief and an infusion of energy—just the kind of boost he and the Chosen Few will need for all the places they’ll go next. —LEOR GALIL

CONCERT PREVIEWSTHURSDAY3

ISAIAH COLLIER & THE CHOSEN FEW

See Pick of the Week at left. Kamaal Williams headlines. 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle, 1035 N. Western, \$25, \$20 in advance. 21+

FRIDAY4

JITWAM Henry Wu headlines; Jitwam and Leja Hazer open. 10 PM, Smart Bar, 3730 N. Clark, \$20, \$15 in advance. 21+

Born in India, raised in New Zealand and Australia, and based I’m not sure where, pop provocateur Jitwam might seem fickle—his outre style leapfrogs from sun-bleached, broken psychedelia (“Drowning in Tomorrow,” from 2017’s *जतिम सहि*) to sparkling, limber nu-funk (“Busstop,” from 2019’s *Honeycomb*) to minimal, mumbled soul (“Stronger,” from 2019’s *Purple EP*). But there’s a core to his sound: in a 2018 *Passion of the Weiss* interview, the producer, singer, and DJ invoked Madlib’s genre hopping, which orbited a clear center of gravity, to explain his own. “Madlib never forgot about his hip-hop fans,” Jitwam said. “Even though he was mad into jazz, or mad into rock and roll or industrial, he never lost his hip-hop fans. I’m really trying to take a page out of that book. Flex these different styles, but also have some continuation of an aesthetic.” Jitwam keeps disco and house close to his heart, and injects their intuitive dance-floor pulse into his music. Those influences stay front and center on his October collaboration with Australian duo Cosmo’s Midnight, “Feel Good” (Defected Records Limited/The Remedy Project), a refined nu-disco single that constantly refreshes its graceful momentum with violin flourishes, limber funk bass, and melodic froufrou—it balances exquisite detail with irresistible danceability. —LEOR GALIL

CHICAGO PSYCH FEST 12 *The Great Society Mind Destroyers* headline; *Plastic Crimewave Syndicate* and *Daydream Review* open. DJ sets by *Psyche Prissy Pie*. 9 PM, Hideout, 1354 W. Wabansia, \$12. 21+

For 12 years, the Chicago Psych Fest has provided a great way to check out some of the city’s best psychedelic and experimental rock bands. The 2022 edition features a one-off reunion of the Great Society Mind Destroyers, whose headlining set will be their first gig together in 11 years—reason enough by itself to come to Psych Fest, if you feel comfortable at concerts these days. Though the Great Society Mind Destroyers had a short lifespan, starting as an experimental trio in 2007 and breaking up in 2011, they left quite a trail. The 2011 full-length *Spirit Smoke* and an array of live recordings on their Bandcamp page document what a powerhouse they were. Their reunion lineup brings back three original members—guitarist and vocalist Andrew Kettering, bassist Will Saucedo, and drummer Ralph Darski—plus the band’s previous part-time tambourinist, Will Donis, and new second guitarist Jake Lingan.



Mitski EBRU YILDIZ



Myquale JULIUS JIMINEZ

Openers include Psych Fest regulars Plastic Crimewave Syndicate, led by artist, music historian, and Reader contributor Steve Krakow. Their latest release, August's *Harbingers of Ascent*, takes a droning, fuzzy journey filled with wah-pedal wildness, and its sharp musicianship is up to the group's high standards. For this set, Krakow tells me they'll be playing exclusively new material. Those of you who arrive at a show just in time for the headliner, you ought to break that habit for Psych Fest's first band, Daydream Review (who headline the Empty Bottle on Sunday, February 20). They're a pastel-tinted pop-psych gem, and their self-titled 2021 debut EP (which came out on cassette via Cold Lunch and digitally via Bandcamp) is a delight for fans of late Beatles, XTC, 70s British art-rock à la Soft Machine, and trippy, light, atmospheric psych. Their videos, especially the one for "With You," are beautiful too. Thanks to COVID, Psych Fest 12 is scaled down to one night, and with good reason—but this three-band bill has three very good bands, and it should be a lovely time. —MONICA KENDRICK

rapper and producer owes a debt to both cities. On his self-released 2019 single "Isolation," for example, he pairs lyrics about the long-term effects of institutional segregation on Milwaukee's north side with a confident, sumptuously soulful sound that has a lived-in feel and a comfortable familiarity with the genre's history. That sound has made him welcome in Chicago's hip-hop scene—in comments on the song's Soundcloud page, a few fans have compared him to Saba, though the smoky richness in Myquale's voice helps distinguish him. He's continued finessing his vibe on an EP (2020's *Passport Package*) and a handful of singles, and late last year he dropped "Never or Now," which *South Side Weekly* calls the "nucleus" of the forthcoming project *Above All*. Myquale's vocals scatter their laid-back swing with moments of grit and tension, and they dance with the track's genteel neosoul keys and sparse, razor-thin percussion in a suavely stylish performance that will be tough for the rest of *Above All* to top. —LEOR GALIL

ALBUM REVIEWS

MITSKI, *LAUREL HELL*

Dead Oceans

mitski.bandcamp.com/album/laurel-hell

In summer 2019, Mitski Miyawaki (born Mitsuki Francis Laycock) announced that she would be playing her "last show, indefinitely" that September. The singer-songwriter, composer, and multi-

instrumentalist, who'd become an indie-rock phenom, later clarified that she wasn't retiring but rather taking a hiatus—she'd spent more than five years on a grueling tour schedule and at least twice that long entirely dedicated to her craft. As she told *Rolling Stone* in December 2021, "I could see a future self, who would put out music for the sake of keeping the machine running. And that really scared me." Taking a step back from your career just as your star is on the rise isn't an easy choice, but Mitski's return to the limelight this year has shown that refocusing and prioritizing yourself can pay off; her gorgeous new full-length, *Laurel Hell*, consists mostly of songs she started writing in 2018. Now based in Nashville, Mitski named the album after the flowery yet poisonous mountain laurel, which is native to the eastern and southern U.S. and can grow dense enough to be impassable—according to legend, it's killed people who've tried. It's easy to find metaphors in something beautiful but potentially dangerous (a musical career, a tumultuous relationship), and Mitski uses the concept to weave emotionally complex tales. The somber "Heat Lightning" kicks off with an intro like the Velvet Underground's "Venus in Furs" minus all the droning, then builds into a rich, piano-flecked ballad. Written with Semisonic's Dan Wilson, "The Only Heartbreaker" asks whether a person who makes the mistakes in a relationship might also be the only one fighting for it; it's a pop anthem that could be the theme to a long-lost 80s movie about a small-town underdog turned local hero. Many of us have had to pause our regular lives due to the pandemic, and though Mitski's time away

was of her own choosing, *Laurel Hell* encourages us to see our involuntary periods of quiet reflection as incubators for future triumphs. —JAMIE LUDWIG

THE ROYAL ARCTIC INSTITUTE, *FROM CATNAP TO COMA*

Already Dead

alreadydeadtapes.bandcamp.com/album/from-catnap-to-coma

The Royal Arctic Institute is a group of New York- and New Jersey-based musicians who made indelible marks on the east coast's underground rock heyday of the 80s and 90s as members of Das Damen, Two Dollar Guitar, and Cell. This instrumental band operates with a core trio: guitarist John Leon (who's played with Roky Erickson), bassist David Motamed, and drummer Lyle Hysen. Collectively, the three of them have plenty of fuel in the tank (in the form of sweet country-fried riffs and jazzy beats), but for last year's *Sodium Light*, they brought second guitarist Lynn Wright and keyboardist Carl Baggaley into the mix as guests. That album's sublimely chilled-out avant-Americana landscapes further flesh out the cosmic, line-blurring sound that the Royal Arctic Institute has dubbed "post-everything." Wright and Baggaley have since become full-time members, and on the new *From Catnap to Coma*, the quintet creates sweeping vistas where space jazz, alt-country, surf, ambient music, psychedelia, and shoegaze meet, taking that sound to the next level of heady goodness. Produced by James McNew, the

WEDNESDAY 16

MYQUALE *Qari headlines; Myquale and Dimitri Moore open. 8:30 PM, Sleeping Village, 3734 W. Belmont, \$5. 21+*

Milwaukee native Myquale moved to Chicago in 2014 to attend DePaul, and the music he's made as a



Elena Setién © PABLO AXPE

continued from 45

album's five twangy, feather-light meditations have much in common with the music of McNew's band Yo La Tengo, except Leon doesn't let loose with the same sort of bonkers guitar freak-outs as YLT guitarist Ira Kaplan; instead, his effortless wizardry lies in his unhurried, introspective serenity. Imagine avant-jazz titan Bill Frisell jamming with YLT on a far-out dreamscape, and you have something like Royal Arctic's vibe. Frisell is actually a direct inspiration for Royal Arctic (they've cited his self-titled 2001 album with bassist Dave Holland and drummer Elvin Jones as an influence), and *From Catnap to Coma* similarly navigates exquisite melody and deep groove. Whether you experience the album as one continuous track or as five separate songs (the band offers both formats but recommends the first), you can easily get lost in the hallucinatory guitar-twining sprawl of stoner-folk trips such as "Fishing by Lantern," "First of the Eight," and "Anosmia Suite." With cinematic beauty and layered detail that could make Ennio Morricone envious, *From Catnap to Coma* is a blissful escape. —BRAD COHAN

ELENA SETIÉN, UNFAMILIAR MINDS

Thrill Jockey
elenasetien.bandcamp.com/album/unfamiliar-minds

Basque singer and multi-instrumentalist Elena Setién began work on her latest English-language

recording, *Unfamiliar Minds*, just as the first wave of COVID shut Europe down. She uses both sound and language to get its pandemic-times message across: the echoing piano chords on the opening song, "2020," evoke the numbness wrought by accumulating uncertainty, while the progressively shorter lines in its lyrics convey a sense of sickening deceleration. On "Situation" and "Such a Drag," human bonds erode and television proves a weak replacement.

But Setién doesn't stay mired in dysphoria. On the Laurie Anderson-like recitation "New," a dissociative state gives way to a calm and hopeful regard for the natural world, as though a tide is turning. A pair of settings for poems by celebrated shut-in Emily Dickinson more decisively split the darkness: Setién's playful singing on "In This Short Life" injects levity into the poem's articulation of powerlessness, and "I Dwell in Possibility" radiates faith in creative potential. Through most of the album, Setién accompanies her voice with keyboards and violin. But she switches to guitar for the title track, obtaining a dissonance that suits its words: they give equal weight to the COVID era's enduring trauma and to the hope that people will in some way pass through it changed for the better. —BILL MEYER

SARAH SHOOK & THE DISARMERS, NIGHTROAMER

Thirty Tigers
sarahshookthedisarmers.bandcamp.com



Stander © CORBIN HOWARD

Sarah Shook & the Disarmers are known for their roots-driven sound, but on their new third full-length, *Nightroamer*, Shook's country aesthetics battle for space alongside some pretty healthy indie inclinations. The production is a bit denser on this recording compared to its predecessor, 2018's *Years*—keyboards occasionally factor into the arrangements—and Shook herself gives off less of a pissed-off vibe. She's still spent too much time loving wasters, though, and this clutch of songs details it all. Shook is among the performers impacted by Bloodshot Records' problems with nonpayment of artist royalties, which delayed the release of *Nightroamer* as she found a new label home on Thirty Tigers. The album's first single, "No Mistakes," sounds like a dark night in a bar, with pedal steel propelling a somber mood that's partly Shook's natural disposition and partly too much booze. It's a mode where she's most effective; she gives the waltz-time title track a graceful ennui equally indebted to her country forebears and relatively contemporary rock vocalists. Even if Shook is inclined toward a lack of cheer, she arrived at that outlook in earnest: On album opener "Somebody Else," which focuses on an abusive relationship, she sings, "If I can't help myself / You'll keep on keepin' me down." Given her history of bad deals and bad relationships, the more pop-oriented approach and funky drum backing on "I Got This"—pleasant enough that you can imagine it licensed for a TV commercial—is a surprising change of pace. That song does unfortunately disrupt an album's worth of scuffed-up performances that seem

capable of converting the most country-averse listener. Even the occasional and inauspicious use of Auto-Tune ("It Doesn't Change Anything," "Please Be a Stranger") can't blunt the dusty splendor of Shook's latest batch of reflections. —DAVE CANTOR

STANDER, VULNERABLE

The Garrote
stander.bandcamp.com/album/vulnerable

This year promises to be big for the Garrote, a new Quad Cities label and publisher founded by Aseethe guitarist-singer Brian Barr and photographer-videographer Josh Ford, who's worked with the likes of Sunn O))), High on Fire, and Facs. The Garrote has a stacked release schedule for 2022, starting this month with *Vulnerable*, the second full-length by Chicago instrumental trio Stander. On this LP guitarist Mike Boyd, bassist Derek Shlepr, and drummer Stephen Waller take their dynamic, gloomy rock into sophisticated new realms, including twinkling, near-silent guitar passages and massive wall-of-sound distortion freak-outs. Stander tip the hat to veteran Chicago bands working similarly heady instrumental turf: they do the heavy, slow, yearning chords that have become Pelican's signature, and they pile on the epic grandeur a la Russian Circles. It's a joy to listen to Stander toy with light and darkness as they ramp up from stillness to top volume—it keeps *Vulnerable* full of excitement, energy, and thoughtful twists and turns. —LUCA CIMARUSTI

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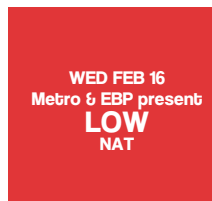
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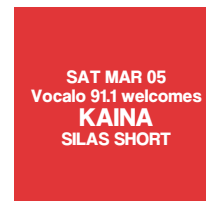
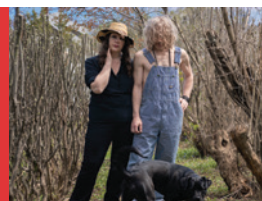
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Jill Hopkins hosts the Beastie Boys tribute MCA Day at Lincoln Hall in August 2019.

📷 COURTESY JILL HOPKINS

CHICAGOANS OF NOTE

Jill Hopkins, new media and civic events producer for the Metro venues

"I absolutely see this job as an opportunity to remind people—and I'm not trying to be hyperbolic here—of the majesty of live entertainment."

As told to JAMIE LUDWIG

Jill Hopkins is a Chicago broadcaster, DJ, writer, musician, and storyteller. To end her eight-year stint at Vocolo Radio, Hopkins kicked off 2022 by joining the Metro family of venues (which also includes Smart Bar and GMan) as their new media and civic events producer.

I was always a big radio and music-video fan—when we got MTV at my grandma's house when I was a kid, I wanted to be Downtown Julie Brown so much. Growing up in the 80s and 90s, Chicago's radio landscape was so diverse. I always had WGCI in my life, and I'm glad that there's still legacy stations

like that around, but I listened to all sorts of music, so I was always bouncing around the dial: I listened to a hard-rock station called the Blaze. The Loop was a big deal for me, but so was B96 and Z95.

In the 90s, I kind of rested on Q101 because I was an alternative-rock head. Every time I talk to [former Q101 DJ] James VanOsdol these days, I make sure to let him know how much I appreciate what he did on the radio when I was in high school. I guess I hadn't put two and two together that regular people could have those jobs—I don't know how I thought you got those jobs—but he just seemed like a

guy that you would know who just happened to know a lot about music.

So I've always been interested in broadcasting, but I didn't really have a path to it until I was in my 30s. The gold standard for me in local radio as a kid was Herb Kent, who had like a 60-year broadcast career. I lived with my mom and my grandma, so you've gotta find media you can all agree on sometimes. Herb would play a lot of old soul music, and that really stuck out to me. Then there were the morning shock jocks: B96 had Eddie & JoBo forever. Eric & Kathy was on for a really long time. Mancow was on in the mornings. But the

shock jocks were really difficult to listen to if that wasn't your style, and there weren't a lot of choices.

Folks like JVO and Herb Kent did a lot for making radio more about the music than about the large personalities. I'm not saying that these guys are personality free—Herb Kent was dripping with charisma—but they weren't yelling in your face at six in the morning about God knows what, and I appreciated that very much.

That was an attitude that Silvia Rivera at Vocolo and I shared—I kind of stepped into a preexisting vibe and ethos at Vocolo that valued music, and culture, and storytelling over self-promotion via large personality. It was a pleasure to just be my passionate self about music and not be expected to bounce off the walls. There's nothing inherently wrong with that, but it's not who I am and it's not who I ever wanted to be as a broadcaster, so I was really glad they accepted that about me.

When I was in broadcasting school, they only offered a few silos. I didn't want to work for a Clear Channel or iHeartRadio type of thing, and I didn't want to do sports radio. So I had to really think about what I wanted to do and where in the city I could do it. I didn't want to move anywhere else—especially anywhere smaller than Chicago with less entertainment options—so I really had to think about how I was going to stay here and work within the preexisting parameters of radio.

Then I remembered that CHIRP existed. I was jazzed to be able to do a weekly show with them for a year and some change. I've been a club DJ, and I really like figuring out how to get from point A to point B—let's say point A is Janet Jackson and point B is Slayer. With their open format, CHIRP was a perfect station for that. At Vocolo you're not given as much freedom as CHIRP, for a variety of reasons, but with their urban-alternative format there's still a lot of wiggle room to play with. I'm glad Chicago has at least two stations that go out of their way to stand out from this kind of stale, corporate radio landscape. And I'm not even talking about the college stations—those have always been about freedom and creativity for young people.

[My broad taste] has helped not just in pro-

MUSIC

gramming music, [but also] in the conversations and the interviews I've been able to have with people, especially with a lot of younger artists who've decided to be genreless. I'm able to hear what somebody's influences are in their music, pick them out, bring it back to them, and have them be relieved that somebody understands what they are trying to do. It's also been super helpful in relating to other people. In the public-radio space, you're asking people for money a lot, so it's been helpful in talking to donors or people from the parent company about things that they might be interested in, as opposed to having a very narrow scope of reference. It's helped me navigate all sorts of spaces.

A lot of people in music broadcasting and in music journalism have a very broad spectrum of knowledge, but we're not always given opportunities to flex those muscles. Being able to flex my muscles in spaces like CHIRP and Vocolo means they don't atrophy. I haven't forgotten the things that I've taken time to learn about music over the years, and that's going to serve me well in this new endeavor at the Metro where we deal with legacy artists and up-and-comers from across space and time. Some of these kids sound like they're from the future—it's wild.

[Starting this job] is equal parts more exciting than I can express and stomach-churning terrifying. Getting to carve your own path is a dream, and getting to work for this venue is a dream. Me, [owner] Joe Shanahan, [talent buyer] Joe Carsello, and the marketing team are working together to make something special that other clubs may not have. We're making video content, we're making podcasts, we'll be doing a lot more nontraditional events on the campus. And we've got the Metro's 40th anniversary coming up in July.

This project isn't just my own, but *our* own, because I'm roping everybody into the weird stuff that I've planned. I want to curate audience experiences that feel special and inclusive, and to help people who may not be comfortable yet going to shows feel less like they're missing out. The Metro has been my favorite place to see a show for a very long time, and getting to share the history of the place with everybody—because so much has happened within those walls—and getting to speak to artists who have graced the stages there and will continue to grace the stages there . . . I keep saying it's a dream come true, but it really, truly is.

The role is so new that things aren't necessarily set in stone just yet, but initially our goal

is to drum up anticipation for the anniversary and make sure folks have a good time leading up to that. Once the anniversary year kicks off, we'll have bigger things to share. I'll be talking to not just artists but audience members. If you're standing in line to get into the building or to buy tickets or something like that, I want to hear from you. I want to hear why you're in love with this band, why you got here early to ride the rail in the front row.

I'm especially interested in speaking to very young music fans, and especially young women. I feel like nobody really asks young women about their thoughts, especially about music, and they're not given nearly enough credit for the things that they like and why they like them. If anybody had put a microphone in my face when I was 14 and I was standing in line outside the Fireside or something, I would've been so stoked. I would've had so many opinions about Screeching Weasel or whatever.


Was it last year when that Linda Lindas video dropped where they're playing in the library? I almost threw my phone across the room, I was so hyped for them. And then to hear the subject matter of that first single, I was just like, "Oh my God, this is everything! Somebody's gonna see this video and start a band." I was in a band with a bunch of women who were instructors at Girls Rock! Chicago, and it was one of those things where I was just like, "Ooh, if I knew how to read music, I'd be [volunteering with them too]." The model of that organization, the mission of that organization . . . I wish they had been around when I was younger. I could have used a little more guidance—we were all just kind of twisting in the wind as fledgling musicians. It's such a great thing; it teaches you so much about teamwork and yourself, and music is just the vehicle for so much more.

COVID aside, it's an exciting time in Chicago to be a young musician. I'm low-key very jealous. I'm showing my age here, obviously, but the technology available—to not just make music but to produce it and to share it as a finished product without leaving your home—is amazing. That's so wild to me, thinking about saving up for a four-track back in the day and hoping that you have some blank cassettes in the house, and that your friends can come over, and that you're not grounded. There's just so much that young musicians can do inexpensively and individually. Even if they are stuck at home because of COVID, they can still make and create and share music in a way that was previously unthinkable. I'm honestly


envious. To have the youthful exuberance . . . a lot of us lose that when we get older because life gets in the way or whatever. To have the time and energy to create so easily is a great thing, and we're getting so much great music out of it.

There are indie labels in the city making sure that this music gets promoted and gets heard and gets appreciated. Nobody's dropping the ball in COVID times if they can help it. I'm really impressed by folks like Tasha, Nnamdi, Kaina, Ric Wilson, and Matt Muse. The list goes on and on and on. Your brain wants to categorize things, so when you hear somebody like Ric Wilson, your brain might want to silo him into hip-hop, but he's making dance music, he's making pop music. Tasha is singing us lullabies sometimes, but she's also very funky. The whole lineup that Sooper Records has going—I cannot stop listening to that Nnamdi album [last year's *Are You Happy*]. It is so incredible. I once listened to it all the way through on the wrong speed and it was still really good. There's just so much talent in this town.

I absolutely see this job as an opportunity to remind people—and I'm not trying to be hyperbolic here—of the majesty of live entertainment. It's magical. In the building where I now work, I've seen Prince play while Common and Macy Gray sang backup. I've also been on that same stage playing music with my feminist rock collective. I've seen Sinead O'Connor bring an entire crowd to tears after David Bowie died, but I've also seen a hip-hop rock band from New York that doesn't exist anymore but that I was obsessed with for two years in the late 90s—2 Skinnee J's. We've thrown shows there for the radio station. I've seen people get engaged there. I've made out in the photo booth at Smart Bar. I've had every kind of experience you can have there.

For the people that miss live shows and everything that comes with them, I want to remind them that it's still going to happen. We're gonna get there again. And to remind them about those times that maybe they forgot about. Maybe somebody got to see that first show at the Metro with R.E.M. in 1982 and their memories are a little fuzzy, so we're gonna help jog their brains. There's a lot to remember about a good rock show, but if it's a really good time, you're probably forgetting some things as well. So we want to bring that back to the forefront, and remind folks that we're here when they're ready. 

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Baby Keem 3/30, 7 PM, Concord Music Hall **🎫**
Beths, Lunar Vacation 3/2, 9 PM, Metro, 18+
Big Syn, Ted Tyro, Curls 2/10, 8 PM, Golden Dagger
Birthday Massacre, Julien-K, Programmable Animal 2/27, 7 PM, Reggies Rock Club, 17+
Bottom Bracket, Boundary Waters, Gosh Diggity, Pretty Pleased 2/18, 6:30 PM, Subterranean, 17+
Chase Alex, Izzihot!, Bigbodyfiji, Jenni 2/14, 8 PM, Schubas **FREE**
Claud, Jackie Hayes, Interlochen Songwriters 2/26, 7 PM, Lincoln Hall **🎫**
Collective Soul 2/20, 7 PM, Genesee Theatre, Waukegan **🎫**
Dadju 6/1, 7:30 PM, Concord Music Hall, 18+
Dangerous Summer, Cory Wells, Brkn, Bottom Bracket 3/11, 7:30 PM, Cobra Lounge **🎫**
Dead Inside DJs 2/11, 8 PM, Sleeping Village **FREE**
Devil in a Woodpile 2/10, 6 PM, Hideout
District 97, Aziola Cry, Sonus Umbra 2/27, 7 PM, Reggies Music Joint
Chris Duarte 2/26, 8 PM, Banana's Comedy Shack at Reggies
Farruko 2/20, 8 PM, Rosemont Theatre, Rosemont **🎫**
Dom Flemons 2/18, 8 PM, Szold Hall, Old Town School of Folk Music **🎫**
Friko, Grace Bloom, Fruit Leather 2/14, 8 PM, Beat Kitchen **🎫**
Gal Gun, Grumpy, Grey Slush 2/15, 7:30 PM, Schubas **FREE**

Generacion Suicida, Dark Thoughts, Evil Empire 5/26, 8 PM, Cobra Lounge, 18+
Gimme Gimme Disco 2/25, 9:30 PM, House of Blues, 17+
Good Hangs, Domestic Terminal, Mood Funeral, Bitter Ends 2/16, 6 PM, Beat Kitchen **🎫**
Grand Funk Railroad 2/25, 8 PM, Genesee Theatre, Waukegan **🎫**
Alex Grelle, Karen Meat 2/15, 8 PM, Sleeping Village
Buddy Guy, Ronnie Baker Brooks 2/26, 8 PM, Rialto Square Theatre, Joliet **🎫**
Halsey, Marias 7/3, 7 PM, Hollywood Casino Amphitheatre, Tinley Park **🎫**
Lalah Hathaway 2/13, 5 and 8 PM; 2/14, 6 and 9 PM; 2/15, 7 PM, City Winery **🎫**
Henhouse Prowlers 3/5, 8 PM, Maurer Hall, Old Town School of Folk Music **🎫**
Illuminati Hotties, Fenne Lily, Pom Pom Squad 3/4, 7 PM, Lincoln Hall **🎫**
Indoorsmen, Red Scarves, Close Kept 2/28, 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle **FREE**
Jacksons 2/18, 6:30 PM, Hard Rock Casino Northern Indiana, Gary
Chris Janson 2/24, 7:30 PM, Rialto Square Theatre, Joliet **🎫**
Just a Mess, Guardrail 3/4, 8 PM, GMan Tavern
Liam Kazar 2/26, 8 PM, Metro, 18+
Koffee, Buju 5/15, 8 PM, House of Blues, 17+
Jon Langford & John Szymanski 2/19, 8 PM, FitzGerald's, Berwyn
Late Bar Family Dance Party featuring DJ Dave Roberts, DJ Jeff Moyer, DJ Sonic Marchesa 2/12, 8 PM, Sleeping Village

Lever, Alright Maybes, St. Marlboro, Anfang 2/11, 7:30 PM, Chop Shop, 18+
Marcus Atom, Justice Hill & Nighttime Love 3/25, 9:30 PM, Hideout
Mariachi Vargas 2/12, 8 PM, Rosemont Theatre, Rosemont **🎫**
Matute 2/25, 8 PM, Rosemont Theatre, Rosemont **🎫**
Maybe April, Carleton Koldyke & the Wave 2/17, 8 PM, City Winery **🎫**
Microphones, Emily Sprague 3/2, 8:30 PM, Thalia Hall, 17+
Midcentury Llama, Totally Cashed, Trenchies 2/11, 8 PM, Beat Kitchen, 17+
Mild Orange 2/19, 9 PM, Schubas, 18+
Minks 4/8, 9:30 PM, Hideout
Modern Nun, Discus, Owney 2/10, 8:30 PM, Sleeping Village
Modern Shag, Everyday Specials, Red Scarves 2/14, 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle **FREE**
Mother Mother, Sir Sly, Transviolet 10/7, 8 PM, Radius Chicago **🎫**
Jason Narducy 2/12, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston **🎫**
Nicky Jam 2/11, 8 PM, Rosemont Theatre, Rosemont **🎫**
Nocturna New Loves & Broken Hearts Valentine's Ball featuring DJ Scary Lady Sarah 2/12, 11:30 PM, Metro, 18+
Nora O'Connor, Soft Opening 2/11, 8 PM, FitzGerald's, Berwyn
Off Broadway, Handcuffs, Dead Freddie 2/25, 9 PM, Reggies Rock Club, 17+
Paul Cebal Tomorrow Sound 2/18, 8 PM, FitzGerald's, Berwyn
Pinksqueeze, Disaster Kid, God Awful Small Affairs 2/11, 8 PM, Golden Dagger

David Poole 2/13, 8 PM, Golden Dagger
Queen! featuring Derrick Carter, Michael Serafini, Garrett David 2/13 and 2/20, 10 PM, Smart Bar
Red Wanting Blue, Meaghan Farrell, Brett Newski 2/11, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston **🎫**
Rex Orange County 6/24, 8 PM, Huntington Bank Pavilion **🎫**
Rock and Roll Playhouse presents the Music of Phish for Kids 2/13, 11:30 AM, Thalia Hall **🎫**
Solo the Dweeb, Dial Up 2/10, 7 PM, Subterranean, 17+
Squirrel Flower, Christelle Bofale 2/20, 8 PM, Schubas, 18+
Suicide Machines, Catbite, Public Serpents, Blaqrock 2/26, 7:30 PM, Reggies Rock Club, 17+
Surfbort, Pussy Gillette, Mz Neon 2/25, 10 PM, Empty Bottle
Tossers, Crazy & the Brains, Avondale Ramblers, Jordan Joyes 3/17, 8 PM, Metro, 18+
Vacations 3/20, 8 PM, Bottom Lounge, 17+
Valentine's Day Juke Jam featuring Tutu Shakura, Roman- cee, DJ Curt Henny, DJ Skeezus, DJ Boogieknigh, DJ Skoli 2/12, 9:20 PM, Subterranean, 18+
Waterr, lamgawd, Green-Slime, Solarfive, Sean Doe 2/12, 10 PM, Subterranean **FREE**

UPDATED
Adoy 3/3, 7:30 PM, Metro, canceled
Clem Snide 2/12, 7 and 9:30 PM, Golden Dagger; 7 PM sold out, 9:30 PM added
Dodie 2/20, 7:30 PM, Riviera Theatre, rescheduled **🎫**
Fugees 3/2, 8 PM, United Center, canceled
Gashi 3/29, 8 PM, Bottom Lounge, canceled
Girls Against Boys, Facs, Poison Arrows 10/12, 8 PM, Metro, rescheduled, 18+
Guardin, Sewerperson 2/16, 7 PM, Bottom Lounge, lineup updated **🎫**
Iglooghost, Alaska Young 2/18, 9 PM, Schubas, lineup updated, 18+
Just Friends, Graduating Life, Bears in Trees, King of Heck 3/26, 7 PM, Bottom Lounge, venue changed **🎫**
Kaina, Silas Short, Semiratruth 3/5, 7 PM, Metro, lineup updated **🎫**
Los Pericos 3/13, 6 PM, Concord Music Hall, postponed **🎫**
Low, Nat Harvie 2/16, 8 PM, Metro, lineup updated, 18+
John Mayer 4/28-4/29, 7:30 PM, United Center, date

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added **🎫**
James Vincent McMorrow, Ben Abraham 3/31, 9 PM, Metro, canceled
Mr. Blotto 2/15, 2/22, 3/1, 3/8, 3/15, 3/22, 3/29, 4/5, 4/12, 4/19, and 4/26, 8 PM, Reggies Music Joint, dates added
Nothing but Thieves 3/6, 7 PM, the Vic, canceled
Rose Tattoo, Enuff Z'Nuff, Steve Ramone, Criminal Kids 2/22, 7 PM, Reggies Rock Club, canceled
Sounds of the Street Festival day one featuring Casualties, Virus, Corrupted Youth, Decayed, User Unauthorized, Stolen Wheelchairs, Shitizen, Knoxious 2/11, 4 PM, Reggies Rock Club, lineup updated **🎫**
Squid 3/16, 7:30 PM, Metro, venue changed, 18+
Twin Shadow, Hxlt 2/16, 8:30 PM, Thalia Hall, lineup updated, 17+
Twiztid, Grimm 3/5, 7:30 PM, Bottom Lounge, lineup updated, 17+
Vundabar, M.A.G.S. 6/14, 8 PM, Bottom Lounge, rescheduled; lineup updated, 17+
The Warning 4/28, 7 PM, Bottom Lounge, rescheduled, 17+
Windy City Smokeout day one featuring Willie Nelson & Family, Turnpike Troubadours, Zach Bryan, Morgan Wade 8/4, 4 PM, United Center, lineup updated **🎫**
Zombi, Luggage, Mirror Age 2/19, 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle, lineup updated

UPCOMING

Action Bronson, Earl Sweat-shirt 2/11, 7 PM, Riviera Theatre **🎫**
Melissa Aldana Quartet 2/11, 7:30 PM, Logan Center for the Arts **🎫**
Alexander/McLean Project 2/10-2/12, 8 and 10 PM; 2/13, 4 and 8 PM, Jazz Showcase **🎫**
Backseat Lovers, Over Under 2/17, 7:30 PM, the Vic **🎫**
Bad Suns, Kid Bloom, Little Image 2/11, 6 PM, Radius Chicago **🎫**
Cautious Clay 2/11, 8 PM, House of Blues, 17+
Cordae 2/28, 7:30 PM, House of Blues **🎫**
Patrick Droney 2/20, 8 PM, Lincoln Hall, 18+
Enjambre 2/17, 6 PM, Concord Music Hall **🎫** **📺**



GOSSIP WOLF

A furry ear to the ground of the local music scene

CHICAGO ANTIFOLK UNIT Boo Baby have been hanging out on the edge of this wolf's awareness for years, having opened for the likes of local indie darlings Whitney, K Records singer-songwriter Karl Blau, and Chicago-raised outsider artist David Liebe Hart. Boo Baby's loose-knit indie folk provides a fitting backdrop for the earnest delivery and irreverent lyrics of cofounder and lead songwriter **Robert Salazar**. On "Jazz?," from Boo Baby's new album, **The Opening Band**, Salazar sings of the struggle to find parking in Wrigleyville during a Cubs game—and he does it with enough charm to milk that painful premise for giggles. Boo Baby celebrate the release of *The Opening Band* by headlining **Sleeping Village** on Friday, February 4. Waltzer and the Foons open; tickets are \$15, \$12 in advance.

In 2018, the *Reader* memorialized Chicago dance-music producer and multi-instrumentalist **Dan Jugle**, who'd just died at age 37. At the time, his close friend **Beau Wanzer**, who'd played with him in **Juzer**, mentioned that the duo had made unreleased recordings that he hoped would eventually see the light of day. Late last month, Dutch electronic label **Rubber** released three tracks from those archives digitally and on 12-inch vinyl, and their skittering, propulsive techno vibrates with menacing power. At 4 PM on Saturday, February 5, Wanzer and Jugle's longtime friend and collaborator **Mike Broers** will celebrate the release with free DJ sets at **Gramophone Records**.

If they'd been a band in the 1970s, local garage-soul squad **Hollyy** would've had records featured on shop racks next to blue-eyed-soul masters such as Hall & Oates and the Doobie Brothers. On Friday, February 11, they'll drop their sophomore EP, *If You're Ever Lost*, whose easy melodies and sunny arrangements sound like a perfect antidote to Chicago weather this time of year. On Saturday, February 5, Hollyy open for Motherfolk at **Subterranean**. —J.R. NELSON AND LEOR GALIL

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

WOLF BY KETH HERZIK

I N A L I A



Los Angeles-based Grateful Shred manage to channel that elusive Dead vibe: wide-open guitar tones, effortless three-part vocal harmonies, choogling beats, and plenty of tripped out, Shredded solos.



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SAVAGE LOVE

You don't need to "dip out" to get off

Master the dirty-talk basics, and then dive into your fantasies.

By **DAN SAVAGE**

Q: Longtime reader here, first-time writer. I'm a bisexual woman. I've been married to a straight man for eight years. Our marriage and our sex life are amazing. We communicate well, and we have a lot of fun together. You probably think you know where this is going, Dan, but trust me, this isn't your typical bisexual-person-married-to-a-straight-person problem.

Here's the thing: I would call myself a hetero-romantic bisexual. I love men. I love dick, and I love having sex with men. Men turn me on. And I have always been interested in men romantically. I've also always been into women, but only sexually. I can't

picture myself dating a woman. Or being married to one. But I've never been able to get off from straight sex or straight porn. When I orgasm, I am either watching lesbian porn or gay male porn or I'm thinking about it. I am turned on by my husband. I find him attractive, and the idea of having sex with him gets me wet. But when it comes time to get off, I go into my head and think about two women or two men. If I don't do this, I can't orgasm! I've always been this way. My husband is satisfied, I'm getting off, and we both enjoy sex together. So, what's the problem? I don't want to have to leave the moment to get off! I want to be able to get off

while being fully present! I feel like I'm losing out on a ton of intimacy with my husband by not being in the moment with him while I'm trying to cum. I want to cum from straight sex!

Do you think there is a way I can achieve this? Is it fucked up that I have to think about something else to orgasm when I'm with a man? Help me! I haven't told my husband this because it would crush me to learn he had to "dip out" to get off.

—**BEING IN MOMENT IN STRAIGHT SEX IS NO-GO**

P.S. I fully explored the possibility of being a lesbian but I'm sure I'm not. I really, really like men. I like men a lot. I couldn't live without them.

✍️ JOE NEWTON

A: There's a solution here, BIMISSING, one that would allow you to remain in the moment without sacrificing your orgasms.

Zooming out for a quick second, BIMISSING, first let's put your problem in perspective. You're married to a man you love, you have a great sex life, and you're getting off. You're winning. And you're not the only person with this . . . well, I don't wanna call it a "problem," BIMISSING, because for some people fantasizing during partnered sex—the kind of dipping out you describe—is a solution. Lots of people need to imagine a particular scenario and/or particular cast of characters to get themselves to the point of "orgasmic inevitability," to use one of my favorite phrases from the sex-research literature, and if entertaining go-to fantasies during partnered sex is the thing that gets them to that point, they shouldn't hesitate to entertain those fantasies. In other words, BIMISSING, while I wanna offer you a fix, I don't want you—or anyone like you—to think you're broken. Or fucked up. Because you're not.

Now, here's the simple, easy, obvious fix—here's the sex hack—that'll keep you in the moment without derailing your orgasms: dirty talk.

A quick review of my tips for dirty talk beginners: tell 'em what you're gonna do ("I'm going to fuck the shit out of you"), tell 'em what you're doing ("I'm fucking the shit out of you"), tell 'em what you did ("I fucked the shit out of you"). You can also ask someone what they're gonna do, what they're doing, and what they did.

Now, if you're already doing that kind of dirty talk, BIMISSING, great. If you're not, start. Then, once you've mastered Gonna, Doing,

Did (GDD) basics, you need to start mixing your basic GDD dirty talk together with dirty talk about your go-to fantasies.

But before you can do that, BIMISSING, you are gonna have to level with your husband about these fantasies and your reliance on them. Telling your husband that you've always had to think about gay sex to get to the point of orgasmic inevitability—while emphasizing that he makes your pussy wet, and you love having sex with him—is definitely a risk. He could have a bad reaction. If he has a problem with it, BIMISSING, tell him you're like a woman who can't come from vaginal intercourse alone, aka, most women, only instead of needing to press a vibrator against your clit during intercourse to get off, you need to press a mental image of gay sex against your brain to get off.

So, yeah, your husband could have hurt feelings, and it could take some time to work through this. But think of the potential rewards! Instead of leaving your husband behind when you start fantasizing about men fucking men and women fucking women, you'll get to take him along! (And I don't want to tell on straight guys here, but some of them really like hearing about two women fucking. Your husband could be one of those guys.)

"BIMISSING can be fully present in her body and feel the great pleasure of sex with her husband—and know that this is where her pleasure is coming from physically—while also be intentional about bringing this fantasy into her mind at the same time," said Dr. Lori Brotto, a clinical psychologist and a sex researcher at the University of British Columbia and the author of *Better Sex Through Mindfulness: How Women Can Cultivate Desire*. "And

if BIMISSING can share her fantasy out loud, she'll be able to hear herself sharing the details of this fantasy, which is an auditory trigger that will keep her rooted in the here and now even more and intensify the pleasure. If her husband responds with his own sounds of pleasure," or with fantasies of his own that build on yours, "that will further anchor BIMISSING in the present moment."

Picture this, BIMISSING: You're having hot straight sex with your hot straight husband. You start thinking about two hot fags or two hot dykes going at it. But now, instead of feeling guilty about these fantasies, you'll be able to share them with your husband. And, yes, it's a hard truth to share, BIMISSING, but for all you know your husband has some go-to fantasies of his own that he'd love to share—fantasies he may rely on when he needs a little help getting to the point of orgasmic inevitability. If you can successfully integrate your go-to fantasies (two women or two men fucking the shit out of each other) with your in-the-moment reality (your husband is fucking the shit out of you while you describe two women or two men fucking the shit out of each other), you won't have to "dip out" to come.

P.S. I feel the exact same way—really like men, couldn't live without men—and I'm not a lesbian either. Coincidence? I don't think so. There are no coincidences.

Follow Dr. Lori Brotto on Twitter @DrLoriBrotto. Dr. Brotto's new book, *Better Sex Through Mindfulness: The At-Home Guide*, comes out soon. 📖

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PERSONALS

Girl Talk— Axl Rose was seen with Barbie Girl, Barbie Doll & Bambi. Steven Tyler ran into Axl R. with Rock Bunny & Bunny Rock

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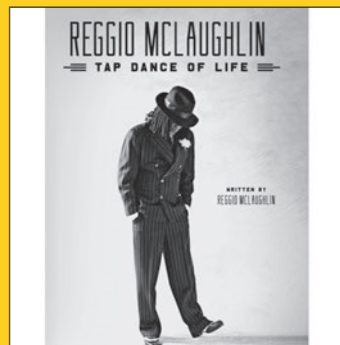
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