

# READER

## SHOWING UP *for one another*

Poet and organizer JazStarr builds bridges on the page and in the community.

By ALEJANDRO HERNANDEZ 40

The Reader's  
guide to  
**World Music  
Festival  
Chicago**  
Special 16-page insert inside!

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## Special 16-page insert inside

### THE READER'S GUIDE TO WORLD MUSIC FESTIVAL CHICAGO

The festival's 11 free concerts, spread out over ten days and 11 venues, offer more than inspiration and fun—they invite us to forge new bonds of community and care.



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# CITY LIFE

## SHOP LOCAL

### Continuing education

Sewing, self-defense, and other classes to sharpen your mind.

By SALEM COLLO-JULIN

It's never too late to learn a new skill, or polish an old one. Chicago has many organizations that offer adult education classes and workshops designed to teach students new concepts, technical skills, or even new dance moves. Taking a class is a good way to set an ongoing friend date if you're someone who has a tough schedule and misses hanging out with people. And you can meet new friends and network! Here's a few ideas to get you started.

#### Stories of Our Genes and Ancestry

Sites like Ancestry.com have made it easier for us to map out our family trees, but what do you do after you've found all the names and dates? Through the Newberry Library's Adult Education program, Dr. Aaron Greenberg, cofounder of the storytelling technology company Biograph and lecturer at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, teaches this four-session virtual seminar to assist amateur genealogists and family story keepers in transforming research into narratives that contextualize facts and create a deeper picture of our ancestral pasts.

Saturdays 10/29-11/19, 2-4 PM, \$193.50-\$215, [newberry.org](http://newberry.org)

#### Sewing 101

Maybe you're not interested in appearing



on *Project Runway*, but wouldn't it be nice to be able to confidently hem those jeans or at least get that big button back on to your winter coat? Learn some basic skills from a real fashion designer, Chicagoan Anastasia Chatzka, who will teach you how to use a sewing machine, attach buttons and zippers, and even read a sewing pattern. No experience is necessary to start. If you get the hang of it, Chatzka also offers advanced classes in tailoring, knitwear, and streetwear. Students can opt for Sunday or Saturday morning or Monday evening sessions that happen at Chatzka's

studio (2041 W. Carroll, Suite 222). Next six-week sessions start Sun 10/23, \$345 includes materials, [anastasiachatka.com](http://anastasiachatka.com)

#### City Colleges

City Colleges of Chicago offer an array of both in-person and online instruction designed for adults who need affordable professional certifications, GED courses, and also . . . stepping. You can still get in on **Steppin' for Fun and Fitness**, a late fall offering at Daley College (7500 S. Pulaski) that will teach you the basic moves and flair

Learn to sketch and never be bored at a cafe again KLAUDIA PIASKOWSKA/UNSPLASH

of stepping—a partner dance form created in Chicago and often performed to R&B music. *Wednesdays 10/19-12/7, 6-7 PM, \$55*

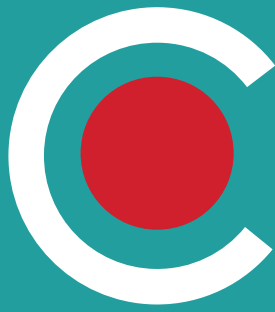
And if you're interested in working on your drawing techniques, let the city be your muse with **Urban Sketching: An Introduction**, an in-person class hosted by Harold Washington College (30 E. Lake). Most classes will be held at destinations in the Loop or reachable by public transportation. Students will learn to draw what they see in the city using pencil and ink. *Saturdays 10/1-11/5, 10 AM-1 PM, \$189* Information and registration for both at [ccc.edu](http://ccc.edu)

#### The Five Fingers of Self-Defense

Self-defense isn't just about knowing a martial art—in fact, skills like risk assessment, positioning strategies, and verbal tools are essential to navigating crisis situations. The people at Thousand Waves Martial Arts and Self-Defense Center teach the “five fingers” approach: think, yell, run, fight, tell. These strategies can also lead to better awareness and communication skills within all your interpersonal relationships. Training is available to people of all genders ages 12 and up.

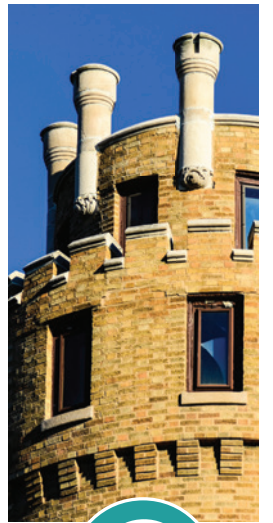
*Two-hour workshop, future dates Sat 10/8 4-6 PM and Fri 12/9 6-8 PM, \$50 (sliding scale available), 1220 W. Belmont, 773-472-7663, [thousandwaves.org](http://thousandwaves.org)*

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Jaren Zacher preps an assortment of dishes with copi.  GREG ROTHSTEIN FOR CHICAGO READER

## FEATURE

# Chả Cá Nuggs takes a nose-to-tail fin approach to eating the invasive copi

Jaren Zacher's Asian carp nuggets are coming to Monday Night Football, the *Reader's* weekly chef pop-up at the Kedzie Inn.

By **MIKE SULA**

**T**he invasive fish formerly known as Asian carp was renamed “copi” earlier this summer by the Department of Natural Resources. Short for “copious,” the state hopes that a vaguely Mediterranean-sounding rebranding will entice consumers to eat more of the bony, obscenely prolific, freshwater filter feeders that have outcompeted native species for all

that good Illinois River algae and zooplankton since the aughts—after they'd apparently escaped the southern catfish and water treatment ponds they were imported to clean up.

The state's Choose Copi campaign brought in the big guns, recruiting chefs like Brian Jupiter of Ina Mae Tavern and Frontier, Beverly Kim of Parachute and Wherewithall, and Paul Virant of Gaijin and Vie, to extol the firm,

clean-tasting, healthy flesh of the leaping leviathans.

It's not the first attempt to redeem the erstwhile Asian carp, a group of four surface swimming species—silver, bighead, black, and grass—whose nominal association with their whiskered, bottom-feeding, muddy-flavored cousins have kept them out of markets and restaurants, just as much as their obstinate,

unfilet-able bone structure.

Neither factor has ever been an issue in southeast Asia where they're a staple—valued additions to hot pots and soup bowls, either chopsticked whole or emulsified into cakes and fish balls.

That was Jaren Zacher's thinking a year ago when he embarked on an independent R&D project in his home kitchen, looking for a “holistic” approach toward eating the fish into oblivion, or at least environmental manageability. “It doesn't present as a filet really well just because of the Y bones and general structure of the fish,” says Zacher, who runs a copi-focused bar snack pop-up called Chả Cá Nuggs. “A lot of Americans aren't exposed to fish that hasn't been fileted. But I come from a Jewish background. I've been eating gefilte fish since I was a kid. I think that's why I felt comfortable going into it like this. I looked at where these fish were originally coming from—southwestern China, Thailand, Vietnam—and what they do there is they use it in fish cakes. So, ‘OK, let's look at it that way.’”

Zacher, who's 28, has worked in restaurants since he was a teenager, mostly in the front of the house—and for a two-year stint in Lettuce Entertain You Enterprises's accounting department. He became interested in the carp problem when their potential threat to the Great Lakes made headlines about a dozen years ago. “I tuned in on that, and it was something always in the back of my mind. Like, there's definitely a way to solve this problem from a food perspective. But I was a young twentysomething; I didn't really have the experience to figure out what that was.”

Zacher found his way into the kitchen often enough. As the lead food runner and expeditor for LEYE's rotating chef concept Intro, he volunteered to stage in the kitchen throughout its one-year-and-change run. When he took off for Australia in 2018, he landed a stint in the kitchen of John Niland, the Sydney-based chef at the forefront of sustainable fish cookery. “He's all about using as much of the fish as possible—kind of that nose-to-tail mentality—he uses offal; he makes charcuterie. It made me reevaluate how I was looking at copi.”

When Zacher returned home last fall he cleaned out the limited minced Asian carp reserves at Dirk's Fish and then reached out to

## FOOD & DRINK

the DNR who pointed him in the direction of Roy Sorce of downstate Peoria's Sorce Freshwater Company, a "family-owned purveyor of tasty invasive fish."

"He works directly with a cooperative of fishermen who fish the Peoria Pool of the Illinois River. He's got a processing facility that backs up to the river down there. The guys pull the fish right out of the water and drive their boats right up to the facility. They're processed straightaway, so it's a quick, clean, fresh process. You don't get any of the stagnation that can happen with river and lake fish."

Zacher started out with small amounts of Sorce's minced copi, and began experimenting with binders, seasonings, and batters until he settled on a standard fish cake base he was happy with, emulsifying the fish with cassava flour and cornstarch for elasticity and chew; seasoning it with onion and garlic powder, salt and pepper, and bit of paprika; and dredging McNugget-sized cakes in cornmeal and rice flour tempura before deep frying.

He named his concept for Hanoi's storied turmeric-seasoned freshwater fish dish, *Chả Cá Thăng Long*, and incorporated a magnolia blossom into his logo to refer to New Orleans and the undersung cross-cultural Vietnamese-Cajun cuisine that emerged along the gulf coast starting in the 80s. "I wanted to pay service to the food traditions I was pulling from without appropriating. I see the fish as cross-cultural. The preparation is inspired by where the fish are from, and the flavor profile demonstrates how it could adapt here. I'm trying to present both angles to show how much


of a blank slate copi can be."

He debuted his deep-fried copi nuggs at a pop-up at Kimski in June, served with a handful of vegan dipping sauces: miso BBQ, honey mustard, lime cilantro crema, and remoulade. "It surprises a lot of people that I'm making a vegan remoulade. It's not like I need to make vegan sauces, but I want to showcase this fish as much as I possibly can."

He offered a trio of po'boys too, built on Ba Le bread, which included a riff on a banh mi, with a variant steamed and fried fish cake; a take on a traditional New Orleans oyster po'boy subbing in carp nuggs; and a nod to the McRib, with pickles, onions, and barbecue sauce.

"It was absolutely terrifying," he says. "This is definitely a one-man show, and I didn't know what I was getting myself into." But the feedback was encouraging enough that he followed up with two more pop-ups at Ludlow Liquors in August and September. His fourth is this October 10th at Monday Night Foodball, the *Reader's* weekly chef pop-up at the Kedzie Inn in Irving Park. More on that later.

For now Zacher's not trying to get into food manufacturing or restaurant supply. His efforts are purely public-spirited.

"This is a self-funded brand awareness campaign," he says. "Maybe I'm a little too altruistic about it all, but I think it's a good quality fish, and I've got no problem putting my time, sweat, and effort behind it to get more people to try it out." 

 @MikeSula

# ARE YOU READY FOR SOME FOOTBALL!?

The leaves are falling over the Kedzie Inn, and that means it's a new lineup for

## Monday Night Foodball

the *Reader's* weekly chef pop up series. Follow the chefs, @chicago\_reader, and @mikesula on Instagram for weekly menu drops, ordering info, updates, and the stories behind Chicago's most exciting foodlums.

**Oct. 3:** Pasta night with Tony Quartaro of Gemma Foods

@gemmafoods

**Oct. 10:** Night of the Copi (the invasive species formerly known as Asian carp) with Cha Cá Nuggs

@chacannuggs

**Oct. 17:** Traditional Jewish deli with a modern purpose with Schneider Provisions

@schneider\_provisions

**Oct. 24:** Sausage party with the Hot Dog Box

@thehotdogboxofficial

**Oct. 31:** Halloween bye night

**Nov. 7:** Plant-focused taqueria pop-up Piñatta @pinattachicago

**Nov. 14:** The return of barbecue ronin Heffer BBQ

@therealhefferbbq

**Nov. 21:** An all-star Umamicue Friendsgiving @umamicue

**Nov. 28:** Thanksgiving break

**Dec. 5:** Spotlight on Lao cuisine with Laos to Your House

@laostoyourhouse773

**Dec. 12:** Kimski rumspringa with Won Kim @revisecmw

**Dec. 19:** First night of Hanukkah with Zeitlin's Delicatessen and Schneider Provisions

@zeitlinsdelicatessen @schneider\_provisions

See [chicagoreader.com/food-drink/](https://chicagoreader.com/food-drink/) for weekly menus and ordering info

### The Active Transportation Alliance discusses its campaigns to fight car-dependency by John Greenfield

Over the next six issues of the Chicago Reader, we'll be talking with local sustainable transportation organizations that are working to make the Chicago area a safer, more just, more efficient, and more fun place to get around on foot, bike, transit, and other green modes. We're starting with the Active Transportation Alliance. Founded in 1985 as the Chicagoland Bicycle Federation, the ATA works to improve conditions and increase opportunities for bicycling, walking and transit. I recently caught up with the group's managing director of advocacy Jim Merrell, to discuss some of the challenges facing Chicagoland when it comes to transportation equity.

"We still have a very car-centric policy regime in the area, where cars are still king," Merrell said. "Prioritizing car traffic over other considerations, such as safety and quality of life, unfortunately continues to be a big driving force for a lot of decisions that are being made." On the bright side, Merrell added, the U.S. has a new \$1.2 trillion federal infrastructure bill, Illinois has a nearly \$45 billion state capital plan, and the city of Chicago has a \$3.7 billion infrastructure program. "Money's flowing in a way that it hasn't in some time."

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Still, too much of that cash could be allocated to highway expansion, he added. For example, Governor JB Pritzker wants to use billions of federal dollars to add lanes to the Ike and Stevenson Expressways. "Any project that expands road capacity is going to lead to more driving," Merrell noted. "That's inherently an inequitable outcome when it comes to who bears the burden of that additional driving, its impact on climate and air quality. . . . When we talk about equity, the big picture is breaking the cycle of car-oriented policy at all levels of government."

So if we can't beat traffic jams through highway expansion, how can we help people get where they need to go more efficiently? One of ATA's key campaigns is to improve bus service—a non-sexy but crucial mode—especially for Black, Latino, and lower-income residents. Well-enforced bus lanes help provide faster, more reliable service. But while New York has 138 miles of these facilities and Los Angeles has 107, Chicago has a measly 11 miles—which are often disrespected by motorists.


Read the rest of this interview online at [chicagoreader.com/transportationseries](https://chicagoreader.com/transportationseries)



Coverage funded by The Darrell R. Windle Charitable Fund and Polo Inn

# COMMENTARY



Red Grange (top) and Joe Zeller, photographed during a 1935 Bears practice by Alan Fisher for the *World Telegram & Sun*. They didn't have to deal with TIFs or helmets that year.  COURTESY LIBRARY OF CONGRESS ARCHIVES

## ON POLITICS

### Just like we told you

The Bears finally make their play for public money to build their private stadium.

By **BEN JORAVSKY**

**W**e've reached an "I told you so" moment, dear readers, where I get to say . . . I told you so.

It was roughly one year ago that I predicted the Bears would probably call upon the good citizens of Arlington Heights to fork over a TIF handout to build their new football stadium on the site of the old racetrack.

And so it was that last week George Halas McCaskey, chairman of the Bears, held a dog and pony show at Hersey High School in Arlington Heights to say, "Yeah, that hippie guy from the *Reader* had it right. We're about to sock it to you."

OK, McCaskey's far too smart to put it so bluntly. Instead, he said: "The Bears will seek no public funding for direct stadium structure construction. However . . ."

Get ready, Arlington Heights, cause what

comes after "however" is never a joke.

"We will need help," McCaskey continued. Just like I told you.

Now McCaskey has not mentioned exactly what kind or how much help they will need. But I think we can all agree that before this is over the Bears will have stuck their big ol' paw into that Tax Increment Financing honeypot. Courtesy of the Arlington Heights taxpayers.

As a taxpaying resident of Chicago all I can say is thank goodness it's them and not me. For once.

By the way, I made that initial prediction a year ago after an unintentionally funny headline in *Crain's Chicago Business* that said: "A new Bears stadium: Who'd pay for it?" Like there was any doubt as to the answer to that question.

This year's funny headline ran in the *Sun-*

*Times*. It said: "The Bears have had preliminary talks with [Governor] Pritzker, lawmakers about subsidies—and no one has slammed the door." You know, like the Bears are waiting with bated breath to see if they get what they want.

Call me jaded, people, but I do not believe the Bears would have gone this far—placing an option to buy the old racetrack and hiring consultants to do traffic surveys—if they weren't reasonably assured that it was only a matter of time before the handout was theirs.

That means we've reached what I call the get-that-official-an-Oscar phase of TIF deals. I call it that because public officials will conjure their inner Brando as they play the role of unbiased public servants, objectively sifting through the evidence to determine if, in fact, a handout is warranted.

As opposed to having already made up their minds to give the Bears what they want.

If Arlington Heights is anything like Chicago, its leaders will eventually find themselves reassuring taxpayers that, after carefully studying the matter, they've concluded that handing over public money to the Bears is in the public's best interest. So it will be like the Bears are doing the taxpayers a favor, as opposed to the other way around.

At last week's dog and pony presentation, the Bears promised that no public dollars will go to construct the football stadium. Which is a distinction without much meaning to taxpayers. Since taxpayers will be shelling out money for other parts of the stadium project.

And, really, what difference does it make if public money goes for seats in the stadium, as opposed to the parking lot around the stadium, or the foundation on which the stadium rests, or the roads leading to the stadium and so forth? It's still public money helping the Bears pay for their stadium.

Curiously, McCaskey's pledge undercuts the Bears' argument that they need money at all. Because if they can afford to build a stadium without a subsidy, why take the subsidy at all?

I'll say this for the Arlington Heights deal—at least it's generated some resistance. This one from the right, which has been notoriously silent in regards to Chicago's TIF scam.

Specifically, opposition comes from the Americans for Prosperity-Illinois, a local affil-

iate of an outfit created by the Koch brothers, those far-right libertarians whose policies I generally abhor.

But I agree with them here. They say they're sick and tired of "corporate welfare." And I say, right on to that. For all these years, I've been watching Mayors Daley, Emanuel, and Lightfoot doling out TIF money to wealthy developers on the grounds that it's an "investment" in Chicago.

And then I watch them turn around and say we can't afford mental health clinics in poor neighborhoods or librarians and nurses in public schools.


When they give money to rich people, it's always an "investment." But when they spend the money on people who really need it, it's treated like a waste. So, yes, I find myself in the unlikely position of cheering on the Koch brothers bunch. In fact, Brian Costin, one of their leaders, will be a guest on my podcast.

Costin and his allies submitted to the Arlington Heights Village Board over 600 signatures from voters, asking the board to pass an "Anti-Corporate Welfare Ordinance" that would prohibit "offering or extending any financial incentive to any business or corporation to operate in the village." If board members vote down that ordinance—as I suspect they will—Costin and his allies will move to Plan B.

They will attempt to gather over 7,000 signatures to a petition that would put the issue on the ballot, probably in next April's municipal election. In other words, let the voters decide if they want to give public dollars to the Bears.

It's pretty exciting to watch democracy in action. On the other hand, there's a chance—admittedly, very remote—that they might get their measure on the ballot. And that the voters of Arlington Heights might reject a Bears handout.

In which case, guess what? The Bears will turn around and look to Chicago for a sweetheart deal, which knowing our mayors, they will probably get.

Just goes to show you, when it comes to TIFs, one way or another taxpayers in Chicago always stand a chance of losing. 

 @bennyjshow





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# READER

## ON CULTURE

# Anti-abortion activists float a new argument: ageism

But the 14th Amendment isn't on their side, yet.

By DEANNA ISAACS



Northwestern University student John Jameson protests Created Equal's anti-choice campus display.  
 DEANNA ISAACS

Move over, Grandpa.

You think ageism is your cause? Last week, Created Equal, an Ohio-based organization opposed to ending unwanted pregnancies came to town, making stops at the city's largest college campuses. At Northwestern, they set up shop on Sheridan Road, displaying enlarged images of dismembered fetal parts and passing out leaflets announcing that "Abortion is Ageism."

"Preborn babies differ from born humans in size, level of development, environment, and dependency. But toddlers and adults differ from one another in these ways as well, yet we don't kill them based on these arbitrary differences," their leaflet says.

It's a perfectly logical argument as long as you're willing to overlook the fact that the "preborn" environment is somebody else's body.

They were ignored by all the students I saw, except for theater major John Jameson, who had stopped to stage his own counterprotest, with a sign that said "Pro-Lifers SUCK."

According to a Created Equal press release, the organization's president, Mark Har-

ington, maintains that "Preborn babies deserve equal protection under the Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. Depriving younger humans of their natural right to life is an age-based discrimination."

Huh? The 14th Amendment, ratified in 1868, granted citizenship to "all persons born or naturalized in the United States," and equal protection under the law to all "persons." Does that mean an embryo or fetus has civil rights? Could this be something that happened with the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*?

I put that question to Ameri Klafeta, director of women's and reproductive rights at ACLU of Illinois.

"Fetal rights are not recognized under the equal protection clause," Klafeta says. "Not even this [federal] Supreme Court has gone that far."

And here, in the state of Illinois, "Our state supreme court has been very clear that a fetus cannot have independent rights. That was case law in Illinois, and it's now codified in the 2019 Reproductive Health Act." That act says, very specifically, "a fertilized egg, embryo, or

fetus does not have independent rights under the laws of this state."

"It's untenable to have a situation where a fetus could have independent rights, and it would be inconsistent with a whole host of other laws," Klafeta says. For example, "Courts consistently refuse to force one person to have a medical procedure, even if it would benefit someone else. A woman cannot be compelled to have a C-section, even if that's purportedly in the best interest of the fetus. So this idea that there can be two separate interests when a woman is carrying a pregnancy that could be competing with each other wouldn't fit under Illinois law."

As for federal law, "a fetus has never been recognized as a person under the 14th Amendment. It does not have the same rights as a child that's been born.

"One of the holdings in *Roe* was that there's not constitutional protection for the fetus, that the fetus is not a person, as that word is used in the constitution. The *Dobbs* decision reverses *Roe*, but in the decision Justice Alito also said that the opinion is not based on any view about whether or not a fetus would have

the same rights constitutionally as a person."

So that leaves it open?

"It creates a confusing landscape. And organizations like this one, that came to the universities here, will try to capitalize on it. *Dobbs* just said there is no right to an abortion. It did not take that extra step and say 'There is no right to an abortion because there are fetal rights under the constitution.' This group is trying to take the next step. But that would be an untenable legal position. It's inconsistent with the idea that someone cannot be compelled to undergo any kind of invasive bodily procedure for the benefit of anyone else. The protections around that are many, including a U.S. Supreme Court case [*Cruzan*] that says you have a right not to undergo medical treatment if you don't want to.

"I think anti-abortion organizations are going to try to push ahead to get fetal rights recognized under the Constitution. But that's not something the Supreme Court has already done."

Not yet. 📌



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# MICA

## POETRY CORNER

love poem with homemade cookies

By Maya Marshall

I'm nervous about writing  
about my kitchen  
and how you kiss it. And about how  
I like to lick the outside curve  
of the spoon. Spoon, I'm grateful  
for you and your strong soft hands.  
I like that they sweat for no reason,  
I'm nervous, but why? Love is serious.  
It's all we're ever writing about anyway.  
Half of war is the defense of love  
the other half is blood money.  
Race is some people saying we love ourselves  
enough to fight to live. And anyway, I love  
you and how your body relaxes, creaks  
and cracks as it settles down onto the couch,  
where I scratch your head and you scratch the fat  
cat's head, and I feed you cookies it took only hours  
to complete. I felt the ache in my left ankle  
and shifted to stir cardamom and salt  
with sugar for you. I want to make you things.  
I mention paint and you build a studio.  
I mention books and you build desks and shelves.  
What can I give you but a girl on your couch  
wearing your too-big sweater, dreams  
you can touch, a sweet treat that says: I think  
of you, I retrieve all of the bits I need to make  
for you something more—crumbs  
to put in your mouth with my lips.

Maya Marshall is the author of *All the Blood Involved in Love* and cofounder of *underbelly*, the journal on the practical magic of poetic revision. Marshall has taught at Emory University, Northwestern University and Loyola University Chicago, and holds fellowships from MacDowell and Cave Canem among others. You can find her writing in *Boston Review*, *Crazyhorse*, *Best New Poets*, and elsewhere. She is an assistant professor of English and creative writing at Adelphi University.

Poem curated by Jacob Saenz. Saenz is the author of *Throwing the Crown*, winner of the APR/Honickman First Book Prize. His poetry has appeared in *American Poetry Review*, *Memorious*, *PANK*, *RHINO*, *Tammy* and other journals. A *CantoMundo* fellow, he's been the recipient of a Letras Latinas Residency, a Ruth Lilly Poetry Fellowship and a Latinx Scholarship from the Frost Place.

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## ON PRISONS

# Shooting ourselves in the foot

Harsh penalties for gun crimes don't make communities safer.

By **ANTHONY EHLERS**

**G**un violence across the nation, and especially here in Chicago, seems to be all we see on the news.

Politicians like Darren Bailey, the Republican nominee for Illinois governor, would have you believe that gun violence is right outside your door. But gun violence is not evenly distributed across the entire city. Instead, it is concentrated in neighborhoods that experience many forms of disadvantage, from poverty to segregation, food and job deserts, and rampant unemployment.

Would it surprise you to know that Illinois has some of the strictest firearms laws in the country? According to Everytown USA, Illinois is the sixth-strongest state for gun laws, due to its state-mandated background checks, laws keeping guns away from domestic abusers, and “red flag” laws. And the state’s firearm-enhancement penalties can add 15 to 25 years to sentences. I fail to see how our gun laws could get much tougher.

For decades, American policies have been driven by the idea that bad behavior is caused by bad people. This led to the tough-on-crime politics of the 1990s, which in turn led to the construction of the world’s largest prison system. The United States incarcerates more of its citizens than any other country. This legacy comes at a ruinous cost to our society, especially in Black and Brown communities.

In 2006, while sentencing William Lang to seven years for aggravated unlawful use of a weapon, a Cook County Circuit Court trial judge said, “I don’t understand what I or society gains by putting you in prison for possession of a weapon. If I thought it was going to deter you or anybody else, it might make sense. But I’m fully aware that what I do to you is going to be zero effect on anyone else out there carrying a weapon.”

In 2016, dozens of organizations signed onto a report entitled Building a Safe Chicago: Calling for a Comprehensive Plan, which

noted, “In recent years, our state has increased penalties for firearm possession six times, instituting new mandatory minimum sentences. As a result, the number of Illinoisans incarcerated for possessing a weapon in violation of licensing laws tripled, while arrests remained flat. Consistent with research showing that sentence severity is unlikely to deter violent crime, homicide rates fell no faster here than they did in states which had not increased such sentences—and seem to have increased at a faster pace.”

Obviously, being more punitive doesn’t work.

As a crime prevention measure, firearm enhancements are useless—and a colossal waste of taxpayer money. Harsher penalties are reactive, and they’re lazy politics. There is, however, a growing concern about what, if anything, can be done.

Shootings are rare on the more affluent north side, but not on the poorer west and south sides. Black and Brown Chicagoans are most likely to be the victims of shootings, and poverty can explain part of the disparity. But make no mistake, individual poverty is not the full explanation. Exclusionary housing policies and discrimination have pushed Black and Brown people into segregated neighborhoods, and segregation remains significant in Chicago. Both the government and the private sector have neglected Black and Brown neighborhoods, leaving people without good schools, banks, grocery stores, and other neighborhood institutions.

The government tends to disengage from urban issues, and respond with punitive policies that exacerbate the problems therein. This approach is characterized by abandonment, disinvestment, and punishment. “That’s no coincidence,” says Alex Kotlowitz, author of *There Are No Children Here*, a 1992 book about the lives of two boys in the now-demolished Henry Horner Homes, and producer of *The Interrupters*, a documentary about violence-mediation workers. “That’s no coincidence. We’ve got to recommit ourselves to finding ways to fortify and rebuild these communities—all the obvious things, which is affordable housing, accessible health care, better schools, community centers. That’s the part that drives me crazy. All the things we already know but we’re unable or unwilling to address it in a really robust manner.”

In 2019, Mayor Lori Lightfoot announced

the creation of a Memorial Day violence-reduction program called Our City, Our Safety, which she expanded in 2020 to year-round citywide gun-violence reduction. However, *South Side Weekly* reported that in May 2020, the Chicago Police Department began using the city’s gun-violence prevention center to surveil political demonstrations against everything from police brutality to gun violence itself, and since then the Our City, Our Safety initiative has apparently existed as little more than an online dashboard.

Our national urban policy cannot be neglect and disinvestment; it must be investment and help. You don’t often hear this from today’s politicians—they take the easy way out and scream about punishment. Politicians love the status quo: it favors them, gives them a platform and agenda, while seemingly allowing them to actually accomplish next to nothing for their constituents. Punishment has been the most consistent response to the challenges of urban crime, violence, and poverty. All you have to do is look at your news every night to see that it has been a failure.

Harsh penalties such as eliminating parole, so-called truth in sentencing, and mandatory gun-enhancement penalties, combined with more aggressive policing and prosecution, trap more and more Black and Brown people into the criminal legal system.

Instead of punishment, the focus has to shift to the fundamental root causes—poverty, segregation, disinvestment, and the widespread availability of guns to people who shouldn’t have them.

I freely admit that I don’t come armed with all the answers to this complex problem. However, I have eyes, and even I can see that if Illinois’s tough gun laws do not help, punishment is a failed strategy. And I can also see some of the answers, such as addressing root problems like poverty and disinvestment, that could help. How is it that our elected officials can’t think of any answers to address one of the biggest issues in the state?

We must demand real answers from those who want our vote. Stricter penalties do not work, as we can all plainly see. If politicians can’t come up with honest answers and solutions to the root problem of violence, don’t give them your vote! The status quo only helps them. We must demand more. **✊**

**@Chicago\_Reader**

## September is National Suicide Prevention Awareness Month



Suicide is an important topic that people are often hesitant to discuss. But the more we talk about it, the more we can break the stigmas, and the more lives we can save. Misinformation surrounding mental health can cause us to downplay the severity of symptoms in friends and loved ones experiencing depression, and perpetuate the myth that seeking help is a sign of weakness. This defies logic when seeking help is among the bravest things a person can do when they are struggling with depression or thoughts of suicide.

While suicides are preventable, they are all too common in our society. According to the 2020 data from the World Health Organization:

- Suicide is the 12th leading cause of death in the U.S. and the 15th in Illinois
- In 2020, approximately 46,000 people died by suicide
- 1 death occurs every 40 seconds and 130 people die by suicide per day
- Men are 3.88 times more likely to die by suicide than women.

Even so, many communities lack adequate mental health resources, especially low-income communities and communities of color. A 2021 study from the CDC showed that while there was an overall decrease in suicides in the U.S. between 2019 and 2020, there were spikes among Black, Latino, and Indigenous populations.

National Suicide Prevention Awareness Month was established in 2008, and held in September to coincide with World Suicide Prevention Day on September 10. Every year since, people around the country gather to remember those lost to suicide, celebrate those who have survived

September is National Suicide Prevention Awareness Month. If you or a loved one are in crisis or having thoughts of suicide, please dial 988, call 1-800-273-TALK (8255), or text TALK to 741741. If 911 is needed, ask specifically for an ambulance and for a Crisis Intervention Trained (CIT) police officer.

Read more online at [chicagoreader.com/suicideprevention](http://chicagoreader.com/suicideprevention)

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A crowd looks on as The Breathing Light perform at the People's Fest.  KELLY GARCIA

## PUBLIC SPACE

# A performance for the people

Organizers of the People's Fest want Douglass Park to be accessible to the community year-round.

By **KELLY GARCIA**

**O**n a cloudy afternoon a couple of Saturdays ago, faint lyrics could be heard echoing down Marshall Boulevard, which exits Douglass Park on the park's south side. The sound was not coming from any of the bands performing at Riot Fest inside the park, but a small crowd had gathered under the shade of nearby trees to watch the performer: an older woman playing guitar in front of a banner that read NO RIOT FEST.

*♪♪ We don't want your Riot Fest, no  
We don't want that tall black fence, no  
We want trees and the singing lark  
Give us back our Douglass Park ♪♪*

It had been a few years since organizers held the first People's Fest, a celebration of a growing movement to protect Douglass Park from privatization, but the scene was familiar. A group of residents set up tents, hung banners, and assembled a small stage. They greeted onlookers with friendly smiles and offered fresh produce, activities for kids, and live music—free and open to all.

The focus of their protest was taking place simultaneously just blocks away. Concertgo-

ers, fresh off the CTA, streamed into Douglass Park's already torn-up fields for another year of Riot Fest. The ticketed, for-profit music festival that includes punk, alt-rock, and hip-hop bands has caused tens of thousands of dollars in damages to the park in previous years and—along with other summer festivals—left neighborhood residents without a park for weeks on end.

But on that Saturday, the residents who spent their summer lining up to speak at park district board meetings, writing letters to city officials, and collecting petition signatures were still—perhaps at peace in each other's company. They set blankets down over patches of green and settled in for a long afternoon featuring a variety show of their own.

The next song was an acoustic cover of the 1937 folk song “Hello Stranger” by Chicago-based “tape explorer” Magic Ian. Rapper Veg@ P played a set from his newly released EP *D@zed and Confused*. Johnny Marshall performed some stand-up. The Black queer punk trio Bussy Kween Power Trip gave an exhilarating performance. Slowly, the crowd of bobbing heads grew.

I found myself starstruck by The Breathing Light, an Alabama-bred, unapologetic Afro-

punk trio.

Their electric sound sent shockwaves through the air. Drummer Dwayne Robinson wore a shirt that had a Blue Lives Matter flag with the words “Burn this flag” underneath. Their presence was fitting for a much larger stage at a festival like the one occupying Douglass Park.

“A lot of it has to do with what it means to be a successful band,” front man Kyle Ozero told me. “Some people think it makes you successful to play at a show like Riot Fest . . . but we don't care enough about that.”

The band was fearless about the repercussions of speaking out against one of the largest independently owned music festivals in the country. Speaking out is actually their brand.

Pointing to his shirt, Ozero told a story of when he pissed some people off after visiting Hollywood Forever, the iconic resting place of Hollywood's biggest stars.

“I made a sign and got in front of Johnny Ramone's grave site and called him a racist,” Ozero said, with obvious pride. With Riot Fest, it's nothing different for the band.

“It's disappointing to see punk-inspired, counterculture-inspired bands playing at a fest like that,” Julie Aziza, another band mem-

ber, said. “Even for it to be named Riot Fest as though it's something radical . . . it's ‘gentrification fest’ at this point.”

On a bench, Jorge Angel, a resident who's been living across the street from Douglass Park for ten years, sat pensively.

“We're hoping to get more signatures,” he said in Spanish, nodding to the table in front of him with stacks of petitions. As of publication, Concerned Citizens of Riot Fest in Douglass Park, which Angel is active with, has gathered close to 3,000 signatures in support of removing the large music festivals from Douglass Park.

But Angel was frustrated from an incident earlier that day when he was standing outside his porch with two kids on his watch. Parked in front of his house, he says, were two Riot Fest-goers snorting what appeared to be cocaine off the hood of their cars.

“I have nothing against people who do that,” he said. “I just think they need to respect the residents who live here.”


Several tables with local vendors were spread throughout the grass. Some were selling handmade jewelry, scarves, and candles. A group of abolitionists known as the Chi Capys were selling T-shirts for donations to people who are incarcerated.

One vendor who asked to speak anonymously said they used to go to Riot Fest before the festival was kicked out of Humboldt Park by angry residents, but they stopped going when the makeup of the audience changed.

“It's mostly white people now, and they're rude and disrespectful,” they said. “They don't take into consideration the people around the neighborhood in addition to the lack of organization by the festival.”

As day turned to night, the crowd simmered. Many stood attentively, as if waiting for a signal. Others lay peacefully on the grass—dreaming of a better tomorrow.

“Do you have hope?” I asked Jorge Angel.

“Yes,” he said without pausing. “We're growing in numbers, and I'm confident this will be the last year of Riot Fest.” 

 @KellyGarcia\_

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## CITY COUNCIL

# A changing aldermanic Black caucus

There's an opportunity for new—and possibly more progressive—Black leaders to take the reins.

By **TONIA HILL AND THE TRIIBE**

*This article was co-published in partnership with The TRIIBE.*

**T**he Chicago Aldermanic Black Caucus (CABC) is changing. So far this year, a total of 15 City Council members have either stepped down, announced plans to retire, or launched campaigns to challenge Mayor Lori Lightfoot in the 2023 mayoral election. And there's also one alderperson, Patrick Daley Thompson, who was convicted of filing false income tax returns in February; another, Ed Burke, remains under federal indictment.

Of those 15 alderpeople, six are members of the 20-person CABC, a group charged with

“representing the needs and interests of Chicago’s Black communities,” according to its website.

Three Black alderpeople—Carrie Austin (34th Ward), Leslie Hairston (5th Ward), and Howard Brookins (21st Ward)—will retire at the end of their terms. Hairston was elected in 1999 and Brookins in 2003. Austin, elected in 1994, is currently the longest-serving Black alderperson; additionally in 2021, a federal jury indicted Austin and her chief of staff on bribery charges for allegedly conspiring to receive home improvements for construction contractors that sought city assistance for a development project in her ward.

Two Black alderpeople have thrown their

hats into the mayoral race: Sophia King (4th Ward) and Roderick Sawyer (6th Ward). The latter is the son of the late Eugene Sawyer, who was appointed mayor after the sudden death of former Chicago mayor Harold Washington in 1987.

Alderperson Michael Scott Jr. (24th Ward) retired from the City Council in May after serving since 2015. Out of 19 vying for the seat, Lightfoot appointed his sister Monique Scott to take his place.

With Chicago’s municipal election season now in full swing, the aldermanic shakeup comes as self-styled progressive alderpeople appear ascendant in a City Council that is still finding its identity after decades of

CABC members (from left) Alderpersons Roderick Sawyer (6th), Sophia King (4th), Leslie Hairston (5th), Carrie Austin (34th), and Howard Brookins Jr. (21st).  DAVID ELUTILLO FOR THE TRIIBE

lockstep allegiance to machine bosses in the mayor’s office.

Such unprecedented shifts could attract young Black Chicagoans—and others disillusioned with politics—to vote in the municipal election, which has experienced low voter turnouts in recent years. But whether that will prompt the CABC to become more independent or progressive as well is yet to be seen.

“If you ask a person, a Black person in particular, what do you think we can do to improve public safety or how do you feel about people in your community having oversight over the police, most people would say that’s a great idea,” said Greg Kelley, president of



SEIU Healthcare Illinois Indiana Missouri & Kansas. SEIU Healthcare is a union representing health care, child care, home care, and nursing home workers in the Midwest.

“That’s a progressive thing,” Kelley added. “But I wouldn’t necessarily call it ‘progressive’ if I were talking to someone like my mother, for example.”

Republicans and right-wing extremists have turned the word “progressive” into a derogatory term, using it as a dog whistle to describe cities with Democratic leaders like Chicago as “lawless.”

The word, Kelley said, can elicit a certain reaction from older Black voters.

“I think we need to do a better job at explaining the issues and relying less on buzzwords like ‘progressive.’ This messaging isn’t reaching certain folks and they may be resistant because they are unfamiliar with the terms,” Kelley said. “So, our job is to communicate the issues without the labels.”

The TRiiBE reached out to Black political experts, City Council members, organizers, and labor leaders to weigh in on what a shift in City Council could mean for Black

Chicagoans.

The consensus from the group is that candidates and leaders must not only be progressive in name, but also in action.

**T**hink back to the administrations of former mayors Richard M. Daley and Rahm Emanuel. During each of those administrations, the CABC voted for controversial initiatives supported by the respective mayors, including Daley’s 75-year parking deal and Emanuel’s closure of half the city’s public mental health clinics and plans for a cop academy.

During Mayor Lightfoot’s first term, the CABC has largely voted in agreement with her 89 percent of the time, according to an analysis conducted by the University of Illinois at Chicago’s political science department.

Those decisions have had long-lasting impacts on Black communities. For example, Black youth organizers with the #NoCop-Academy campaign pushed back against Emanuel’s \$95 million cop academy for Chicago police in West Garfield Park because investing more in the police would mean

more violence for Black and Brown communities. Instead, they demanded through their grassroots campaign that the city fund and provide resources for schools and youth.

City Council voted 38-8 in favor of the cop academy in March 2019. In September 2020, Lightfoot’s administration asked for an additional \$20 million for phase two of the cop academy, raising the cost for the cop academy to \$128 million.

“That was a campaign largely driven by young Black people,” Kennedy Bartley told The TRiiBE. She is one of the lead organizers for the #DefundCPD Campaign and director of campaigns at the Chicago Torture Justice Center, which seeks to address the traumas of police violence and institutionalized racism through access to healing and wellness services, trauma-informed resources, and community connection.

“So, I think as far back as I can remember, but also as recently as the cop academy, as budget votes continue to increase police budgets and fund Black communities and Latinx communities and poor communities at abysmal rates, the Black Caucus has historically

taken violent votes,” she added.

The term progressive has become a buzzword in recent years and election cycles—so much so that Lightfoot co-opted the language and concerns of young Black and queer organizers to aid her run for mayor in 2019.

Although the term dates back to the 1900s, according to NPR, the 2016 presidential campaign of U.S. senator Bernie Sanders breathed new life into it. “Progressivism is now a way for politicians to appeal to far left-leaning Americans, without alienating moderates and independents who reject the ‘liberal label,’” NPR reported.

In 2019, a slate of progressive candidates joined the City Council. Longtime south-side organizer Jeanette Taylor (20th Ward) won a runoff race to succeed former 20th Ward alderperson Willie Cochran. In 2016, a federal grand jury indicted Cochran on charges that he allegedly took money from a charitable fund that was intended to help families and children in his ward, according to the Department of Justice.

Before becoming an alderperson, Taylor served as an organizer with the Kenwood

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Oakland Community Organization and was a leading organizer with the Obama Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) Coalition.

There's also BYP100 board member Maria Hadden, who beat longtime 49th Ward incumbent Joe Moore, ending his 28-year career on the City Council. Moore identified as a progressive, but according to a Block Club Chicago article, he voted more than 98 percent of the time with Emanuel.

Not only did Hadden become the first openly queer Black woman elected to Chicago City Council, but she also became the first Black alderperson to be elected to a north side Ward.

And there's Matt Martin, who was elected to the 47th Ward in 2019. Before joining the City Council, he served as a civil rights attorney in the Office of the Illinois Attorney General. He focused on issues including police reform, workers' rights, health care, LGBTQ+ rights, and reproductive rights. He also helped to write the consent decree.

Along with Taylor, Hadden and Martin serve on the CABC and the Chicago City Council Progressive Reform Caucus (CCCPRC).

Then there's Alderperson Rossana Rodriguez-Sanchez (33rd Ward), a former community organizer who beat incumbent Deb Mell in the 2019 runoff. Mell was appointed to the City Council in 2013 to replace her father, who had served on the City Council since 1975. Rodriguez-Sanchez is a member of the CCCPRC and the Chicago City Council Latino Caucus.

Taylor, Rodriguez-Sanchez, and Hadden's roots in activism have kept them connected to the needs of their constituents.

Recent progressive policies that passed through City Council include the Fight for \$15 minimum wage campaign in November 2019, the Woodlawn Housing Preservation Ordinance in September 2020, and the Empowering Communities for Public Safety (ECPS) ordinance in July 2021.

Beginning in 2016, members of the CBA coalition—which Alderperson Taylor had been a part of—came together to protect residents in Woodlawn and neighboring communities from displacement due to the development of the Barack Obama Presidential Center in Jackson Park. Those efforts came to fruition in 2020, when the City Council approved the Woodlawn Housing Preservation Ordinance, which Taylor cosponsored. One of the ordinance's key features is a requirement that for each redevelopment of 52 vacant city-owned lots, at least 30 percent of new apartments

must be made affordable to “very low-income households.”

“It's about the representation that goes beyond the identity of Blackness and represents the class interests and the social interests of Black folks in the city,” Bartley said. “I think it's about getting organizers into office.”

With these new voices in office, Bartley said, then we can find ways to meaningfully challenge the alderpeople who have been in power for years.

“We know that Black voters are loyal voters,” she said. “How are we providing material alternatives to the folks in our communities and neighborhoods and then organizing them to believe in bolder representation?”

**F**or Chicago Teachers Union president Stacy Davis Gates, the mayor is an important part of the equation, too. Since the mayor sits atop the city's governmental power structure, some alderpeople acquiesce to that power, she said.

“If Black people want to be accommodated in the city, they're going to have to be accommodated by a progressive mayor because that is the type of mayor who's going to fully fund schools,” Gates told The TRiiBE. “That is the type of mayor that will go into neighborhoods like Chatham and make sure that it continues to be a place for the working class and the middle class. You need mayors to lead.”

She pointed to the success of Chicago's first Black mayor, Harold Washington, and the causes he championed and enacted once he took office in 1983. As mayor, he opened the city's budget process up for public input, fought to redistrict wards which provided more Black and Latinx representation, and created the Ethics Commission to check the power of the city's administration.

“The greatest amount of transformation for Black people in the city did not come from a Black Caucus,” Gates said. “It came from a Black mayor through a movement of people who wanted more for all people in this city. But it was anchored in the hopes and dreams of the migrants from Mississippi.”

Mayor Lightfoot led a proposal to sue gang members for their assets, despite criticism from the legal community who said the ordinance, if passed, would fail to reduce gun violence and would seize money, property, and other assets from vulnerable people not even alleged to have participated in violence, such as parents, grandparents, and other family members. Six Black alderpeople voted in agreement with her: Jason Ervin

(28th Ward), Derrick Curtis (18th Ward), Greg Mitchell (7th Ward), Emma Mitts (37th Ward), Scott, and Christopher Taliaferro (29th Ward), who serve on the City Council's public safety committee. Lightfoot delayed a final vote on that ordinance in February.

When Mayor Lightfoot proposed to extend and expand the citywide curfew for youth following the shooting of a 16-year-old teenager in Millennium Park, despite critics saying the measure would disproportionately harm Black and Brown youth, ten CABC members voted in favor of it: Mitchell, Michelle Harris (8th Ward), Curtis, Brookins, Scott, Walter Burnett (27th Ward), Ervin, Taliaferro, Austin, and Mitts.

For politicians, merely identifying as a progressive candidate is not enough. Bartley said the words, actions, and policymaking decisions must match, and voters must demand more and be clear about what they're asking of their elected representatives.

For Kelley, progressivism, as it relates to politics and legislation, includes policymaking that addresses the needs of everyday working people.

There's a widely held belief that millennials and Generation Z only mobilize on issues by leading demonstrations or protests. While some applaud their efforts, they are often criticized because they aren't appearing en masse to vote in elections.

More than 520,000 people voted in the general municipal election in February 2019; of that total, approximately 3.5 percent were between the ages of 18 to 24, 15 percent were between the ages of 25 to 34, and 17 percent were between the ages of 35 to 44.

Overall, voter turnout was 35 percent in the general municipal election and 33 percent for the runoff election in April 2019.

TRiiBE contributor Charles Preston wrote a 2019 opinion piece responding to criticism about millennial voter turnout. He noted that organizing and demonstrations led by young Black people did lead to wins for the movement and Chicagoans during the previous municipal election cycle.

“Many activists who stood in front of Lori Lightfoot and Garry McCarthy at past Chicago Police Department Board hearings are now witnessing those very candidates reiterate (some would say co-opt) their talking points! The call for more mental health clinics, an elected school board, and defunding police in favor of more community-based programs is not an original thought by candidates. This is the result of the incredibly penetrating

and revolutionary action by youth,” Preston wrote.

In order to attract new potential voters, lawmakers must have messaging and communication about progressive policies that are digestible for all constituents across ages and backgrounds.

Although Brookins believes there is an opportunity to push Black people further left, he said many Black voters identify as Democrats while still supporting some conservative-leaning policies.

“My elections have shown that African Americans are, by nature, conservative, especially the older African Americans who are the bread-and-butter people that go out and vote,” Brookins told The TRiiBE on September 8.

Earlier that day, Brookins endorsed southside native and community organizer Ronnie Mosley's campaign to replace him in the 21st Ward. In 2017, Mosley cofounded Homegrown Strategy Group, a policy and organizing firm that believes in community power and the idea that achievement comes through collective effort.


“With that said, there is room for a shift in liberal ideas, especially when it comes to things like policing, which I've been at the forefront of,” Brookins continued.

He was one of the sponsors of the reparations ordinance for victims of disgraced Chicago Police Department Commander Jon Burge. The measure was introduced in 2013 and was approved in 2015.

However, Brookins also voted in support of the cop academy in 2019.

“But I still believe there's a strong contingency of people who believe that we should pull ourselves up by the bootstraps, live a law-and-order-type life, and so forth. But there's room to gently push people, not necessarily jerk them to the left,” Brookins added.

When candidates claim to be progressive, Bartley said we must ask them about their commitment to issues like affordable housing, mental health, and funding for education. And, once elected, it's up to constituents to hold them accountable.

“Do you commit to building 100 percent affordable housing in your ward? Do you commit to ‘treatment, not trauma’ in a way that defunds the police? Do you commit to fighting against education cuts?” she said. “It's about just being sharper in our demands and what we're requiring.” 

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Coach James Wade (center) diagrams a play with the Chicago Sky during the 2021 season. © RANDY BELICE / GETTY

SPORTS

## Bigger than basketball

The WNBA season is over. Brittney Griner remains in a Russian prison. What's next?

By MAYA GOLDBERG-SAFIR

The end of the Chicago Sky's 2022 season came as quick as an end-of-summer downpour—unexpected, and, for fans, heart-wrenching. The team had carried a ten-point lead heading into the fourth quarter in a closeout game five against the Connecticut Sun, moments from securing a spot in the WNBA Finals.

Instead, in a matter of minutes, the defending champions inexplicably crumbled.

The sold-out crowd inside Wintrust Arena watched agape. A season ending in disaster may be a familiar feeling to many Chicagoans, but not to Sky fans, whose last two seasons have been marked by Candace Parker's dominant return and a championship culture known across the league. As the seconds wound down, the realization rippled through the crowd, as Chicago's veteran roster went completely scoreless for the final four minutes and 45 seconds of the game. In section 115, just behind the Sky bench, season ticket holders Crispin

Torres and Kaaren Fehsenfeld felt their stomachs flip.

"I just kept thinking: what happened?" said Torres, who had been ready to celebrate another Finals berth.

Until those final four minutes, the Sky's season had been electric.

After the team's 2021 championship run, "you couldn't talk about women's basketball without talking about Chicago," said Sky head coach James Wade. The franchise took on that responsibility with pride.

In the summer of 2022, the team registered their best record in franchise history and hosted the city's first-ever WNBA All-Star Game. Chicago—or Skytown, as fans call it—became the center of the women's basketball world, and, game after game, thousands streamed into Wintrust Arena to watch the defending champs hit the court.

The Sky's die-hard fan base is growing, and the culture is distinctive from traditional professional sports. "For a long

time, I've felt very quiet about being a sports fan," Torres said. "But the WNBA just feels so different. As a politically minded person, as a leftist, a queer person, and a trans person, it's probably the most eclectic and open-minded group of sports fans I've ever been a part of."

This year's WNBA season was bigger than basketball itself: it was the year this boldly political and often openly queer fan base was confronted with injustice of a new kind. Long before the first tip-off, through the regular season and playoffs, and even now, WNBA superstar Brittney Griner has been wrongfully detained in Russia, where she's lived in a prison cell for over 220 days.

For many in the Sky organization, Griner's detainment is personal. A number of the team's players have competed alongside Griner, including Courtney Vandersloot and Allie Quigley, who last saw their friend in Russia playing for UMMC

Ekaterinburg. In February, Vandersloot and Quigley returned to Ekaterinburg after traveling abroad during a two-week break from the season. But Griner wasn't there. Players grew increasingly alarmed as the reality of her detainment set in.

On March 1, all remaining Americans were evacuated from Russia as its invasion of Ukraine intensified. Later Vandersloot would tell *The Athletic* magazine, "I can't even explain the feeling that it was. We were all sick to our stomachs about it. It's really hard to be there and know that your friend, your teammate, is in a situation like that and you can't do anything to help her. It's a continuous feeling."

And so the Chicago Sky—its players, coaches, and front-office staff—kept Griner's plight front and center throughout the season. "It gave us a perspective of the things that are really important," said Coach Wade. He said the coaching staff even made the decision to relax rules around when players' family members could be present.

The franchise also used the WNBA season as a platform for fans to lift up Griner's name, grieve her absence, and demand her return.

Throughout the Sky's season at Wintrust Arena, you could feel the collective outcry in support of Griner. On Day 78 of her ordeal—soon after Griner was officially declared by the Biden administration as "wrongfully detained," a human bargaining chip arrested to leverage concessions from the United States during wartime—that Friday night, when the Sky dropped its first regular season home game in overtime, was also the debut of a floor decal that read "BG, 42" and would remain on the court all season long. On Day 143, the day of the WNBA All-Star Game in Chicago, when every player returned from halftime to honor Griner, every single one wore her jersey. Day 171, after Griner was sentenced to ten years in a Russian prison, fans at the Sky's at-home win over the Washington Mystics brought T-shirts, pins, and homemade signs

pleading for the return of the basketball superstar.

Beneath Griner's case is the alarming reality of inequity in professional sports, something Coach Wade pointed out as well. When Griner was wrongfully detained in Russia, she was in the midst of "making the ultimate sacrifice, spending time away from her family in order to provide," Wade said. The reality remains that, for women's professional basketball players, there really is no "off-season." Instead, as of last year, nearly half of the WNBA's players spent their time "off" playing abroad, earning up to ten times what they do in the United States.

Perhaps the unresolved end to the Sky's season in Chicago was appropriate, in some way: it forces fans, players, and coaches to grapple with a world bigger than basketball. As Coach Wade said, "We know this isn't life or death. Griner's situation gave us the perspective of the things that are really important."

On September 16, President Biden met with Cherelle Griner, reportedly giving her insight into what the White House is doing to bring her wife home. This kind of public display of assurance is somewhat unprecedented in wrongful detainment cases. And it may encourage families of the other more than 70 Americans wrongfully detained abroad to speak louder with renewed hope. Whereas the government has long urged wrongful detainment families to keep their loved ones' story out of the public eye, Griner's case helps to push in an opposite direction. Alongside efforts like the Bring Our Families Home Campaign, organized by the families of people wrongfully detained overseas, Griner's case shows that making noise may in fact be a powerful force to help bring Americans home.

In that sense, Griner is now a game changer for the issue of wrongful detainment. "She has literally elevated the issue more in the past six months than anyone in the history of the issue," said Jonathan Franks, a wrongful detainment expert who has been part of several successful negotiations to bring detainees home. "And she hasn't even gotten to speak for herself yet. Imagine what she'll do once she has her voice."

When the Sky lost in catastrophic fashion on September 8, ending their season, it was Day 203 of Griner's detainment. When the buzzer sound-



Brittney Griner has been detained in Russia for more than 220 days. © HALEY TWEEDELL

ed, players and fans walked dejectedly from the court, but I couldn't quite digest or make sense of this being the end: not for the Sky, nor for Chicago fans' support of Brittney Griner.

So I decided to fly to Las Vegas for a Sky-less WNBA Finals and a last chance to grapple with the unknown.

I arrived in Vegas for game two between the Las Vegas Aces and the Connecticut Sun. Throughout the season, the Aces had snatched a few close games from Chicago, but now, I hoped to see them dominate the Sun. I wanted catharsis, at least on the basketball court.

Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino, where the Aces play, is a world away from Wintrust Arena. To get to Michelob Ultra Arena within the casino, you must first cross a dizzying floor of slot machines, fine dining restaurants, and frozen slushie bars. Inside the arena, I scoured the crowds for a flash of Sky blue or a Candace Parker jersey, but there were none to be found. Instead, I bought an Aces T-shirt (all A'ja Wilson shirts were sold-out, of course, after she was announced as the league's MVP a week before) and sat undercover next to a group of season ticket holders.

The Aces had no mercy for the Sun, keeping them muffled throughout the game.

Unlike the Chicago Sky, a team whose roster was built around the steadiness of its veterans, the Aces are a young team, an emergent force. They played with ferocious athleticism and a single-minded determination to bring the first-ever professional sports championship home to Vegas. And the crowd was ecstatic, absorbed in a show of smoke machines, a pyrotechnic display, and a halftime performance by Lil Jon.

At the final buzzer marking the Aces' win, the crowd screamed, and I screamed with them. It was an important reminder that, as a sports fan, every disappointing loss is followed by the potential for revival. A few days later, I spoke to Coach Wade, who echoed a similar sentiment: "The last game was very tough for me personally," he said. "It's hard for me to describe because I just want to make the fans happy. I know they're ride or die for us."

The Sky's story is one of a powerful turnaround from years of low attendance to sold-out crowds. The coaching staff knows it, too. As the seconds dwindled down in that final game, Coach Wade and his staff turned to the crowd, thanking them. "As we were walking off the floor, they're cheering us even though we lost one of the most disappointing games," Wade said. "And they just cheered us like we were winners in their

eyes. And that says a lot to me about the fans in Chicago."

After the game in Vegas, amidst the stream of Aces fans, I ran into someone wearing a "Free Brittney Griner Now" pin, one of the very pins I had helped to pass out during All-Star Weekend.

"You were at the All-Star game in Chicago!" I said.

"Yes," the woman said, "how did you know?"

"I helped to pass out those pins," I told her. "My friend Jade made them."

"I wear it all the time," she said. "I wear it to every single game."

Our brief conversation reminded me of how effortlessly WNBA fans had come together around Brittney Griner. More than anything else, the season will be remembered for this: "It was the BG year," as Sky fan Crispin Torres told me. "More than anything else, I think when people look back at this season, that's what they will remember."

Back home after my quick trip to Vegas, I watched one last WNBA game in Chicago. For game four of the finals, I searched for a local sports bar willing to play the game with sound. I was nervous, a feeling I'm all too familiar with from years of being a WNBA fan in public. But far more quickly than I'd expected, a bartender at a Logan Square watering hole checked with their manager, then agreed. He was happy to play the game on the patio, sound on.

And so we descended upon the bar, ten or so Sky fans in total: my partner and I, along with Torres, Fehsenfeld, *Skyhook Podcast* co-host Chris Pennant, and a group of people who'd also called the very same bar asking if they too could watch the WNBA finals. Our city is now home to the kind of WNBA community that many of us have been waiting nearly a lifetime to be part of.

Chicago Sky basketball is a success story, and it's here to stay. But Brittney Griner is not yet home. Until she's free, the women's basketball community will keep wearing their "Free BG" merch everywhere. And we'll continue to count the days, demand action, and hold governments accountable.

"This is bigger than basketball," affirmed Coach Wade. "We can't let the message fall on deaf ears because our basketball season is over." ■

🐦 @mayags

**“DARK TESTAMENT: A CENTURY OF BLACK WRITERS ON JUSTICE”**

Through 9/23; Thu-Mon 10 AM-5 PM, American Writers Museum, 180 N. Michigan, 312-374-8790, americanwritersmuseum.org, \$14 adults, \$9 seniors and students



Sixteen portraits of Black writers fill one wall of the exhibit, which stretches across three gallery spaces. © COURTESY AMERICAN WRITERS MUSEUM

## HISTORY

## Writers on the wall

A new exhibit at the American Writers Museum features prominent and lesser-known Black authors, poets, and journalists.

By **DEBBIE-MARIE BROWN**

The American Writers Museum’s newest exhibit, “Dark Testament: A Century of Black Writers on Justice,” is named after a book of poems by Pauli Murray, a writer, lawyer, activist, priest, and professor. While Murray inspired people like Chief Justice Thurgood Marshall (he called her work “the Bible” of the civil rights movement) and Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, who drew on Murray’s work for her legal brief, she is largely unknown by the public. (Murray was LGBTQ+ and wrote extensively about gender and sexuality, and used she/her pronouns to describe herself.)

“Her work has been crucial, but it’s often been invisible,” said Dr. Keidrick Roy, the exhibit’s lead curator. Roy spent the last five years getting a PhD at Harvard, studying how

African Americans have taken up the ideals of American liberty, progress, and justice in their writings since the nation’s revolutionary era of the 1700s. “And so in this exhibition,” Roy continued, “it’s only fitting to prominently feature Murray and her life and her work as an organizing theme, to help us pay attention to the things that we observe but we don’t really see.”

*Dark Testament* is an immersive experience that has been two years in the making. It opened to the public on September 22 at the American Writers Museum (AWM) downtown and explores racial injustice from the Civil War through the Civil Rights movement from the perspective of Black writers such as Octavia E. Butler, Ida B. Wells, Ethel Payne, Lorraine Hansberry, and Ann Petry, among many others. At the project’s start,

the curation team—made of writers, journalists, academics, and poets—had a series of conversations with a variety of African American scholars in Black studies, which expanded the aim and reach of that project, birthing its four central organizing themes: Citizen, Justice, Violence, and Joy. “This project has been a dream come true,” Roy said.

The presentation stretches across three of the museum’s gallery spaces. When visitors enter, they first step into the Meijer Gallery, where they’ll find on the right a chronicle of major Black American writers, with physical copies of influential works highlighted from each phase. The works *What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?*, written in 1852 by Frederick Douglass, and *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, written in 1861 by Harriet Jacobs, represents the period from 1850-1865 entitled “Slavery and Freedom,” for example. Ida B. Wells’s *The Red Record: Tabulated Statistics and Alleged Causes of Lynching in the United States* represented the era between Reconstruction and Jim Crow (1865-1919). *Invisible Man* (1952) by Ralph Ellison is highlighted in the section on the years 1940-1960, a period defined by international conflict and integration.

Across from those mounted texts, 16 brilliantly colored five-foot-tall portraits are installed side by side, filling up the entire width of the gallery’s wall. Visitors can interact with the art using an augmented-reality app on their phones. Large multicolored portraits depicting the likes of Ma Rainey, Douglass, Wells, and James Baldwin are painted or quilted in various complementing styles by local artists, many of whom are associated with the Chicago Public Art Group.

One of the painters, Bernard Williams, oversaw the completion of the 16 portraits and said that he commissioned artists—Damon Reed, Dorothy Irene Burge, and Dorian Sylvain, and himself—that he thought would “do well with creating dynamic portraits,” as the painters have experience creating outdoor murals in Chicago and painting portraits. Dorothy Burge is the only fabric artist among the group.

In a section of the Conant Readers hall, a larger exhibition room, there’s a component that examines the significance of the

Black press, Black newspapers, and Black publishers. “Black press has been central to the distribution of Black thought since its founding,” Kiedrick said, since writers like Langston Hughes and W.E.B. Du Bois used the Black press as a mechanism to distribute their ideas. He noted that the Black press increased the capacity for transmission of ideas within Chicago but also across the country, connecting Black people in different regions of the country who wouldn’t have interacted otherwise.

“You have people in the south reading the *Chicago Defender* for instance, and that encouraged aspects of the Great Migration,” Roy said. “The Black press provided a space for Black leaders to emerge in a variety of capacities, and to have a public facing national voice that Black folks paid attention to.”

Myiti Sengstacke-Rice is the fifth generation of publishers in her family. Her great-granduncle was Robert Sengstacke Abbott, the founding publisher of the *Chicago Defender* and inventor of the Bud Billiken Parade, and her grandfather was a publisher of the *Defender* as well. Her father is renowned photographer Bobby Sengstacke. She donated a walking cane, a camera, and countless photos from her late family members to the exhibit.

“Writers are really clamoring for great spaces to be able to express what they’re seeing out there in the world. And you know, they need good platforms for that,” Sengstacke-Rice said.

The last part of the exhibit is in the Rubin Writers Room, where an intimate video presentation shows contemporary writers discussing the resonance of works from the past. Meanwhile, actors from Congo Square Theatre Company act out quotes from each text on screen.

The museum considers this their most ambitious presentation to date.

“The larger movements have a lot of different Black intellectuals, writers, men and women alike, who were really thinking deeply about the American Enlightenment ideals upon which the nation was founded,” Roy said. “And they should be celebrated as philosophers.”

🐦 @debbiemarieb\_

# SWING STATE

BY **REBECCA GILMAN**  
DIRECTED BY **ROBERT FALLS**

**It's hard to know who your friends are  
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Recently widowed, Peg tends to the native plants in her 40-acre rural Wisconsin prairie backyard, her solitary days interrupted only by visits from a family friend with a checkered past. When a mysterious theft alerts the authorities, a string of events unfold that forever changes their lives. Pulitzer Prize finalist playwright Rebecca Gilman and her longtime collaborator, Tony Award-winning director Robert Falls, team up again for their sixth Goodman production—a contemporary portrait of America's heartland in a time when it feels like everyone's way of life is in danger of disappearing.

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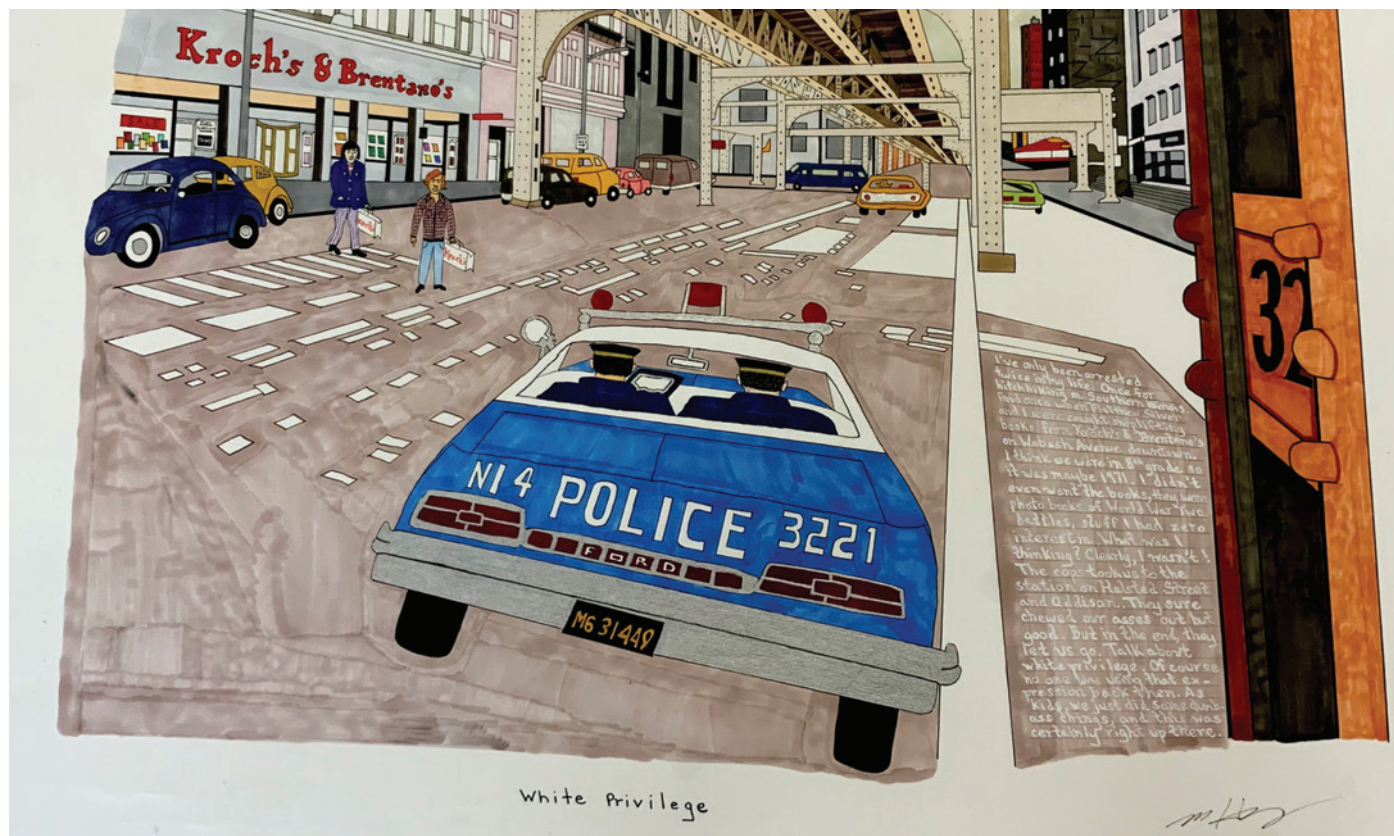
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**White Privilege** by William Horberg

COURTESY THE ARTIST

run-in with a Kroch's store detective myself a couple decades after Horberg. When I recount this to him via email, he's happy to hear I was continuing his traditions.

Nostalgia for the people and places of childhood is a side effect of aging. The further we are from formative early locales and friendships in our lives, the more it feels like they're gone forever—and that whatever has taken their place is lesser or lacking. Had Horberg not left town in 1987 his depictions of Chicago would undoubtedly be very different. Revisiting geography through the mind's eye is almost the opposite of walking the same streets for decades on end and noticing incremental changes. I don't mean this as a criticism of Horberg's project but to note the specific slant of his approach. He names his exhibit "My Old Town." It is a place preserved in amber.

This series was largely completed during the plague lockdown, a time when many artists looked inward by necessity and circumstance. If you can't go outside you must find subject matter elsewhere. One's past can be a deep well to draw from but holds its share of pitfalls and false paths. Fortunately for Horberg and for us, his looking back has produced images that teem with life even as they mourn what's gone.

When I first looked through this body of work I was reminded of the drawings of the late Wesley Willis. Horberg also relies on rulered perspectival lines to depict urban vistas and a colorful marker palette. Unlike a Willis, a typical Horberg drawing features at least one person, often a close friend or loved one. These images are as much a tribute to those who have come and gone as the burger stands and movie theaters that formed Horberg's identity.

By rooting his compositions in recognizable blocks of our city, the artist allows any viewer who's logged time in Chicago to feel a connection. Whether he's depicting the Hotel Belmont, the Bahá'í Temple, the Jazz Record Mart, or just a humble row of brick apartment buildings, Horberg's Chicago is our Chicago as well. It's a place where past and present are in a constant state of flux, a lively, often fraught state of constant renegotiation and debate. I know it better from looking at these drawings.

@Chicago\_Reader

## GALLERIES

### Drawing on the past

William Horberg's art evokes memories of a Chicago gone by.

By **DMITRY SAMAROV**

Most people are lucky to have one act that hits. William Horberg is well into his third. Horberg was born in Chicago and grew up around Belmont and Broadway in the Lakeview neighborhood in the 60s and 70s. He ran a repertory movie theater called the Sandburg at the corner of Division and Dearborn from 1979 to 1981, then moved out to Hollywood. He went on to a storied career producing films like *A Rage in Harlem*, *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, and *Milk*, as well as TV shows like *The Queen's Gambit*. Now he has turned to drawing as a way to explore the places of his childhood that left an indelible mark on him, to fix them in a lasting way as memories fade and bulldozers bury a past that informed everything he was to become.

There's something about drawing—no matter the artist's skill level—that can communicate people and places more intimately than any photograph. Evidence of human

touch brings an intimacy no machine could ever replicate. When I look at Horberg's pen-and-marker depictions of the landmarks of his childhood, I feel my way through those streets palpably in ways a frozen black-and-white print can never approach. It doesn't hurt that I know many of these places from firsthand experience, but Horberg's versions are from decades before I got to Chicago; some from before I was born. Yet I feel links to those bygone days in these vibrant and likable pictures.

Memory plays a starring role. Decades removed from his subject matter, Horberg has used family photos and period snapshots to get the details of the architecture right. There are certain things that are impossible to render without visual source material, whether perceptual or photographic—you just can't make them up. The particularity of a cornice or how a street sign might have a typo or some other unique irregularity—these are aspects

that make Horberg's drawings distinctive. And yet, as a longtime Chicago resident, I can see the armature or skeleton of the city I know behind these long gone facades. No matter how many of these buildings have been demolished or how many businesses have succeeded ones that failed, something of the spirit of these blocks remains right where it's always been.

Horberg's depictions of neighborhoods like Old Town may not look instantly familiar to younger residents but they'll surely recognize something like Crate & Barrel, which began as a small storefront on Wells Street before ballooning into a home furnishings brand. His drawing of Kroch's & Brentano's bookstore on Wabash in the Loop instantly took me back to the early 90s when I was a student at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Coincidentally, the caption accompanying this drawing recounts a childhood incident of getting busted shoplifting with his friends. I had a



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Huguette Caland's 1968 oil painting *City II* COURTESY THE BLOCK MUSEUM

## MUSEUMS

### Abstraction and meaning

A survey of work from MENA region artists visits Evanston's Block Museum.

By **DMITRY SAMAROV**

It's rare for me to be surprised by a painting show, but I didn't see "Taking Shape" coming. The exhibition is a generous survey of abstract art made from the 1950s to the 1980s, drawn from the collection of the Barjeel Art Foundation based in Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates. "Taking Shape" includes the work of over 50 artists, representing more than a dozen countries throughout the Middle East and North African (MENA) region. Some of the artists have had successful art careers, but none enjoys name recognition in America like Pollock or Kandinsky. I know of few prior attempts to take a snapshot of nonfigurative

art from midcentury MENA artists.

In many parts of the world, art has traditionally been employed to illuminate faith or governmental sovereignty. That's not to say that Malevichs weren't used to promote the Soviet state or that de Koonings weren't employed as propaganda for the U.S., because they were, but that wasn't always the intent of either of those artists. The idea that an artist's work is solely an expression of their own feelings or ideas, apart from the society they belong to, wasn't common or accepted in the countries represented in this show.

Much of the difficulty in contextualizing



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IMAGE CREDITS: "Cosmic Returning" painting from *Quantum Chandelier* 21-D-02, Michiko Itatani, 2021, 78" x 96," oil on canvas, courtesy of Michiko Itatani. (Detail)

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these paintings is the very different political situations in each artist's home country. A succession of upheavals, from colonial subjugation to experiments in socialism and democracy, to lapses into theocratic rule, are the experiences under which this work evolved. In the bios of most painters included in the show, there's time spent at art school or travel to Europe or the U.S. early in their development. Whatever the impact or influence of this foreign approach, it seems each artist spent the rest of their career reconciling it to their own native traditions.


Walking through the galleries I spotted echoes of abstract expressionism, color field painting, suprematism, and other recognizable Western styles, but the closer I looked the less familiar they became. An amazing thing happens when a person picks up a brush: even if they're trying their best to imitate something they admire, their own unique signature is spelled out all over the canvas. No two people can ever paint a picture the same way.

Highlights include Hamed Abdalla's 1975 work *Al-Tamazzuq (The Rupture)*, a wide-

brushed evocation of Arabic letterform set on a cracked blue background. Shakir Hassan Al Said's 1983 work *Al-Muntassirun (The Victorious)* reminds me of a scuffed-up and graffitied city wall. Huguette Caland's *Bribes de Corps* (1971) is a playful riff on a favorite part of the human anatomy, and Etel Adnan's *Autumn in Yosemite Valley* (1964) is a quilt-like composition that suggests both leaves and landscape. When I go back to see the show next time, I know I'll find half a dozen other favorites. Each wall of the show had paintings that made me stop and linger.

Abstract art's greatest strength is also its fatal flaw. Because there's nothing in a nonobjective picture that can be conclusively defined as meaning one thing rather than another, it can be used to stand for whatever one would like it to. That's how a Pollock drip painting can represent breaking free from the bonds of European easel painting and be used to fight the perceived atheistic threat posed by the Soviet Union during the Cold War at the same time. An added wrinkle in this case is the influence of traditional Islamic law, which forbids graven images fashioned by human

hand, believing images to be the province of the divine. I doubt every artist included painted their canvases for the glory of God, but their abstract form allows for such an interpretation.

Gathered together by Sultan Sooud al Qassemi in the UAE and sent on a tour through the U.S., I assume there's some diplomatic intent to this exhibition, but thanks to the nonfigurative styles represented that intent can't be spelled out and cannot diminish the quality of the art on its own terms. Paintings, books, music, and other cultural products are often used as a kind of soft power, to exert influence on behalf of those that commissioned or otherwise made them possible. Whatever the Barjeel Art Foundation's purpose, the result is a revelatory introduction to a body of work few in the West will be familiar with. The uncanny impression I left with was of spending time with pictures I didn't know I knew. Like seeing a foreign landscape or a stranger's face and recognizing it all the same. 

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**IMAGE CREDITS:** Louise Abbéma (1853–1927, France), *Sarah Bernhardt et Louise Abbéma sur le lac au bois de Boulogne*, 1883, Oil on canvas, 160 x 210 x 3 cm (framed), Collections Comédie-Française. (Detail)

  
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Marcela Torres © ERICK WILCZYNSKI

## PERFORMANCE

## Venerable tobacco smoke

Marcela Torres blends historical dances in an exploration of crop cultivation and colonialism.

By **KERRY CARDOZA**

Any smoker can relate to the feeling of release they get from a cigarette, the satisfying blend of calm relief and buzzy energy. When artist Marcela Torres started smoking cigars about seven years ago, they were struck by the respite it offered. So began a relationship with tobacco, which has stretched to include its historical connection to colonization and Latin America, its cultivation, and use in ritual, all of which manifest in Torres' new choreographic work, *Iyapokatzin; the venerable tobacco smoke*.

"Sometimes an ancestor will call to you, and by ancestor I mean a plant, or an object, or a spirit," Torres says. "Then when I researched more, I realized how tied it was to political movements or to colonization or to culture or like all these different parts of Latinidad that I just thought were really interesting. So I began to dive in further and further. In different voodoo or other spiritual beliefs, when you find an ancestor spirit, it's a call to get to know that entity in all these different ways.

It's research but also getting to know the thing itself through other folks or other histories or other communities."

The Chicago premiere of *Iyapokatzin*, which is Nahuatl for "venerable tobacco smoke," will take place at El Paseo Community Garden in Pilsen on October 1, with a second presentation the following day at Malinalli Garden in Little Village. (An earlier performance was staged in September at Minnesota's Franconia Sculpture Park.) The 45-minute piece is less a dance than a ceremony or offering "both to ancestors but also to the public," Torres says.

*Iyapokatzin* is the culmination of three years of research into not only tobacco itself, but also into how to properly tell its story, and how to integrate its history into movement and community and Latine diaspora. Its completion, in the ways the artist envisioned, was made possible through the support of Chicago DanceMakers Forum, where Torres is a 2022 Lab Artist.

Torres typically works slowly, learning all

they can about a subject, and physically practicing it. Over that research period, Torres grew tobacco at El Paseo and built an adobe monument meant for burning the harvested plant and communally releasing grief. They also learned two different types of historical dances: Azteca-Chichimeca, from Chicago native Izayo Mazehualli, and Folklórico, from Texas-based Gabriela Mendoza-Garcia. Mazehualli will also be performing in *Iyapokatzin*.

"It's really important to have a community base," Torres says. Their collaborators also include La Spacer, a local DJ, producer, and composer who created a score for the performance that incorporates both techno beats and Son jarocho, a style of folk music from Veracruz, Mexico.

"They were important to me, to have somebody who wasn't going to judge me for being queer in a way, because often these dances can be very binary and controlled," Torres says. "I'm more comfortable in feeling nonbinary, like not wanting to fulfill certain masculine or feminine roles."

Torres's desire to translate these dances in a nonbinary way also comes through in their attire, a flowing black assemblage that pays homage to their goth, clubby teenage years and to the rancho style of Folklórico dress. "A lot of the Folklórico outfits haven't changed in a long time, but I wanted to make something that felt more related to my life," Torres says.

### IYAPOKATZIN; THE VENERABLE

#### TOBACCO SMOKE

Sat 10/1 6:30 PM, El Paseo Community Garden, 944 W. 21st; Sun 10/2 6:30 PM, Malinalli Garden, 2800 S. Ridgeway, free

"A lot of aesthetics are related to both honoring the pantheon of Aztec gods and also thinking about how the Folklórico outfit can actually make sense to me now."

Being able to work with people who understood Torres's diasporic story was crucial—it helped them feel more comfortable in taking traditional movements and making them more contemporary, more relevant to Torres's life.

"Some forms of Mexican dance can feel really static, both accessible and yet not accessible," Torres says. "A lot of dance forms are controlled, partially for real reasons—they

want to keep them preserved. But when we think about Folklórico, a lot of those dances aren't that old." After the Mexican Revolution, which ended in 1920, Torres explains, there was a period of cultural reform, where the bourgeoisie made decisions regarding what cultural practices would be chosen to represent what Mexico was. "They decided the dances and they decided all the costuming," Torres says. "It wasn't necessarily the people themselves. The goal was to unify what Mexico was after the war. So it's interesting that there can be such rigidity on what it's considered when it was really just a decision of a few people and often not Indigenous people. My goal is for people to see these dance forms as contemporary options for play in the descriptions of our current lives."

In some ancient stories, tobacco was seen as a healer, a spiritual protector. This idea of protection is one that resonates with Torres, who has trained in martial arts. That training is evident in the performance, in moments where the artist bobs and weaves, or thrusts out an arm or a leg as if in combat. "A lot of the things I've been interested in in my practice have to do with personal journeys or knowing self or finding strength," they say. "This work is not so much a departure, it's actually really similar."

Torres says a lot of the movements of Muay Thai, Azteca-Chichimeca, and Folklórico are similar, with a lot of time spent on one's toes. "You can do everything you want to feel strength, but if you don't know where home is or your ancestry or your relations, it might not ever feel like safety," Torres says. "I have the physical strength, but as far as feeling some wholeness with an idea of the spiritual self—that was what I think was missing." Deepening their relationship with tobacco, and learning its history and connection to Latinidad, has helped bridge that gap.

Though Torres also works in sculpture, ceramics, and other mediums, performance remains their preferred art form. "Through performance, we have a relationship with the body and we have a relationship with a location and other people. Through that, there's always the quest to figure out what space or objects or movement interact to create this physical, emotional experience," they say.

"Sometimes I don't totally understand why I'm making . . . but I feel like they're all connected to this desire to know the earth or know oneself through the earth." **RI**

**@booksnotboys**



Melissa DuPrey (rear) and Lisandra Tena in Paloma Nozicka's *Enough to Let the Light In*, presented by Teatro Vista in this year's Destinos festival. © JOEL MAISONET

## REVIEW

## Stranger things

*Enough to Let the Light In* gives a thriller twist to a couple's secrets.

By EMILY McCLANATHAN

What if the person you love—the one you want to spend the rest of your life with—were to confess a secret so bizarre, so disturbing, that it makes you question whether you know them at all? How do you truly accept every part of a person when you can't begin to understand one of their most deeply held beliefs?

Such questions are at the heart of *Enough to Let the Light In*, a world premiere psychological thriller by Mexican American playwright Paloma Nozicka, produced by Teatro Vista and copresented at Steppenwolf's 1700 Theater. Director Georgette Verdin and the two costars skillfully balance suspenseful staging, complete with some hair-raising jump scares, and the raw emotions of a relationship under immense strain.

Melissa DuPrey (Dr. Sara Ortiz on ABC's *Grey's Anatomy*) and Lisandra Tena (Lola Guerrero on AMC's *Fear the Walking Dead*) play Marc and Cynthia, two women who have been together for only eight months but are ready to commit to each other for good. Marc has a successful therapy practice, and Cynthia

is an artist who used to paint professionally but now works in retail at an art supply store. On the night when we meet the two lovers, Cynthia invites Marc to stay over at her house for the first time. Indeed, she has never even let her partner set foot past her front door—an early revelation that immediately raises questions, given the evident intimacy between the two.

The show maintains a lighthearted tone at first as Marc and Cynthia settle in for a happy evening together. DuPrey and Tena share a playful, sweet chemistry, but their lively banter is soon underscored by foreboding hints at what's ahead. Cynthia acts strangely territorial about a certain closet door, insisting that Marc hang her coat elsewhere and that the door remain slightly ajar, laughing off these demands by saying she's a bit OCD.

We also glimpse another odd habit of Cynthia's: pouring out a bowl of dry cereal and leaving it in the living room. Later, when Cynthia is alone in the room, she whispers a spine-chilling question, "Are you there?" into the dark closet. The house itself seems as

jumpy as its owner—doors open on their own, a painting repeatedly falls off the wall, and mysterious sounds cause you to tune in closely to any ambient noise in the theater, wondering if it's part of the show.

When Cynthia suggests a game of Two Truths and a Lie, secrets slowly begin to come to light. It would be a shame to reveal too many plot points, so I'll keep the spoilers to a minimum. We learn that Cynthia had a previous marriage and a child before meeting Marc and that her family was torn apart by a terrible tragedy. While this news is shocking to Marc, it pales in comparison to Cynthia's next confession: she claims to know why the house seems haunted, and her explanation shakes Marc to the core. As a good therapist, Marc insists that she would never use the term "crazy," but her professional instincts kick in as she realizes that her partner is traumatized and needs help.


Under Verdin's direction, the pacing of this production is exceptionally well done. The comfortable normalcy of the early scenes is punctuated with enough unsettling notes to keep the viewer on edge. Tena is quite effective in her delivery of Cynthia's bombshell revelations, and the action gradually builds to a climax that justifies the moniker of "thriller." The quality work of the creative team, especially the scenic design by Sotirios Livaditis and sound design by Stefanie M. Senior, is key to the success of the jump scares.

While it's certainly thrilling, the psychological aspects of this psychological thriller are equally as compelling. Cynthia bares her soul about what motherhood has cost her, especially as someone who didn't want children in the first place. Despite her love for her child, the loss of her previous life as a promising young artist—and the attendant loss of her sense of self—led her to dark places. For readers of Toni Morrison, there are distinct echoes of *Be-loved*, particularly in the haunted house trope and its connection to maternal guilt.

For Marc, the evening's events provide a harrowing test of her love for Cynthia and her commitment to this relatively new relationship. When her partner asks her to believe something that defies reason, Marc is torn between logic and love. Complicating matters, Cynthia raises the point that Marc herself, a regular churchgoer, believes in an unseen

God and still talks to her late father. How is this different from Cynthia's extraordinary claims? Marc struggles to come up with a good response.

The play ends ambiguously, leaving room for speculation about what's really going on in this creepy old house and how these two women will navigate their future together (or not). None of the questions it raises are tied up with a neat bow, but this feels like an honest approach. Everyone brings baggage to a relationship, if not secrets as strange as Cynthia's, and it would feel contrived to end with pat answers here. No one would wish to have their relationship stress-tested in such an extreme manner, but the show prompts reflection on what it means to accept someone's whole self when you love them.

A final note: *Enough to Let the Light In* is part of the fifth Destinos: Chicago International Latino Theater Festival. With 13 productions across Chicago and Aurora, the festival runs through mid-October (some shows continue into November), and showcases new works by Latino theater artists and companies from Chicago, the U.S., and Latin America. This year's festival and Teatro Vista's production are both dedicated to the late Myrna Salazar, cofounder and executive director of the Chicago Latino Theater Alliance, the organization that coproduces Destinos along with the National Museum of Mexican Art, the International Latino Cultural Center, and the Puerto Rican Arts Alliance. 

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Monica Saucedo in *Horizonte*, photo by Dean Paul.

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Cloud Gate Dance Theatre of Taiwan, photo by LEE Chia-yeh.

# THEATER

## OPENING

### RR Feast of feats

Cabaret ZaZou is a slightly slimmed-down Teatro ZinZanni.

Picking up where Teatro ZinZanni left off, the newest attraction under the medium top (that is, the classic circus-meets-Victorian-bordello spiegelent in the Hotel Cambria), Cabaret ZaZou's *Luminaire* is pretty much the same thing—but still a good option if you're looking to splash out on a downtown extravaganza. Under the tent's glittery mirrors and chandeliers, a contortionist (the astounding Ulzii Mergen) contorts, a clown (the inimitable Frank Ferrante, formerly known as "the Caesar" with ZinZanni) cavorts, and juggler Viktor Kee and aerialists Trio Vortex keep balls and their bodies moving overhead with astonishing precision.

With blistering chief vocalists James Harkness and Liv Warfield blasting the tent's roof off with renditions of "What's Goin' On," "Willow Weep for Me," and "Father Figure," the music blends soul, jazz, rock, and pop as a soundtrack for the featherweight storyline involving Ferrante's bellboy, Fortissimo, trying to find and win the forgiveness of his lost love. With the help of volunteers from the audience, he enacts rituals from his hometown in Italy's "Feast of Forgiveness," which at one point involves a cunning rendition of "The Impossible Dream," played on desk bells.

It's all very silly stuff, but Ferrante remains an ingratiating host and a dab hand at finding the right volunteers and putting them at ease. And the circus acts are as breathtaking as ever. If you've already seen ZinZanni and loved it, the show's for you. If you haven't but are in the mood for a lighthearted performance with heartstopping interludes of circus arts, then *Luminaire* can light the way to a fun night out. —KERRY REID **LUMINAIRE** Open run: Wed-Sat 7 PM, Sun noon, Hotel Cambria, 32 W. Randolph, 312-488-0900, [broadwayinchicago.com](http://broadwayinchicago.com), \$75-\$185 (most tickets include meal)

### RR Split personality with a twist

Idle Muse's take on Jekyll/Hyde dissects gender and class politics.

Idle Muse Theatre Company's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* is good, dark Halloween-season entertainment, especially if you're a fan of the Hammer/Amicus/American International Pictures-style of lurid rethinking of Victorian horror classics. Adapted by Michael Dalberg and directed by Morgan Manasa, this production ups the sex-and-violence aspects of Robert Louis Stevenson's 1886 story of morally upright Dr. Henry Jekyll, who concocts a potion that transforms him into wantonly murderous Edward Hyde—the embodiment of Jekyll's own hidden evil urges.

Dalberg's crisp, epigrammatic script turns Henry Jekyll into Henri Jekyll (Brandi Jimenez Lee), whose ambitions are thwarted by the sexism of London's medical establishment. Henri is romantically drawn to her straitlaced solicitor, Gabriel Utterson (Shane Richlen), as is he to her. But demonic, lustful Hyde (the commanding Jack Sharkey) keeps intruding, eager to wreak vengeance on the men who Henri feels have wronged her, including fellow physician Hastie Lanyon (Joel Thompson) and corrupt aristocrat Sir Danvers Carew (played by understudy Ross Compton at the performance I saw).

Having Jekyll and Hyde played by separate actors deprives the audience of a transformation scene, traditionally the high point of Jekyll/Hyde movies and plays.



*The Ugly One* at Trap Door Theatre 📍 J. MICHAEL GRIGGS



*Tebas Land* at Destinos: The Chicago International Latino Theater Festival 📍 ROGELIO OLGUÍN

But there's plenty of payoff in the alter egos' heated arguments—the external manifestation of Jekyll's interior monologues—and the malevolent glee with which Sharkey imbues Hyde is delicious in the ripe Vincent Price/Christopher Lee tradition. Sound designer L.J. Luthringer's pounding techno background music adds a contemporary intensity to the Gothic tale. —ALBERT



*The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* at Idle Muse 📍 STEVEN TOWNSEND/DISTANT ERAS

**WILLIAMS** *THE STRANGE CASE OF DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE* Through 10/23: Thu-Sat 8 PM, Sun 3 PM, the Edge Off-Broadway, 1133 W. Catalpa, 773-340-9438, [idlemuse.org](http://idlemuse.org), \$20 (\$15 students and seniors, \$10 Thu industry nights)

### RR Whose life is it, anyway?

*Tebas Land* maps the territory between artist and subject.

What is an artist's relationship to their art? The complexities of that question form the central story in Franco-Uruguayan playwright Sergio Blanco's *Tebas Land*, now appearing under the direction of Argentinean director Juan Parodi in its U.S. premiere as part of the fifth Destinos: Chicago International Latino Theater Festival. Presented by the Chicago Latino Theater Alliance in collaboration with the National Museum of Mexican Art, the show is performed in Spanish with English subtitles.

*Tebas Land* tells the story of S (Esteban Schemberg), a playwright seeking to create a project around the story of Martín (Tommy Rivera-Vega), a young man who murdered his father. Through several meetings on a prison basketball court, the pair gets to know each other as S gives Martín a space to share his story in his own words.

Guided by his artistic vision, S initially intends to understand Martín's decisions to kill his father and to unravel the psyche of a parricide before, during, and after his crime. As their meetings progress, questions emerge about the complexities of portrayal and what it means to represent someone else's story. The line between the artist and his subject becomes increasingly obscured, impacting S's final vision for his performance.

Parodi and both performers skillfully illustrate the intricacies and subtleties of S and Martín's relationship, whilst centering the play's most critical questions. The central relationship is elevated by the play's unique structure, which is distinctly and sometimes humorously meta and weaves thoughtful parallels between Martín and the myth of Oedipus. —KATIE POWERS **TEBAS LAND** Through 10/9: Thu-Sat 7:30 PM, Sun 3:30 PM, Chicago Dramatists, 1105 W. Chicago, [destinosfest.org](http://destinosfest.org), \$20-\$25. In Spanish with English subtitles.

### RR Temporary beauty

Trap Door's *The Ugly One* is a cautionary tale.

Lette (Dennis Bisto) assumes that since he's the inventor of his company's latest product, he'll be the one to present it at the big upcoming corporate event. But then his coworkers and wife reveal a secret kept from him his entire life: his hideous face. No one would ever buy his genius invention when he looks like that! Thrown into existential turmoil, Lette is convinced to undergo unproven and radical plastic surgery under the knife of the ghoulish Scheffler (Alexis DawTyne) to change his looks. The operation succeeds too well and overnight he becomes the envy of everyone he meets.

The transformation from an ugly talent to a universally adored Adonis isn't a fit made to last. With fame and riches come envy and paranoia. Soon Lette spends most of his time clinging to fool's gold rather than satisfaction at work or happiness at home. He's trying to hold on to something he never even wanted before he got his new face. Marius von Mayenburg's 2007 horror comedy gets a bracing, utterly contemporary interpretation with Trap Door under Michael Mejia's direction. Lette's desperate striving for hollow beauty will be familiar to anyone who scrolls Instagram, and Scheffler's triumphant declaration that she's an artist rather than a doctor will evoke countless unwatchable reality TV shows. Like an old-fashioned fairy tale, this brash, over-the-top show reminds us to be careful what we wish for. —DMITRY SAMAROV **THE UGLY ONE** Through 10/29: Thu-Sat 8 PM, Trap Door Theatre, 1655 W. Cortland, [trapdoortheatre.com](http://trapdoortheatre.com), \$25 (two for one Thu) 📍





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## INTERVIEW

# 'Let's make the funniest movie we can make'

Billy Eichner and Luke Macfarlane discuss their new LGBTQ+ film *Bros*, which brings equal parts comedy and authenticity to theaters.

By **ADAM MULLINS-KHATIB**

**B**ros, directed by Nicholas Stoller, written by Northwestern alumnus Billy Eichner and Stoller, is a film that prides itself on a couple of firsts: the first romantic comedy from a major studio focusing on gay men and Eichner as the first openly gay man to write and star in a studio picture. Featuring an LGBTQ+ principal cast, the film hilariously threads the needle in its portrayal of common complications across all romantic relationships, while never sacrificing the uniqueness of LGBTQ+ experiences.

I sat down with Eichner and costar Luke Macfarlane—who play protagonists Bobby and Aaron, respectively—to discuss the joy of the theatrical experience, bringing the film from idea to reality, and the exuberant messiness of loving both complicated people and communities. What follows has been edited for length and clarity.

**Adam Mullins-Khatib: When you spoke to the audience after the screening last night, you spoke to the importance of sitting together in a theater and laughing. What does that really mean to you?**

**Billy Eichner:** I think we've forgotten how much fun it is to sit in a movie theater with people and laugh for a couple of hours, you know? It's an experience I grew up having all the time that we took for granted. A lot of the movies that get released in theaters are pretty dark and gritty and cynical, or they're harm movies, you know, they're meant to scare people. And I love a lot of those movies, nothing against those movies, but, you know, there's something about experiencing [comedy] with hundreds of other people that I think is very comforting and delightful and makes you feel good about life. So, I hope that *Bros* gives people that experience.

**Luke Macfarlane:** Again, we were for the last maybe five to six minutes kind of waiting in the hallway and listening, and I forgot how much I like listening to people respond to something. I've seen the movie enough times now that I can not just watch a movie, but also listen to the audience watch the movie. And that's delightful, absolutely delightful.

**I love all kinds of movies, but it's sad, losing that experience of just being in that room and laughing together, not just being nervous or scared or anxious together.**

**Eichner:** Right, or suffering through a four-hour movie together. And, for LGBTQ movies, the few that we've got, they've so often been about the suffering of being gay. About the torture of the closet. They're period pieces about tortured gay, gay cowboy, queer people, and we're getting beaten up and we're dying of several different diseases, and we're being played by straight male movie stars. So, we don't even get to play the roles where we're dying! And look, those stories are important to tell . . . but we also fall in love and make each other laugh a lot. My experience of being gay is and has been pretty joyful. Most of the time when it has been complicated or challenging, it's been in the way that being a human is complicated and challenging for everyone straight or LGBTQ. So again, this is a rare movie, and I'm glad to be giving people that experience and I hope they take us up on it.

**Were there any particular points that struck you as critical in the development process of bringing this idea from inception to the theaters?**

**Eichner:** Sort of, yeah. You know it's the first movie I've ever written and the first movie I've ever starred in. But, I didn't make it by myself.



Luke Macfarlane as Aaron and Billy Eichner as Bobby in *Bros* © UNIVERSAL PICTURES

had never met him before. I read the script . . . and immediately had that feeling, "Oh, oh boy, this is, this is good." Not only because it was hilarious, but because it really spoke to something that I identified with. And then I went in, I auditioned, and it felt really good. . . . We sat down in conversation before and after, and we've talked about this a couple times, but the Garth Brooks thing [Brooks is Aaron's favorite musician, much to Bobby's dismay] actually came out of a real conversation that happened during filming.

**Eichner:** On set! A few weeks into filming.

**Macfarlane:** On set. And Billy was like, "I'm going to put it in." And there were other things that he just sort of threw in that didn't ultimately make it in the movie that were just based on conversations and how he and I are different and how we take up two different sort of spectrums of the cis, white male spectrum.

**Were there any favorite moments that didn't make it into the film?**

**Eichner:** We shot 170 pages. With the extra time that, unfortunately, COVID gave us—because we got shut down about a month before we were supposed to start shooting in early 2020 and then a year and a half passed by—we just kept writing more stuff and more funny stuff and more jokes. So, by the time we got to shoot, we had 170 pages. To Nick's credit, he somehow found a way to shoot it all, because the number of shoot days we got didn't increase.

Yeah, oh my god, there were so many jokes. I think some of the set pieces that we had to cut will end up on the DVD or something like that. We had a whole Pride parade sequence, a huge Pride parade that falls apart where everyone starts fighting. I love that scene, but ultimately, some things were a little, in the context of the movie, too silly. It's not a sketch comedy show, it's a real, grounded story we're trying to tell, one with a lot of comedy and a lot of laughs, but sometimes even when things were funny on paper, it just felt like a different tone. They couldn't fit in the movie as much as we loved them. There's a lot of those. And I think maybe you'll see them in the extras. **✎**

I made it with two very experienced guys who made a lot of great major studio comedies, Judd Apatow and Nick Stoller. *Bridesmaids*, *The 40-Year-Old Virgin*, *Forgetting Sarah Marshall*, and the list goes on and on.

I love those movies. We're comedy guys, first and foremost, you don't sit down and say, "I'm writing a historic comedy, or I'm going to write a gay movie, etc." We sat down and said, "Let's make the funniest movie we can make."

But also, and I told those guys from the beginning—and to their credit, they were always backing me up on it—I said, "It has to be authentic." That's what I want to give people. I want LGBTQ folks and the gay men that the movie is essentially about to see themselves reflected in a way we have not gotten nearly enough of over the years, especially on a big screen in the movie theater. And I think it's important and fun and exciting for straight people, who might think they know what it's like to be gay based on a few wacky sitcom characters they've seen over the years, but they don't really know.

I told Nick and Judd from the beginning, we can't just do *When Harry Met Sally* and slip in two gay guys, you know? We don't play by those rules. And the movie has to reflect that. So that was really important to me.

**Macfarlane:** The rules are different.

**Luke, in terms of your involvement in this film, can you kind of speak to how you became aware of it? How do you know Billy, or was this your first interaction?**

**Macfarlane:** It was very much the old-fashioned way. My agent sent me a script and said, "This is a great part." I was aware of Billy but

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REVIEW

# Marilyn-Monroe; or, *Blonde*

Andrew Dominik’s epic allegory has Melvillian ambition.

By KATHLEEN SACHS

“For all men tragically great are made so through a certain morbidity. Be sure of this, O young ambition, all mortal greatness is but disease.”

—Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*

Imagine my surprise when, as a preteen girl with a budding interest in film—for whom the galaxy of the Hollywood star system was an

accessible inroad to the vast universe of cinema—I checked out Joyce Carol Oates’s 2000 novel *Blonde* from the library, thinking it was a straightforward biography of the mythical star.

“There came Death hurtling along the Boulevard in waning sepia light,” begins Oates’s haunting prelude. I was perplexed. I’d known that Marilyn Monroe had died young and

that she’d faced a lifetime of struggle. With images of Lorelei Lee and Sugar “Kane” Kowalczyk dancing, singing, and playing ukulele in my head (these roles from *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* [1953] and *Some Like It Hot* [1959], respectively, feature prominently both in Oates’s novel and Andrew Dominik’s adaptation of it), I hadn’t fully comprehended the gravitas of Marilyn’s allure past the multitude of cheap

clothes and home-good tchotchkes on which her face was plastered.

But just as the hazy, clip-art likenesses of Marilyn on rhinestone-studded T-shirts and aluminum signs aren’t accurate representations of the star as a person, nor is Oates’s novel or any of its adaptations. “Mr. Melville obviously lacks the realist’s conviction that the bare facts of human life are in themselves eloquent,” wrote esteemed critic and biographer Carl Van Doren in an essay on *Moby-Dick* for a 1924 issue of *The Bookman* literary journal, “and so permits himself to lean a great deal upon certain misty symbols to give his meaning its rich colors and ominous shadows.”

Rich colors certainly distinguish the meaning of Marilyn, from her bright red lipstick to the Technicolor glamor of films such as *Gentlemen* and the earlier *Niagara* (1953), as do ominous shadows. Just as death hurtles along at the beginning of Oates’s book, a montage of severe chiaroscuro shots depicting how the white light of Marilyn Monroe is illuminated against those shadows—set to the film’s correspondingly portentous score by Nick Cave and Warren Ellis—begins this controversial adaptation. New Zealand-born, Australia-based writer-director Dominik (*The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford* [2007], *Killing Them Softly* [2012]) started adapting Oates’s novel in 2011, with Jessica Chastain at one point attached to star as Marilyn, the part which later went to Cuban actress

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

## FILM

Ana de Armas.

What's there left to say about why *Blonde* is controversial? It's rated NC-17, the first film of its kind to be released on a streaming service; there's nudity, sex scenes, and, most disturbing, several scenes depicting sexual and physical violence against the main character. And there's not one but two scenes shot from inside a vagina as it's being prepared for an abortion.

Thus some viewers have criticized the film for what it's not and what it could never be—a revisionist history that would somehow make Marilyn's life and legacy less sorrowful. These viewers would likely prefer that *Blonde* focused more on facets of her personality (or, should I say, persona; much of *Blonde* the novel and the film are about Marilyn Monroe the construct versus Norma Jeane the person) and career that audiences could perceive as contrary to the myth of Marilyn as a poor little rich girl whose extraordinary beauty made her susceptible to exploitation from both men and the entertainment industry at large. Many also make note of Monroe's intellectual curiosity, pointing that out as something a less offensive text would have chosen to highlight.

Such criticism, however, is not about the film, but rather the ongoing mythology surrounding Marilyn the construct, which is inherently what Oates's novel and Dominik's film seek to epitomize. The former has said that Monroe is her "Moby Dick, the powerful galvanizing image about which an epic might be constructed, with myriad levels of meaning and significance." Monroe is in turn the American public's white whale, that which we seek to dominate and claim as our own. The discussion over depictions of Monroe are often less about the depictions themselves and more about who has the right to tell her story and what version of the story it should be.

Dominik follows his source material faithfully, altering it only by omission. (The novel is several hundred pages long, so naturally a screenwriter would need to be prudent about what to keep in and what to leave out. Joyce Chopra, for example, directed an adaptation of the novel for television in 2001, largely focusing on the same sections of the book that Dominik does with a few key differentiators). It starts at the beginning of the story, with the troubled mother of little Norma Jeane Baker planting in her daughter's head the false hope that her absent father is actually a Hollywood titan. Those familiar with the lore will recog-

nize the image of her supposed father hanging on the wall of the dilapidated bungalow where she and her mother reside; she grew up thinking that her father was Clark Gable, a prophetic misconception that would come full circle when she costarred with him in John Huston's *The Misfits* (1961).

These parts are especially fraught. Norma Jeane's mother, Gladys Pearl Baker (Julianne Nicholson, who's harrowing in the turn), is shown trying to drown her daughter in a bathtub, which results in the mother being institutionalized and Norma Jeane being sent to an orphanage. The film glosses over other facets of Monroe's early life, such as her first marriage at age 16 and when she was discovered as a pinup model for cheesecake magazines, jumping instead to her first movie audition. Before the latter event, she's raped by the studio head (implied to be Darryl F. Zanuck from 20th Century Fox); after, she's ghoulishly mocked during the screen test. This passage is in color, one gimmick of the film being that it's in color when it depicts Norma Jeane and in black-and-white when it's Marilyn. That preternatural intelligence that so many claim goes unrecognized is on display during her screen test, as she compares the script of the film she's auditioning for to Chekhov, which prompts condescending scoffs from the male studio employees.

Nevertheless getting the part as a result of the rape, Marilyn's star is soon on the rise. Here begins the most hallucinatory part of the film, wherein she enters into a ménage à trois with Charlie "Cass" Chaplin Jr. (Xavier Samuel) and Edward G. Robinson Jr. (Evan Williams), boys about town with daddy issues (being the sons of their respective seniors) and substance abuse problems. This sexual and emotional algebra problem eventually yields a pregnancy, something Marilyn had long yearned for; however, realizing that her mother's mental health issues could be passed down to her child and having been offered a part in Howard Hawks's *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, she undergoes her first abortion. The relationship between the three is perhaps the most embellished aspect of whatever parts of Marilyn's real life exist in this allegorical rendering; she allegedly was involved with the men, but not in a sexually charged throuple as depicted in the film.

Then she meets her second husband, the Ex-Athlete, baseball legend Joe DiMaggio (Bobby Cannavale), who is possessive of Mari-

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lyn and becomes abusive toward her, especially after the stunt for Billy Wilder's *The Seven Year Itch* (1955) that found her standing atop a subway grate, letting her white dress blow up in front of thousands of onlookers. Next comes her relationship with *The Playwright*, Arthur Miller (Adrien Brody, excellent in the role), who appeals to Marilyn's intellectual side; he seems genuinely interested in her notes on his play *After the Fall*. They soon wed, and a relationship that seems idyllic becomes fraught after Marilyn suffers a miscarriage of their much-wanted child.


Now in an emotional free fall and separated from Miller, Marilyn enters into an affair with President John F. Kennedy, which becomes the symbol of her impending demise. She's brutally assaulted by the president, then forced to have an abortion against her will, all leading up to the day Death comes knocking with its special delivery.

I'd argue that *Blonde* exists independently of some criticisms that have been leveled against it but not that it's always a good film. One can't deny the boldness of Dominik's artistic choices. The visual delineations between Norma Jeane and Marilyn Monroe, for example, are successful, even striking. Other choices, like the frequent shifts in aspect ratio, are ambitious but not as affecting.

Some are outright disastrous, as in multiple sequences where what looks like a 3D ultrasound of a baby does a Malickian song and dance in an attempt to impart the meaning of life upon its poor, defenseless mother. Shots during the honeymoon phase of Miller and Monroe's marriage (meant to mimic real-life photographs of the two) are almost unbearably schmaltzy, especially as Cave and Ellis's nightmarishly ethereal score plays alongside

it.

Naturally the question of whether Dominik, a male director, is qualified to depict such specifically female issues has arisen. I can't make a case for the film being feminist one way or the other, if only because that isn't the point. Dominik's depiction of Marilyn's suffering, excessive though it may be, is aggressively confrontational in such a way that some have termed broaching on torture porn. An alternate viewpoint could be that it's intentionally repellant at times to underscore the depths of her hardship. I can't help but think that in many ways it's us, the viewers, who are still asking too much of Marilyn: we want to acknowledge her pain, but not too much, attempting to forge a balance that may not have existed. Perhaps we want Marilyn to have been a certain way in spite of her pain, which represents yet another projection onto the eternally blank slate.

We search not for the real Marilyn Monroe but the idea of Marilyn that conforms with our respective image of her. Thus the demand that such an undertaking be wholly representative is difficult at best, hypocritical at worst. "*Blonde* . . . is a work of fiction and imagination," writes literary critic Elaine Showalter in a review of the novel, "and Oates plays with, rearranges, and invents the details of Monroe's life in order to achieve a deeper poetic and spiritual truth." Whether or not Oates and Dominik succeeded in doing so is, like the mythos of Marilyn, ultimately a matter of personal interpretation, of belief in one's conviction. To again quote *Moby-Dick*: "Let faith oust fact; let fancy oust memory; I look deep down and do believe." 

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*Catherine Called Birdy* ALEX BAILEY/AMAZON CONTENT SERVICES LLC

NOW PLAYING

**RR** *The African Desperate*

At the beginning of Martine Syms's debut narrative feature, sculptor Palace (Diamond Stingily, also an artist in real life) is shown receiving her MFA from an art school in upstate New York. Four white faculty members bestow the honor, but only after offering a range of supercilious (some even outright racist) critiques and patronizing banalities. This kicks off Palace's final 24 hours as an exhausted graduate student, who vows to skip the end-of-summer party but instead finds herself drawn to the debauchery. Syms's work—which ranges from performance art to gallery installations to this more straightforward narrative endeavor—is compelled by a preternaturally propulsive energy that sustains its momentum even as she explores various forms of expression. As Palace navigates her final day at the college, Syms inserts multimedia quirks into the coming-of-age proceedings, such as when Palace, doing her makeup for the night, assumes the peculiar dialect of a social media influencer filming a tutorial; trenchant memes occasionally pop up in the top right corner of the screen, flashing by so quick as to be illegible but hilarious nonetheless. It's through these means that the film offers wry commentary on everything from undecipherable artspeak to racism. (An exchange between Palace and a faculty member extolling the virtues of a rapper he heard an interview with on NPR's *Fresh Air*, to which Palace replies "What's *Fresh Air*?", is one of the funniest things I've seen in a film all year.) Cowritten by Syms and Rocket Caleshu, its script is so good as to seem unwritten, the stuff of real-life folly; Stingily's performance is similarly ingenious. —KATHLEEN SACHS 97 min. [Gene Siskel Film Center](#)

**RR** *Bros*

In the romantic comedy *Bros*, Bobby (Billy Eichner) recently expanded his career as a LGBTQ+ history podcast host into lead curator of the first major LGBTQ+ museum in New York. After a meet-cute of

sorts with not-his-usual-type Aaron (Luke Macfarlane), Bobby struggles to pair his feelings with his self-described permanently single lifestyle.

Written by Eichner and longtime comedy veteran Nicholas Stoller, and directed by Stoller, *Bros* toes the line between genuine moments of sweetness and acerbically cutting sarcastic wit. Modes of relationships differ, and *Bros* is comfortable in highlighting those differences for all their joys and faults.

Where the film truly succeeds is in its ability to deftly balance universal experience with individuality. While there are obviously commonalities between the romantic experiences of gay and straight people across gender identities, or even more narrowly between cis white men as a subcategory, the diversity of specific experience is critical to Eichner's script, as even within narrow categories there are vastly varied modes of interaction, openness, and perspective. Of course, finding shared experience and opening oneself up to be surprised by those who fall outside of our initial expectations is a common trope in romantic comedies, but Eichner and Stoller's script is inventive enough to expand the trope in entertaining ways, and Macfarlane brings depth of performance to a character that could otherwise fall into cliché.

Ultimately, *Bros* is a genuinely funny movie with nuanced emotional heft. It's a refreshing and vulnerable take on the genre from a perspective so rarely seen in Hollywood filmmaking and a reminder of the joy and laughter that's there to be found in the chaotic minutia of human relationships if we're open to finding it. —ADAM MULLINS-KHATIB R, 115 min. [Wide release in theaters](#)

*Catherine Called Birdy*

Based on Karen Cushman's well-loved 1994 children's novel, Lena Dunham presents a girl's coming-of-age story set in 13th-century England. The sets and costumes look period-correct, but this is no attempt at historic verisimilitude à la Robert Eggers's *The Witch*. Birdy is the kind of impossible, irreverent girl Dunham special-

izes in. Spoiled, defiant, but also capable of empathy beyond her years, she's an almost prototypical heroine for a children's book.

The plot turns on the family's money problems, the solution being to marry Birdy off for as much of a dowry as she can command. Of course the girl fights this plan tooth and nail, sending a succession of suitors running away screaming. Using contemporary pop music and employing 2022 dialogue—albeit peppered with occasional medieval lingo—Dunham has fashioned a teen rom-com in period garb. It reminded me a bit of Sofia Coppola's *Marie Antoinette*, though pitched to tweens. Those familiar with Dunham's previous work will be surprised by the gentleness of approach and the conventionality of the story's resolution. In the end, Birdy comes to terms with the need to do what's best for her family and to grow up and become like everyone else. I was very aware while watching that as a 51-year-old man I was not who this was made for. But is it a good message to send young girls that they can be bad and do what they want for a little while but when the rubber hits the road they must toe the line? —DMITRY SAMAROV PG-13, 108 min. [Wide release in theaters and streaming on Prime Video](#)

*Don't Worry Darling*

The saying goes that all press is good press, but how true can that be if alleged drama surrounding a film overshadows the merits of the film itself? *Don't Worry Darling* is the second movie to fall into this trap this summer, though it does manage to still bring on the thrills, mostly thanks to another potent performance from Florence Pugh. Her range is on full display as Alice, a 1950s housewife who begins to suspect that her husband's company is up to something sinister within their utopian community. Alice, her husband, Jack (a dull but good enough Harry Styles), and all the company employees along with their wives live isolated from the rest of the world, hardly able to remember their lives from before they arrived. The only rule is that they stay within the company town, where they're safe. Chris Pine delivers a disturbing performance that's part televangelist and part cult leader, totally nailing that brand of big, inspiring speeches that seem poignant in delivery but are empty when you actually listen to the words being said.

Piecing together what's actually going on in this seemingly idyllic community proves tougher than expected, which primes for a tense twist in the final act, and the film's introductory scenes are truly creepy as Alice begins to question her sanity, the world, and the people around her. The issue is in the middle: once Alice is convinced that something is wrong, the movie ought

to pick up the pace to maintain momentum. Instead, it drudges on with a shot-by-shot repetitiveness that's likely intentional but ends up being ineffective. There's even a pump-fake twist and by this point, you're begging for the real reveal to be, well, revealed. When the truth finally does come out, the explanation is interesting but flimsy, and after waiting so long to find out, it's unsatisfying. Ultimately, *Don't Worry Darling* boasts a (mostly) talented cast with a strong start but can't follow through on its promises. —NOËLLE D. LILLEY R, 122 min. [Wide release in theaters](#)

**RR** *Riotsville, U.S.A.*

After protests in many major American cities shook the country's establishment in the mid-60s, Lyndon Johnson assembled what would come to be known as the Kerner Commission (after Illinois governor Otto Kerner, who headed it) to study and recommend solutions to the racial and economic issues that inspired the widespread unrest. Their report, published by Bantam Books in paperback, quickly became a bestseller. But the sweeping reforms the commission called for were mostly ignored, except for a line item toward the end to boost funding for law enforcement. Some of this new money went to the construction of model towns on army bases in Virginia and Georgia. Dubbed "Riotsville," they were stage sets where police departments and the military playacted command and control tactics to quell inner-city turmoil, complete with bleachers full of officers and politicians cheering and laughing as soldiers dressed as "hooligans" and "rabble-rousers" got their heads bashed in and helicopters clouded all of the ersatz Main Street with tear gas.

Sierra Pettengill's disquieting documentary uses only archival footage shot by the military and clips from period news coverage to explore this uncanny episode in the country's history. As fake as the towns and protestors obviously were, the training law enforcement groups received in these Riotsvilles was all too real. Their violent strategies to snuff out unrest outside the Republican convention in Miami and the Democratic one in Chicago in 1968 were taught on those sets. While Pettengill's sympathy for the largely left-wing activists and community organizers is clear, her use of strictly period footage that has rarely been screened before—and certainly never for a wide audience such as a major broadcast network—lends her film a depth that would've been absent if she presented a bunch of contemporary talking heads explaining the flaws and lapses of the establishment. These odd, sometimes amateurish frames put the viewer back into that tumultuous time in a way that no amount of outraged words ever could. —DMITRY SAMAROV 91 min. [Gene Siskel Film Center](#)

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## SHOWING *for one another* UP

JazStarr  THOUGHTPOET

Poet and organizer JazStarr builds bridges on the page and in the community.

By **ALEJANDRO HERNANDEZ**

**F**or decades, Chicago's spoken-word poetry community has made influential waves across the city and country. Open-mike nights are a proving ground for young creatives to discover their voices and hone their crafts. One of the unsung architects of this community is JazStarr, who is now venturing on her path and stepping into her own spotlight as a musician—one who also works tirelessly behind the scenes.

"I came up in the poetry scene under my mentors," JazStarr recently told me. "They really showed me that community can actually be a part of your everyday life if you make it that way, whether that be showing up for a fundraising event or organization, or it be organizing yourself to provide resources for people around you. I don't see myself ever

being an artist that could choose one or the other. It has to be both together. I have to both be an artist and be an activist."

JazStarr credits her grandmother and the west-side block she grew up on with instilling within her an appreciation for the importance of building solidarity within communities. In addition to actively helping to create spaces for young Black and queer creatives, she also organized interventions between Black and Latinx gang members when racial tensions rose following the 2020 protests that were sparked by George Floyd's murder by Minneapolis police officers.

"I felt like everybody around me was doing something and I was just in my own area feeling crazy, because it felt like my brother couldn't walk down the street," she recalled. "This is just not the time for us to be busting



# MUSIC

JazStarr THOUGHTPOET



each other. We need to be focused on the bigger issue at hand. Let's come together because what happened to George Floyd is happening to both [Black and Brown people], and as minorities and POC we should be able to come together to make a bigger push."

JazStarr helped organize a coalition of people from both Black and Brown communities along the south and west sides. The coalition led multiple peace walks in which residents and gang members from predominantly Black neighborhoods would walk into Latino neighborhoods and join their respective residents hand in hand, and vice versa.

After pouring so much of herself into filling the cups of those around her, JazStarr came to a point in her life when she realized she needed to do something for herself. She's spent the better part of the decade supporting others, whether it be through her contributions as

an organizer or as a backup singer. With the release of her debut project *Ambrosia*, she's finally ready to step into her own spotlight.

"It took a lot for me to get to the point of trusting myself to put out music, trusting the process and a lot of growing pains," she lamented. "We were just making music, and making music, and I didn't really have a theme for it. At first, I was just like, 'I do want to see myself complete something for myself.' That's really the energy of this project: showing up for myself, and the execution of starting things and finishing them with intention."

The same way JazStarr showed up for her community for so many years, her community showed up for her to assist in the creation of *Ambrosia*, namely key collaborators Freddie Old Soul and \_stepchild. The project is a nostalgic eight-piece of smooth and seductive neo-soul with subtle hip-hop influences. Jaz-

Starr embarks listeners on a nearly 22-minute journey of love, vulnerability, and spirituality that is easy to relate to. After finally accomplishing something for herself, she intends to continue celebrating as a multidimensional Black woman, and helping give those around her the proper tools to improve themselves and their community,

"It gives a very gratifying feeling to know that you could very much change somebody else's life with music. I want to be able to see people younger than us take this and then keep going until it becomes the culture of Chicago for people to grab their bags and put them to work," she said. "Let's keep the youth productive, hold ourselves accountable, and be emotionally sound Black people in the city of Chicago. That's the goal."

@DroInTheWind\_

JazStarr THOUGHTPOET



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**Dar Williams**

All Request Show • In Maurer Hall

**FRIDAY, OCTOBER 7 8PM**

**Trace Bundy**

In Szold Hall

**SATURDAY, OCTOBER 8 11AM**

Family Concert

**The Okee Dokee Brothers**

In Maurer Hall

**SATURDAY, OCTOBER 8 7:30PM**

**David Wilcox**

with special guest Jean Rohe • In Szold Hall

**SUNDAY, OCTOBER 9 6:30PM**

**Indigenous Peoples' Day**

featuring DJ Shub, Mato, Wayuhi, OPLIAM, and PHNX.WAV • at Logan Square Auditorium, 2539 N. Kedzie Blvd, Logan Square

**MONDAY, OCTOBER 10 8PM**

**Indigenous Peoples' Day**

featuring Indigenous, Chicha Roots, Kichwa Runa, Galguez Laxá, and Dizá • In Maurer Hall

**FRIDAY, OCTOBER 14 8PM**

**Lera Lynn**

In Szold Hall

**FRIDAY, OCTOBER 21 8PM**

**Stephen Kellogg**

In Maurer Hall

**FRIDAY, OCTOBER 21 8PM**

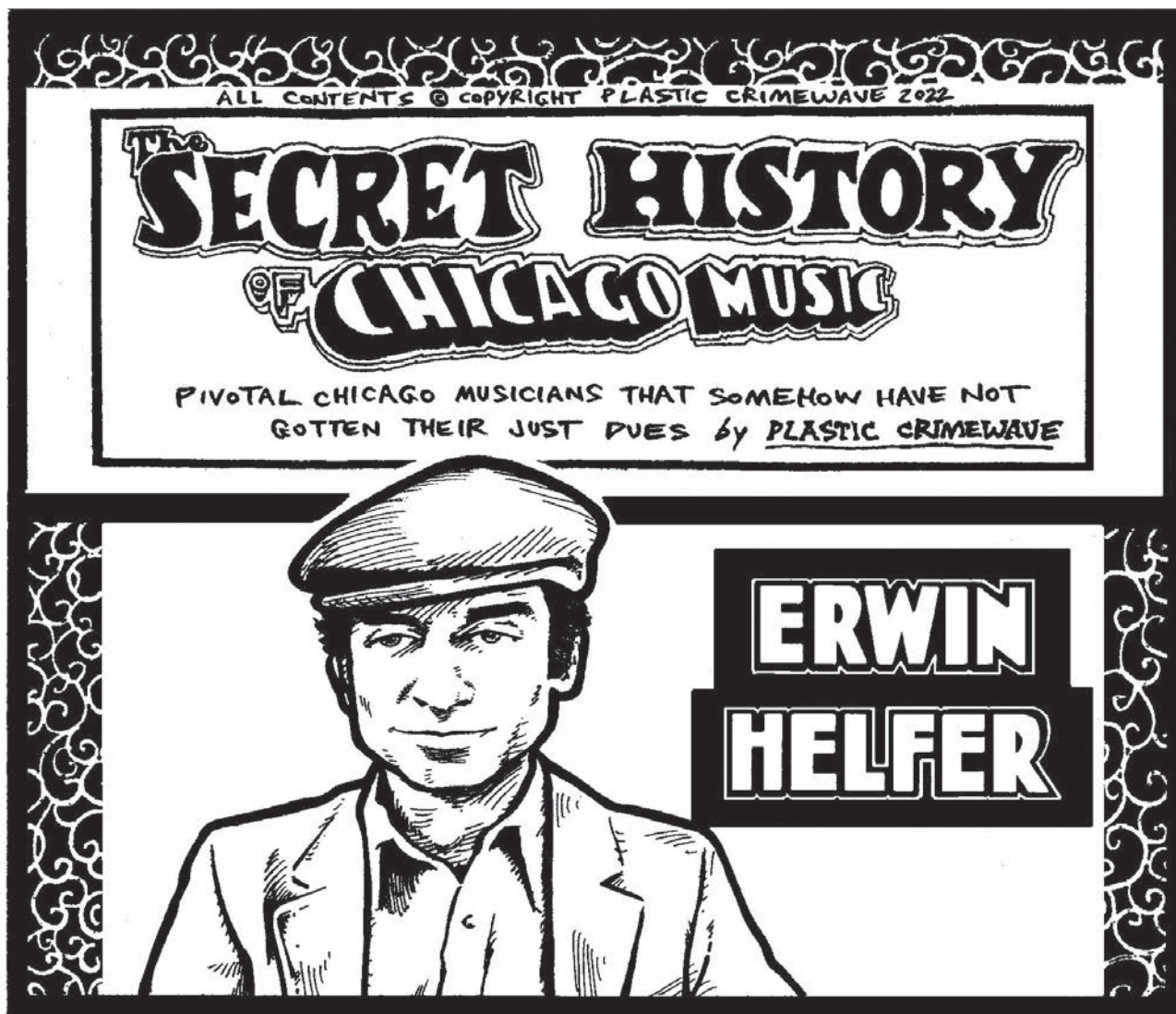
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STEVE KRAKOW

Erwin Helfer. But not only did he survive, he's also returned to his music and teaching career in his 86th year. Let's start from the beginning, though, to emphasize Helfer's extraordinary longevity and influence.

Erwin Helfer was born January 20, 1936, in Chicago, and when he was very young, his father used to throw weekend music parties. "He was a people person," Helfer told Blues Blast Magazine in 2020. "He played washboard bass and jug, and he did a good job at it. I had a couple of 'play' uncles: Charlie, who played ragtime piano, and Si, who played clarinet, and they'd all get together and jam at the house."

At age five or so, Helfer began picking out melodies on a piano his father had bought. "I wanted a piano, and my dad was a practical joker," he recalled in his Blues Blast interview. "When my mom and I went out shopping, we came back and there was a little Wurlitzer piano sitting in the living room. My mom was surprised. She didn't even know about it."

Helfer began developing his own idiosyncratic style, he says, because he didn't have the patience to memorize existing songs note for note. When he was 12, his family moved to Glencoe, and he eventually attended New Trier High School in neighboring Winnetka. In school he fell for what he's called "the sadness, the darkness and the joy" in blues and boogie-woogie music, after discovering New Orleans musicians George Lewis (clarinet) and Bunk Johnson (trumpet).

Helfer also made his professional debut in high school, playing with blues singer Estelle "Mama" Yancey, the widow of influential early boogie-woogie pianist Jimmy Yancey. "She was a holy terror—and a good friend!" he told Blues Blast. "She could swear and drink more than any man on this earth!" Yancey tapped him to fill in for the legendary Little Brother Montgomery for a gig at Indiana University.

"Little Brother didn't want to do it," Helfer said. "I really hadn't played in public at that point, but I made the trip, and, apparently, it was some type of success." The two of them continued working together frequently until Yancey died in 1986 at age 90, and Helfer sometimes did double duty as her booking agent.

## THE SECRET HISTORY OF CHICAGO MUSIC

# Boogie-woogie 2, pandemic 0

Pianist Erwin Helfer has survived more than a virus to carry forward the legacy of the progenitors of blues and jazz.

By STEVE KRAKOW

*Since 2004 Plastic Crimewave (aka Steve Krakow) has used the Secret History of Chicago Music to shine a light on worthy artists with Chicago ties who've been forgotten, underrated, or never noticed in the first place.*

We won't know the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic for many years, not least because they haven't stopped piling up. Bodily sickness, mental illness, financial loss—everyone seems to have been afflicted differently, and the effects on our medical, political, social, and economic systems compound those individual misfortunes. New

variants, vaccine updates, and long COVID are still creating unexpected problems, and in this grotesquely abnormal situation, our leaders have given us little choice but to try to live life as "normally" as we can. For many of us, that isn't normal at all.

COVID nearly took everything from beloved Chicago blues and boogie-woogie pianist

## HEAVY TIMBRE

CHICAGO BOOGIE PIANO

SOLO PERFORMANCES BY WILLIE MABON / SUNNYLAND SLIM  
JIMMY WALKER / BLIND JOHN DAVIS / ERWIN HELFER



Their years together would also inspire one of Helfer's signature compositions, "Stella."

While Helfer was still a teenager, modernist composer Bill Russell took him under his wing. Russell was also a violinist, music historian, producer, and record-store owner—but most important for Helfer, he was a jazz historian, having contributed three essays to the milestone 1939 book *Jazzmen*, which chronicled the New Orleans musicians who'd helped birth the genre. Through Russell, Helfer would meet players of incredible historical significance, including pianist Glover Compton (who played with Jelly Roll Morton), drummer Warren "Baby" Dodds, and gospel goddess Mahalia Jackson. "He took me down to her apartment when she was a 'hair burner'—a beautician," Helfer told *Blues Blast*. "She lived on 37th and Prairie."

When Russell moved to New Orleans, Helfer followed. In the mid-50s he enrolled as a psychology major at Tulane University, but he was really there for the music. He soaked up the sounds of bands at parades and funerals and studied Crescent City pianists such as Leon T. "Archibald" Gross and Professor Longhair. When Helfer met Professor Longhair, the future legend was working as a custodian at a small record store, even though he'd already released what would prove to be his biggest success, "Bald Head," and his classic single "Tipitina" had come out in 1953.

Helfer would continue meeting early practitioners of blues and jazz—including trumpeter-cornetist De De Pierce and his wife, pianist-singer Billie—and this would open more doors for him. In 1956, Helfer was inspired to start his own label, Tone Records, to help the artists he'd met. Tone's sole release was the 1957 compilation *Primitive Piano*, with Billie Pierce, Doug Suggs, James Robinson,

and the Saint Louis-based Speckled Red. It was recognized immediately as an important historical document, and Chicago-based label the Sirens (founded by Steve Dolins, who'd been taking lessons with Helfer) reissued it in 1975 and again in 2003.

Helfer moved back to Chicago in the 60s and earned his bachelor's in music theory at the American Conservatory of Music. (He's always been as big a fan of Bach as he was the blues, but by his own reckoning he's not wired to play classical.) He later moved on to a master's degree in piano pedagogy from Northeastern Illinois University, and his students helped refresh his ears. "I enrolled because I'd gotten bored listening to myself," he told *DownBeat* magazine earlier this year.

Helfer's career started picking up steam in the 1960s. He gave a young Paul Butterfield piano lessons. He played harpsichord on Nick Gravenites's proto-psychedelic 1965 single "Drunken Boat" b/w "Whole Lotta Soul," where Gravenites is billed as "Nick the Greek" (the record also features harmonica from Butterfield and horn freak-outs by Lester Bowie and Roscoe Mitchell, soon to form the Art Ensemble of Chicago). In 1970 he appeared on the Chess Records album *Moogie Woogie*, trying out new synthesizer technology—which he hated. He also played with guitarist Big Joe Williams, keyboardist Jimmy Walker, and folk singer Barbara Dane.

In 1976 Helfer released the now-classic compilation *Heavy Timbre: Chicago Boogie Piano* through the Sirens Records. It attempts to re-create the feel of a "rent party" with tunes by heavy blues pianists such as Blind John Davis, Sunnyland Slim, and Willie Mabon. Helfer also put out his first solo album, *On the Sunny Side of the Street*, for the Flying Fish label in 1979. In the 70s he also toured Europe

Erwin Helfer has frequently released compilations with other blues pianists he wants to honor and promote. These examples, *Heavy Timbre* and *8 Hands on 88 Keys*, are from 1976 and 2002, respectively.

with a killer lineup featuring Chicago guitarists Eddie Taylor and Homesick James and Chicago harmonica player Big John Wrencher.

In the 80s, Helfer started a band with harmonica player and singer Billy Branch and guitarist Pete Crawford. Crawford was also Helfer's business partner in the new Red Beans label, which released albums by the likes of Branch, Mama Yancey, Sunnyland Slim, Johnny "Big Moose" Walker, Blind John Davis, and Otis "Big Smokey" Smothers. During that decade he also cemented a fruitful musical partnership with saxophonist Clark Dean that lasted till Dean's death in 2017.

In 2001, the Sirens released Helfer's album *I'm Not Hungry but I Like to Eat—Blues!*, which earned him a nomination for "Comeback Blues Album of the Year" at the W.C. Handy Awards in 2003. He continued to release albums, and he gigged steadily, holding down residencies at Katerina's, Barrelhouse Flat, Township, and most recently the Hungry Brain on Belmont near Western, where he was still playing every Tuesday right up till the pandemic. He's also appeared at the Chicago Blues Festival as often as not since the mid-80s.

Helfer still lives on the street where he settled in 1968, a gentrifying stretch of North Magnolia Avenue near DePaul University. His block was given the honorary name Erwin Helfer Way in 2006. "I think they put that up because I used to ride my bike—that's how I used to get to my job on the North Side—and after a few drinks, I didn't know where I lived," Helfer explained to the *Chicago Tribune* earlier this year. "So they put that street sign up for me so I could find out where I was going."

The pandemic proved doubly devastating for Helfer. "At least two of the things I love most—playing music and teaching—were strictly unable for me to do," he told the *Tribune*. He didn't catch COVID in the frightening initial months of its spread, but he began slipping into a paranoid and depressive place. "I had no digital skills and couldn't manage my bank account at all, because I always just rode my bike down to the bank, put in my money, or took out my money, and mailed all my bills. This I couldn't do. I started being dysfunctional. Some of my friends caught onto it quickly. They did research into what was the best hos-

pital and got me into Rush University Medical Center. When I went there, I was really in bad shape."

Over a period of six weeks, Helfer underwent 11 sessions of electroconvulsive therapy—yes, that's "shock treatment," but it's not violent anymore, no matter what you saw in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. "I was scheduled for 12, but I didn't need the last one," Helfer told *DownBeat*. In his *Tribune* interview, he sang the treatment's praises. "It was the best therapy that I could've had," he said. "I don't know how it works, but it wasn't painful."

When Helfer got home from the hospital, though, he caught COVID. "[Singer and friend] Katherine Davis, when I moved back in the house, was staying here, taking care of me," he explained to the *Tribune*. "But she was always outside the house, going to the South Side, where she lives. She got COVID, and I got it from her. During that period, I was sick, but she was a lot sicker. I ended up taking care of her—which was fine, because she offered right away to take care of me. She's been a good friend for a long time. And we both have a lot of dirt on each other."

Davis explained her motives to the *Trib*. "There wasn't anybody to help take care of him, so they were talking about putting him in a nursing home," she recalled. "And I said, 'No. I can't let that happen to him.'"

Helfer recovered, thankfully, and in summer 2021 he gradually began performing again, mostly at the Hideout and the Hungry Brain (though he's had to stop riding his bike to gigs). He's back to teaching too, albeit with a much smaller complement of students. In January 2022, he performed at the Old Town School of Folk Music to celebrate his 86th birthday and the release of the 2021 album *Celebrate the Journey* (once again on the Sirens label). Last year he also released an instructional book, *Blues Piano and How to Play It*—and if anyone would know, it's him. Helfer is a fighter, and Chicago blues is richer for it. **FI**

**The radio version of the Secret History of Chicago Music airs on Outside the Loop on WGN Radio 720 AM, Saturdays at 5 AM with host Mike Stephen.**

## MUSIC

ALL AGES FREE

## PICK OF THE WEEK

## Kali Malone's disciplined compositions tune into the church organ's expressive potential

## KALI MALONE

Sat 10/1, 8 PM, Rockefeller Chapel,  
University of Chicago, 5850 S.  
Woodlawn **FREE** **AL**

**STOCKHOLM-BASED**, American-born composer Kali Malone is known for her pipe-organ works, and her path to the instrument was hardly conventional. Five minutes into her first and only organ lesson, she prevailed upon the teacher to let her get inside the instrument. She left with a referral to an organ tuner, with whom she eventually apprenticed. Malone's music doesn't deal with virtuosic display. Instead, she devises rigorous, rule-based compositions whose austerity is paradoxically affecting. On *The Sacrificial Code* (Ideal Recordings), the two-hour 2019 album whose material forms the foundation for this concert, close microphone placement strips the organ of its usual room reverb, revealing the structural integrity of a series of long, slow-motion canons that draw the listener into a meditative state. And on "Pipe Inversions (for Kirnberger III)," Malone's contribution to a 2021 collection of music in just intonation titled *The Harmonic Series II* (Important), she uses that tuning system to set the listener adrift in a wash of sympathetic vibrations that can be felt as much as heard. Because some of her pieces require four hands, Malone sometimes performs with a second musician; her accompanist tonight will be Stephen O'Malley of Sunn O))), Khanate, and KTL. —**BILL MEYER**



© JULIEN MIGNOT

CONCERT PREVIEW  
SATURDAY 1

**KALI MALONE** See *Pick of the Week* at left.  
8 PM, Rockefeller Chapel, University of Chicago,  
5850 S. Woodlawn. **FREE** **AL**

**TAR** Part of the daylong festival *Smashed Plastic: Live Vol. 1*, which also includes several DJs and live sets from Pixel Grip, Fire-Toolz, Rookie, Ono, Serengeti, and Bev Rage & the Drinks. Noon-10 PM, *Smashed Plastic, Workshop 4200, 4200 W. Diversey*, \$35. 21+

Chicago posthardcore four-piece Tar broke up in 1995, and the number of times they've reunited for a show since then you can count on one hand—this gig will be the first time they've buffeted a live audience with their mischievous stomp since 2017. They haven't exactly been silent the past five years, though: for one thing, they've excavated six live recordings from their seven-year run (including a rehearsal tape with no vocals) and uploaded them to Bandcamp. Two of the recordings are from Lounge Ax: the final Tar show in November 1995 and a ripping set from November 1992. The latter captures Tar's ability to extract melody from repetitive bludgeoning and teeth-gnashing aggression. Front man John Mohr delivers his bellicose yells with the mania of a musician feeding off the energy of a crowd, and the band's intensity comes through so clearly that you can almost smell the hot, cigarette-stained air of a packed 90s club—and almost see their famous aluminum guitars, custom-built by Ian Schneller at Specimen Products. (That clarity is thanks in part to Brad Wood, one of Chicago indie rock's go-to producers at the time, who was working live sound that night.) Tar contributed another Lounge Ax set from earlier in 1992 to last year's four-disc *Tar Box*, which rounds up their two Amphetamine Reptile albums (1990's *Roundhouse* and 1991's *Jackson*) and their first AmRep EP, 1989's *Handsome*. Georgia indie label Chunklet Industries and Tar's own No Blow Records had the set's vinyl pressed at Chicago plant Smashed Plastic, so it's a full-circle moment to see Tar play at Smashed Plastic's first daylong music festival. —**LEOR GALIL**

## SUNDAY 2

**MEDICINE SINGERS** 8:30 PM, *Empty Bottle*,  
1035 N. Western, remaining tickets available only  
at the door. 21+

The Eastern Medicine Singers are a traditional Algonquin drum and vocal group based in Rhode Island. They sing mostly in several Algonquian languages, some of which are nearly extinct, and their dedication to keeping their culture alive and thriving manifests itself not only in their strictly traditional performances but also in their adventurous innovation. A familiar presence at powwows, in concert halls, and on the festival circuit, they played South by Southwest in 2017, where New York-based Israeli avant-garde guitarist and composer Yonatan Gat



Medicine Singers @ ILKA SCHLOCKERMANN, MING WU, PETER GANNUSHKIN, ŽIGA KORITNIK

(also of rock trio Monotonix) spontaneously joined them onstage. This led to a creative partnership, and this summer that partnership produced the collaborative album *Medicine Singers*. It's the first release on Stone Tapes, an imprint of Indiana label Joyful Noise run by Gat, and its artistic vision was shaped with insight and guidance from Eastern Medicine Singers founder and bandleader Daryl Black Eagle Jamieson.

The album ensemble, called simply "the Medicine Singers," combines the Eastern Medicine Singers with a group of musicians that includes Gat, Thor Harris and Christopher Pravidca of Swans, Chicago-born trumpeter Jaimie Branch (who passed away in August), drummer Ikue Mori, ambient-music pioneer Laraaji, and Ryan Olson of midwest rock ensemble Gayngs. The music mixes traditional Native drum songs with heavy psych, electronica, spiritual jazz, and rock, and the languages in its lyrics include Ojibwe and the Algonquian Massachusetts dialect (which Jamieson told the *Fader* that only ten people in the world speak). That description doesn't do it justice, though—with its startling freshness and constant twists and turns, it's unlike anything I've ever heard. "Sunrise (Rumble)" is a swaggering take on the 1958 classic "Rumble" by Link Wray (who was part Shawnee), and its huge, thundering heartbeat commands a reverent awe. "Sanctuary" has a playful jazz breakdown featuring Branch, Laraaji, and experimental composer Gelbart.

Gat and Olson produced the record, and they know when to focus on the avant-garde big guns and when to let the richness and variety of songs and singers take center stage. On "Sunset," for instance, Gat's spiraling, shimmering guitar break works like a futuristic echo of the singers' cry to the sun, and then he steps back as their voices return. The Medicine Singers project is a mutually transformative meeting of cultures with a sound that's big enough to fill a forest—in the friendly confines

of the Empty Bottle, it should be overwhelming.

—MONICA KENDRICK

## WEDNESDAY 5

**SUDAN ARCHIVES** *Lulu Be opens. 8 PM, Lincoln Hall, 2424 N. Lincoln, \$25, \$22 in advance. 18+*

When she filmed the music video for "OMG Britt," a trap anthem off her new record, *Natural Brown Prom Queen*, Brittney Parks was determined to smash a violin on camera. Not just any violin, either: She wanted to destroy her very first instrument, the one on which she'd taught herself to play by ear in fourth grade. Parks, who performs as Sudan Archives, has made the violin a defining part of her aesthetic since her vibey, luscious self-titled debut EP in 2017. Her sound is just as indebted to the liberatory musicianship of West African and Sudanese fiddlers as it is to the DIY scene in her native Cincinnati. It was there that a teenage Parks resisted her stepfather's attempts to manufacture a family pop duo from her and her sister. Instead, she broke curfew at underground raves. Eventually her rebelliousness got her kicked out of her family's house, and at age 19 she winged it to Los Angeles, where she's remained ever since, releasing her first two EPs and the 2019 album *Athena*. *Natural Brown Prom Queen* lurches in the direction of those late-night raves, bottling the effervescence and irreverence of being young and invincible. Despite Parks's symbolic violin demolition, the instrument is still a key ingredient on the new album—a fiddle figure animates "TDLY (Homegrown Land)," for instance—but it's mostly camouflaged, just one of many swatches in her band's instrumental palette.

*Natural Brown Prom Queen* doesn't just depart musically from Parks's earlier records; it's also her



Ganser @ KIRSTEN MICCOLI

most confessional release yet, and her most vulnerable. A few tracks after the brooding ballad "Home-sick," the album ends with "#513" (the area code of Cincinnati and environs), in which Parks vows to go back to her hometown. But the repatriation seems more symbolic than literal: *Natural Brown Prom Queen* sounds like catharsis, its 18 tracks confronting the life she fled as a teen. On "NBPQ (Topless)" and "Selfish Soul," Parks counsels her younger self through the anguish of trying to conform to white beauty standards; in "Selfish Soul" her violin plays as a grungy guitar, in "NBPQ" as a tanbūra (a Sudanese cousin of the oud). Parks also implies that her path on the violin hasn't always been easy. The interlude "Do Your Thing (Refreshing Springs)" uses dreamy keyboards as a backdrop for an old voice mail from her mother, who encourages her not to worry about being unable to read music. "The other musicians are not playing by music, either," her mother says. "Get up there and do your thing," Parks has ever since. —HANNAH EDGAR

## SUNDAY 9

**GANSER** *Otoboke Beaver headline. 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle, 1035 N. Western, remaining tickets available only at the door. 21+*

Dread can be suffocating, but Ganser make it work like a spark. On their new EP, *Nothing You Do Matters* (Felte), the Chicago postpunk four-piece take cues from dance punk for their end-of-the-world party music—they're trying to build something worth living for in a hellscape that constantly finds boring new ways to make everyone feel disposable and empty. Ganser understand that there's little we can do as individuals to change the trajectory of our historical moment, but they're also aware that

beyond the grimness of futility and despair there's the option of simply getting off the bus—"People Watching" and "What Me Worry?" encompass both these emotional poles, but they also make it clear we can find some semblance of liberty by setting our own terms. On the chorus of "What Me Worry?," bassist-vocalist Alicia Gaines honors her own agency by insisting that the path in front of her is still uncharted; as her elongated bellow stretches out against a wall of guitars fit for TV on the Radio, every syllable says her choices are hers to make. At least some of Ganser's choices seem to be working; their breakthrough 2020 album, *Just Look at That Sky*, established them as one of the best rock bands in town, no easy feat considering the pandemic made it difficult to hear those songs in person. There's a lot of rottenness in the world, but *Nothing You Do Matters* makes me thankful we've still got Ganser. —LEOR GALIL

**BEN ZUCKER** *8:30 PM, Constellation, 3111 N. Western, \$15. 18+*

Born in Pennsylvania, Ben Zucker lived in Berkeley, New England, and London before moving to Chicago for a graduate composition program at Northwestern University. He was excited to come here to study because he'd been a longtime fan of the city's rich, varied musical scenes, including the jazz stalwarts in the AACM and the adventurous rock bands that have defined Chicago indie labels Thrill Jockey and Drag City. Zucker's music has a similarly ambitious spirit. In 2017 he composed a work for cello and objects titled QOWOOPO, inspired by the browser game QWOP; in 2019 he released a vocal piece titled *Semiramide Riconosciuta (An Archaeology)*, inspired by Queen Shammuramat of the Neo-Assyrian Empire; and earlier this year he wrote music for a puppet show by Chicago-based direc-

# MUSIC

## continued from 45

tor and puppet artist Jaerin Son titled *Dogs or Cats; Augmented Body*.

On his 2021 album *Demiurgent* (on local label Fallen Moon), Zucker adds studio manipulations to material culled from live improvisations and field recordings. The title's reference to a "demiurge"—a term ancient Greek philosophers used to describe the creator of the world—foreshadows the spectacle of the music. In "Cereltan," soft percussive tones appear amid shapeshifting ambience like stars glistening in a night sky; in the pensive, brooding "Edicroes," the way electric noise and wavering electronics feed off each other feels like a cycling of life and death. Zucker's most recent studio release, this spring's *Having Becomes*, is centered on meditative drones built from single-take vibraphone recordings, and on a couple tracks he placed tack and modeling clay on the tone bars to alter their sound, creating something subdued and graceful.

On September 30, Zucker releases *Semiterritory* (Ears & Eyes), a stirring live recording by his experimental jazz quartet, Fifth Season, but that won't affect his performance at Constellation. He's presenting a doctoral recital showcasing four different works based on his dissertation, joined by ten musicians—including vocalist Julian Otis, clarinetist Jeff Kimmel, and violist Johanna Brock—and adding his own trumpet, vibraphone, and electronics. Zucker's dissertation interrogates the idea of "openness" involved in compositions featuring indeterminacy and improvisation. Two of the pieces he'll present are larger ensemble works where the music will change based on performers' observations of their own and others' playing. The other two are part of a new series in which notation will be read and then reread with what he calls "changing conditions of interpretation." That open structure speaks to Zucker's curiosity, which will be on full display at this vital concert. —**JOSHUA MINSOO KIM**

## ALBUM REVIEWS

### DISCUSSING THE SUN, FEEL IT ALL Lonely Ghost

[discussingthesun.bandcamp.com/album/feel-it-all](https://discussingthesun.bandcamp.com/album/feel-it-all)

I've heard plenty of great songs that capture the dissociative lonesomeness and strange thrills of navigating interpersonal relationships now that so much human communication is sucked up by the vortex of social media. The best recent example is "Shade," a psych-tinged single that indie duo Discussing the Sun released to preview their new debut album, *Feel It All* (Lonely Ghost). Front person Mars sings with a corrosive longing that underlines the bittersweet sense of dislocation in the song's dreamlike melody and prickly yet relaxed percussion—all of which is fairly representative of the whole album. Discussing the Sun's pop collage reflects its members' individual output. Under the name Holy Kerouac, Mars (who's currently in Chicago) makes bedroom indie rock spackled with emo and laptop pop; the duo's other member, Cleveland-based Leave Nelson B, produces instrumental hip-hop and dabbles in remixing (last year, he dropped a prismatic EP of reworked material from arty Chicago act Oux). Mars and Nelson make sense of each other's tastes on *Feel It All*, which flits between

serene electronic dreamscapes and bustling, kaleidoscopic pop experiments that fill the air like New Year's confetti. The duo's genre experimentation gives their music commonalities with hyperpop, but even as Spotify and the major labels work to shape that genre into something identifiably marketable, Discussing the Sun's forlorn, effervescent aesthetic stays undomesticated. —**LEOR GALIL**

### MAGMA, KÄRTÉHL

#### Seventh

[seventhrecords.com/en/magma-19/kartehl-1316.html](https://seventhrecords.com/en/magma-19/kartehl-1316.html)

Formed by drummer Christian Vander in Paris in 1969, Magma have made a career of defying convention, and the fact that they're still actively recording and playing live today is an astonishing gift. Their music could arguably be labeled modern classical, progressive rock, free jazz, or even psychedelia, but it's too big for any of those boxes. Even the band couldn't come up with an earthly word to describe what they do. Instead they chose "zeuhl," a term from Kobaïan, a language of Vander's creation and the mother tongue of the fictional planet Kobaïa, where all the ensemble's concept albums have taken place (since the 70s, many other forward-thinking, cataclysmic ensembles have adopted the term "zeuhl" too).

I've followed this otherworldly, ecologically minded band since I got hip to them in the 90s, and I've been lucky enough to see them twice. Magma's 14th album, 2019's *Zess*, had a somber, dystopian vibe, but the new *Kärtéhl* (on their own Seventh Records) has a more positive musical outlook and a lighter musical tone. Opener "Hakéhn Deis" begins with a jazzy drumbeat before launching into odd time signatures that'd turn Gentle Giant green with envy. Vander delivers its surprisingly melodic vocals alongside longtime collaborator Stella Vander (also his ex-wife), and the track builds to a grand, even sunny-sounding coda, with tasteful fuzz guitar edging its way in. Like most bands decades old, Magma have shifted lineups several times, and the relatively new group that appears on most of *Kärtéhl* jelled in 2020. They already sound exuberant, though, and keyboardists Thierry Eliez and Simon Goubert highlight the samba-inspired, almost tropical feel of "Do Rin Ili Üss" with their complex, dueling lines.

That said, Magma's familiar gloomy and mysterious side also appears on the new album, notably on the operatic "Waloméhndem Warreï," which uses a choir of voices to gigantic and almost frightening effect. "Wüi Mäléhn Tü" opens with massive, trebly bass courtesy of Jimmy Top (son of original bassist Jannick Top), mixed with some bizarre, high-pitched vocal warbling. Christian Vander's bluesy lead singing sounds pained, in contrast to the redemptive voice of Stella Vander and the chirpy melodies of a female choir. The album's series of ups and downs ends with the joyful "Déhndé," which almost sounds like a conventional soul-pop song or a tune from a hippie musical. Once I adjusted to its blindingly bright mood, I marveled again at how wide-reaching Magma are.

I should probably say "how wide-reaching Magma have always been," because on the 1978 LP *Attahk* they delved into funk and soul, dividing their fans. Funny enough, *Kärtéhl* features two bonus tracks recorded that same year, both of them demos chosen from Vander's archives. They offer a fasci-



Ben Zucker © DEIDRE HUCKABAY



Discussing the Sun © COURTESY LONELY GHOST RECORDS



Open Mike Eagle  R. GARDINER

nating glimpse into the band's creative process, and even though they're stripped down to just piano and voice, they're still so intricately thought-out and weird that they sometimes sound like overreaching Beach Boys arrangements written on angel dust. Many legacy artists lose the plot by this stage of their careers, but Magma have been charting their own path for so long that they always seem to know where they're going—and *Kärtéhl* is an exciting new entry in their oeuvre. —STEVE KRAKOW

**DOUG MCCOMBS,**  
**VMAK<KOMBZ<<<DUGLAS<<6NDR7<<<**

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If you've paid even the slightest bit of attention to Chicago music over the past, say, 35 years, you've surely heard Doug McCombs. He's held down the low end for indie-rock legends Eleventh Dream Day since the mid-80s, acted as the heart and soul of postrock pioneers Tortoise since their founding in 1990, and helmed the shape-shifting Brokeback since 1997. McCombs's playing is rock-solid, sensible, and melodic, and while he's best known as a bassist, on his first-ever solo LP, the brand-new *VMAK<KOMBZ<<<DUGLAS<<6NDR7<<<*, he applies his singular style mostly to acoustic and electric guitar explorations. With elements of minimal ambience, Ennio

Morricone-influenced twang, and his own signature *Laughing Stock*-flavored postrock bliss, McCombs dives into all sides of his musical self on the record's three ruminative tracks—some expected, some new and surprising. The album's side-length closer, "To Whose Falls Shadows," layers ambient guitar and dreamy, rhythmic plucking to create something warm, heady, and transcendent. McCombs's track record all but ensured that *VMAK<KOMBZ<<<DUGLAS<<6NDR7<<<* would be an instant classic of spaced-out perfection; if anything, it'll make you wonder why it took so long to get a Doug McCombs solo album out into the world. —LUCA CIMARUSTI

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Chicago-born, Los Angeles-based rapper Open Mike Eagle is a seemingly inexhaustible font of laugh-out-loud one-liners, and he delivers as always on his latest album, *Component System With the Auto Reverse* (on his own Auto Reverse label). You need to be careful drinking anything while listening to it, lest uncomfortable snorking ensue when the rapper gets to the best lines in "Peak Lock-down Raps": "I got a discount code for therapy / I




Petbrick  AL OVERDRIVE

hit go and got Rickrolled, apparently / It was a big blow." But funny as he is, fans don't just tune in for the laffs. Inspired by the likes De La Soul and They Might Be Giants, Mike writes loopy gags that float and bob and tie themselves together into surprisingly thoughtful reveries on aging, mental illness, disappointment, and hope. His flow feels laid-back even as he chews up syllables at a rapid clip—as if he's a stoned nerd who almost apologetically has to get out everything on his mind. On "79th and Stony Island," he starts musing on watching the Kanye West documentary *Jeen-Yuhs*, goes on to cheerfully explain he's got "memories like flesh wounds," and finishes up by listening to his son laughing. Throughout the album, Mike weaves his thoughts on COVID, racism, and our bleak political landscape in and out of pop-culture references and goofball nonsense—which he uses less as distractions than as ways to hold firm to his humanity under threat. "It'll be endless, I will fight you every day," Mike croons on the hook of "I'll Fight You." It's a joke, but he also means it. —NOAH BERLATSKY

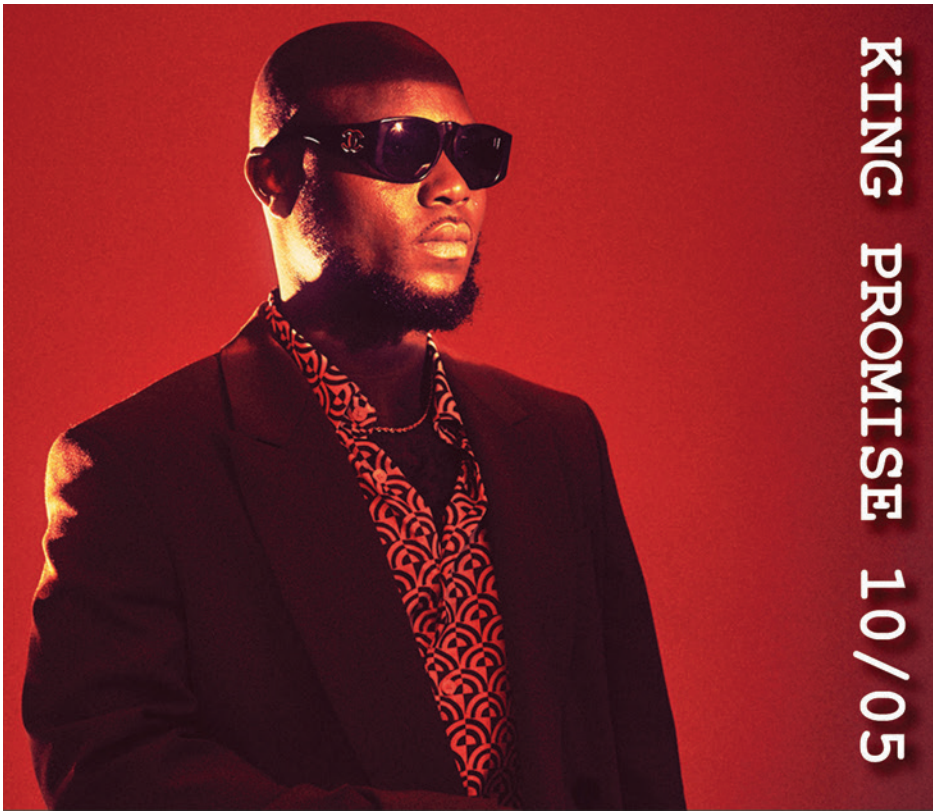
**PETBRICK, LIMINAL**  
**Neurot/Rocket**  
[petbrick.bandcamp.com/album/liminal](http://petbrick.bandcamp.com/album/liminal)

Plenty of bands do a lot with compact lineups, but few can match the huge black-hole vortex of sound that Petbrick creates. The London-based

duo of British multi-instrumentalist and producer Wayne Adams and legendary Brazilian metal drummer Iggor Cavalera came together a few years ago with a plan to make "horrible noise" without compromise. But as Petbrick peeled away self-imposed limits, they wound up making something magical—and yes, as far as I'm concerned it's magic when a band can bundle together cinema-worthy synth composition, D-beat, and experimental electronics and leave me wanting more. On their new second album, *Liminal*, Petbrick break their own mold again, exploring a planet in the throes of self-destruction while twisting a mix of styles—industrial, noise, samba, hardcore, hip-hop—into their futuristic diatribes. Some of those sounds might seem like unlikely bedfellows, but despite Petbrick's disorienting atmospheres, listening to *Liminal* feels a lot like reading a page-turner of a sci-fi novel. Assisting them in their mission are a handful of guest vocalists who enhance their explorations: Converge's Jacob Bannon peels the paint off the walls with his performance on "Grind You Dull," while New York rappers Lord Goat and Truck Jewelz drop verses on "Lysergic Aura," which could soundtrack a hallucinatory voyage to the underworld and back. One of the most powerful tracks is "Distorted Peace," a doomy, droning missive featuring vocalist Paula Rebellato of Brazilian psych trio Rakta. Petbrick's alternate world might be a dystopia, but it still offers an excellent escape from the daily realities of the one we're in now. —JAMIE LUDWIG 







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# SAVAGE LOVE

## DEAL OR NO DEAL

### My wife slut-shames me when I hook up with someone else

She might just be annoyed with the arrangement.

By DAN SAVAGE

**Q:** Forty-two-year-old dad here. I've been married for 12 years, and my marriage has been somewhat turbulent. But after some affairs—one where my wife screwed my best friend—and therapy, we reconnected, righted ourselves, and started a wonderful family. We both identify as bisexual now, and we are ethically nonmonogamous. My question is this: my wife never seeks out other lovers, but I often do. She thinks looking for sex on apps is gross and won't try it. She did recently suggest we become poly—that we date other couples together—only to shut that down after one date with another couple. She also kind of slut-shames me when I ask permission to hook up or date someone else. She wants to be open in theory, but she seems to be against it in practice. We communicate well and she continues to give me permission (but always after shaming me), and I check in regularly only to have her act annoyed when I inform her of each new adventure. I am not sure what to do.

—OFTEN PRACTICING ETHICAL NONMONOGAMY

**A:** Has it occurred to you

that maybe . . . just maybe . . . your wife doesn't wanna hear about each and every one of your adventures? Or any of them? I mean, it seems clear to me she doesn't want to hear about them. It's all right there in your letter: your wife doesn't enjoy discussing your dates, hookups, adventures, etc., and yet you persist in asking her and telling her.

You mention "some affairs" earlier in your marriage, OPEN, back before you came out to each other as bisexual and opened your relationship. But you only share the details of one: *your wife fucked your best friend*. That had to hurt. I'm glad you two got into therapy, managed to work through the fallout, got to a better place, and decided to start a family together. But I feel like I don't have all the relevant information here—like whose idea opening up was (yours?) and your wife's state of mind when she agreed (guilt-racked?)—which means I have no choice but to speculate . . .

You've been married for 12 years, you started a family sometime after that turbulent period, which means your kid or kids are still young and may be very young. Your wife could be interested in other sex partners but lacks the

energy for them right now, seeing as she's doing . . . judging from your letter . . . way more than her fair share of the parenting. I mean, if you're constantly running off on dates and hookups and having adventures and leaving her home alone with the kid(s), it's possible that your wife is annoyed with you and you're reading her annoyance as slut-shaming.

And if you proposed opening up the relationship and she agreed to it—after she fucked your best friend—maybe she doesn't feel free to say no when you ask for permission to fuck someone else, which could also leave your wife annoyed. Annoyance that, again, you could be reading as slut-shaming.

At any rate, OPEN, if I were married to someone who agreed to open the relationship but who seemed annoyed or upset or slut-shamed me whenever I asked for their OK to go fuck someone else, I would have a few questions for my spouse: Do they want an open relationship at all? Did they ever? Do they still? And if they did and still do, would they prefer a DADT ("don't ask, don't tell") arrangement over a TMFE ("tell me fucking everything") arrangement?


I think a few check-in/checkup sessions with your couples' counselor are in order here. Maybe your wife's feelings have changed, after having a kid (or kids). Or maybe your wife—cheater though she was—would prefer a monogamous relationship after all. Or, hey, maybe your wife is happy for you to fuck other people but would like to see—at least while your kids are young—you dial back your adventuring and dial up your dadding. But I can only speculate. Your wife knows. Ask her.

**Q:** My wife likes to suck cock. But not my cock. She finds the act degrading "in a sexy way," and the "vibe" is all wrong with me, she

says, because we love each other too much. We have a wonderful, loving, and creative sex life otherwise. (And, yes, I eat her pussy.) She has my OK to suck off other men, which happens once or twice a year, and I have her OK to get sucked off by other women, which never happens. Finding men who want no-strings-attached blow jobs from a hot married woman is obviously easier than finding women who want to give no-strings-attached blow jobs to married men. We live in a very gay part of the Los Angeles area. I'm 100 percent straight and not the least bit bisexual. But more than once I've been offered a blow job by gay

men at my gym (the locker room is a scene), and I've honestly been tempted to close my eyes and think about it being a woman. My wife isn't comfortable with the idea because she thinks gay men are likelier to have STIs and she doesn't want me bringing anything home. I think she's being a bigot.

—SEEKING UNDERSTANDABLE COMPROMISE KNOWING ERECTIONS RARELY SUCKED

**A:** I hope the guys lining up to suck your cock at the gym will forgive me for this . . . 

There is more to this week's Savage Love. To read the entire column, go to Savage Love.

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The  
*Reader's*  
guide to  
**World  
Music  
Festival  
Chicago**

The festival's *11 free concerts*, spread out over ten days and 11 venues, offer more than inspiration and fun—they invite us to forge *new bonds of community and care*.

By LESLIE ALLISON, JACOB ARNOLD, NOAH BERLATSKY, AARON COHEN, HANNAH EDGAR, LEOR GALIL, MARK GUARINO, CATALINA MARIA JOHNSON, MONICA KENDRICK, JOSHUA MINSOO KIM, STEVE KRAKOW, JAMIE LUDWIG, BILL MEYER, PHILIP MONTORO, JAMES PORTER, KELLEY TATRO, AND SANDRA TREVIÑO

# World Music Festival Chicago

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## WORLD MUSIC FESTIVAL CHICAGO

Full schedule on the back cover of this guide.  
*Friday, September 30, through Sunday,  
October 9, various times and venues, all concerts  
free, many concerts all ages*

**T**he term “world music” has never been adequate to the task we’ve set it—even in its most benign reading, it implies a division between the listener and the rest of the world. And if that listener is in the United States, our country’s global hegemony in popular music colors the term’s meaning too.

Americans don’t have to listen outside our borders to participate in an influential, relevant, up-to-the-moment musical culture. Much of the rest of the world does—or, more accurately, much of the rest of the world is made to feel as though it does. When it comes to music, we export much more than we import.

Looked at in such a light, “world music” represents an opportunity for Americans to recognize our privilege in this area—and to level the playing field, at least between our own ears. The World Music Festival exists to encourage this sort of curiosity, empathy, and connection.

After shutting down for the first two years of the COVID-19 pandemic, the World Music Festival is returning to Chicago in 2022, with 11 concerts at 11 venues between Friday, September 30, and Sunday, October 9. While the aspiring fascists in the Republican Party escalate their campaign to turn nonwhite foreigners into targets for fear, resentment, and hatred, our city welcomes artists from India,

Colombia, Cuba, Mali, Mexico, Bolivia, and beyond. No other event gives so many of Chicago’s diverse populations the joy of a concert that says “home.”

Founded in 1999, the World Music Festival is organized by David Chavez and Carlos Cuauhtémoc Tortolero of the city’s Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events, with Brian Keigher of People of Rhythm partnering with Tortolero on Ragamala, the marathon of Indian classical music that’s opened every fest since 2013. Though we can be grateful the festival is happening at all, the pandemic still got its licks in—DCASE wasn’t able to begin preparations till February, when the city decided that the risk of COVID-related cancellation was low enough. Ordinarily work on the next festival starts as soon as the previous one ends.

Given the length of the visa process for overseas artists, losing four months meant losing many opportunities to book those artists. As a result, more than a third of this year’s acts are from Chicago—a huge increase from 2019, when their share was closer to one in seven. That doesn’t seem so much like a compromise with circumstances, though, when you consider that the local music on the bill includes the gritty East-West fusion of the Arab Blues, the Peruvian-flavored jazz of Juan Pastor Chinchano, the updated Mongolian and Tuvan folk of Tuvergen Band, and the rambunctious, hard-rocking ska en español of Malafacha.

The lineup of out-of-town artists is even more exciting, in part because DCASE chose to book a larger number of emerging acts instead of splashing out on a headliner big enough for Pritzker Pavilion. Millennium Park shows are great, sure, but so is the chance to see such a dazzling variety of music, all for free, in a little more than a week. La Dame Blanche (Cuba by way of France) pairs her fierce rhymes and dramatic flute with colossal beats from across the African diaspora; Paolo Angeli (Italy) turns his cleverly modified Sardinian guitar into a percussion engine; Gili Yalo (Ethiopia by way of Israel) honors the jazzy, funky grooves that his homeland made immortal in the 60s and 70s; and Kaleta & Super Yamba Band (Benin and Nigeria by way of New York City) fuse Afrobeat and juju for a driving, danceable sound that’s as cheerful as it is aggressive.

By some metrics, the festival is smaller than in 2019—there were 18 concerts then, not 11, and they were spread out over 17 days rather than ten. But the total number of artists has stayed about the same, at around three dozen—the big change is that this year 16 of those artists appear at two big events, Ragamala and the Global Peace Picnic.

For 2022 DCASE has booked a slightly larger share of the festival’s shows at conventional music venues (as opposed to city buildings or parks), which Tortolero says was intended in part to help those venues survive pandemic losses. The city covers every expense—artist

fees, hotels, transportation, staff and production costs, back-line rental, rider fulfillment—so that all revenue the venue makes from bar sales and other sources stays in-house. In return, the city benefits from the venues’ established audiences and marketing operations.

The festival’s use of conventional venues presents an accessibility issue—none of them admits concertgoers of all ages, and they’re mostly on the north side. But they provide better sound than you’d get in any park setting that isn’t Pritzker Pavilion, and they’re less dependent on good weather.

More important, World Music Festival concerts don’t put up barriers of their own—neither the literal fences that surround a public park when it’s occupied by a for-profit fest nor the metaphorical hurdles created by cover charges and tickets. We’ve all paid for this programming already, and it’s for everyone.

That might be the best thing about the fest. Decades of right-wing depredations have endangered the idea of a common good, replacing the connecting threads of our society with “Fuck you, I got mine.” But the World Music Festival was created for no other reason than to make us happy and bring us closer together—and it’s expressly designed to do that for as many different people as possible. In that way, it’s a lot like music itself. **PHILIP MONTORO**

# World Music Festival Chicago

World Music Festival Chicago 2022 is presented by the Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events. Additional support is provided by the following partners: Chicago Park District, Consulate General of Israel to the Midwest, Italian Cultural Institute of Chicago, Navy Pier, Old Town School of Folk Music, Reva and David Logan Center for the Arts, South Asian Classical Music Society-Chicago, and South Asia Institute.

## FRIDAY30

**RAGAMALA: A CELEBRATION OF INDIAN CLASSICAL MUSIC** Presented in collaboration with South Asia Institute, South Asian Classical Music Society-Chicago, and People of Rhythm Productions. This event continues into the morning of Saturday, October 1. Fri 9/30, 6 PM-8 AM, Preston Bradley Hall, Chicago Cultural Center, 78 E. Washington, third floor, all ages

This year closes the first decade of **Ragamala**, the largest overnight Indian classical music concert in the country—it debuted as part of the World Music Festival in 2013. Think of it as a sophisticated and inspiring slumber party, and bring your cozy accoutrements—thermos, pillows, snacks—so you can take in as much of this experience as possible. Ragamala offers a thrilling variety of performers in the genre's two main styles, Hindustani (northern) and Carnatic (southern). To arrive at a deeper understanding of these traditions and of what to expect at Ragamala, the *Reader* spoke with two of this year's most innovative performers, Hindustani sarangi player Suhail Yusuf Khan and Carnatic vocalist Roopa Mahadevan.

Hindustani and Carnatic music both consist of vast, elaborate systems of melodic structures (variously called raga, rag, or raag) and rhythmic cycles (tala or taal). "These ragas are your muse," Mahadevan explains. "What is the essence of the raga? What does it look and feel like?"

The two styles differ somewhat in their approach to interpretation. "Carnatic relies more heavily on songs as the center—any improvisation you're doing is around a particular song," Mahadevan says. Hindustani tradition, by contrast, encourages improvisation as the focal point of a performance. "Unlike Western classical music, the interpretation of com-

positions in Hindustani music has nothing to do with how the composer composed it," Khan says, "but the way an artist's individuality allows for expression."

"Designation of rags according to different times of the day [is part of] the Hindustani music system," Khan adds, so all-night concerts such as Ragamala "bring out a flavor of rag music otherwise hard to experience."

"Concerts are getting shorter, people are marketing via social media, smaller clips," Mahadevan says. Meanwhile, Ragamala provides a space to slow down and luxuriate in the opulence of Indian classical music. Mahadevan has performed at Ragamala before, and she describes the vibe as a "one-stop shop—people can just show up and there's something intimate, like you're in someone's living room."

Mahadevan also treasures what Ragamala offers her as a musician. "It's a really heartwarming experience to see the number of people sitting there at [3 AM]," she says. "Like, oh yeah, art does really mean something for a lot of people!"

**LESLIE ALLISON**

**6-7:15 PM PURBAYAN CHATTERJEE, RAKESH CHAURASIA, AND OJAS ADHIYA**

Ragamala kicks off with an unstoppable Hindustani trio of **Purbayan Chatterjee** (sitar), **Rakesh Chaurasia** (bansuri flute), and **Ojas Adhiya** (tabla drums). Coming off an August performance together at Carnegie Hall, these artists are deeply attuned to one another. Themes bounce among them with kinetic spontaneity as the bansuri sculpts the air, the tabla molds the earth, and the sitar performs a metallic alchemy between them.

Chatterjee, a Mumbai-based sitarist, has performed on almost every continent, solo and with ensembles Shastriya Syndicate and Stringstruck. His exploratory, incisive playing guides you on an

unfolding path through waving fields of microtones and crisply elaborated structures. In September 2022, Purbayan released the album *Saath Saath* in collaboration with Chaurasia, his friend of two decades.

Chaurasia's bansuri radiates a warm cloud of melody, husky and smooth. He maneuvers the North Indian bamboo flute from a lilting, swooning dance into a meditative hum. He believes that the aesthetic beauty of Hindustani music is inseparable from its healing and spiritual powers. "While performing... I feel as if I am praying in a temple," he said in a 2016 interview for the Darbar Festival. "The notes have to do something within your system so it affects your chakras and your mind frame." Tabla player Ojas Adhiya engages with his collaborators fully, shifting like a hunter between loose, open focus and lightning-fast forward propulsion. His expressive face silently exchanges detailed musical information with his collaborators as the syncopated pitches of his paired drums ring out from under his agile hands.

This all-star trio will immerse you in the sounds and sensations of twilight, helping you sink into alignment with the present moment—and preparing your state of mind for the night ahead.

**LESLIE ALLISON**

**7:45-9 PM ROOPA MAHADEVAN, SRUTI SARATHY, AND ROHAN KRISHNAMURTHY**

Bay Area-based vocalist **Roopa Mahadevan** is a torchbearer for the evolution of Carnatic singing in the diaspora. Her performance—the only vocal set at Ragamala—is a must-see. Mahadevan presents the lyrical canon with charisma, thoughtfulness, and joy. Her lithe and nuanced melodies and her rich, grounded timbre are evocative on their own, but she adds extra dimensions by "pushing the Carnatic concert format," as she puts it, to include "what

Purbayan Chatterjee (left) COURTESY THE ARTIST

Rakesh Chaurasia (center) COURTESY THE ARTIST

Ojas Adhiya (right) COURTESY THE ARTIST



# World Music Festival Chicago



Roopa Mahadevan © COURTESY THE ARTIST



Sruti Sarathy © SANDRA HERCHEN



Rohan Krishnamurthy © COURTESY THE ARTIST

## continued from 3

these compositions mean to us, to bring a new lens to the music.”

Mahadevan performs in art-world and popular-music contexts, leading the crossover jazz and soul ensemble Roopa in Flux as well as a choir called the Navatman Music Collective. She also sings for Bharatanatyam and modern dancers, and this connection shapes her practice: “I love moving,” she says. “So much of Indian music is how you play around with space, how the notes glide and connect; it means a lot to me to be able to gesture and respond to that with my entire body. That’s the aliveness of it—it brings all of you to the performance.”

Mahadevan and violinist-composer **Sruti Sarathy** are currently creating new pieces exploring contemporary themes using Carnatic forms. “In some ways, the cultural ethos of the Carnatic music world is at odds with what we care about in the diaspora,” Mahadevan says. “But we don’t want to give up on the beauty of the tradition, the complexity it has to offer. So we asked, ‘Are there ways we can do both?’” Their original album advancing the Carnatic repertoire will be released in 2023. Mahadevan’s Ragamala set, with Sarathy and mridangam player **Rohan Krishnamurthy**, will draw on the three musicians’ long-standing collaboration.

For Mahadevan, “the singing of these songs is transformative.” Listeners will be transformed as well. **LESLIE ALLISON**

## 9:30–10:45 PM ANUPAMA BHAGWAT AND AMIT KAVTHEKAR

The sitar is the most familiar Indian instrument to

American ears, but its incredible range and power can still startle even an experienced listener—especially in the arms of **Anupama Bhagwat**. She deftly plies the shiny loom of her sitar’s silvery strings to weave a three-part cloth: vibrant melody plays out against a backdrop of echoing drones, all draped in a shimmering veil of sympathetic vibrations. Though Bhagwat improvises and interprets in the Hindustani style particular to her musical lineage, she leads with the commanding presence and side-smiling coolness of her own artistic voice.

Bhagwat’s sitar speaks a cogent language that awakens the emotions and stimulates the imagination. On up-tempo compositions, her momentum is magnetic as she alternates vigorous cascades of rapid melody and swirling eddies produced by bending her strings. On chiller jams, her melodies pulse through a mist of resonance, as though moving in a dream. Simply put, she shreds.

Bhagwat, now living in Bangalore, has earned her reputation with more than 25 years of beguiling performances across India, Europe, and the States. At Ragamala, her sitar will converse with the rounded pitches and burbling rhythms of the tabla, played by energizing and innovative Boston-based master **Amit Kavthekar**. Alongside its virtuosity, Kavthekar’s playing also delivers a distinctive, winking charisma. From the multilayered phrases of his drums, emotive expressions surface—jokes, questions, murmurs, retorts.

In a 2021 interview with the Suromurchhana Music Festival, Bhagwat explained how the fluctuating emotions evoked by each rag shape the music’s interpretation. The rag communicates with the vocabulary of the unconscious, she said: “The rag will take over, and the musician becomes one of the

listeners.” In this set, two inquisitive artists will carefully listen and channel what the rags wish to tell us. **LESLIE ALLISON**

## 11:15 PM–12:30 AM INDRAJIT BANERJEE, RUPAK KULKARNI, AND HINDOLE MAJUMDAR

Sitarist **Indrajit Banerjee** occupies a prestigious position in the venerated Maihar gharānā (a performance community of northern Indian Hindustani music), and he’s also collaborated with all kinds of global artists—similar to the approach of another Maihar gharānā musician, Ravi Shankar. (Banerjee’s uncle and teacher, Kartick Kumar, was one of Shankar’s top students.) Banerjee’s family legacy includes a commanding technique, particularly in the way he finesses lead lines while drawing resonance from his instrument’s sympathetic strings on pieces such as “Aahir Bhairav: Alap.” His music has also been included in a short film on Hindu rituals titled *Cloth Paper Dreams*. Like his predecessors, Banerjee teaches the traditions of the sitar to emerging generations of musicians, specifically at the Antara School of Indian Classical Music in Austin, Texas. He has also combined his instrument with electronic keyboards on the aptly titled “Sitar Ji Chill,” available on Soundcloud. Banerjee has previously worked with jazz guitarist Fareed Haque and saxophonist Jeff Coffin, but at Ragamala he’ll perform in a traditional format with **Rupak Kulkarni** and **Hindole Majumdar**. Kulkarni is a virtuoso on the bansuri, a bamboo flute that’s been integral to Hindustani music for centuries. He sounds especially vibrant in a fast-paced combo with an equally dextrous percussionist—someone like Majumdar. Based in Mil-

waukee, Majumdar is a tabla player who’s mastered numerous complex rhythms (talas) from across India. He’s also a teacher, and he founded the Hindole Majumdar School of Music and Dance in Wisconsin. **AARON COHEN**

## 1–2:15 AM SARASWATHI RANGANATHAN, SRUTI SARATHY, AND ROHAN KRISHNAMURTHY

Chicago-based musician **Saraswathi Ranganathan** has brought the veena—specifically the long-necked South Indian lute used in Carnatic music—to a wide array of collaborations. Several of them feature her original compositions, such as the quietly inspirational “Ennai Azhaithaen—I Embrace Me,” a multilingual song commissioned by the Chicago Humanities Festival. Her cross-cultural meetings also include accompanying a Buster Keaton silent film, engaging with hip-hop rhythms alongside Colorado-based singer Sofie Reed, and helping bring together musicians from across Europe, Asia, and Africa as founder of the Surabhi Ensemble (who perform at the World Music Festival later in the week). But Ranganathan remains dedicated to her instrument’s traditions and legacy—she studied primarily with her mother, Shantha Ranganathan, in Bangalore. She’s a Ragamala veteran, and her set at the 2018 event highlighted her devotion to that history as well as her striking technique. Ranganathan shares a universalist perspective with the other members of this trio: violinist **Sruti Sarathy**, also a composer and singer, has been immersed in the Carnatic tradition since childhood, but she’s also worked in Hindustani music and collaborated with Japanese taiko drummers and Romani artists; mri-

# World Music Festival Chicago

dangam player **Rohan Krishnamurthy** has branched out from Indian classical to play jazz and funk.

Indian violinists Mysore Manjunath and Mysore Nagaraj, originally scheduled for this slot, canceled their tour due to visa problems. **AARON COHEN**

## 2:45-4 AM SUHAIL YUSUF KHAN AND AMIT KAVTHEKAR

**Suhail Yusuf Khan** is a versatile and sensitive performer, and you can trust him to carry you through the darkest hours of early morning. In the Hindustani system, performances are a duet between the rags and the time of day: "Rags are structured melodies designed to evoke certain feelings and heighten the emotional state of the mind," Khan explains. "My rags for this concert will be selected according to the time allotted." If you've ever lain awake at 3 AM, wondering what it all means, this is an exceptional opportunity to delve into that mystery.

Khan carries forward the legacy of his grandfather, who was likewise a master of the North Indian sarangi—a type of bowed viol carved from a single block of wood. He's been absorbed in Hindustani music culture since childhood, and he's also a composer and an ethnomusicology scholar who has written extensively about the sarangi and the contemporary transformations of Indian classical music. He relishes expanding the scope of his instrument.

"Sarangi's ability to be inclusive is what I love the most!" he says. "It can be tuned to any key, fit into any genre, and still maintain its own unique sound." That luscious, distinctive sound blends the bowing of the melody and drone strings with subtle reverberations emitted from a large complement of sympathetic strings (anywhere from 11 to 37). Thanks to the cavernous, almost aromatic resonance of these sympathetic vibrations, the sarangi stands out among folk instruments for its resemblance to the human voice.

In **Amit Kavthekar's** second set of the night, the tabla player will entwine his grooves with Khan's rags. These two musicians have been collaborating since 2015, and their connection onstage is palpable. Combined with the soulful journey of Khan's sarangi, Kavthekar's fresh and responsive playing will swirl out into your senses and linger there.

**LESLIE ALLISON**

## 4:30-5:45 AM RAMAN KALYAN AND ROHAN KRISHNAMURTHY

**Raman Kalyan**, also known as V.K. Raman and "Flute Raman," comes by his nickname honestly. A long-standing master in the Carnatic bamboo flute, the venu, Kalyan has released more than 80 albums, performed for hundreds of commercials and films, and composed many scores for dance and theater productions. Kalyan breathes a living complexity into his instrument, and he does it with lively charisma and a twinkling eye.

The venu looks simple, but Kalyan can draw an astounding diversity of textures and pitches from it. His melodies seem to escape the confines of the performance, skittering across the water, rumbling



Anupama Bhagwat © COURTESY THE ARTIST



Saraswathi Ranganathan © COURTESY THE ARTIST



Indrajit Banerjee, Rupak Kulkarni, Hindole Majumdar © COURTESY THE ARTIST



Natty Nation © M.O.D. PHOTOGRAPHY

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in the soil, zigzagging through the forest canopy. Whether bouncingly buoyant or thickly rooted, the irresistible tones of Kalyan's flute crackle irresistibly with an unpredictable, playful electricity.

Kalyan has devoted his career to advocating for Carnatic music. He's the founder of the Indo American Academy of Classical Music, an institution based in Virginia that also offers free online instrumental and vocal lessons. For his ongoing project 1000 Ragas @ 1000 Locations, he performs ragas in places he feels match the energy of the piece, often playing outdoors and, charmingly, for nonhuman audiences—whether peacocks in someone's yard or a bayou landscape buzzing with insects. He records

music for meditation and sound healing, and he collaborates with ensembles across global traditions—an expansive approach that's also audible in the openhearted enthusiasm and fun of his playing.

At Ragamala, Kalyan will summon the spirits of dance and devotion with mridangam accompaniment by **Rohan Krishnamurthy**, in his second set of the event. Krishnamurthy is a percussionist and composer based in the Bay Area, and in his trio the Alaya Project, he integrates Carnatic music, jazz, and funk. He's developed a hybrid drum kit that bridges the practices of playing with sticks and by hand, and he's patented a novel drum-tuning system. His inventiveness also comes across in the epic narratives of his mridangam lines, wide in dynamic

range and deep in rhythmic power. **LESLIE ALLISON**

## 6:15-7:30 AM **MANIK KHAN AND HINDOLE MAJUMDAR**

There's no finer way to clear out the night's dreams, collect your thoughts, and welcome the morning sun than with the sarod, a lutelike Hindustani stringed instrument with a calm, pure sound. **Manik Khan's** treatment of the sarod is confident, warm, and soothing, and his phrasing creates a relaxed and spacious environment for the tabla to unfurl its tendrils of rhythm.

Khan's father, Ali Akbar Khan, a member of Hindustani music royalty, trained him in sarod and in-

tiated him into the world of performance by having him play on tour alongside him. Now an esteemed solo musician in the Bay Area, Khan builds on his lineage through traditional performances, crossover collaborations, and educational programs and partnerships with local symphonies and school youth orchestras.

For this final Ragamala set, tabla master **Hindole Majumdar** will make his second appearance of the event. In addition to being a dedicated teacher, Hindole has toured the world as a soloist and accompanied renowned dancers and instrumentalists. Though he's also trained in mridangam, he'll play tabla in this duo with Khan using his contemplative, exhaling lines to help cast the spell of the morning rags.

As sunrise pours down through the stained glass of the Cultural Center, congratulate yourself for experiencing an absurd amount of world-class art for zero dollars. Then get yourself home, rest, and digest the revelations of the past 14 hours.

**LESLIE ALLISON**

## SATURDAY 1

**GLOBAL PEACE PICNIC** *This mini festival features eight acts on two stages. Sat 10/1, 1-7:30 PM, Humboldt Park Boathouse, 1301 N. Sacramento, all ages*

### Global Stage, 1 PM **TAMBURICA HAUS BEND**

The word "tamburica" (spelled several ways in English, including "tamburitza") refers to a family of stringed instruments widespread throughout Eastern and Central Europe, particularly the countries of the former Yugoslavia and other Balkan nations. These long-necked lutes are close kin to the Indian tamboura and the Persian tambura by way of the Silk Road and the Ottomans, and they belong to the same family of instruments as the viola-like kontra. Large formal tamburica orchestras have existed since the 19th century, but the instrument is more commonly played in a small string band with a bass, as it is in Chicago's **Tamburica Haus Bend**. This format is closer in size and spirit to a traditional village ensemble that plays for community occasions both festive and somber.

For seven years, the Tamburica Haus Bend have been playing together at festivals and other events throughout the Chicago area. The ensemble is slightly unusual in that bassist Zoran Miletic, tamburica player Joe Kirin, and kontra player Bob Persa are joined by an accordionist, Zoran Radovanovic. They get a great deal of sound out of such a small group of players, bringing a joyful, infectious energy to a raucous and bittersweet repertoire that comes from Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia, and other nearby countries. I reached Kirin for an online chat, and he described two of his favorite songs from the band's usual set: the upbeat, clap-along dance number "Evo Banke" ("Here's the Bank") refers to the



Suhail Yusuf Khan, Amit Kavthekar © COURTESY THE ARTIST



Raman Kalyan, Manik Khan © COURTESY THE ARTIST



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Tamburica Haus Bend COURTESY THE ARTIST



Sones de México Ensemble HENRY FAJARDO



Shanta Nurullah LAUREN DEUTSCH

tradition of audience members showering Romani musicians with money when they're moved by the music, while "Moja Mala Nema Mane" ("My Girl Has No Flaws"), made famous by Croatian band Zlatni Dukati, is a playful love song with a slightly sinister denouement. The Global Peace Picnic is an excellent setting to experience the Tamburica Haus Bend live; their music is ripe for dancing and for celebrating the persistence of culture and community through adversity. **MONICA KENDRICK**

## iSúbelo! Stage, 1:30 PM **SONES DE MÉXICO ENSEMBLE**

Formed in Pilsen in 1994, the **Sones de México Ensemble** have made it their goal to promote traditional Mexican son, a centuries-old form of folk music that fuses elements from Spanish, African, and Indigenous cultures. The Chicago group's mastery of regional Mexican musical styles has been central to their mission, and they've spent the past three decades performing live shows, self-releasing albums, collaborating with dance companies, and holding classes and workshops. Their passion runs deep, and it overflows on their records. On their 1996 debut album, *iQue Florezca!*, they cull from huapango, mariachi, and more, creating a palpably jubilant mix. "iQue Florezca la Luz!" overflows with cheerful group vocals in beautiful harmony, while "Xipe" highlights how easily the group can make simple percussion feel life-affirming. The celebratory vibe continues on 2002's *Fandango on 18th Street*, where even the song titles ("Polkas," "Boloros") affirm the group's desire to deliver joy through as many genres as possible. Sones de México took more liberties on *Esta Tierra Es Tuya*, tackling Bach, Led Zeppelin, and the Woody Guthrie song that gives the album its title; here, more than on any of their other works, they aim to capture the Mexican immigrant experience in its infinite variety. The Sones de México Ensemble's two most recent albums, 2010's *iViva la Revolución!* and 2013's *13 B'akt'un*, both respond to specific events. The former celebrates the Mexican Revolution on the 100th anniversary of its beginning; it features music from the early 20th century and ends with a sprawling four-part suite that ranks among the group's most epic recordings. The latter came shortly after the Mayan calendar completed one of its many cycles on December 21, 2012, and includes an especially beautiful recording called "Xochipitzahuatl," named after the traditional marriage song and dance. Listening to the Sones de México Ensemble is to experience the richness of Mexico's musical history. **JOSHUA MINSOO KIM**

## Global Stage, 2:30 PM **SHANTA NURULLAH**

When **Shanta Nurullah** left the U.S. for India in 1969, she wasn't aware that she was joining a wave of musicians looking eastward for inspiration. A native Chicagoan, she'd joined a study-abroad trip to escape a lonely winter at her small Minnesota college, where she was one of only a handful of Black

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students on campus. She fell in love with the sitar shortly after arriving in Pune, in the western state of Maharashtra, and she spent the next six months absorbed in learning to play it. "It was just what I had to do," Nurullah recalls. Still, she left India feeling discouraged because she'd been told that she'd have to practice eight hours per day for at least five years before she'd be a decent player. But when she returned to Chicago after graduation and began collaborating with Phil Cohran of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM) at his Black music workshops, he encouraged her to think beyond Indian classical music and even wrote some new material for her. "That was all the permission I needed," Nurullah remembers. She began to find a voice, employing the sitar's distinctive timbres and textures to re-create spirituals and other songs as well as to improvise. In 2015, Nurullah formed SitarSyst, a Chicago-based collective informed by her decades-long career as a musician, storyteller, and teacher. On their 2016 recording, *Sitar Black*, the group uses a variety of instruments, among them oud, trumpet, mbira, guitar, bass, voice, and percussion (including the madal, a Nepalese hand drum). They play blues, jazz, and traditional tunes and also perform group improvisations, an eclectic approach that allows the musicians "to express who we are and what's important to us as

citizens of the world," says Nurullah. **KELLEY TATRO**

## iSúbelo! Stage, 3 PM **AFRICARIBE**

**AfriCaribe's** bomba performances create a celebration for the eyes and ears. The ensemble's many members converse with one another in a complex interplay: A semicircle of women in white blouses, headscarves, and long, colorful ruffled skirts dance and sing a call-and-response melody. Two hand drummers accompany them, with the primo drummer following the lead dancer's improvised movements and the buleador drummer keeping a constant bass rhythm. A third percussionist accompanies on *cuá* (a wooden barrel on its side, played with two sticks) while one of the singers plays a maraca.

Bomba is a Puerto Rican folk music, dance, and song with West African origins. Between the 16th and 19th centuries, the Spanish empire enslaved tens of thousands of Africans to work on sugar plantations. These Africans and their descendants helped shape Puerto Rican culture, including its art and music. Bomba was also influenced by the traditions of the Taíno people native to the island and by European dancing.

Evaristo "Tito" Rodríguez founded AfriCaribe in 2000 "to celebrate the African influence in Puerto Rico and other Caribbean lands." The Chicago nonprofit maintains not just a bomba ensemble but

also a production company and a cultural center at 2547 W. Division, where it holds all-ages classes and other community activities. Before the pandemic hit, AfriCaribe had hosted monthly "bombazos" for more than 18 years.

The AfriCaribe ensemble, which ranges from eight to 15 members, consists of volunteers and focuses on education. Its activities, according to Rodríguez, include performances, lectures, demonstrations, workshops, and residencies; it also develops curricula for teachers. "Bomba has always been part of the history of Latino music," he explains. "We would listen to salsa groups of the 1950s and '60s without realizing that some of those rhythms were based on bomba."

The pandemic "really did a number on us," Rodríguez acknowledges. "We tried on a few occasions to do the virtual thing, but it's hard to perform in front of a camera. It's not dishing out any kind of energies," he says, laughing. "Bomba is very communal." **JACOB ARNOLD**

## Global Stage, 4 PM **NATTY NATION**

**Natty Nation** are a Madison institution. In 2010, the alt-weekly *Isthmus* named the reggae band's second album, 1998's rootsy *Earth Citizen*, the 24th-best pop album to come out of Madison; in 2008, Natty Nation had begun a 12-year run of Black Friday

shows at the High Noon Saloon, a streak that might still be going if it weren't for COVID-19. More than two dozen musicians have passed through the lineup since the band began in 1995, and they've weathered the loss of a cofounder, vocalist-guitarist Jeffrey "J-Maxx" Maxwell, who died in 2001; bassist-vocalist Demetrius "Jah Boogie" Wainwright is the sole remaining original member. Natty Nation have maintained a solid base in classic reggae grooves and themes (Rastafarianism, peaceful lifestyles, radical equity) while expanding their sound. The 2008 album *Reincarnation*, for example, stitches in elements of hip-hop, enlisting a handful of outside producers to add light boom-bap beats, dubby samples, and snatches of rapping that highlight the soulfulness of Natty Nation's reggae. On the group's most recent full-length, 2016's *Divine Spark*, their relaxed melodies highlight reggae's great capacity for transcendent repetition. "I've been into meditation for a while," Wainwright told *Isthmus* after the release of *Divine Spark*. "We're picking up people through that." I have no trouble believing him, since these guys prefer to reach fans by playing live—and they've had nearly three decades to perfect their hypnotic reggae riddims. **LEOR GALIL**

## iSúbelo! Stage, 4:30 PM **LA DAME BLANCHE**

Flutist, singer, and percussionist Yaite Ramos Rodri-



AfriCaribe's bomba ensemble ■ COURTESY THE ARTIST



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quez, aka **La Dame Blanche**, was born in 1979 into a musical family in Pinar del Río, the westernmost province of Cuba; her father, Jesus “Aguaje” Ramos, is a trombonist and musical director of the Orquesta Buena Vista Social Club, and her uncle Mayito Rivera spent more than two decades as the front man for legendary Cuban band Los Van Van. She began conservatory training in classical flute at age eight, then relocated to Paris in the late 90s. After making her mark as backup singer with French-Spanish punk raggamuffin band Sergent Garcia, she began developing her own musical persona as La Dame Blanche. Ramos Rodriguez’s stage name is meant to evoke a fearsome yet benevolent mythical figure—a witch, sorcerer, and healer—as well as to reflect her beliefs as a practitioner of Santería (an Afro-Cuban spiritual system with roots in Yoruban beliefs). Her tunes inject traditional sounds—notably batá drums, used in many religious ceremonies—into a compelling, ultra-danceable fusion of styles from across the African diaspora, including rumba, reggae, dancehall, cumbia, and moombahton. Masterfully backed by French sound engineer and beat maker Marc “Babylotion” Damblé, La Dame Blanche spits fierce feminist calls to power and pride in the face of sexist violence, her rhythmic flow marked by flavorful Cuban slang; she also punctuates her vocals with dramatic flute lines that reflect the Latin-jazz grooves she explored at Havana’s Escuela Nacional de Arte de Cuba. La Dame Blanche’s buoyantly creative performances feel as if they map out the road from rumba to rap. **CATALINA MARIA JOHNSON**

## Global Stage, 5:45 PM **JINA BRASS BAND CHICAGO**

The newly established **Jina Brass Band Chicago** shares DNA with a New York group founded in 2005 under a similar name—they’re both baraat brass bands, named for the groom’s processional in a South Asian wedding, and they capture the energy and excitement of that celebration with traditional baraat songs, classic Punjabi tunes, and upbeat Bollywood numbers. Both bands also get support from New York-based percussionist Sunny Jain, leader of the group Red Baraat: the son of Punjabi immigrants, he runs a company called Jainsounds that supplies live music for weddings. The local version of Jina Brass Band is led by one of his many Red Baraat collaborators, Chicago-based tubaist Akshat Jain, who also teaches at the Merit School of Music and plays principal tuba in the Chicago Composers Orchestra. He’s joined in the core lineup by trombonist Catie Hickey, who cofounded the workshop Taller de Trombones de Panamá in 2014, and percussionist Kabir Dalawari, who released a jazzy debut album in March 2022 called *Awareness*. Jina Brass Band Chicago fills out its lineup with a shifting cast of musicians, so that its complement of instruments always includes sousaphone, trombone, trumpet, saxophone, and percussion—including the double-headed dhol, a drum long associated with rambunctious bhangra beats and other forms of South Asian folk music. Akshat Jain is also part of

party-happy marching band Mucca Pazza, so you’d better believe he knows how to keep a crowd on its feet. **LEOR GALIL**

## iSúbelo! Stage, 6:15 PM **BAZURTO ALL STARS**

Colombian band the **Bazurto All Stars** build supremely danceable grooves upon the musical pillars of champeta, a vibrant Afro-Colombian musical style and dance that originated along the country’s Atlantic-Caribbean coast—particularly in the urban centers of Cartagena (where the All Stars are based) and Barranquilla. Rooted in the music of the descendants of the free Black communities who populated the region in the 18th century, champeta jelled into its contemporary form in the late 70s and early 80s. U.S. audiences caught a glimpse of its fancy, hip-shimmying footwork and irresistible beats when Shakira (who’s from Barranquilla) brought it to the Super Bowl stage during her 2020 halftime performance.

The Bazurto All Stars seamlessly blend classic champeta with rhythms from many of the African genres that helped inform it, such as Congolese soukous and Ghanaian highlife. They also veer into Caribbean grooves from Jamaica and Haiti, adding dollops of reggae as well as hip-hop and reggaeton. Four of the group’s seven members are vocalists, and they often come together in tight, fluid harmonies. One of those vocalists, Jeison Guerrero, is also an accomplished rapper, and his rhymes accentuate the band’s party-time themes.

Champeta songs typically flow from an introduction and chorus into the genre’s most lively element, a repetitive passage called the *despeluque*. In Caribbean slang, the term has come to refer to letting your hair down in the wildest way and is now synonymous with partying. In the *despeluque*, the guitars and bass pull back, and the percussion—in the Bazurto All Stars, conga and drums—lays a foundation for simple chants that facilitate audience participation. For example, a 2020 single about traveling with or without a visa is called “Pa’Lante,” a contraction of “para adelante” that usually means “go ahead,” “onward,” or “go for it”—and its repetition in the chorus echoes its use throughout the Americas as a popular chant in rallies advocating for social and political change. The Bazurto All Stars are putting out the call: *pa’lante* Chicago, with a major moment of *despeluque*! **CATALINA MARIA JOHNSON**

**LA CHICA, BEATS Y BATERIA, DJ FANITA BANANA** Sat 10/1, 10 PM (doors at 9 PM), Martyrs’, 3855 N. Lincoln, 21+

**La Chica** is the creation of French-Venezuelan artist Sophie Fustec. Born in Paris, she began playing music at age six—first violin, then piano, which became her instrument of choice. Fustec visited Venezuela often while growing up, and at age 19 she decided to split her time between Europe and South America while studying classical piano and analog synthesizers. In 2010, when she was in her late 20s, she joined Bastien Picot, Florent Mateo,



Jina Brass Band Chicago © MARK HALE



Bazurto All Stars © COURTESY THE ARTIST

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and Anthony Winzenrieth to form French electronic-pop band 3SomeSisters.

In 2015, Fustec debuted her solo work as La Chica, which combines R&B, pop, classical, electronic music, and other contemporary sounds. And she doesn't just sing, she roars—manifesting her femininity and Latinidad as well as the healing powers of music. La Chica's first EP, *Oasis*, dropped in 2017, followed by *Cambio* in 2019.

"I love rhythm. I grew up with Caribbean percussion, so it naturally shows in my music," Fustec says. "I usually build everything from the beat, even if it's implicit. I need to feel a pulse to be able to create the rest. The colors in my harmonies come from many different inspirations, but the biggest is prob-

ably my love for Debussy, on one side, and the UK scene with the Beatles, Radiohead, and James Blake on the other."

Fustec's latest release, 2020's *La Loba*, is dedicated to her late brother, Pablo, who died in summer 2020 after trying to rescue one of his dogs from a scalding hot spring. She fondly remembers Pablo as her companion on the road and in art, and their bond may explain the urgency in her voice throughout *La Loba*—it channels pain, sorrow, and rage. But with this record, Fustec has transformed these emotions into poetic vignettes of hope. "I've composed those songs to heal," she explains. "It's an ongoing transformation." **SANDRA TREVIÑO**

**Beats y Bateria** are too eclectic for the mainstream

spotlight, but that variety also makes this global-music trio unpredictable and interesting. The Chicago band's far-reaching vision combines century-old folk tunes and ancient rhythms with a modern electronic sheen, informed by the members' diverse backgrounds: vocalist Ana Everling (see below) is Moldovan, and draws from her homeland's music as well as jazz, fado, samba, and other styles; drummer Daniel Crane loves salsa, jazz, Afro-Brazilian music, hip-hop, house, and more; Cuban DJ and producer AfroQbano, aka Harold Gonzalez Medina, worked as a house and hip-hop DJ in Havana clubs and developed a taste for the rhythms of Afrobeat, funk, and bhangra.

After moving to Chicago, Medina joined Beats y Bateria as well as Latinx music and arts collec-

tive Future Rootz, and he's shared stages with the likes of Mos Def, Pete Rock, Antibalas, and Hypnotic Brass Ensemble. He tied for runner-up in the *Reader's* 2016 Best of Chicago poll for "Best DJ." Crane picked up drums at age 11 and started playing professionally at 16. He took his first tour of Europe at 18, and after college (where he studied jazz, Afro-Cuban, Afro-Brazilian, and West African rhythms) he traveled to São Paulo to learn more about Brazilian drumming. Everling became part of the Chicago scene in 2015, joining projects playing jazz and pop as well as Latin American and Balkan music. She has also added her vocals to Amada, Alfonso Ponticelli & Swing Gitan, and La Peña Orchestra, and her newest group is Taraf de Chicago, a folk ensemble that specializes in old Moldovan peasant songs.

Everling sings in several different languages, underlining the wildly hybridized nature of Beats y Bateria's sound—the lyrics on their most recent single, "Carolina" (from summer 2020), are in Portuguese. The tune starts like a traditional ballad, but then electronic textures begin to ebb and flow as the track morphs to encompass jazz, house, disco, bossa nova, and more. Beats y Bateria say they're close to completing their first full-length album, which ought to be out in late 2022 or early 2023. They also plan to drop another single in time for their World Music Festival performance. **STEVE KRAKOW**



La Chica © COURTESY THE ARTIST



Beats y Bateria © COURTESY THE ARTIST

## SUNDAY<sup>2</sup>

### PAOLO ANGELI, SURABHI ENSEMBLE

Additional support for Paolo Angeli provided by the Italian Cultural Institute of Chicago. Sun 10/2, 5 PM, Reva and David Logan Center for the Arts, 915 E. 60th, all ages

Plenty of critics have suggested that the age of guitar music is over, but they must be thinking of somebody besides **Paolo Angeli**. The Sardinian musician, vocalist, and ethnomusicologist might be one of the world's most innovative guitarists, judging not just by his experimental compositions but also by the instrument he's created to play them: a prepared chitarra sarda ("Sardinian guitar," a large-bodied baritone) that he's outfitted with hammers, pedals, propellers, additional strings, and more, morphing it into a hybrid between guitar, cello, and percussion section. Angeli's influences include traditional Sardinian music, postrock, jazz, and flamenco, and the techniques he's mastered are just as varied: he strums and plucks (sometimes with a giant metal plectrum), he uses a bow, he taps out percussion with his bare feet, and he processes everything through a battery of effects pedals. His music is avant-garde, but it rarely feels abstract: the warmth at its core and its cinematic qualities make it supremely approachable. In 2019, he released *22.22 Free Radiohead*, where he refracts ten Radiohead songs through his vision—and in a low-key power move, he recorded them with no overdubs. Angeli's

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latest album, *Rade*, came out earlier this year, and its fusion of breezy Mediterranean atmospheres with lush instrumentation feels like it reveals more secrets on repeat listens. **JAMIE LUDWIG**

The **Surabhi Ensemble** create a cross-cultural fusion that includes Indian raga, Spanish flamenco, Mexican folk, and Arab maqam. These Chicago-based musicians, dancers, and artists work to demonstrate the commonalities among cultures—a mission they took on the road for a 2019 tour of Vietnam, Senegal, Portugal, and Spain—and they're developing a new performance piece that draws on their collective experience of the pandemic. The show is sung in Arabic, Spanish, and Hindi and includes traditional and folkloric styles such as son jarocho, flamenco, and salsa, as well as Rajasthani and Bharatanatyam dances. It also features poetry, mantras, meditations, and stunning visuals captured during the group's travels to Oaxaca and Tahiti.

The Surabhi Ensemble consists of about a dozen artists, who bring a diversity of cultural backgrounds into the fold. Though this new performance highlights traditional music and dance, it's not an exercise in aesthetic purism, says Surabhi member Carlo Basile, also of Las Guitarras de España.

"Yes, there are many traditional aspects in the show, but there is much more going on," Basile explains. "This isn't so much about the dances or music being traditional, because they morph throughout the performance—it is more about us as human beings."

COVID-19 and the uprisings following the police murder of George Floyd colored the production from the start. "We had a big workshop about all the different feelings that we encountered, not just personally, but collectively as a society, maybe, through the pandemic," Basile says. "Things we went through as protocols, and what we went through with grief, and the loss, obviously, is astounding. All of these things came out in different sections [of the performance] that we're calling vignettes or scenes from the pandemic."

At a concert this summer, the Surabhi Ensemble put out a limited-edition prerelease version of their forthcoming album, *Un Respiro Libre*, which contains those pandemic songs. Some of that material, along with tunes they haven't shared yet, will appear in their set at this World Music Festival showcase—and they're hoping to have a final version of the album ready too. **SANDRA TREVIÑO**

## MONDAY 3

### GILI YALO, JUAN PASTOR CHINCHANO

Additional support for Gili Yalo provided by the Consulate General of Israel to the Midwest. Mon 10/3, 7 PM (doors at 6 PM), Constellation, 3111 N. Western, 18+

When singer-songwriter **Gili Yalo** was four years old, he and his family were airlifted from Sudan with

thousands of other Ethiopian Jews, who'd immigrated to escape the mid-1980s famine in their homeland and ended up caught in the middle of Sudan's civil war. The crisis prompted the Israeli government and the CIA to launch Operation Moses to resettle this vulnerable population in Israel. Yalo was lucky to survive the perilous journey—many children did not—but he still found it challenging to adjust to his adopted home. African immigrants faced discrimination, and because few Israelis understood Amharic, he had to learn to speak Hebrew. He got his start in music by singing in an army choir, pop cover bands, and a dub group, but then he went back to his Ethiopian roots. Yalo's self-titled 2017 album, released when he was 36 years old, asserts his identity in an eminently danceable way, highlighting the

beats, horns, and keyboards of the Ethiopian funk and jazz that emerged in the 1960s (documented on the ongoing *Éthiopiennes* series of albums released by French label Buda Musique). His songs use Ethiopian pentatonic scales (he began with the most common, called "tezeta," and branched out from there), but he's shifted some of their East African rhythms to fit with reggae grooves. Yalo returned to Ethiopia to shoot the 2017 video to "Selam," which depicts him surrounded by children—many of whom are around the age he was when he first left the country. Two years later, Yalo recorded the 2019 EP *Made in Amharica* with the team of producers at Texas studio Niles City Sound, highlighting rock-based song structures and electric guitar leads. His recent singles, whose lyrics mix Amharic, Hebrew,

and English, embrace a variety of international sounds and some reliably universal themes: the latest, this summer's ballad "Yom Ehad Yavo" (Hebrew for "The Day Will Come"), is a plaintive cry for lost love. **AARON COHEN**

If Peruvian traditional music can be visualized as overlapping spheres of influence—indigenous Andean instruments, Spanish colonial dances, African rhythms—then drummer **Juan Pastor** sits at the intersection of nearly all of them. In the years since he moved to Chicago in 2006, lured by the city's jazz tradition and the university program at DePaul, he's added even more elements to that nexus. Pastor got his start learning folkloric percussion from family members and other musicians



Surabhi Ensemble @ COURTESY THE ARTIST



Paolo Angeli @ COURTESY THE ARTIST



Gili Yalo @ MICHAEL TOPYOL



Juan Pastor, drummer and bandleader of Chinchano @ COURTESY THE ARTIST

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in Lima, where he grew up, and when he heard jazz for the first time, he was “amazed.” As he recalls in the liner notes to *Juan Pastor Chinchano*, his 2014 recording debut, “I knew I wanted to learn to play it.” That album inaugurated his band of the same name, **Chinchano**, whose core lineup is now Pastor on drums and percussion, Stu Mindeman on piano, Matt Ulery on bass, and Dustin Laurenzi on tenor saxophone. On Chinchano’s new album, *Carlitos*, dedicated to Pastor’s late father, they’ll be joined by saxophonist Greg Ward, trumpeter Victor Garcia, and percussionists Javier Quintana and Flavio Donoso (all based in Chicago except for Donoso, who’s from Lima).

“Chinchano” refers to someone from Chinchano province, south of Lima, or from its capital city, Chinchano Alta, where Pastor first learned to play the box-shaped drum called the cajón (literally “crate” or “drawer”). The cajón is a cornerstone of Afro-Peruvian music, with roots both deep and bloody. Enslaved Africans in Peru repurposed wooden crates to circumvent bans on percussion instruments, which slaveholders feared could encode insurrectionist messages. (Here in the United States, the patting juba—a dance that uses the body as percussion—was born out of a similarly draconian ban.) Pastor has never left the cajón, and it’s become a central part of Chinchano’s sound: Pastor often steps out from behind his drum kit to solo on it or to lead the band from his perch atop it.

HANNAH EDGAR

## TUESDAY 4

**SEFFARINE, THE ARAB BLUES** Tue 10/4,  
7 PM (doors at 6 PM), *Sleeping Village, 3734 W. Belmont, 21+*

Genre fusion is sometimes seen as a relatively new

phenomenon, accelerating as technologies such as radio, television, streaming, and social media have lowered the barriers between communities. But humans have been mixing and matching sounds and influences basically since they started making music. Led by vocalist Lamiae Naki and flamenco guitarist and oud player Nat Hulskamp, **Seffarine** participate in that age-old tradition, connecting people by threading the needle between past and present. Based in Portland, Oregon, they’re named for an ancient square in Naki’s hometown of Fez, Morocco, famous for centuries for its metalworking (a tradition her family continues today). Much as Motown songwriters borrowed from the noises of Detroit’s automobile factories, Seffarine take some of their rhythms from the sounds of artisans at their craft. Their 2015 debut album, *De Fez a Jerez*, is rooted in the historical ties between Fez and Andalusia, Spain, where Hulskamp has studied music—especially the period between the ninth and 15th centuries, when people, culture, and ideas flowed relatively peacefully between the two cities via the Strait of Gibraltar. The group function as a duo with guests in the studio, but when they play live they’re joined by Damian Erskine on bass, Madagascar-born Manavihare Fiaindratovo on percussion, and Iranian multi-instrumentalist Bobak Salehi on kamancheh, sehtar, tar, and violin. Seffarine’s music can melt the coldest hearts—the gorgeous, plaintive “Une Autre Chance” perfectly balances melancholy and romance. And their performances reach even greater emotional heights when cajón player Manuel Gutierrez, who’s also a celebrated flamenco dancer and choreographer, lights up the stage with his moves. **JAMIE LUDWIG**

Egyptian percussionist, DJ, and dancer Karim Nagi is a ubiquitous presence on the Chicago music scene. He performs solo concerts, which include dancing and storytelling; he leads Huzam, a quartet of Arab American musicians who play original compositions in traditional forms; and he plays in

the **Arab Blues** project developed by Rami Gabriel, who’s not just a musician but also a professor of psychology at Columbia College. Gabriel switches between electric guitar, oud, and buzuq, while Nagi accompanies on riqq (a small tambourine-like frame drum), tabla (a goblet-shaped hand drum, often called a “darbuka” in the West), or an unconventional trap kit assembled mainly from traditional instruments (for a bass drum, he sometimes uses a box drum). Like the name says, the Arab Blues seek connections between the Middle Eastern compositional and improvisational canon—called the turath—and the Western traditions of blues and jazz. This isn’t an entirely new approach, and in the duo’s sets you can hear occasional echoes of earlier East-West hybrids, such as Dick Dale’s surf-rock workout on the Eastern Mediterranean folk song “Misirlou” or Rabi Abou-Khalil’s oud fusion classic “Blue Camel.” The Arab Blues’s synthesis is accessible, gritty, and exhilarating, and Nagi is a born performer—he always seems to be having the time of his life onstage. He and Gabriel create a sound that’s sometimes graceful, sometimes bracingly noisy, like a Middle Eastern garage band. **NOAH BERLATSKY**

## WEDNESDAY 5

**EVA SALINA, ANA EVERLING** Wed 10/5,  
7 PM (doors at 6:30 PM), *Schubas, 3159 N. Southport, 21+*

In the United States, the general populace knows Romani music mostly via Spain and the flamenco guitar. But Romani traditions are much broader than a single country or instrument. New York-based singer **Eva Salina** has spent the past decade using her flexible voice and considerable intelligence to explore the wide range of Balkan Romani traditions. Her self-released 2013 debut, *Solo*, consists mainly of a cappella renditions of hymnlike songs—

even Salina’s breathing becomes part of the performance, and her powerful keening vocals evoke Middle Eastern performers such as the great Oum Kalthoum. On the marvelous 2016 album, *Lema Lema: Eva Salina Sings Šaban Bajramović*, by contrast, she twines her melismatic lines around Balkan brass-band arrangements—it’s party music for extroverted flirtation. Her most recent record, 2018’s *Sudbina*, takes another left turn; Salina and Romani accordion player Peter Stan collaborate on a set of fleet, polka-tinged dance tunes and heartbreak ballads associated with Vida Pavlović, a Serbian singer known as “the Queen of Roma Music.” (Macedonian singer Esma Redžepova, a contemporary of Pavlović’s who also earned that epithet, is much more famous in the West.) A highlight of *Sudbina* is “E Laute Bašalen Taj Roven,” a jaunty tune whose rhythms suggest a waltz on a pitching ship deck and whose lyrics (by historian Milan Vasić) describe the torture and murder of Romani people in the Nazis’ Banjica concentration camp. Salina’s career so far is testament to an admirably restless aesthetic—she’s helped shine light on a repertoire whose true extent is mostly ignored even in traditional- and world-music circles. Stan has become a regular collaborator, and he’ll be accompanying Salina at the World Music Festival. **NOAH BERLATSKY**

Moldovan-born singer and guitarist **Ana Everling** moved to Chicago in 2010, and since joining the world music scene here in 2015, she’s grown into a mesmerizing artist. She adapts her clear, lucid voice deftly to multiple styles, singing jazz, fado, bossa nova, and various Eastern European genres with equal ease. In 2016 she collaborated with bassist Jerry Fuller and guitarist Jarvis Raymond on *Under Paris Skies*, a tribute to more than 100 years of music from France’s most iconic city. In 2018 she released *Soleira*, a duo album with guitarist Carolina Folmer that’s full of heartfelt renditions of works by Spanish and Latin American composers. She also does a dazzling Middle Eastern-inflected rendition



Lamiae Naki and Nat Hulskamp of Seffarine © COURTESY THE ARTIST



Rami Gabriel and Karim Nagi of the Arab Blues © COURTESY THE ARTIST

# World Music Festival Chicago



Eva Salina @ DEBORAH FEINGOLD



Ana Everling @ COURTESY THE ARTIST



Al Bilali Soudan @ COURTESY THE ARTIST



Tuvergen Band @ SUSIE INVERSO

of Duke Ellington's "Caravan."

Everling's latest release, from early August, is a collaboration with guitarist David Onderdonk called *The Music of Guinga*. It celebrates the work of underappreciated Brazilian composer and guitarist Guinga (aka Carlos Althier de Souza Lemos Escobar), who has collaborated with the likes of Sergio Mendes and Clara Nunes and had his songs recorded by Elis Regina, Chico Buarque, Cauby Peixoto, and many others. For decades, he also held down a day job as a dentist. Guinga has a light touch with his eloquent rhythms and melodies, and Everling and Onderdonk are a perfect duo to bring his compositions to elegant life.

Everling is also a member of Beats y Bateria, who play a World Music Festival show at Martyrs' on Saturday, October 1 (see above). **MONICA KENDRICK**

## THURSDAY 6

**AL BILALI SOUDAN, TUVERGEN BAND** *This concert is part of the Old Town School of Folk Music's Ojalá! series, supported by the Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art. Thu 10/6, 7 PM (doors at 6 PM), the Promontory, 5311 S. Lake Park Ave. W., 21+*

Performers such as Tinariwen, Mdou Moctar, and Bombino have popularized and internationalized the Tuareg guitar sound of the West African Sahel, a fiery mix of desert blues and traditional Middle Eastern-tinged melodies and rhythms. Malian band **Al Bilali Soudan** stick closer to the music's acoustic roots than most of their peers, but they have as impressive a pedigree as anyone in the genre. Abellow Yattara, the 69-year-old group leader, learned to play from his father when he was seven and appeared on the early 1970s cassette recordings of Ali Farka Touré; one of his uncles was a member of Le Mali des Sables, who were included in the series of 1971 LPs that German label Bärenreiter-Musicaphon claimed as the first recorded anthology of Malian music. Abellow formed Al Bilali Soudan with his uncle Aboubacrine Yattara, and they're accompanied by their sons Mohamed ag Abellow and Ibrahim "Tchiale" ag Aboubacrine. The core of their sound is an instrument known in the Tamasheq language as the tehardent, a fretless three-string precursor to the banjo (better known in the West by its Bambara name, "ngoni"); for percussion they use the calabash, a hollowed half gourd.

Al Bilali Soudan's self-titled acoustic debut album (released in 2012 by Clermont Music) is mesmerizing and absolutely essential listening for anyone interested in Tuareg music—few recordings give you such a stark sense of the style's ancient origins, with its jagged rhythms, stabbing runs of notes, and chanted phrases. The band go electric on their 2020 album, *Tombouctou* (also on Clermont Music), but even with amplification they remain distinct from their more Western-leaning contemporaries. You can hear parallels with the deep blues of Son House or Charley Patton, but they seem more like

convergence than influence, and the hints of Hendrix or Van Halen in the psychedelic solos of Mdou Moctar are almost entirely absent. Rather than adapt to the electric sound, Al Bilali Soudan simply perform as they always do while plugged in. The result is soulful, loud, and gloriously raw. This is the band's first North American tour. **NOAH BERLATSKY**

By some counts, Mongolia's horses outnumber its humans, and the country enshrines its long history of equestrianism in its music. The cello-like morin khuur, whose two strings and bow are traditionally made with horsehair, is the most recognizable symbol of Mongolian musical culture. The neighboring Tuvan republic, now part of the Russian Federation, has its own analogue: the igil, similar to the morin khuur but occasionally made with goatskin, stretched over the face of the sound box banjo-style. Because of the figurative carvings that often adorn the instruments' scrolls, both are colloquially called horse-head fiddles.

You'll spot both instruments in **Tuvergen Band**, a Chicago-based trio that derives its name from the Mongolian word for "galloping." Tamir Hargana and Naizal Hargana (no relation) lived in Inner Mongolia before moving to the U.S. for university, and they bring some of the country's most distinctive sounds to Tuvergen, including a variety of folk lutes (the Tuvan doshpuluur, the western Mongolian tovshuur) and a style of overtone singing native to Inner Asia called khoomei, which allows vocalists to layer one or more additional notes atop the fundamental—it creates instantly recognizable combinations of buzzing, rumbling, and whistling tones. Tuvergen's take on Mongolian and Tuvan folk music frequently uses the ancient horseback rhythms of those styles, but it also roves as widely as their name implies, reflecting the band's self-description as "modern nomadic music." Much of Tuvergen's fusion twist comes via American percussionist and ethnomusicologist Brent Roman. He plays five continents' worth of instruments to evoke and augment the sounds of traditional Mongolian ensembles—including the Irish bodhrán (a frame drum, usually played by hand but here mounted on a kit), the Afro-Peruvian cajón (a box drum, which doubles as Roman's seat), and the Indigenous Australian didgeridoo, whose overtone-rich drone complements Tamir's khoomei singing. **HANNAH EDGAR**

## FRIDAY 7

**SON ROMPE PERA, MALAFACHA, DJ KINKY P** *Fri 10/7, 9 PM (doors at 8 PM), Reggies Rock Club, 2105 S. State, 18+*

**Son Rompe Pera** are youthful, energetic, cosmopolitan, and muy chilango—very much of Mexico City. The five-piece band, founded by three brothers nicknamed Kacho, Kilos, and Mongo Gama, have built a driving, danceable sound around the marimba. The brothers learned the instrument from their

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Son Rompe Pera © MARC VAN DER AA



Malafacha © COURTESY THE ARTIST



Kaleta & Super Yamba Band © COURTESY THE ARTIST



Occidental Brothers Dance Band International © COURTESY THE ARTIST

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late father, who made a living as a musician in Nautcalpan, on the outskirts of Mexico City. In their teen years, they left the marimba behind to play punk, rockabilly, and ska, and now that they've returned to it, their style carries the stamp of that musical journey—as well as a history of migrations upon migrations that can make your head spin. The marimba's long journey tells of the forced relocation of African people to the Americas, but its presence in Mexico City provides evidence of 20th-century arrivals from the country's rural south (especially Chiapas and Oaxaca, where marimba music is most established) who came to the burgeoning megalopolis in search of opportunity. Son Rompe Pera add to these associations a dizzying array of border-crossing sounds, including cumbia (likewise a well-traveled genre, and one of the band's most beloved), a cover of a ska classic, and a remake of

Lalo Guerrero's "Los Chucos Suaves," which recalls the comings and goings of the 1940s subcultural figure of the pachuco. The band's play with history coexists with street-savvy humor and a style that reflects Mexico City's love affair with rock, punk, and metal—at Chicago's Mole de Mayo festival earlier this year, the crowd even got a circle pit going for a couple of numbers. Son Rompe Pera's combination of irresistible intensity, impish iconoclasm, and deep musical roots ought to get your mind working, and it'll definitely keep your feet moving.

### KELLEY TATRO

Twenty-two years ago in Pilsen, two sets of brothers—Ezequiel and Alejandro Cruz and Ivan and Moises Bello—formed the Latin rock-ska cover band Pirámides. In 2003, having become popular doing that, they decided to add more musicians, start writing original music, and change their name to

### Malafacha.

Malafacha are now reaping the rewards of staying together for almost 20 years, though the band have had about that same number of musicians come and go around the Cruz and Bello brothers. "It's much easier now to put your music out there and get gigs, because there are so many festivals, so many venues, and so many more opportunities than we had when we began," says Moises Bello. "I believe it's because many who were involved since the beginning of the [Latin rock] scene in Chicago are still involved, but on a larger scale. For us to have seen these changes, from when there was nothing to now having options, it's been amazing."

Malafacha's exuberant sound combines ska, alternative rock, metal, and punk en español, and their lyrics protest injustices, especially those directed at immigrants. Their music draws out the youth of the community while continuing to appeal to listeners

who grew up with the band—at their vivacious performances, their original fans still turn out, while those fans' children are now the ones fueling the mosh pit. In 2014, Malafacha helped launch the Chicago Ska Collective to support bands from across the city and organize shows for touring bands.

In addition to the brothers—Moises and Ivan Bello on lead vocals and lead guitar, respectively, and Ezequiel and Alejandro Cruz on bass and drums—Malafacha now also includes keyboardist Carlos Gutierrez, guitarist Roberto Carlos Tovar, trumpeter Jesse Escobar, and saxophonists Angel Lorenz and Ramón Esparza. This fall, Malafacha plan to release a new album produced by two heavyweights in regional Mexican music: Kevin Villalpaldo (Alacranes Musical) and Armando Terrazas (Los Horóscopos de Durango). They've already put out the advance singles "Muy Temprano" and "Enterrados en la Historia." **SANDRA TREVIÑO**

# World Music Festival Chicago



Cha Wa © PATRICK NIDDRIE



Héctor Guerra © COURTESY THE ARTIST

## SATURDAY 8

**KALETA & SUPER YAMBA BAND, OCCIDENTAL BROTHERS DANCE BAND INTERNATIONAL, DJ MWELWA** Sat 10/8, 10 PM (doors at 9 PM), Chop Shop, 2033 W. North, 21+

If it's true you can tell a musician's personality by their playing style, then Leon Ligan-Majek, aka **Kaleta**, is a man of contradictions. His fleet guitar picking feels almost introspective, weaving an intricate, subtle web of rhythm, but when he opens his mouth all hell breaks loose—his guttural holler demands your full attention. When Kaleta and his jaggedly

funky New York-based band, **Super Yamba**, recorded live at Paste magazine's New York studio in 2018, he caught the host off-guard with a loud grunt before she could even introduce the group.

Kaleta was born in Benin, and during his adolescence his family moved to Lagos, Nigeria, where Fela Kuti had just fused West African highlife with American soul and funk to create Afrobeat. Kaleta began performing in church in the late 70s, then spent a few years backing juju star King Sunny Adé before joining Fela's band Egypt 80, where he got his grits with a long stint in the 80s and 90s. Psychedelic rock was also a huge influence on him as a young man, and you can hear that too on his debut album with Super Yamba, 2019's *Mèdaho*, which

places him in the lineage of his powerful mentors. The band has since made appearances (sometimes virtual, for obvious reasons) at several important music festivals, and two songs from *Mèdaho* were licensed for Zoë Kravitz's 2020 Hulu series *High Fidelity*.

Because *Mèdaho* came out only a few months before the pandemic, leaving little opportunity for touring, Kaleta's live shows today are especially cathartic. He and Super Yamba have recently resumed playing in-person shows after a two-year absence, and they feel it acutely. Their music was urgent already, and with this extra drive it's ready to explode like a split atom. **JAMES PORTER**

Guitarist Nathaniel Braddock first convened the **Occidental Brothers Dance Band International** in 2005 as an instrumental four-piece with alto saxophonist Greg Ward; they played mostly covers, focusing on the vintage West African styles that Braddock had begun teaching at the Old Town School of Folk Music. As the combo added members, their repertoire shifted. Their self-titled debut CD, released in 2006, consisted of sparse instrumental showcases for sweet reed melodies and lilting guitar picking, but its successor, *Odo Sanbra*, consisted mainly of high-energy dance tunes from Ghana that showcased the extroverted vocals of Kofi Cromwell, who was aboard from 2006 till '08. By the time Congolese singer Samba Mapangala began his stint with the group in 2009, they were playing mostly originals. The Occidental Brothers' performance schedule has waxed and waned over the years as musicians have moved in and out of town; Braddock relocated to Australia for a couple years in 2014 and currently lives in Cambridge, and Ward was based in New York for six years before returning to Chicago in 2015. But it has nonetheless persisted, taking on a series of collaborative endeavors, not just with Mapangala but also with Zambian vocalist Mathew Tembo and Brooklyn-based choreographer Edisa Weeks. Sometimes the band still get back to their instrumental roots, and that's how they'll appear for their first Chicago gig since February 2020. Besides Ward and Braddock, the Occidental Brothers Dance Band International will include longtime bassist Joshua Ramos and returning drummer Daniel "Rambo" Asamoah, formerly Cromwell's bandmate in Ghanaian highlife group the Western Diamonds; he played on *Odo Sanbra*, and he's filling in here for regular drummer Greg Artry. **BILL MEYER**

## SUNDAY 9

**CHA WA, HÉCTOR GUERRA** Sun 10/9, 3 PM, Lake Stage, Navy Pier, 600 E. Grand, all ages

With the Neville Brothers and the original Meters both long out of commission, the group now carrying the torch of New Orleans street music are **Cha Wa**. They named their 2016 debut album *Funk 'n'*

*Feathers*, and its sound combines the call-and-response chants of Mardi Gras Indians, wild brass-band revelry, and raw New Orleans funk. Cha Wa pay homage to those three traditions, and they do the job well. Their 2021 release *My People* (Single Lock), the band's latest album, overflows with earthy grooves, rowdy group singing, syncopated second-line rhythms, smooth neosoul, and sophisticated horn arrangements. Many of their songs engage with social-justice concerns: the title track addresses homelessness, and a cover of Bob Dylan's "Masters of War" turns it into a mournful lament. But Cha Wa aren't just rehashing the spirit and glory of past New Orleans masters; both their feet are in the present. Touches of rapping and sampling and an appearance by New Orleans singer Anjelika "Jelly" Joseph (a touring member of Tank & the Bangas) give the songs a playful lift. The band's recordings can transport a walking parade into your living room, and their restless onstage energy and swagger will bring a crowd to its feet. But even a strictly cerebral listener will get something to think about from Cha Wa. **MARK GUARINO**

**Héctor Guerra's** mestizo fusion has a Pan-Latin shamanic cumbia vibe, flavored by his Bolivian Andean and Andalusian Spanish background as well as his time living in Mexico with Indigenous artists and healers. In 2000, while still a teenager, he cofounded Pachamama Crew, a collective inspired by Public Enemy but rooted in Latine style, whose music reflects the struggle of Latine immigrants in Spain. He began developing his own beats in 2003, and at 18 he toured as an opener for DJ Lord (a late-career member of Public Enemy). After Pachamama Crew's sole full-length album in 2011, he moved to Mexico and began a solo career with the 2012 release *Amor*. His compositions, originally centered on rap, have evolved with the addition of cumbia, tropical bass, and Mexican folkloric music, along with reggae and dancehall. During his time in Mexico, Guerra collaborated with rockers such as Café Tacvba's Rubén Albarrán and spent time with Indigenous people around the country, including the Comcaac in the northwestern state of Sonora. The pandemic shutdown brought about his latest album, 2021's *Perreo Cósmico*, an ode to sexual liberation created in collaboration with a transatlantic roster of producers and musicians; its danceable grooves fit solidly within the global bass movement, sliding among trap, Afrobeats, reggae, hip-hop, dancehall, and cumbia. ("Perreo," from the word for "dog," is a dance popularized in the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico, characterized by rhythmic grinding with one dance partner facing the back of the other.) Now living in Bolivia, Guerra continues on a globe-trotting musical path that more intentionally highlights the Andean flavors of his paternal heritage. His upcoming album, *Cumbiando el Mundo*, features Bolivian folk maestro Donato Espinoza, and on Spanish-language Bolivian podcast *Lo Que Dice un Jilguero*, Guerra described it as "cumbia for bettering the human experience."

**CATALINA MARIA JOHNSON**

# The Complete Schedule of World Music Festival Chicago

## FRIDAY<sup>30</sup>

**RAGAMALA: A CELEBRATION OF INDIAN CLASSICAL MUSIC** This event continues into the morning of Saturday, October 1. 6 PM-8 AM, Preston Bradley Hall, Chicago Cultural Center, 78 E. Washington, third floor, all ages

**6-7:15 PM PURBAYAN CHATTERJEE, RAKESH CHAURASIA, AND OJAS ADHIYA**

**7:45-9 PM ROOPA MAHADEVAN, SRUTI SARATHY, AND ROHAN KRISHNAMURTHY**

**9:30-10:45 PM ANUPAMA BHAGWAT AND AMIT KAYTHEKAR**

**11:15 PM-12:30 AM INDRAJIT BANERJEE, RUPAK KULKARNI, AND HINDOLE MAJUMDAR**

**1-2:15 AM SARASWATHI RANGANATHAN, SRUTI SARATHY, AND ROHAN KRISHNAMURTHY**

**2:45-4 AM SUHAIL YUSUF KHAN AND AMIT KAYTHEKAR**

**4:30-5:45 AM RAMAN KALYAN AND ROHAN KRISHNAMURTHY**

**6:15-7:30 AM MANIK KHAN AND HINDOLE MAJUMDAR**

## SATURDAY<sup>1</sup>

**GLOBAL PEACE PICNIC** This mini festival features eight acts on two stages. 1-7:30 PM, Humboldt Park Boathouse, 1301 N. Sacramento, all ages

**Global Stage, 1 PM TAMBURICA HAUS BEND**

**iSúbelo! Stage, 1:30 PM SONES DE MÉXICO ENSEMBLE**

**Global Stage, 2:30 PM SHANTA NURULLAH**

**iSúbelo! Stage, 3 PM AFRICARIBE**

**Global Stage, 4 PM NATTY NATION**

**iSúbelo! Stage, 4:30 PM LA DAME BLANCHE**

**Global Stage, 5:45 PM JINA BRASS BAND CHICAGO**

**iSúbelo! Stage, 6:15 PM BAZURTO ALL STARS**

**LA CHICA, BEATS Y BATERIA, DJ FANITA BANANA** 10 PM (doors at 9 PM), Martyrs', 3855 N. Lincoln, 21+

## SUNDAY<sup>2</sup>

**PAOLO ANGELI, SURABHI ENSEMBLE** 5 PM, Reva and David Logan Center for the Arts, 915 E. 60th, all ages

## MONDAY<sup>3</sup>

**GILI YALO, JUAN PASTOR CHINCHANO** 7 PM (doors at 6 PM), Constellation, 3111 N. Western, 18+

## TUESDAY<sup>4</sup>

**SEFFARINE, THE ARAB BLUES** 7 PM (doors at 6 PM), Sleeping Village, 3734 W. Belmont, 21+

## WEDNESDAY<sup>5</sup>

**EVA SALINA, ANA EVERLING** 7 PM (doors at 6:30 PM), Schubas, 3159 N. Southport, 21+

## THURSDAY<sup>6</sup>

**AL BILALI SOUDAN, TUVERGEN BAND** 7 PM (doors at 6 PM), the Promontory, 5311 S. Lake Park Ave. W., 21+

## FRIDAY<sup>7</sup>

**SON ROMPE PERA, MALAFACHA, DJ KINKY P** 9 PM (doors at 8 PM), Reggies Rock Club, 2105 S. State, 18+

## SATURDAY<sup>8</sup>

**KALETA & SUPER YAMBA BAND, OCCIDENTAL BROTHERS DANCE BAND INTERNATIONAL, DJ MWELWA** 10 PM (doors at 9 PM), Chop Shop, 2033 W. North, 21+

## SUNDAY<sup>9</sup>

**CHA WA, HÉCTOR GUERRA** 3 PM, Lake Stage, Navy Pier, 600 E. Grand, all ages 