

CHICAGO READER

EXQUISITE INDEPENDENCE

god's closet's
monthly
clothing
pop-ups
provide
gender-
affirming
spaces

By DEBBIE-MARIE BROWN

P. 26



Chicago
Reader
**NONPROFIT
GUIDE**
2022

Special annual
insert inside!

THIS WEEK

CHICAGO READER | NOVEMBER 24, 2022 | VOLUME 52, NUMBER 4

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EDITOR'S NOTE

The who's who of local journalism gathered recently at the Newberry Library for the 83rd annual Chicago Journalists Association awards. As the organization's first in-person ceremony since the pandemic took its grip, a buoyant feeling was in the air (aided perhaps by an open bar), as Chicago journalists rocked their finest duds (props to *Sun-Times* columnist Ismael Pérez for outshining us all), and took a beat to look back at their work across the past year—and its resulting community impact.

The night was an extra special one for the *Reader*, as publisher Tracy Baim received a Lifetime Achievement award, and our own Kelly Garcia was chosen as the Emerging Journalist of the Year. If that weren't enough, staffers Katie Prout and Mike Sula were nominated for Sarah Brown Boyden awards, and freelance contributor Matthew Ritchie took home a first place distinction.

During the pre-awards mixer, *Reader* managing editor Salem Collo-Julin asked if I'd picked up an index card and written down a query for Baim's Q&A session. I'm not sure if it was the free-flowing bourbon, but for some unexplained reason, I brushed it off as a joke.

The ceremony underway, Baim was called to the lectern, and the emcee mentioned that in lieu of a stuffy speech, the honoree had decided to have an informal chat featuring questions from the audience. Panic set in. My boss was about to take the mike, and she might not be able to fill her allotted space. I needed to do something. Swiftly, I pulled out my phone and looked up "Windy City Times," the storied LGBTQ+ publication Baim launched alongside Drew Badanish, Bob Bearden, and Jeff McCourt, and that's when I saw it: Founded 1985.

I immediately felt a knot in my stomach, as even as a schoolboy, I remembered the significance of that time, and what it meant in the queer world I would one day grow up to be a part of: the early days of the AIDS epidemic.

Gladly, Tracy is a talker, and didn't need my help filling up time thanks to her extensive mental Rolodex of experiences, including interviewing Mayor Harold Washington, and taking him to task on the city's poor economic response to the nascent health crisis.

Still, for a moment that seemed eternal, I dissociated, remembered being in Catholic school and having the nuns show us a news report mentioning this new condition, which they packaged as God's welcomed punishment. At that moment, not having experienced my first crush, long division, or having even shaved for the first time, I remember thinking, *I know what I'm going to die of*. Moreover, I knew that no one would come to my funeral, and that my sole existence would be my family's forever shame. That's a lot for a grade schooler to take in.

Anyone who has ever taken a rapid HIV test knows how mortifying those 20 minutes between being swabbed and getting your results can be. Imagine prolonging that over two weeks, which was the norm at the time, way before pre-exposure prophylaxis

(PrEP) was a glimmer in science's eye; when the White House press secretary used the syndrome as a punchline during a briefing; and when, as one poignant scene in a sitcom of the time put it, it was believed AIDS was "killing all the right people."

The LGBTQ+ community desperately needed allies in those primordial days, and the L in the acronym stood hand in hand with their brethren. They organized, marched, rallied, screamed, and fought like hell. Baim did all that while informing, dispelling misinformation, pairing a human face to the crisis, and saving lives along the way. She won't want to hear this, but I say give her all the awards.

Ahead of Thursday, December 1, World AIDS Day—a commemoration that started in 1988 as the first-ever global health day—it's worth noting that HIV, the virus that causes AIDS if left untreated, is now a manageable condition with multiple treatment options, and that while the threat of infection seems like something for the history books, the World Health Organization estimates that 650,000 people died from HIV-related causes globally last year alone, adding to the more than 40 million worldwide deaths since virologists first classified it.

AIDS, and the stigma it carried, robbed the world of a whole generation of artists, thinkers, performers, storytellers, and everyday folk who hid their true identities till the end because the world around them wasn't ready to hear it, let alone accept it. To them I say I remember, and I thank you for being at the forefront. I, and many others, are indebted to you for paving the way, for taking the brunt of this epidemic, and for bringing exposure to a community that had long become used to living in the shadows. I also say thanks for allowing yourself to love when chances are that, like me, you were conditioned at a young age to think you'd never be worthy of it. Thank you from that little boy who was not able to properly word it, and would pray at night for God to make him "normal." Thank you from the adult who still prays, and now gives thanks for every single thing that makes him unique, and asks for a more compassionate and caring world—one where our mere existence isn't an open invitation for banishment, derision, or violence.

I remember. 

—Enrique Limón, editor in chief

 @EnriqueLimon



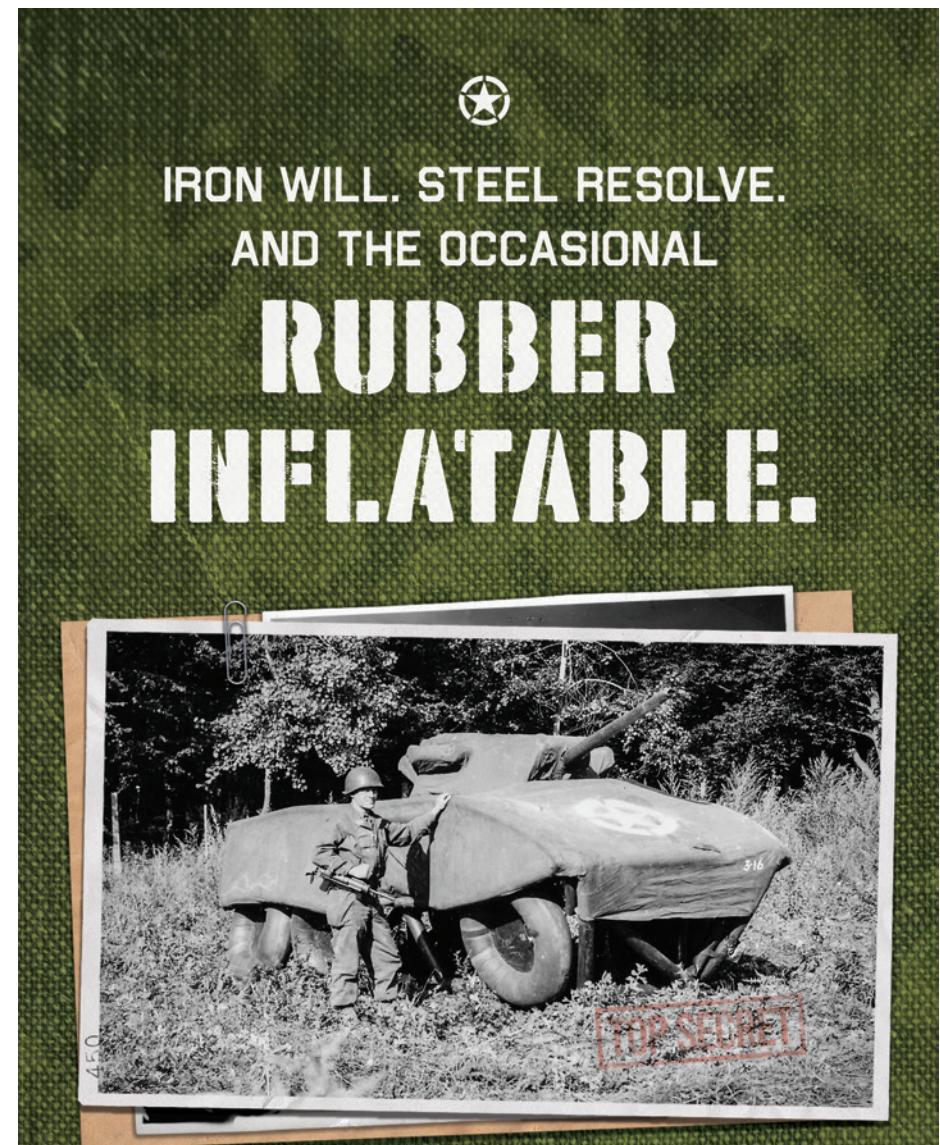
Reader editor in chief Enrique Limón (right) with publisher Tracy Baim  GLITTERGUTS PHOTOGRAPHY



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A black and white photograph of a World War II soldier standing next to an inflatable tank. The soldier is wearing a helmet and holding a rifle. The tank is covered in camouflage netting. A red stamp reading "TOP SECRET" is visible in the bottom right corner of the photo. The background is a textured green surface.

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STREET VIEW

Family style

A fashionable Pilsen trio enjoys their Election Day.

By ISA GIALLORENZO

Alanza Zaritz, 39, was born and raised in Chicago and is one of our city's treasures. She is a familiar, welcoming, and eye-catching figure at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago (MCA), where she has worked since 2005 (she's currently the MCA's store manager).

Zaritz's awe for her hometown is contagious, and very handy, since she has valuable local tips. Her love for fashion is obvious, as she approaches the art of dressing with devotion and expertise. "Fashion is alchemical and chameleonic. Not only does dressing up show regard for people you meet, it causes propulsive explosions of energy," she says.

"I'm always challenging my ideas about self-expression via fashion. My sense of self is wavy, and my closet is similarly all over the place. If only I was better at creating through visual art or music, but I've got this natural affinity for making color and texture combinations on my body. We love a flowy silhouette!" she adds. Zaritz's style is influenced by the way she moves through space, and her job at

the MCA. "It's a super-inspiring place to be. From the ever-changing exhibits to my colleagues to the patrons to the building itself, to the freaking glorious force of nature Lake Michigan, which is just in our backyard, we are always being plied with ideas about who we are and who we can be and how we fit meaning into our existence," she elaborates.

On the day Zaritz was photographed, she was sporting a laundry list of fashion designers celebrated by those well-versed in the métier. "Sies Marjan faux astrakhan jacket in an unexpectedly delightful lilac, seafoam Craig Green quilted trousers, crystal Simone Rocha sandals, and iridescent Loeffler Randall purse. The idea is 'Monet's Water Lilies escapes the Art Institute.' It's all secondhand," she says.

Zaritz felt particularly proud of a humble yet powerful accessory: her "I Voted!" sticker. "Voting is the absolute minimum—less than the minimum. Vote and volunteer and do the research and be involved in your community," she advocates.

Zaritz found a match made in fashion heaven in designer Gábor Hizó, 35. "We've been together about ten years, but we were friends before that. Gábor was the first person who was never derisive regarding my interest in style and that, among his infinite wonderful qualities, was refreshing. I am always curious to see what he'll put together. He's got a great and mysterious inner fantasy. Also, he's supportive of creative expression, whatever shape that may take, and not just for me and Zel [their eight-year-old daughter], but expansively. He's a great collaborator," Zaritz says.

Since they wear the same size, Zaritz often shops Hizó's closet, and they go on exciting thrifting trips together. "We traveled a lot this year and we thrifted in Palm Springs, Oakland, San Francisco, Seattle, and New Orleans. We

buy and sell at Buffalo Exchange, Crossroads, Elliott Consignment, the Second Child, and the RealReal as well, plus Vestiaire Collective and eBay. We prefer pre-loved garments—paying retail is a scam!" asserts Zaritz.

Hizó concurs. "I like secondhand resale shops and small boutiques," he says. That day while strolling and voting with his family in Chinatown, he was going for "warmth, utility, and mobility."

"I am wearing a Craig Green quilted worker jacket, AllSaints wool slacks, Salomon trail running shoes, and a hat I picked up at City Lights in San Fran. I try to carry some kind of camera [a Fuji X-Pro1 for today] with me at all times as I am Zel's number one paparazzo. I think the blue of the jacket is bizarre in the best way possible. It's the color of the future," he predicts.

Hizó is the living example of how menswear can be fun, interesting, and boundless. "Try on everything. Prescribe to no size, trend, style, color, or gender," he says. Hizó describes his style as "unconventional, but sensible, with lots of black and some pops of color." He's currently into big pockets, roomy fits, draping layers, ambiguity, and unusual silhouettes, and also "all the amazing utility-focused vintage clothing from the 80s and 90s by [Marithé et François Girbaud], Yohji [Yamamoto], and Issey Miyake that were as impressively forward-thinking then as they are today."

Their daughter Zel was wearing a lovely non-saccharine denim jumpsuit and Cookie Monster socks. "Zel's outfit is also all secondhand, socks aside. Nununu jumpsuit and Timbs [Timberland boots]. Her crossbody bag was a gift from a cool friend," says Zaritz. She advises parents to buy pre-owned garments and avoid disposable fashion: "Buy natural fibers that decompose and quality items that can be handed down repeatedly or resold.

Mend and do repairs. Learn to sew and teach your kids to sew. Once you can darn your socks or patch a hole, you'll never look at any garment the same way, much less a clothing store. Also, kids naturally gravitate towards fun and fantasy. Encourage that tendency," she adds.

With fashion in her DNA, Zel claims to love dresses, jumpsuits, and cool sweaters. Like her mother, she values movement. "I like to twirl in my dresses," she says. And like her father, Zel values a bit of minimalism and graphic details: "I like simple clothing with shapes on it."

This family's love for art and fashion is only paralleled by their love of Chicago, and these Pilsen dwellers have a lot to share about the city. They are fascinated by Chinatown, and know many of the neighborhood's nooks and crannies well.

"We love the vast variety of restaurants, the park and the river, the library and landmarks, the cultural events, the people-watching. I frequently recommend taking the water taxi or river tour and getting some local perspective. Aji Ichiban, Tsaoca, QXY, Veggie House, Hello Jasmine, and Tous Les Jours are some of our favorites. (Tous Les Jours is South Korean, not French; don't let the name fool you.) I've been going to Joy Yee since I was 11. Chinatown is a perpetual vibe," says Zaritz.

"We are regularly enticed by the idea of bubble tea, Hong Kong-style waffles, and snacks from Aji Ichiban. The sweeter things in life! Thankfully it's a quick jaunt over from Pilsen," says Hizó. "A fun summer move is grabbing cold beverages from Chinatown, then taking the water taxi that stops in Ping Tom Park toward downtown for an unofficial architectural tour of the city. Chicago was built to be seen from the river, and it always seizes me," he adds. □

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In 2006 the Illinois Lottery launched the first Instant Lottery ticket in the country that designated 100 percent of its profits toward organizations that support veterans in Illinois. Working with the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs, the Illinois Lottery has raised over \$20 million to fund the Veterans Cash program that has awarded grants to over 400 Veteran support organizations to date. These groups provide various essential services, including housing assistance, long-term care, disability benefits, employment services, and treatment for post-traumatic stress to the more than half million veterans who live in the state of Illinois. This year's tickets honoring our veterans is called Winter Winnings and was released at the beginning of November to coincide with Veterans Day. The ticket costs \$2 and is available at more than 7,000 Illinois Lottery retailers statewide. With the fun and frosty snowflake design, the Winter Winnings Instant Ticket makes a great stocking stuffer around the holidays for those 18 and over. Visit the Illinois Lottery website for more information about Winter Winnings and other specialty tickets. Read on to learn more about two recent grant recipients, Goodwill Industries of Central Illinois and Midwest Veterans Closet.

Goodwill Industries of Central Illinois

goodwillpeo.org

Based in Peoria, Goodwill Industries of Central Illinois recently received a \$30,000 grant for two veteran-support initiatives, the Veterans Employment Program and the Central Illinois Stand Down for Homeless Veterans events, which support more than 320 Illinois veterans and their families each year.



The Veterans Employment Program assists veterans returning to the civilian workforce or changing careers through assessing skills and interests, career mapping, job training and placement services, and individualized coaching to help veterans overcome barriers to employment, such as struggles with substance abuse, PTSD, or lack of a high school diploma.

Goodwill's annual Central Illinois Stand Down for Homeless Veterans event is a program providing workshops and seminars on subjects such as sobriety, mental health awareness (including PTSD), and suicide prevention, while also supplying unhoused veterans with warm-weather and other supplies for the cold winter months. The 14th Stand Down for Homeless Veterans event was held in October, and planning is already underway for the event's 15th anniversary, which will take place in the Fall of 2023.

In addition, the grant helps fund the General Wayne A. Downing Home for Veterans. Located in Peoria, the facility was built in 2005 and houses 15 veterans. "[We're the] only Goodwill in the country that supports and operates a home for veterans and is supervised 24/7," says Assistant Director of Mission and Program Services Johanna Wagner. "Having a place where veterans can be with other veterans where they receive housing, food, clothing, a support system, and resources like work training provides the support they need against many barriers they face."

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Midwest Veterans Closet

midwestveteranscloset.org

Impacting Veterans Lives, Inc. (dba Midwest Veterans Closet) provides much-needed food and goods to unhoused- and housing-insecure veterans and active-duty personnel who are newly assigned to the Naval Station Great Lakes at their drop-in shopping center in North Chicago.

With their recent grant of \$97,684 through Illinois Lottery and Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs, Midwest Veterans Closet will be able to better support their community of more than 12,000 current and former military members and their families.

The organization prioritizes dignity and care for all who walk through its doors. Veterans and service members can shop at their free store for nutritious meals and snacks, paper goods, clothing, housewares, new and gently used furniture, and more.

"Last year alone we provided over 514,000 pounds of food from our food pantries to veterans throughout the state," said executive director Mary Carmody, who anticipates that the organization's new grant will help them supply even more resources going forward. In addition to running their store, Midwest Veterans Closet provides services such as computer training and employment leads to veterans.

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FOOD & DRINK

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Taylor Hanna (left) and Jennifer Kim SANDY NOTO FOR CHICAGO READER

FEATURE

Alt Economy offers mutually aided instruction for hospitality workers

Chefs Jennifer Kim and Taylor Hanna launch a series of free culinary classes for restaurant workers and microbusinesses.

By MIKE SULA

Taylor Hanna taught herself to cook on the job. “I don’t have formal training,” says the 17-year veteran of nine restaurant kitchen lines, and one half of the pickling power duo Vargo Brother Ferments. “Chefs would give me tasks to do and I wouldn’t know what they were talking about. I’d go into the walk-in and google on my phone, ‘What is soubise?’ And you’d just have to be quick on the fly with it. It’s a

luxury if your chefs and managers are willing to teach you. Oftentimes, there’s no time in the shift to go, ‘Hey, can you spend 15 minutes with me to teach me how to sharpen my knife?’”

Jennifer Kim learned the fundamentals in culinary school, and sharpened them in kitchens such as Blackbird and Avec, but when it came time to open her first solo brick-and-mortar Passerotto, she was flying blind with respect to financial operations. (She sought

help from industry friends.)

During the pandemic both Hanna and Kim emerged as ardent participants and organizers in the semiunderground microbusiness economy that flourished in its first 18 months. They didn’t just rely on skills learned on the fly to further their own ends, but shared them with the loose collaborative community that grew up within this alternative economy. Through pop-ups, workshops, and a barnstorming cross-country tour in the summer of ’21, Alt Economy—the open-source mutual aid platform Kim started—provided hospitality workers with educational resources to survive and thrive outside the established restaurant industry.

“You could kind of fly under the radar with certain things,” says Kim. “We were working at homes, working without licensing. There was flexibility with creativity on how you got to operate your microbusiness.”

But ask any number of cooks, bartenders, and servers who supported themselves within this decentralized labor movement how it’s going now, and the thrilling autonomy that

came along with it has lost some of its shine. The reopening of brick-and-mortars drained blood from the microbusiness model, while a shift in algorithms withered the robust Instagram engagement many of these businesses depended on to get their food in front of eyeballs. Burnout and/or the need to make rent sent many workers back to brick-and-mortars—or out of the industry altogether.

“The pop-up scene was on fire,” says Hanna. “It was very trendy and cool. But you can’t rely on something to be cool to sustain you. It has to be deeper than that.”

“A lot of people are trying to figure out, ‘How do I keep this a viable business?’” says Kim, who’s currently teaching a fine dining course at her alma mater, Kendall College. “‘How do I work within these rigid systems again? How do you compete with these giant businesses?’”

That’s why the pair, building from an informal fish butchery class Kim led in her home last winter, are launching a series of free industry worker skill-share classes, entirely funded by the community. “It was just, ‘Bring

FOOD & DRINK



"We can at least jump-start the process of, 'Here are the basics of behind the bar; all the tools that you'll see; the language that they use.'"  SANDY NOTO FOR CHICAGO READER

over some fish, and we'll learn how to break it down from whole into filets," says Kim. "Participants felt empowered to continue building butchering skills. A few felt more confident to order whole fish versus filets, which has a financial impact on their food cost."

Kim also posted a series of free financial worksheets that give "workers and biz owners a road map on how costs, cash flow, and profits work within whatever ecosystem they are currently participating." In the meantime, she and Hanna began imagining how to go bigger: "Is there something that we can build out that people can come and share information, share skills, share resources in an environment that's driven by the community and taught by the community?"

Earlier this month they put out a call for resources to support a series of three classes, the first beginning December 12 and featuring hands-on sessions on pickling, canning, curing, and fermentation (taught by Hanna and partner Sebastian Vargo); knife sharpening (Kevin Silverman of Northside Cutlery); whole fish butchery (Hatchery instructor Matt Miller); and fish curing and fermentation (Kim). They're working on adding a pastry class. This first set of classes will be held at Impact Kitchen at the Hatchery, a space they're renting out through donations. Others have offered drinks, snacks, or their own bar and kitchen spaces for future classes, but Kim and Hanna haven't yet hit their goals to finance the next two sessions yet.

They're still looking for support for De-

cember's microbusiness courses on financial acumen and cash flow; business plan development, graphics, and design; and food photography. In early 2023 the plan is a series of introductory courses for BIPOC and undocumented workers interested in food photography and styling; bartending; coffee and barista work; and wine 101.

"We heard a lot from industry workers who are interested in entering the specific positions within hospitality that are typically gate-kept from BIPOC or undocumented workers," says Kim. "A lot of those positions, you need prior experience. We can at least jump-start the process of, 'Here are the basics of behind the bar; all the tools that you'll see; the language that they use.'"

Networking is a natural outgrowth of these classes, both for potential job leads and brainstorming on larger systemic issues within the industry. "It gives us a chance to almost have a town hall," says Hanna. "We're all gathered. Let's start talking about the realities of what's happening. For people who do want to keep doing this, what are the changes that we need to make? It's a part of a conversation that needs to be had collectively."

Donations of money, food, time, space, or equipment to support future classes can be made via Venmo @itsforpickles or Zelle at vargobrotherferments@gmail.com. Kim and Hanna pledge to publish transparent financials on how all dollars are allocated. 

 @MikeSula

POETRY CORNER

ancestor's wildest dreams

By Justus Pugh

the warmth of other suns
is teaching me
just how warm the sun's rays can get
when washing over me with light.

just how green the grass is
on the only lawn i have ever known.

how blue the sky is
only because my ancestors afforded me a life
where i can look farther and farther into it
every day.

and every day my wings grow
each feather a lesson,
a blessing.

and i jump off the grass of that lawn they grew
from infertile dirt

it's green turf and sprinkle of dandelions
catapulting me into the blue of the sky
open, wide
safe
in their everlasting protection.

flying higher and higher
feeling my skin shine under the warmth of a sun nowhere near as hot
as what my ancestors felt
when they were living under its gaze
working tirelessly.

and as i get closer and closer to it
higher and higher in the sky
farther and farther from the ground

they tell me to keep going. to fly higher
for these wings are anointed
and there's no way they'll let me fall.

Justus is a poet, writer, and technologist born and raised on the South side of Chicago. As an artist, his work is guided by the idea that our imagination is our ancestor's wildest dreams, inherited. And this imagination comes through writing his "Afrotranscendental" poetry, writing culinary fiction with *Village X Magazine*, and, now and today, storytelling.

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COMMENTARY



ON POLITICS

The Florida strategy

MAGA's attempt to scare white voters into voting against Pritzker didn't work so well, to put it mildly.

By BEN JORAVSKY

Poor Darren Bailey.

The *Chicago City Wire*, the so-called newspaper intended to scare people like me into voting for him, arrived on Election Day, a week after I'd already voted early for someone else. Blame it on the U.S. Postal Service, Senator Bailey.

In fact, I was paging through the *City Wire* while the results came in, showing Governor Pritzker was mopping the floor with Bailey, winning reelection with 54 percent of the vote, roughly the same amount he got against Bruce Rauner in 2018.

Apparently, all that toxicity and hate in the *City Wire* and in the pro-Bailey commercials (all those dire stories about crime running wild in Chicago) didn't really bring out the Republican vote.

In fact, it was just the opposite: a blue wave for Illinois's Democrats. They won everything on the ballot from governor to attorney general to comptroller to treasurer to secretary of state to two all-important seats on the state

supreme court.

Those judicial wins make it a five to two Democratic margin on the top bench, which will keep MAGA from undoing whatever legislation, most notably abortion rights, Pritzker and the Dems have passed or will pass for years to come.

In the aftermath, there are several takeaways. One is that the southern strategy is not as effective as it once was. It's at least not as pivotal as concerns about abortion rights. I'll get to that.

The other is that gerrymandering works. So three cheers to Speaker Chris Welch and his Democratic mapmakers for sticking it to Republicans the way Republicans generally stick it to Dems. Yes, yes, I know... In a perfect world, there would be no partisan mapmaking. No, in a perfect world, legislative boundaries would be drawn by computers without regard for partisan advantage.

But the world's far from perfect, my friends, as you have undoubtedly realized by now. So,

Sir Theodore Bartholomew (aka Sir the Cat) tries to make sense of the *Chicago City Wire*.
© VIVIAN GONZALEZ

please, Democratic voters (especially you squishy liberal types), do not fall prey to the pleas of "reformers" who want to go to independent mapmaking. Not until Republicans do the same in Ohio, Florida, Wisconsin, Texas, and so forth. Which will be never.

The point of gerrymandering is to use decennial census redistricting as an excuse to minimize your opponents' power by packing the opposition into a handful of districts. Which is what Speaker Welch and his mapmakers so effectively did. As evidence, allow me to offer the results from the recent congressional elections.

The state's three Republican congresspeople coasted to reelection. Mike Bost, Mary Miller (of "Hitler was right" infamy), and Darin LaHood won with over or close to 70 percent of the vote.

In contrast, the Democratic congresspeople outside of Chicago—Nikki Budzinski, Sean Casten, Bill Foster, Raja Krishnamoorthi, Brad Schneider, Eric Sorenson, and Lauren Underwood-faced tense campaigns and won with narrower margins.

The key being . . . they won. The margin doesn't really matter, as a miss is as good as a mile in a congressional race. That is, Casten doesn't get less of a vote in Congress than Miller just because her margin of victory was greater.

As a result of Welch's mapmaking, Illinois has one more Democrat in Congress than it had before the election, even though the state lost one overall legislative seat because of its declining population.

If by chance the Dems hold on to Congress—and they're still counting votes in the western states—Speaker Pelosi should send Speaker Welch a bouquet of roses. Too bad New York's Dems are too freaking clueless when it comes to mapmaking—another story for another time.

While we're at it, Welch's mapmakers did the same thing with the state supreme court map. Drew it just right to maximize Democratic votes and keep MAGA from winning the judicial seats they needed to turn Illinois into a northern version of Texas on labor, abortion, environmental regulations, and other matters.

Now onto the Southern strategy. It was devised in the 60s by President Nixon to take advantage of white grievances over civil rights laws which had angered southern, white

Democrats into turning Republican, almost overnight. And the party of Lincoln became the party of Jim Crow.

Nixon figured out that if you scare working-class and middle-class white people with their worst fears of Black people, you can get them to vote for Republicans, even if it's not in their best interests. And the Republicans will be free to pass tax breaks for the rich.

Bailey ran hard on his own version of the Southern strategy, calling Chicago a "hellhole" and predicting the state would be awash with crime if he didn't save us from Pritzker before it's too late.

Actually, that tagline came from the Chicago mayoral campaign of a Republican named Bernie Epton, who ran his own version of the Southern strategy against Harold Washington in 1983. But you get the point.

As far as I can tell, the brain behind Bailey's strategy was Dan Proft, a hardball campaign tactician. Proft's PAC was backed with millions of dollars in contributions from Richard Uihlein, an arch-conservative billionaire, to run commercials and distribute "newspapers" that favored Bailey.

Proft lives in Florida. So I guess we should call it the Florida strategy. I remember interviewing Proft in 2006 when he was running Tony Peraica's unsuccessful campaign against Todd Stroger for president of the Cook County Board of Commissioners.

In those days, Proft was a principal with Urquhart Media, a consulting firm named for Francis Urquhart, the Conservative member of Parliament in the BBC version of *House of Cards*.

Urquhart is so diabolically evil, he murders two of his rivals to get to the top. I urge Democrats to watch that show so they have no illusions about what they're up against with Proft.

I can't say for certain that the Southern strategy is dead. As long as there's MAGA—and, don't kid yourself, MAGA still exists—it will be employed.

Oh, brother, here I go, getting pessimistic. As Democrats tend to do. So let's end the way we began, on a positive note . . .

Against all odds, the red wave turned into a blue one. Well done, Illinois voters, well done! 🎉

@benjyshow

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OFFICIAL INFORMATION REGARDING APPRENTICESHIP OPPORTUNITIES

I.B.E.W. Local 134 and the Electrical Contractors' Association sponsor apprenticeship programs in Cook County, Illinois through the Electrical Joint Apprenticeship and Training Trust (EJATT). EJATT has permission from the U.S. Department of Labor to open a registration for new applicants for its Electrical Program. For more information on this program, please go to our website at www.ejatt.com.

REGISTRATION INFORMATION

Registration for the
Electrical Program
will take place at the
IBEW-NECA Technical Institute
6201 W. 115th Street, Alsip, Illinois
EVERY WEDNESDAY
9:00 A.M. until 11:00 A.M.

All applicants must report in person and bring the following documents in order to register:

1. Your valid Driver's License.
2. Your original Social Security Card.

You must provide copies of the following documents that will be kept by EJATT (No documents will be copied in our office or returned to you):

3. A \$50.00 non-refundable registration fee (Money Order only made payable to EJATT).
4. To prove employment eligibility, you must provide a copy of your U.S. Birth Certificate, U.S. Passport, Certificate of U.S. Citizenship or Naturalization, or Permanent Resident Alien Card. (Minimum age of 17 at registration).
5. To prove High School Graduation (HS), you must provide a copy of your HS transcript (official or unofficial with a graduation date posted), or a copy of a HS Diploma, or GED Certificate. College transcripts do not satisfy this requirement. HS seniors in their last semester prior to graduation may register with acceptance contingent upon graduation.
6. To prove one full year of HS level Algebra with a grade of at least "C" or better, or one post HS level Algebra course or higher level course with a grade of at least "C" or better, you must provide a copy of a transcript. Note: The GED Math Certification does not satisfy this requirement.

Upon an offer of apprenticeship, you must be able to demonstrate that you can perform the essential functions of an apprentice electrician with or without a reasonable accommodation. In addition, a drug screen, physical exam, and background check will be required.

EJATT will not discriminate against apprenticeship applicants or apprentices based on race, color, religion, national origin, sex (including pregnancy and gender identity), sexual orientation, genetic information, or because they are an individual with a disability or a person 40 years old or older. The EJATT will take affirmative action to provide equal opportunity in apprenticeship and will operate the apprenticeship program as required under Title 29 of the Code of Federal Regulations, Part 30.

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REGISTRATION INFORMATION

Registration for the
Communications Program
will take place at the
IBEW-NECA Technical Institute
6201 W. 115th Street, Alsip, Illinois
on the following dates and times

Monday, January 9, 2023, through Friday, January 13, 2023
9:00 A.M. until 11:00 A.M.

All applicants must report in person and bring the following documents in order to register:

1. Your valid Driver's License.
2. Your original Social Security Card.

You must provide copies of the following documents that will be kept by EJATT (No documents will be copied in our office or returned to you):

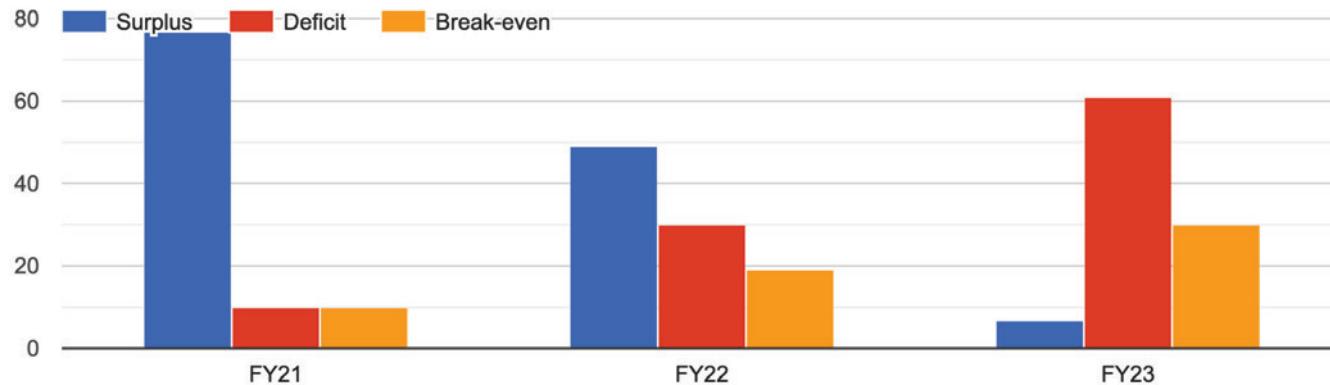
3. A \$50.00 non-refundable registration fee (Money Order only made payable to EJATT).
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5. To prove High School Graduation (HS), you must provide a copy of your HS transcript (official or unofficial with a graduation date posted), or a copy of a HS Diploma, or GED Certificate. College transcripts do not satisfy this requirement. HS seniors in their last semester prior to graduation may register with acceptance contingent upon graduation.
6. To prove one full year of HS level Algebra with a grade of at least "C" or better, or one post HS level Algebra course or higher level course with a grade of at least "C" or better, you must provide a copy of a transcript. Note: The GED Math Certification does not satisfy this requirement.

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COMMENTARY

In FY21, only 10 percent of respondents recorded a deficit [operating] budget. In FY22, that rose to a projected 30 percent, and for FY23, 61 percent are projecting a budget deficit. [Source: Theatre Communications Group's *Budgeting for Uncertainty*] COURTESY TCG



ON CULTURE

Long COVID for the arts

TCG's new report on nonprofit theater

By DEANNA ISAACS

Theatre Communications Group, the national organization for nonprofit theater, is about to release its latest annual report on the fiscal health of the field, *Theatre Facts 2021*. (Yes, it's almost 2023, but this stuff takes time to collect.)

The news is not great.

The report, which compares results over a five-year period, tracks the startling COVID-era jolts the theaters experienced. Average income from single ticket sales, for example, was 93 percent lower in fiscal 2021 than in 2017. And subscription income took an 83 percent dive.

It was a crash. But, says TCG communications director Corinna Schulenburg, there was a financial upside: expenses were down during that period when theaters were shuttered, while government aid kicked in. The result was a frothy blip of budget surpluses.

"Because of federal funding, and because

theaters were producing less, they actually had some liquidity," Schulenburg says. In fact, "what we call their working capital, which essentially is cash flow," hit a peak in 2021.

It was so good that, according to a "snapshot survey" TCG conducted earlier this year, only 10 percent of reporting nonprofit theaters had a deficit budget in 2021, and over 70 percent reported an operating surplus that year.

Now, Schulenburg says, the challenge is that the federal funding has gone away, and the cash cushion is disappearing. By 2022, according to the same survey, 30 percent of responding theaters were projecting deficit operating budgets, and there's a huge increase in that cohort on the horizon: 62 percent are projecting budget deficits in 2023.

Meanwhile, audiences have not been fully returning. (Arts Alliance Illinois says, anecdotally, that members are seeing a 30-to-50 percent drop in performing arts audiences.)

And Schulenburg notes that board member and individual giving has also declined.

"This was a big surprise for us," Schulenburg says. "We've seen individual giving continue to rise, annually. Theaters have been able to count on that kind of community support." But from 2020 to 2021, trustee giving declined 26 percent, while individual giving was down 7 percent. "The pandemic is still active, shows are being canceled, and audiences are not totally returning. From our perspective, we know how resilient our field is, but we're deeply concerned."

The bright spot in all this, Schulenburg says, is the success of advocacy for federal funding at the height of the pandemic. It was "really remarkable; the investment from the shuttered venues operators grant and especially the PPP, as well as the ERTC [Employee Retention Tax Credit]." Over 97 percent of surveyed theaters received some form of federal relief funding, a

level of investment not seen since the Federal Theatre Project during the Great Depression.

Schulenburg mentions a presentation on nonprofit theater economics ("Why Not-for-Profit Theatre?") that Goodman Theatre executive director Roche Schulfer delivered at a TCG forum in 2017. It was "prescient," she says.

I went to the source for an update.

"In 1966, two economists, William Baumol and William Bowen, wrote a book [*Performing Arts: The Economic Dilemma*] illustrating the basic economic challenge of the performing arts, which is that you can't take advantage of gains in productivity or technology like other sectors of the economy. It takes the same number of musicians the same amount of time to play Beethoven's symphonies, or actors to do Shakespeare's plays, as it did when they were written," Schulfer says. "So, as the cost of labor goes up, unless there's a significant gain in fundraising, there's a gap that's filled by increased ticket prices."

"Over the last 50 years or so, ticket prices have risen by far more than the cost of living. At the Goodman, for example, our top ticket is around \$90 now. If it had followed the cost of living, it would be in the range of \$33. We've been raising prices to make up for the gap in fundraising."

"Our mission is to provide new and engaging work, and not to just respond to what the marketplace wants," he told me. "But consumers will pay more for something they're familiar with than for something unknown to them."

Schulfer says this disconnect, amid a shift in institutional funding, means tough times ahead:

"I think there are going to be major performing arts organizations around the country that are going to face real crises in the next 48 months. Groups like Arts Alliance Illinois and TCG are trying to build on what happened during the pandemic, which was an awareness of the importance of the arts to the overall economy. There's an effort to build on that through the National Endowment for the Arts or other federal programs. We'll see if that happens." 

 @Deannalsaacs

ON PRISONS

Hard lessons

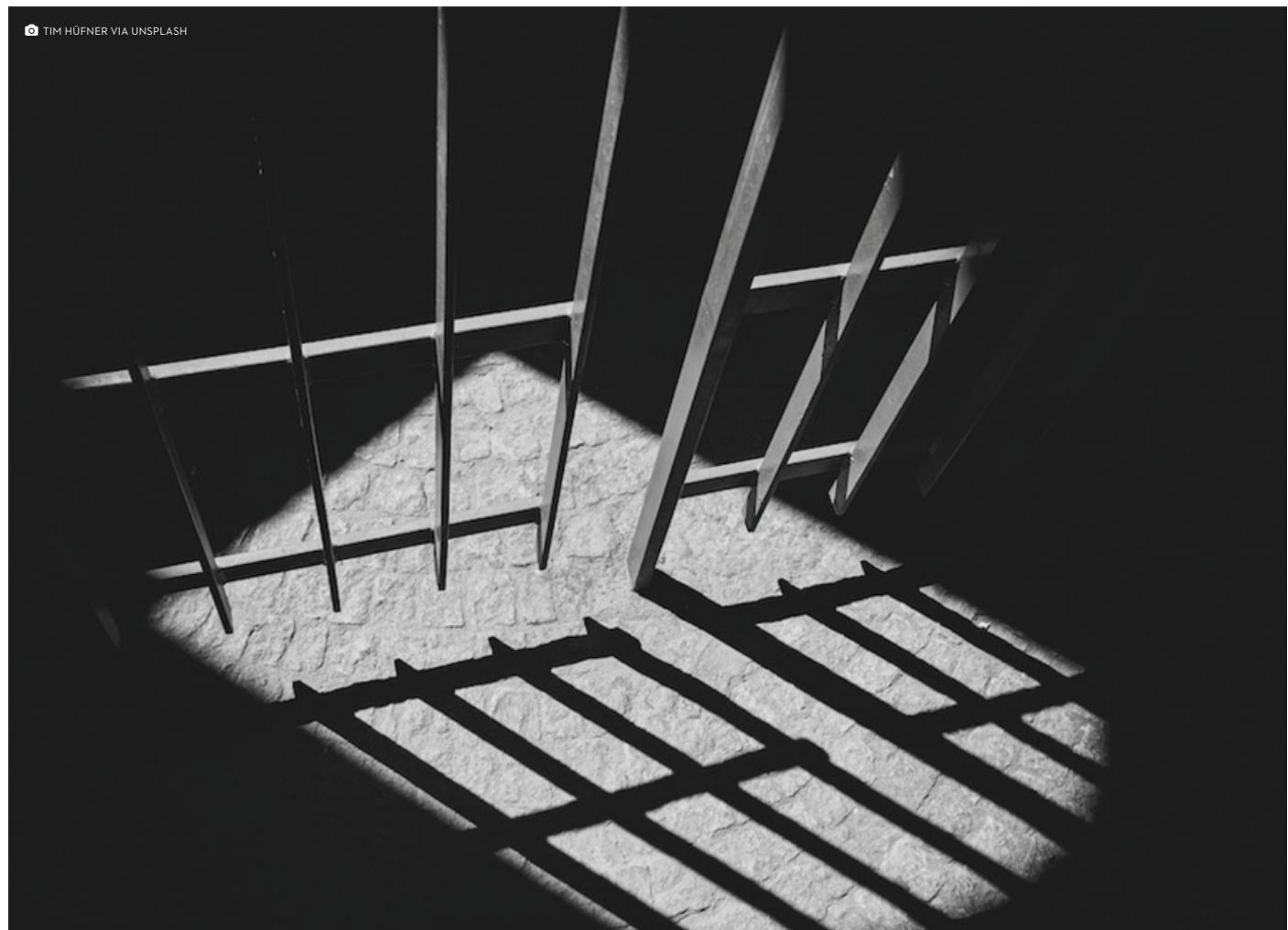
Without education or job training, what hope do people in prison have for rehabilitation?

By ANTHONY EHLERS

It's a common misconception that prisons are designed to rehabilitate people, and that we are getting educated, receiving therapy, and learning trades inside. People seem to think that recidivism occurs simply because people released from prison decide to throw all of that away and choose to commit new crimes. It's just so far from the truth.

The Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) doesn't "correct" anything. There is no such thing as rehabilitation here. Prisons in Illinois are nothing more than a waste management system: society views people in prison as trash and throws us away. Society's attitude toward prisoners has led to increasingly harsh conditions and dehumanization techniques.

Prisons go out of their way to dehumanize people. It starts with stripping us of our names. Within IDOC I am not Anthony Ehlers; I



am B-60794. Your name doesn't matter. If you get mail, they ask for your prison number. To get medicine, they ask for your prison number. If you leave your cell for any reason, they ask for your prison number! Unconsciously, you begin to think of yourself in terms of a prison number as well: once they take away your name, who are you?

When a person endures year after year of being degraded, hated, used, assaulted, and dehumanized, told they are garbage by society, is it any wonder they become depressed, antisocial, and angry?

IDOC offers no educational opportunities and does next to nothing to educate prisoners. I have been told repeatedly that because I have a natural life sentence, I'm not worth being educated. Education should be a basic human right, particularly in prison; it should be a mandatory part of one's prison sentence.

It's only recently that Northwestern's Prison Education Program (NPEP) has provided an option for people imprisoned in Illinois. It's through this program alone that I've been able to get a formal education while incarcerated. Spots are coveted and hard to come by: in their third cohort of students, 20 people were chosen out of some 400 applicants. And from what I've heard, IDOC told NPEP not to accept anyone with long sentences, because in the prison administrators' eyes, those people aren't worthy of education, either.

Think about that. People being released from prison have been deliberately denied any education, yet they are expected to be rehabilitated. When these people get out, they need an education and job skills, because the vast majority will return to the community they came from. Without even an education, what are they to do? How will they live?

Society should have a vested interest in their education and programming. If rehabilitation is truly IDOC's goal, then education and job training should be a priority.

When people don't have something positive to focus on in prison, like education, they find other, more negative ways to fill their time. You get an education in prison one way or another: if IDOC won't provide it, other prisoners will. In prison, you can learn from others' mistakes, or how to get away with things, or how to do things you've never done before. You can learn to hate, and to let your anger fester against the system. You can learn to hate society, which you learn hates you in return.

In prison, mental health issues are exacerbated, and you must learn to deal with them alone, because you don't have help. The prison population is disproportionately made up of Black and Brown people who have been sub-

COMMENTARY

continued from p. 13

jected to racist systems all their lives. Nearly all prisoners have experienced trauma and both physical and sexual violence; many have been through the foster care system; many suffer from mental illness; some dull their pain with substance use. Prison has a messed-up culture and is filled with broken people.

The medical care we get in prison is disastrously subpar, and COVID-19 hit prisoners particularly hard. Here in Stateville more than 25 men died of COVID-19, and many had family and friends on the outside who also died or were hospitalized. That kind of worry and pain is difficult for anyone, but especially in a place like this. Imagine being locked in a cage far from people who need you, trying to make it through the death of your family or friends all alone. It's a wonder some guys were able to hold on to their sanity at all.

Prisoners are at a higher risk for heart disease and other stress-related ailments because in an environment like this one, you must maintain constant situational awareness. Being sentenced to prison is punishment,

but we are often subject to additional, extrajudicial punishment, because some staff feel it's their duty to make prisoners' lives miserable.

Our mental state is always stressed, always on alert, not just from the threat of assault from other prisoners, but also from the staff who put obstacles in your way at every turn. During "shakedowns," they take property—including school work and legal work, and letters and pictures from loved ones—destroy it, or throw it away. Sometimes during shakedowns they break an imprisoned person's TV, radio, or tablet, severing their connection to the outside. Sometimes they place you in a cell with someone who is hostile or dangerous, and you either have to fight or voluntarily go to segregation (solitary).

Most guards believe their word is law. After all, who can you complain to? They often fabricate rules to deny your rights, and if you challenge them in any way, they will write you a disciplinary report. This allows them to take away the few privileges you do retain, like phone calls to loved ones, digital messaging, and access to the commissary.

Every positive accomplishment you achieve in prison is accompanied by an intense struggle to overcome, circumvent, or blatantly break the arbitrary rules made up by staff.

All the while you have to convince yourself daily that your life has value, even when the rest of the world tells you it doesn't.

The prison itself is in a shocking state of disrepair. The cell houses are crumbling. Cracks run from the foundation to the roof. The cells are full of peeling lead-based paint and black mold. Many cells have plumbing that doesn't work. The entire prison has had no hot water for five months, and we're forced to take showers and wash our clothes in cold water. The water here is poisonous. We have very high levels of both copper and lead in our water. Both metals will make you very sick, and can lead to fatal cancers and other ailments. We've had previous bouts of Legionella bacteria here. We have rats, roaches, and birds in our cell houses and chow halls. How many people have to deal with birds shitting inside their homes, or in the places that they eat? How many have woken up because cockroaches are

crawling on their face?

These are the deplorable conditions we live in.

Most of the people here do not have an education or a skill that will help them get jobs after they're released. Many who are released from prison will walk out with untreated mental health problems and trauma, many of their issues having been made worse by prison time. After spending years in conditions like those I've described, they will walk out with nothing more than when they came in. How does that help or benefit society?

People in prison have been marginalized by society in many different ways. In prison, we are taught that there is no way out, and that our marginalization is state-sanctioned. Society can't expect people getting out of prison to do better, if society won't do better by them. We all have to be responsible for what the state does in our name.

It's time to realize that punishment helps no one. It's time we began recycling people instead of throwing them away. □

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SCAN OR VISIT
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FORECAST FORM ART IN THE CARIBBEAN DIASPORA, 1990s–TODAY



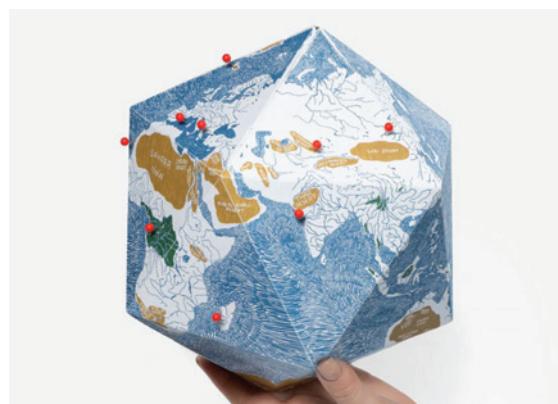
Donna Conlon and Jonathan Harker, *Tropical Zincphony (Zincfonía tropical)* (still), 2013. HD video (color, sound); 1 minute, 45 seconds. Courtesy of the artists and DiabloRosso, Panamá.

The MCA Store helps Chicagoans give the gift of art this holiday season

The Museum of Contemporary Art is synonymous with joy and expression. But some people don't realize that, along with being one of Chicago's top cultural destinations for its expansive galleries, cutting-edge exhibits, and carefully curated events, it's an excellent place to find the perfect gift for the creative spirits and art lovers in your life.

This holiday season, visit the MCA Store in person or online to check out their wide assortment of eye-popping fashions, gorgeous housewares, brain-twisting games, and stocking stuffers. Whatever your budget, we've got you covered, and there's always a discount for MCA Members.

So make your list, check it twice, and take a look at our fantastic gift ideas for the naughty, the nice, and everyone in between.



For the world explorer

Illustrated by Martí Guixé, this 3D globe highlights the parts of the world where Mother Nature reigns, including scarcely populated deserts and jungles, and freshwater lakes, and glaciers. Use the colorful pins to mark where you've been or to plan your next escape.

Retail: \$42.00



For the home entertainer (pictured first column, bottom)

During his lifetime, Italian designer Alessandro Mendini was revered for his contributions to Italian, postmodern, radical design. These fanciful corkscrews are a "design self-portrait" of the master artist that will help you celebrate his legacy along with the holiday season.

Retail: \$65.00



For the artsy technophile

The Lumio Teno speaker fits in the palm of your hands and "breaks" in half to reveal a warm light and powerful speaker. Having won multiple awards for its functional and beautiful design, it may just be the most aesthetically pleasing piece of technology you could ever own.

Retail: \$300.00

For the conscientious shopper

Thoughtfully crafted in Chicago using sustainably sourced vegan materials, the Mohop Mobile Bag is the ultimate bag for the urban explorer. The perfect size for your cell phone and other daily essentials, this bag was designed to stand up to the elements and look fashionable doing so.

Retail: \$79.00

For the vintage fashionista

This handmade necklace by I. Ronni Kappos features German glass made in the Sudetenland region of Bohemia from the 1920s and 1930s and gold-filled findings. As the beads are considered rare and highly collectable, this limited-edition necklace will only be available for a short time.

Retail: \$165.00

For the budget conscious

Whether inflation has got you down or you're saving up for a winter getaway, you don't have to break the piggy bank to afford the perfect holiday gift. Available in seven whimsical colors, this silicone Key keychain by Harry Allen, was modeled after an 18th-century Italian church key and is a wallet-friendly people pleaser.

Retail: \$18.00



For the punctual (or those who aspire to be punctual)

SPGBK (pronounced "spring break") is a Black-owned company based in Fayetteville, North Carolina, and each of their designs pays homage to a local school or community area. Made with stainless steel and soft silicone, and available in four bold, vibrant colors, these watches demand attention.

Retail: \$79.99

For your inner child

Let your creative spirit run free, and experience the Zen idea of living in the moment with the Buddha Board. Use water to paint whatever you please—as the water evaporates you are left with a clean slate, allowing you to start fresh and find new inspiration.

Retail: \$39.00

For your actual child

Forget the tiny toy hotrods of your generation: the Candylab collection includes the vehicles that make our communities roll, including fire engines, utility vehicles, and the all-important taco truck, as well as retro station wagons and cruisers.

Retail: \$20.00



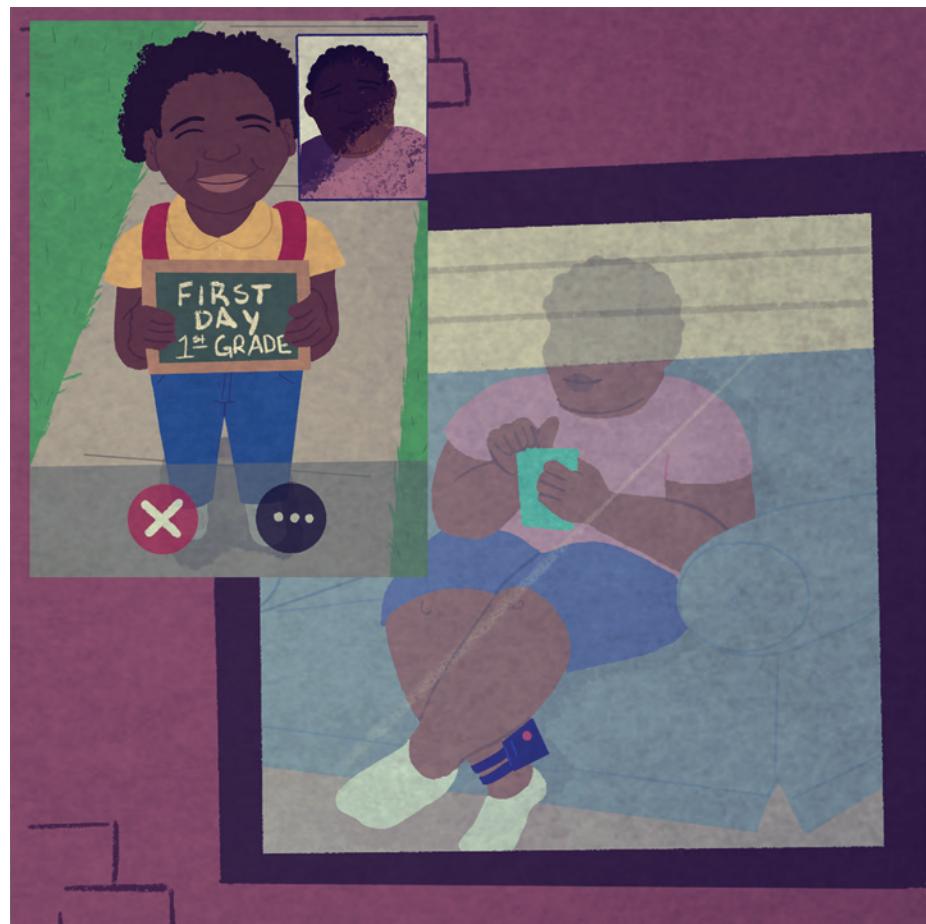
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Do you think about art all day, every day? If so, you're a lot like us! Let the world know what's on your mind with an MCA "Art Everyday" hat.

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NEWS & POLITICS



ROBIN CARNLIUS FOR THE TRiiBE

POLICE

Many are incessantly texted pretrial

The alerts, which are often sent erroneously, summon sheriff's deputies and carry the threat of jail.

By MATT CHAPMAN, THE TRiiBE

This story was produced as a collaboration between The TRiiBE and the Reader.

We have changed the names and other identifying information of some of the sources quoted in this story to protect their anonymity.

While awaiting trial, Shane (a pseudonym) has worn an electronic ankle monitor and been confined to their home, a high-rise apartment they share with their elderly mother and two children, for over two years. During their confinement,

they have been visited hundreds of times by sheriff's deputies who were summoned by erroneous automatic alerts that accused Shane of leaving home without authorization.

Deputies came so often that Shane's toddler began to think they were family friends. "He calls them his buddies because he's so used to seeing them," Shane said. But their oldest son understood who the deputies were. "And that's why a lot of these children grow into men and they disrespect authority, or they feel like they hate the police because they see them doing things that are not conducted in a proper manner."

The alerts that sent texts to Shane's phone and deputies to their front door originated from Track Group, a subcontractor that operates ankle monitors used by the Cook County Sheriff's Office (CCSO). Track Group sends alerts to Protocol, a call center that then sends the texts. Shane is one of hundreds of people who were similarly inundated with text alerts from Protocol while on CCSO's pretrial home-monitoring program over an 18-month period, according to data newly obtained by The TRiiBE and the *Reader*.

As of press time, about 2,000 people are wearing electronic ankle bracelets under CCSO's pretrial house arrest program. They're required to remain inside their home 24 hours a day, but can leave for "essential movement" to go to work or run errands. Sheriff Tom Dart has advocated for repealing the provisions in the 2021 SAFE-T Act pertaining to essential movement. According to a recent article by The Intercept, Dart has systematically limited people who use essential movement for work from also running errands.

The alerts, which often summon sheriff's deputies and carry an implicit threat of being taken to jail, can be disruptive and frightening. Many of the people who were texted repeatedly said in interviews they were inside their homes when the alerts occurred.

Two people who spoke to The TRiiBE and the *Reader* said that sheriff's deputies told them their electronic monitors showed them being miles away, even when the deputies were in their home with them at the time.

"They called me and told me that I was in Delaware," Shane said. "I was like, no, I'm home. I don't have any family in Delaware. And to be honest, I have no clue where that is."

Another person said a deputy told them the electronic monitor showed they were in Lake Michigan in the middle of the winter. A lawyer said their client was told the same thing.

The texts were sent automatically. According to Shereen Mohammad, a communications specialist at CCSO, Protocol staff review alerts only after texts are sent. In a previous story, we reported that in 2021, 80 percent of alerts were found to be false, and spoke to several

people on pretrial monitoring who received frequent alerts accusing them of going AWOL even though they were inside their homes. We also chronicled the tribulations of Jeremy "Mohawk" Johnson, who documented his two-year ordeal of repeated false electronic-monitor alerts while he awaited trial on charges stemming from a 2020 protest.

Since then, we have obtained data on hundreds of thousands of text messages sent to some 10,000 people who, like Shane, were in the home-monitoring program between January 1, 2020, and June 22, 2022. The data shows that Shane's and Johnson's experiences were far from unique.

During that 18-month period, most people on electronic home monitoring got a text from Protocol about three times a month, on average. But a significant number of people were texted far more often. One thousand people on home monitoring were texted an average of three times a week. Thirty people received upwards of 20 texts per week. Twenty-two people got more than 1,000 texts, an average of two a day.

Shane was texted an average of six times a day during the 18-month period. One of the alerts led to deputies arresting Shane. While attending school (with approval), the electronic monitor had alerted, accusing them of leaving, a violation of the pretrial release conditions. After Shane's lawyer presented proof that Shane never left the school, the State's Attorney's Office, which initially petitioned the court to hear the violation, dropped it. Two days later, the Sheriff released Shane from the jail.

Shane said they haven't been able to take their toddler outside to socialize and play because of the terms of home monitoring. "[He] hasn't been around other children. He's never seen outside. He's never seen grass. He's never seen snow. He's never been to a park," they said. "The only thing he had ever did up until now is go to the doctor. So now when he goes places, he's confused because he's not used to seeing it."

"I'm not allowed to go to PTA meetings. I'm not allowed to go on field trips. I don't go to report card pickup. I can't do any of those

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things and I was a very active parent before I got on this house arrest," Shane continued. "I feel like it has really affected my children more than it has affected me."

Tracey Harkins, a criminal attorney who often represents defendants who are on home monitoring, said that attorneys have no choice but to advise their clients to call Protocol every time they receive a text, and to film themselves to prove they're at home. She added that her clients have told her that the call center sometimes doesn't pick up. "They call and the phones keep ringing and no one answers," she said.

The Chicago Appleseed Center for Fair Courts reported a similar pattern in a September 2022 Electronic Monitoring Review. Organizations calling the Protocol center on behalf of their clients reported experiencing "no answer or hours of wait time."

False alerts accusing people of absconding from home are just one of the reasons they're texted by sheriff's subcontractors; another reason is because their ankle bracelets are not getting a strong enough signal. When a person on home monitoring gets one of these texts, they have to step outside for five minutes so the bracelet can try to get a better signal.

During the 18-month period we analyzed, 234 people received an average of three low-signal texts a week telling them to go outside for five minutes; 37 people averaged more than ten a week. One person, Jackie (a pseudonym), was texted more than 800 times, and said they had to step outside due to signal issues more than 500 times over one year on home monitoring. Like others who received excessive false alarms, Jackie's messages were often followed by the arrival of sheriff's deputies, no matter the time of day or night, up to three times a week.

"I was literally at my house," Jackie said. "I just be sitting at my house. They do that constantly. I don't think that [ankle monitor] even works, honestly."

Thirty-five people were texted to step outside between 11 PM and 5 AM about twice a week, on average. Seven people were texted more than four nights a week.

"They came early [in the] morning," between 1 AM and 4 AM, Jackie said. "They sometimes come in the day, most of the time at night."

Leslie (a pseudonym) also got more than 800 low-signal texts while on home monitoring. "When they came to my house my daugh-

ter was asleep. They woke my daughter up. Do you know how much that hurts? It's traumatizing," Leslie said. They added that sheriff's deputies visited their home over 100 times between March 2020 and October 2021.

Once in December 2020, and again in May 2021, thousands of people were texted to step outside for five minutes as a result of what the CCSO called "brief technical issues."

An optional national standard for electronic monitoring devices that was released in 2016 by the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) requires these systems to be accurate within 30 meters (about 98 feet) at least 90 percent of the time to be certified as compliant.

While the NIJ certification is completely optional for both the device manufacturer and any law enforcement agency, CCSO's device vendor, Track Group, still claims to be accurate within 50 feet when signal confidence is "high," 100-140 feet when "medium," and anything further away as "invalid."

When asked about NIJ certification, CCSO referred us to the county's chief procurement officer, whose office did not respond to requests for comment.

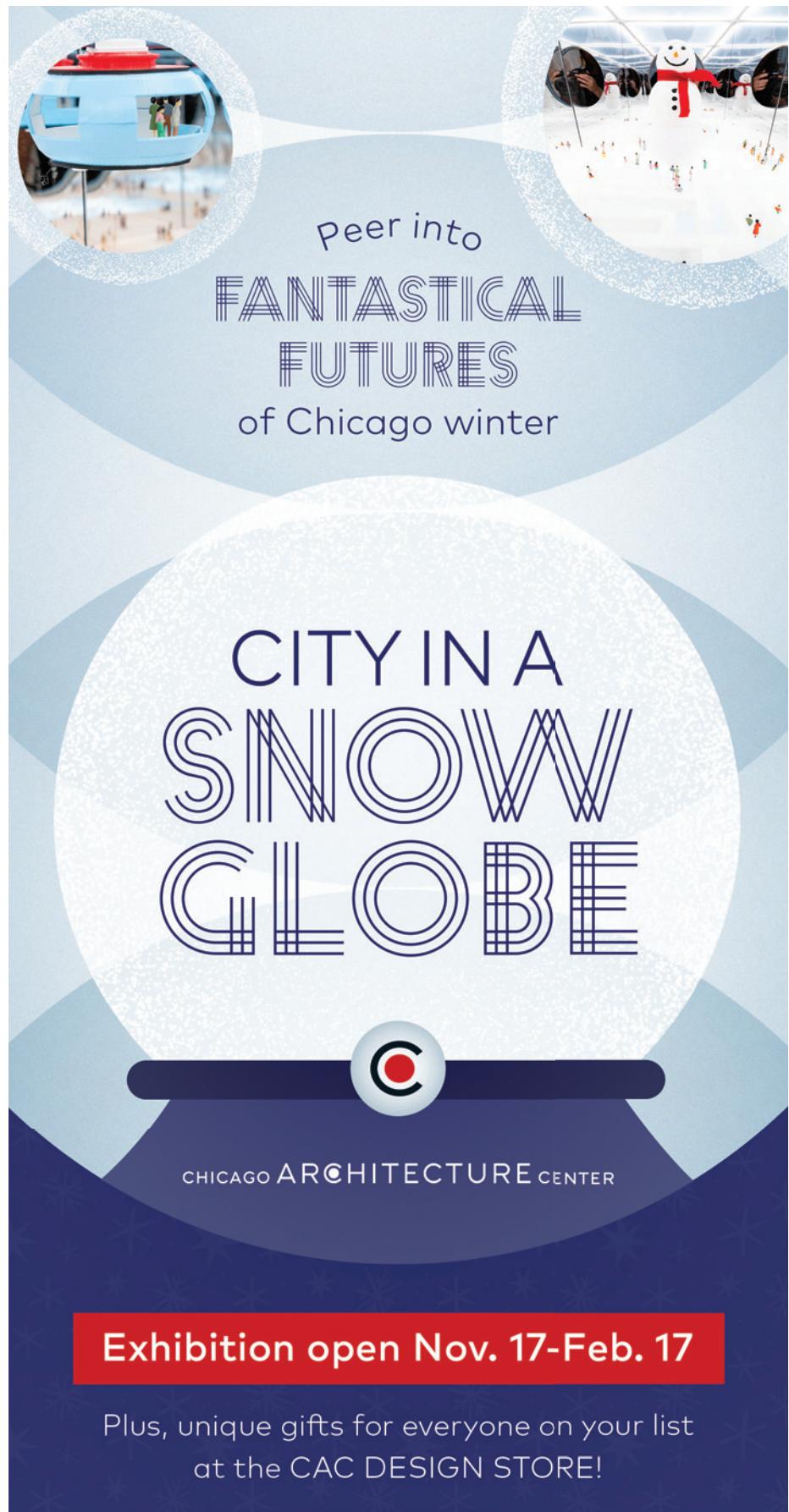
The Appleseed report concluded that the CCSO's home monitoring program "has the potential to violate people's due process rights." The report made three major recommendations: dramatically shrink the use of electronic monitoring in favor of less restrictive supervision; take control of the program out of the sheriff's hands; and have judges weigh in on whether to jail people suspected of violating their release.

James Kilgore, a media fellow at Media-Justice and the author of *Understanding E-Carceration*, said the problem of false alarms reflects a popular mythology that surveillance tech is precise and accurate.

"A lot of the information about false alarms shows us that these devices aren't accurate, they're not well-designed, well-made technology on their own terms, but they're actually very dangerous to others who are victimized by its inaccuracies," Kilgore said. "We need to make sure that we're not using technology that's not vetted in any proper way that's disastrous for people. If we start scratching the surface of the tech, along with diving deeper into the complexities of incarceration, we're seeing all the mythologies of punishment and the power of technology. That's their bread and butter."

This reporting was supported by the Fund for Investigative Journalism.

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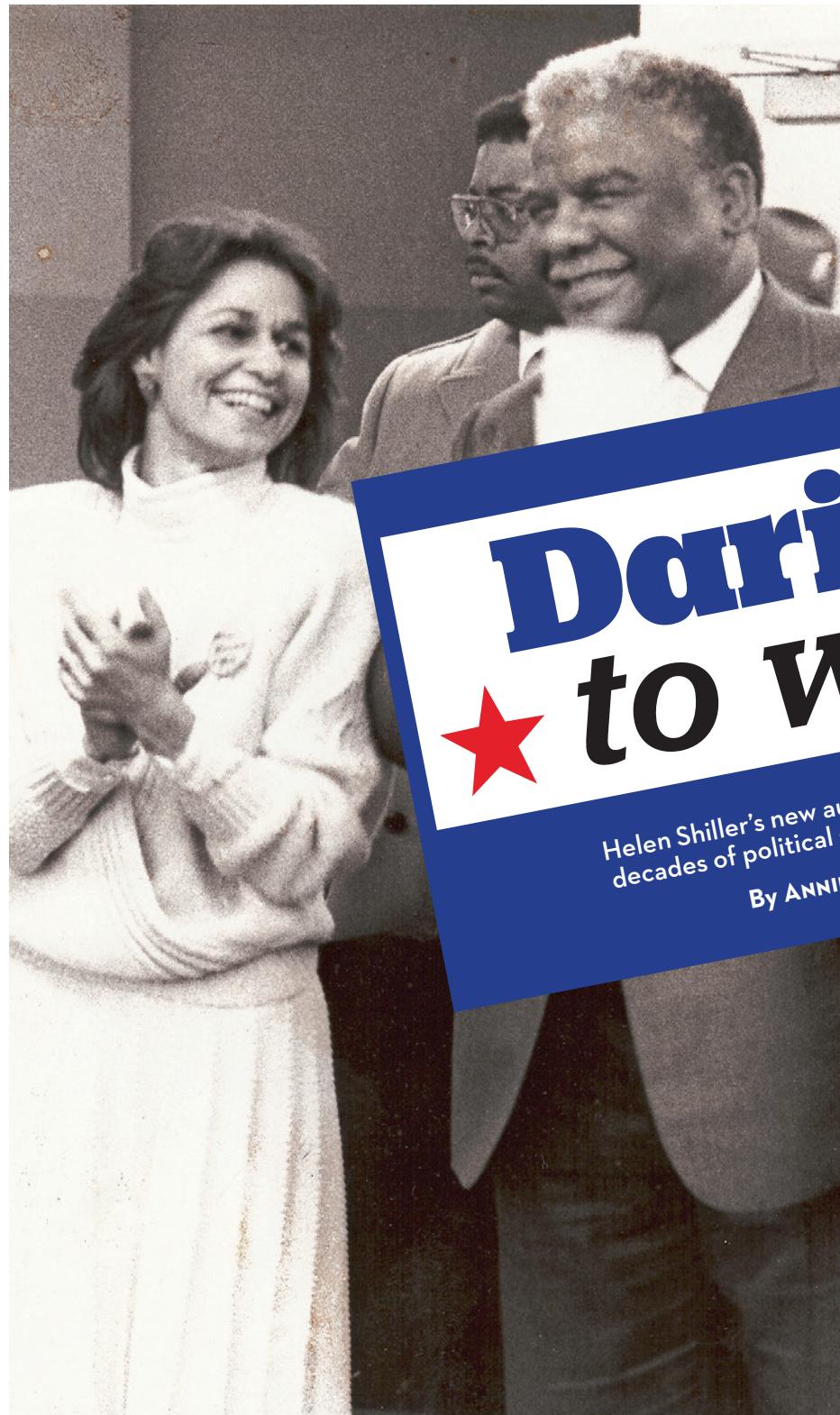
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Daring to win *

Helen Shiller's new autobiography details decades of political struggles in Uptown.

By ANNIE HOWARD

Helen Shiller with Mayor Harold Washington in 1987 © COURTESY HELEN SHILLER

Helen Shiller insists that the story of Uptown is not unique. After more than 50 years living in the neighborhood, it's hard to disagree with her. In many ways, the most pressing concerns that Shiller first identified when she moved to the neighborhood in 1972 still haunt the wider city, and America as a whole: conflicts with police, a lack of adequate housing, and a deep-seated disconnect between the desires of working-class people and the politicians who represent them. In many cases, they've worsened.

But the story of Uptown is irreducible, and among Chicago neighborhoods, its history stands apart in many ways. Where gentrification crept north along the lake from the Gold Coast through Lincoln Park and Lakeview, Uptown's lakefront today remains dotted by affordable high-rise apartments: buildings that could have easily become market-rate

but didn't, thanks to community organizing. Elsewhere in the neighborhood, countless institutions and even single apartment buildings testify to many different populations who fought hard to stay in place.

Their identities are many: poor white families who migrated from abandoned Appalachian coal towns; Native Americans shoved in droves to cities due to federal resettlement legislation; scores of Southeast Asian families, displaced by American militarism in countries like Vietnam and Cambodia; people displaced from shuttered psychiatric clinics. There are countless others. No matter their specific identities, a common thread has united many who have called Uptown home: hardship.

Shiller first arrived in the community in 1972, called to move to the city from Racine, Wisconsin, by the Intercommunal Survival Committee (ISC), a cadre of about two dozen young, white organizers working under the guidance of the Black Panther Party (BPP). For the next 15 years, Shiller was a lively, committed community organizer who focused on the basic survival needs of the neighborhood's most destitute residents. She lost a closely contested run for alderman in 1979. Eight years later, Harold Washington called upon Shiller to run again; she won, helping tip the balance of the City Council in Washington's favor during his second term. Shiller remained in office for six terms before finally retiring in 2011.

Now, with the release of *Daring to Struggle, Daring to Win: Five Decades of Resistance in Chicago's Uptown Community* (the title drawn from Illinois BPP chairman Fred Hampton's call to action), Shiller looks back on her decades in service to Uptown, Chicago, and beyond. Shiller's fundamental goal for the 46th Ward was to encourage development without displacing the ward's low-income residents. Much of that approach has been swept aside under the past 12 years of Alderman James Cappleman, who was a vehement Shiller critic for years before he took office.

With Cappleman's retirement ensuring that the ward will once more change hands, the question remains: will Cappleman's pro-development approach, typified in the ongoing struggle around Weiss Hospital, endure? Or will progressive challengers reanimate the spirit of community activism that propelled Shiller's work in Uptown?

By the time Shiller won her aldermanic campaign in 1987, Chicago's progressives were increasingly optimistic. After the narrow, bruising, racist vitriol that he faced in his 1983 election, followed by three years of "Council Wars" in which white, machine Democrats blocked much of his legislation, Mayor Harold Washington entered his reelection campaign that year on surer footing, boosted by a court-mandated ward remapping in 1986 that enabled the election of Hispanic progressives such as Jesús "Chuy" García and Luis Gutiérrez. Following those elections, which drew the deadlocked council into a draw between its dueling factions, Washington called upon Shiller to run for office. Their twin victories in 1987 heralded a new opportunity to advance the issues that mattered to them both. Many of those issues had been what drove Shiller to move to Chicago in the first place.

But the electoral victories of Washington and his allies did not come out of thin air. It took more than a decade's worth of patient, often violent struggle to create the necessary conditions for these victories, rooted in the Sisyphean challenge of overcoming Chicago's existing political machinery.

When Shiller first landed in Chicago with the ISC, Uptown was home to an eclectic mix of residents. The neighborhood was a site of deep trauma worsened by unscrupulous landlords who were prone to torch occupied apartments after years of leaving them neglected. Fires raged through the community during the 1970s, with one occurring an average of every three days, leaving residents to sudden, violent dispossession of homes that already threatened their well-being.

Among the neighborhood's downtrodden residents, the interrelated consequences of poverty and other kinds of marginalization resulted in poor health outcomes. This reality hit Shiller in the mid-70s. While she was selling copies of the BPP's newspaper, she happened upon a woman who she'd attended college with in the 1960s. Released from a nursing home for the mentally ill, the woman was wandering the neighborhood streets, lacking any of the critical support she needed.

"There were so many people in Uptown that needed services that were just being completely denied, and they were all mixed up together," Shiller says. "People treated them all the same way regardless, so that nobody was having their needs met, and everybody was being manipulated by the machine."

The political machine was both a source of resistance to the survival programs that Shiller helped sustain, and a significant reason for their necessity. Chicago's notorious "Red Squad," a secret division of the Chicago Police Department, kept close tabs on Shiller and her collaborators, working hand in glove with precinct captains who threatened poor families with the loss of public assistance if they were seen talking to ISC organizers.

In spite of that, the ISC maintained an impressive number of survival programs. Shiller's first, the October 1972 Rally to End Police Brutality and Establish Community Control, hosted at the Aragon Ballroom, would serve as a model for countless campaigns to come, pairing the distribution of much-needed groceries with a speech on police violence by Bobby Rush, then the deputy minister of defense of the Illinois BPP. The event was a resounding success, a critical moment that was only the start of Shiller's work in the community.

In the years that followed, Shiller and her comrades found themselves in a variety of struggles, from successfully unseating Cook County state's attorney Edward Hanrahan, who played a critical role in the police murder of Hampton, to resisting the construction of a new City Colleges campus adjacent to the Wilson Red Line station, which eventually became Truman College. These campaigns often included registering people to vote: a significantly more challenging task in the 70s, because registration was restricted to one day the month before elections in two



Shiller's 1978-79 campaign photo, with newly built Truman College in the background © COURTESY HELEN SHILLER

locations per ward, creating massive disparities in who was registered.

Progressives launched their first major salvo against the 46th Ward machine in 1975, when José "Cha Cha" Jiménez, who had transformed the Young Lords from a street gang to a political organization, ran for alderman. With much of the Puerto Rican community pushed out of Lincoln Park into Lakeview and Uptown, Jiménez sought to un-

seat Chris Cohen. Jiménez garnered 27 percent of the vote, with his strongest support in Uptown. Despite the loss, his campaign laid the groundwork for the next few years, as a whirlwind of political activity shook up the City Council.

After winning his sixth election in 1975, Mayor Richard J. Daley passed away in December 1976. His replacement, Michael Bilandic, went on to defeat then-state senator



Intercommunal Survival Committee members sell the Black Panther Party newspaper in Uptown in the 1970s. © COURTESY HELEN SHILLER

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Harold Washington in a 1977 special election. Then, just a year later, the 46th Ward would have its own special election, Shiller's first, in which she took 35 percent of the vote, losing to ward secretary Ralph Axelrod. Both campaigns drew support from the Heart of Uptown Coalition, a block club coalition that served as the key uniting force in organizing a 12-block radius around Truman College.

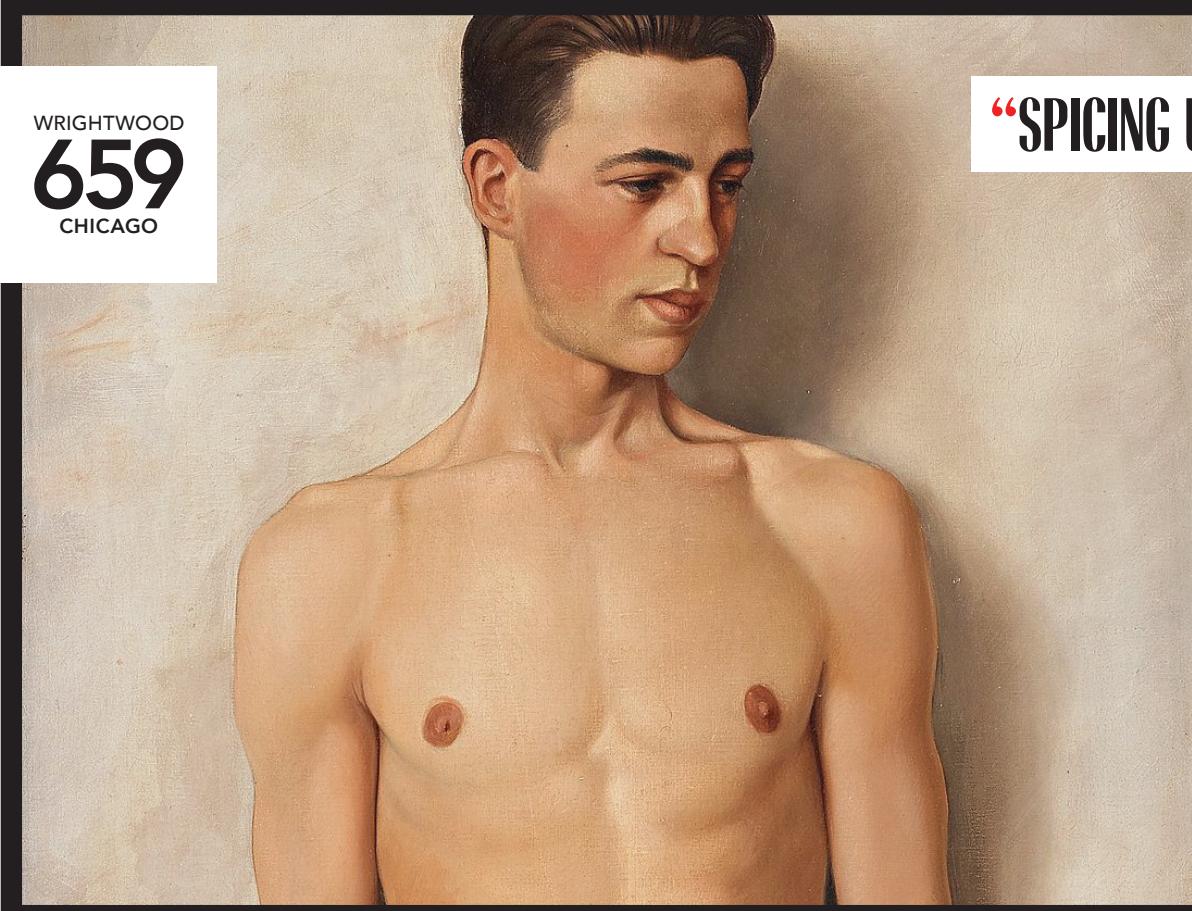
Finally, in 1979, Shiller came within a hair of defeating the machine. Building on the 1978 effort, Shiller's campaign message, "Independent Is Not Enough," served as a critique of mayoral candidate Jane Byrne, who positioned herself as an outsider despite years of service under Daley. The campaign was marred by brutal opposition: Shiller's volunteers were beaten up, racist graffiti defaced her campaign ads, and a Molotov cocktail destroyed her campaign office. Despite the violence, Shiller made it to a runoff, and appeared to have victory in hand in the election's waning moments.

In the closing moments of election night, however, spurious word-of-mouth attacks



Dorothy Tillman and Shiller filing petitions to run for alderman in 1987 © COURTESY HELEN SHILLER

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suggesting that Shiller supported the Palestinian Liberation Organization made their way to Imperial Towers, two high-rise lakefront buildings with significant numbers of elderly Jewish residents. Shiller, whose Jewish ancestors had emigrated to Palestine in the 1920s, saw her victory disappear overnight, undone by powerful machine forces that barely kept her at bay, ultimately losing the runoff by 247 votes.

"Don't give me a label and then decide what I think, unless you're actually able to understand where I'm coming from," Shiller says, regarding the smear. "It wasn't like I didn't expect it, but it was what I always hated about politics."

The next eight years were politically momentous, both locally and beyond. While Washington's 1983 election suggested a wave of political progressivism within the city, the wider context looked quite different: with the 1980 election of Ronald Reagan, federal assistance to cities dwindled drastically, and by the time Washington died in 1987, Chicago had lost \$100 million in annual Community Development Block Grant funding. These

right-wing forces continued to dominate the larger context for Shiller's work in office, and following Washington's death in 1987, the fledgling coalition that put Washington into office would also dissolve amid the ascendancy of another Mayor Daley.

Angela Clay is a product of Helen Shiller's Uptown. Clay calls it the "Helen Era," and as a lifelong Uptown resident, the 31-year-old spent the first 20 years of her life with Shiller as alderman, growing up in an affordable six-unit building on Sunnyside and Hazel. Now, as she mounts her second campaign for alderperson of the 46th Ward, Clay hopes to recapture some of the energy she feels has been lost under Cappleman's leadership, namely, a commitment to working-class Black and Brown children who, like her, are given a chance thanks in large part to the resources the community offered.

Growing up with Shiller as alderman "was a time where young people of color with all different nationalities were able to flourish and be themselves," Clay says. "Our families were awarded the opportunity to live in

affordable homes a stone's throw away from the lakefront, and all these resources made us productive humans."

Many features of Clay's childhood were driven in part by the work undertaken by Shiller's office to keep the neighborhood affordable. Machine politics historically compelled aldermen to support the Democratic Party and mayor in exchange for a portion of the spoils, and Shiller's independence meant that she spent much of her time in office swimming upstream. Still, tactical decisions throughout her six terms resulted in strange bedfellows, including an eventual breakthrough with Mayor Richard M. Daley after years of persistent opposition.

Shiller's work didn't simply ensure that her ward residents received effective government services. Her stubborn refusal to go along with the budget process is case in point: as a lone dissenting vote against many of Daley's yearly budgets, she demonstrated through practical action just how little democracy Chicago residents could expect. A 1996 *Tribune* profile of Shiller described her as the Council's "nag, its irritant,

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IMAGE CREDITS: "Codebreaker" painting from *Celestial Maze*, 20-8-07, Michiko Itatani, 2020, 96" x 78" oil on canvas, courtesy of Michiko Itatani (detail).

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its prophet," and one of Daley's housing advisors, Marilyn Katz, described Shiller as someone "unbending in a city where people bend."

Year after year, the city's budget was a central battleground for Shiller's approach. And her stubbornness worked: by presenting detailed questions about city resources and expenditures to each department, and working closely with lower-level staffers who weren't subject to dictates from the mayor's office to shun her, Shiller wrung resources from the city that might not have otherwise flowed into the community.

"The last thing they wanted was me to say anything about them and use their name, either positively or negatively, in front of the City Council," Shiller says. "That wasn't the point. The point was to get it done, and to figure out the best way to get the attention of a policy maker who could implement what we wanted."

Shiller described the work as "bureaucracy busting," demystifying the political machinery for the disenfranchised and otherwise ensuring that all service requests were addressed within 48 hours, even those made by constituents who did not support her politically. Her office consistently posted resources such as affordable housing waitlists and food drives, continuing the survival-program approach she first embraced when she came to the neighborhood. In this work, she circumvented Mayor Daley's opposition, even as she knew it could ultimately reflect positively on the city's executive branch.

"I am going to provide services in my ward that otherwise people wouldn't get," she remembers thinking. "Guess what: [Daley's] gonna get as much acknowledgment for having done that as I am, but we're gonna provide the best service office in the city, in spite of [him]."

After years of persistent opposition, Shiller endorsed Daley during the 2003 campaign. That political calculus was multifaceted, driven in large part by the mayor offering significant concessions to Shiller in the 1999 and 2000 budgets. As she writes in the book, "Once I endorsed Daley in 2003, the administration treated me just as they treated all of the other aldermen by allowing for aldermanic prerogative, which is essentially local democracy at work."

Having the mayor's support proved critical with the development of Wilson Yard, Shiller's final major project and to this day



Election night, 1987 © COURTESY HELEN SHILLER

an emblem of her approach to "development without displacement." Constructed at the site of a former CTA repair station just south of the Wilson Red Line station that burned down in 1996, the five-acre plot became a fertile source of democratic planning within the neighborhood, initiating a decade-plus process to reimagine the site.

Planning began in July 1998 with a gathering of 250 ward residents at Truman College. It set the model for all future meetings, ensuring that residents of different backgrounds would have to talk with neighbors about competing visions for the project, building up different options that were detailed through hundreds of interviews and thousands of completed surveys. A referendum in the 1999 city elections in 11 neighborhood precincts asked voters if local, state, and federal resources should protect affordable housing in the ward. With 76.5 percent in favor, it suggested the community was ready for an ambitious undertaking.

Wilson Yard is impressive: the project built 178 units of affordable senior and family-sized housing, available to residents making 15 to 60 percent of area median income. With many in the ward opposed to an all-housing approach, the project also included the creation of a multi-floor property with a Target and other ground-floor retail, as well as the opening of an Aldi across the

street. Developed using a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) district, a tool that Shiller had previously criticized for funneling resources to well-heeled developers, the project also included new parks for nearby Stewart School and Arai Middle School. Taken together, it reflected the contradictions and hopeful outcomes of working within a broken system, extracting the greatest possible benefit for the most people despite its many flaws.

"Without aldermanic prerogative, we never would have gotten Wilson Yards or any of the affordable housing that I was able to preserve and create in the 46th Ward," Shiller says. "You can be sure that everything else would have kept going and the market would have taken over."

Wilson Yard was a high-water mark for Shiller's time in office, a parting gift for a community that had changed dramatically since she was first elected. By 2007, Shiller saw the finish line in sight: two decades in office had taken its toll, and she resolved to run one final race before she retired.

"If you don't eat and breathe this work, you can't do a good job," Shiller says. "The ward had changed, and there were still many of the people that were part of my base, but too much of my time was spent on things that were not that important to me."

The 2007 race saw a challenger who in many ways was Shiller's antithesis: James Cappleman. By the time he ran for office, he had already served as president of the Uptown Chicago Commission, founded in 1955 to enact urban renewal projects in the neighborhood, including the Truman College redevelopment. Already a vocal opponent of Wilson Yard, which he compared unfavorably to Cabrini-Green, Cappleman revealed a deep frustration with Shiller's insistent support for the ward's destitute. As one Chicagoist journalist wrote after a debate between the candidates, "Cappleman makes much of his credentials as a social worker, yet the human component of managing a population that is coping with both mental illness and poverty is strikingly missing from his proposals."

Cappleman, who declined to be interviewed for this article, could not unseat Shiller in her final campaign for office, taking 47 percent of the vote as her sole challenger. But after defeating tax attorney and fellow Shiller critic Mary Anne "Molly" Phelan in a runoff in 2011, he began to push back against his predecessor's legacy, encouraging a new ap-

proach to development in the ward. After 12 years, a working-class toehold in the community has slipped, driven by increasing rental prices and a surge of high-end development that took its most dramatic form with the creation of the Stewart School Lofts, which transformed a long-standing elementary school into luxury apartments, reflecting the sharp decline in families living nearby.

Much of this speculation has targeted one of the community's most common sources of housing affordability: single-room occupancies, or SROs. Uptown has long had some of the greatest concentrations of these properties in the city, allowing long-term residents to stay in place for just a few hundred dollars a month. But it lost more than half of its SROs from 2008 to 2018, according to the *Tribune*, and has lost even more since then, with the 160-unit Lorali and the Darlington Hotel among the latest conversions.

As alderperson, Cappleman has had a testy relationship with affordable housing advocates and the precariously housed in his ward. To Marianne Lalonde, a climate scientist and current 46th Ward candidate who came within 25 votes of unseating Cappleman in the 2019 election, his attitude has coarsened neighborly relationships within the community, bolstering the white, upwardly mobile people being drawn to the neighborhood through luxury development that has targeted the area for decades.

"When you set that example from the top down, you're giving other people permission to act that way," Lalonde says. "You're saying that it's OK for you to be disrespectful to your neighbors, and to me, that's completely inappropriate. Your neighbors are your neighbors, regardless of income level."

Lalonde has firsthand experience with the toll of rising rents in the area: when new owners acquired the six-flat she called home in 2020, they spiked her rent by \$625 a month, a 35 percent increase. While she had the resources to put a down payment on a condo a few blocks away, she said other neighbors were not so lucky, including a single mom forced to accept an \$800 increase so that her daughter could finish her last year of elementary school.

"I wrote to the new management company, and I said, 'Do you know what you've done? Do you know the level of impact they've had on our building?'" Lalonde says.

Gentrification takes place block by block, with the market steadily placing increasing pressure on residents. But it also comes in

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Campaigning with Harold in 1987 © MARK POKEMPNER, COURTESY HELEN SHILLER

high-profile actions that signal imagined future changes. These were most recently on display when protestors occupied a parking lot at Weiss Hospital that was slated to have a luxury apartment complex built on the site. While the ward's zoning advisory committee briefly blocked the project from moving forward, Cappleman's influence reversed their decision. In August, protestors staged an 11-day occupation of the soon-to-be-redeveloped parking lot, with existing unhoused Uptown residents joined by community organizers. Dubbed Rise Uptown, it joins a long lineage of battles to promote community stability, public health, and affordability in the neighborhood.

At the same time, evidence suggests that gentrification forces are inexorably transforming the core fabric of the area. The 2019 sale of the Bridgeview Bank building, which had offered low-cost office space to nonprofits that served neighborhood residents, to Cedar Street, responsible for numerous SRO conversions in the area, exemplified these trends. Service providers openly discussed moving their bases elsewhere, in recognition that many of the residents they'd served no longer lived in the surrounding area. Paul Siegel, who has organized in the neighborhood over the past half-century, says that it's been "death by a thousand cuts, and the cuts

are getting bigger," provoking the fighting spirit that remains grounded within the community.

"The two most recent cases are particularly bad and kill two birds with one stone, not only further undermining residential imbalance but threatening a needed community hospital and likely driving human service organizations from the area," Siegel says. "However, we are not passive victims of this protracted assault, and as a result of our many struggles, Uptown's multiracial fighting community still exists."

Regardless of next year's election outcomes, Uptown will continue to be shaped by the competing forces of gentrification and community resistance. Even as decades of transformation have resulted in the displacement of thousands of working-class residents, the bonds that countless people have formed to one of Chicago's most inclusive communities are not easily broken, even as their physical presence is often lost.

That's one of the animating themes of Dis/Placements, an ongoing research project led by UIC professors Anna Guevarra and Gayatri Reddy. Serving as a people's history of Uptown, the project encompasses reading lists, guided walking tours, timelines, photography, and more, showing the unique

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Shiller and then-alderman Tim Evans in the 1989 Gay Pride Parade © PAT CUMMINGS,

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Shiller with Nelson Mandela in 1994 © ANTONIO DICKEY, COURTESY HELEN SHILLER

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imprint that these few square miles have had on the lives of countless people. Guevarra says that she felt the spirit of Uptown captured in Dis/Placements permeated the Rise Uptown occupations, creating a fleeting space beyond ordinary possibilities.

"People gathered to tell stories, share histories, and their dreams and visions for a just world," Guevarra said. "Uptown has always been a gathering place, a port of entry for displaced communities, immigrants, the working class, and Rise Uptown reminded us of that history."

As Shiller's legacy and Cappleman's tenure have demonstrated, albeit in disparate ways, resident involvement in day-to-day political activity is critical, regardless of political leadership. For Marc Kaplan, who began organizing with Shiller in the 1970s and most recently worked on the Weiss Hospital campaign with Northside Action for Justice, it's this dedicated cadre of organized residents that is most critical to Uptown's sustained political identity, not the politics of its officeholders.

"As we learned with 24 years of Helen as alderperson, no matter who's in office, if you don't have strong organizations that are pushing people's power outside of the electoral structure, there are real limitations, even in the best of circumstances, as to what you can get done," Kaplan says.

The problems that the neighborhood still faces are hardly unique, as Shiller first

grasped decades ago. Their continued presence in the daily fabric of the political battles that define our city and many others is a testament to the long-term vision required for deep social change. Mayor Washington warned others that the necessary transformations would not come quickly, saying, "It will take 20 years to have an impact on institutional racism and institutional corruption." Though Washington was only able to hold power for a fraction of the time he wanted to make these long-lasting changes, that mindset nevertheless stayed with Shiller.

More than a decade after leaving office, Shiller is just as dedicated to the issues that animated her decades of organizing and public service (while also picking up welding as a hobby). Much of her effort after leaving office has been dedicated to supporting the Westside Justice Center, an umbrella group that has housed nonprofit organizations and social justice-oriented legal aid attorneys, founded by Shiller's son, Brendan. To celebrate the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Illinois chapter of the Black Panther Party in 2017, Shiller opened up her archives to the Center, helping curate an exhibit that's still up at the Center's headquarters at California and Harrison.

For a moment, it also appeared that Shiller would return to City Hall, this time as the City Council's first-ever independent financial analyst. With years spent poring over the city budget every fall, she considered herself a natural fit for the position, which first

appeared in Rahm Emanuel's 2014 budget recommendations. But by April 2015, Shiller withdrew from consideration, after her appointment became a lightning rod within the Council.

Ironically, while her role as alderman elevated Shiller to a uniquely powerful position within Uptown's organizing milieu, it's the behind-the-scenes work of tending to archives, now stored in several hundred boxes in a multiunit home she shares with her granddaughter, that has allowed the many stories of Uptown as an organized community to endure. Guevarra and Reddy both credit Shiller for the dedication required to keep these materials intact, and are working with Shiller to digitize issues of *Keep Strong*, a magazine the ISC published from 1975 to 1980. Shiller, in turn, credits the Dis/Placements projects for ensuring Uptown's history lives on, allowing people to see the ongoing impact within the fabric of the community.

While many have criticized Chicago's ward model for entrenching the power of localized machine leaders over city resources, Shiller argues that Chicago's democratic structure is worth salvaging. Its problems, she insists, are driven by Democratic Party power brokers using its spoils to help their friends instead of the everyday residents of Chicago's 50 wards. Rather than have a chief of staff, her chief of survival set the tone for how her ward office treated its responsibilities: recognizing the ward office's unique ability to connect government to people's needs, and

getting resources into the hands of residents.

"What came first was making sure that people had some place that they could communicate their needs, which then also informed the things that I needed to impact on the floor of City Council," Shiller says. "That was an example of taking a structure, which can be good or bad, and putting in revolutionary content."

In an election season with a near-unprecedented number of vacant seats, and a loss of more than 200 years of legislative experience, concentrated among alderpeople who happily followed this model, Shiller hopes those running will find ways to serve their constituents on an intimate level. While in office, the work was known as "bureaucracy busting," an outlook that still resonates as Chicago's government struggles to serve large swathes of its residents. Another approach is rooted in her years as a community organizer, drawn from the Black Panthers: survival pending revolution, borne from an awareness that people's lives hang in the balance.

A quote from some of her own writing that hangs in a simple frame in Shiller's home says it all. "We could live respecting our own potential as human beings and work for 'power to the people,'" it reads, "or we could live and die with the haunting knowledge that we were afraid to respect and believe in ourselves and each other." ☈

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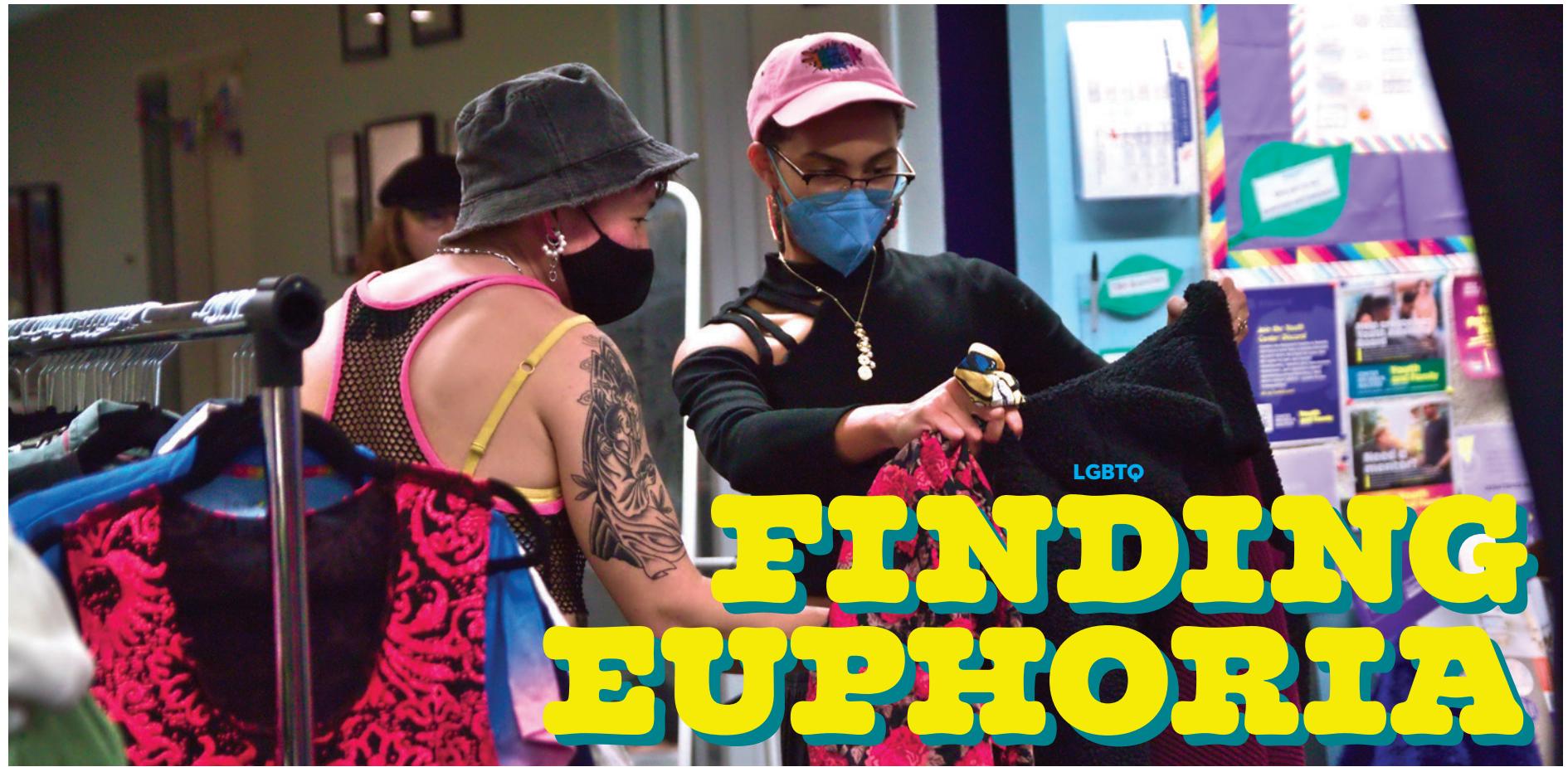
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FINDING EUPHORIA

god's closet hosts monthly pop-ups that offer free clothing and a safe space for gender expression.

By DEBBIE-MARIE BROWN

Wing Yun Schreiber (left) and DJ Lo-Ré-Mii at a god's closet pop-up. © AARIJ ABBAS

Five long fluorescent lights shone brightly overhead, illuminating six clothing racks of assorted styles on the second floor of the Center on Halsted, where god's closet was hosting its November pop-up. DJ Blessntiono stood in black pants and red stiletto boots behind a table, noodling with his DJ comptroller, intently bopping his head while a dark remix of Drake's "Chicago Freestyle" combined with a Jersey club remix blasted through the speakers, complimenting the already ecstatic energy in the space.

A mix of 20 guests and stylists mingled and excitedly grabbed new items of clothing as they encountered them. Most were trying on items in the open space and either modeling for people whose opinions they sought on the outfit, or for the tall mirror so that they could judge themselves.

Wing Yun Schreiber (they/he), a 28-year-old who tends bar in the West Loop and does communications for a local church, founded god's closet in January 2022. The organization provides a community clothing hub and hosts monthly pop-up events that provide gender-affirming clothing to trans and nonbinary people. god's closet (which stylizes its name in lowercase) focuses on college-aged youth and brings LGBTQ+ stylists, makeup artists, tailors, and DJs to their monthly pop-up events throughout Chicago in an attempt to "create a celebratory environment for folks to try on different kinds of gender expression," said Schreiber.

Schreiber is light-skinned and stands at five-foot-eight, with short dark hair, and has an athletic build. At the pop-up, he was dressed in a black, cropped, fishnet tank top rimmed with pink. He wore a yellow bra,

and above it a "Hello, My name is Wing Yun" nametag. His dark gray bucket hat, an assortment of chain-style jewelry, black cargo pants, and an assortment of tattoos testify to their proclivity for fashion.

"I think my style is a lot about, like, fucking with expectations. There's ways that I try to match things that aren't supposed to go together. My favorite thing is to dress up and dress down at the same time."

Walking into this trans-centered pop-up is like attending a thrift store on steroids, and that's intentional. Schreiber said he tries to curate an environment where trans young adults feel comfortable experimenting, and where an array of clothing sizes offer fashionable options for plus-size people.

This year, god's closet has hosted events around the city to make them accessible to as many Chicagoans as possible: Slo 'Mo at

Sleeping Village in Avondale, River City Community Church in Humboldt Park, and Hyde Park's Silver Room.

"Everything that we do is all volunteer- and donation-based," Schreiber said. "It's all completely free."

The year-old experiment in collecting free, fashionable clothes to redistribute to transgender Chicagoans comes out of Schreiber's own experience being trans. Growing up, he wanted to switch up his gender expression but didn't feel like he had access to the clothing he needed to do that.

"Sometimes there would be days when I didn't even feel like I could leave the house because I didn't have anything that I felt comfortable in," he said. "And so I was like, damn, this is a problem that probably other trans people have as well . . . in wanting to be read in a genderqueer way, I have really enjoyed

getting creative with fashion."

Schreiber considered the problem and realized that living in a big city like Chicago, everybody must have extra clothing in their closets. So why not repurpose those clothes to create a community hub where others like himself can find clothing that fits their gender expression?

Schreiber, who attended undergrad at Moody Bible Institute and got their master's degree at Duke Divinity School, initially wanted to start a church in Chicago. They opted to invest that energy in gods closet, where they can still use practices from their seminary background, such as coming together as a community to share things and support one another, as well as being able to celebrate "the divinity all queer folks share collectively" by hosting an event that facilitates safe gender exploration.

In department stores or a typical thrift store, trans people might not feel comfortable going to the opposite gender clothing areas in public. Schreiber has experienced this himself.

In contrast, the stylists at gods closet are all queer and trans people. They can recommend clothing based on attendees' specific preferences, or offer fashionable suggestions. A makeup artist helps people who want to try on a new look, and a tailor is present to alter clothes, if need be, to fit all body sizes. A photographer is on standby to document attendees' experiences of gender euphoria, or the bliss someone feels when their gender presentation aligns with the gender they identify with.

Zelda Cohen (they/them), 22, visits the Center on Halsted youth center daily but returned for the evening after hearing they could grab free clothes in the space. Cohen modeled a sleeveless, black dress and leather jacket for the *Reader*, a fresh find. "Usually people don't have sizes that are 3X or 2X. But I was able to find more clothes than I usually am."

J Fraust is a nonbinary stylist and content creator who began androgynous styling three years ago and also attended the Wednesday event after seeing the event flyer circulate online. "It's easy to style other people for myself, but when it comes to me, sometimes I can struggle with that. And [these stylists] automatically were giving me all types of tips for more masculine presenting wear, and how to make [my] curvy shape look a lot more straight."

One might think finding donations of fashionable clothing would be a challenge, but Schreiber says that's been the easy part because so many LGBTQ+ community members have volunteered their own clothes once they



Patrons peruse clothing at a gods closet pop-up. © AARIJ ABBAS

hear about the effort from the organization's Instagram @godscloset.chi or by word of mouth.

The team is made of a couple of volunteers plus Schreiber and his friend Stevie (they/them), 22, who helps handle logistical matters such as event planning and social media. Stevie also jumps in at pop-ups as a stylist and occasional DJ. Stevie and Schreiber met at the bar they work at; they're the only trans people on staff. They soon found they shared a desire for greater community and spaces where they felt more seen. "I have access to, like, a utility van," Stevie said, which is the core reason for their partnership in the community closet.

Gods closet rents storage space, and volunteers help sort through donations for events. Many venues have generously allowed the crew to hold their events free of charge. The group is planning a fundraiser at the Soho House in January so that they can eventually pay their volunteers.

When sorting through donations, the volunteer crew is intent on making sure that what they select for a pop-up is cute, trendy, and stylish. Stevie says that when curating the clothes, they always ask themselves, is this something that someone would be excited about getting rather than just something that someone else doesn't want? "With my work with other volunteer teams it's like, people, rather than bringing in clothes that they like but haven't worn in a bit, [they'll bring] clothes from ten years ago," Stevie said. "OK, well, if you don't want it, somebody else probably doesn't want it either."

For Schreiber, one of the sweetest parts of running the pop-ups is watching attendees approach at the end of their shopping, arms full of new outfits, asking, "How much do we owe you for all of this stuff?"

"And it's like, nothing, this is all free, as it should be," Schreiber said. "So just seeing the surprise and delight and joy in people's eyes when they realize that yeah, that they're just given access to these things, is really huge."

Stevie said it's always fun to put people in clothes that they wouldn't necessarily grab for themselves, and then watch them try them on and decide to take them home. "I wish that there were more spaces [like this]," Stevie said, "and [that] it was just more prioritized at large for people to be able to get things that they want and need and not have to worry about paying for it." ☀

@debbiemarieb_



Mike Moses at the Regenstein Library © CLAYTON
HAUCK FOR CHICAGO READER

VISUAL ART

What Paul Moses taught

A University of Chicago exhibition pays tribute to a pathbreaking art historian cut down in his prime.

By HANNAH EDGAR

Mike Moses never knew his father, Paul Bell Moses. For the most part, he was afraid to ask about him.

He knew about his father's remarkable life in broad strokes. For example, he knew Moses—the first Black student admitted to Haverford College, a protege of the eminent art collector Albert Barnes, and later a scholar of French impressionism in the University of Chicago's art history department—was brilliant and well-liked. He also knew how his father died, murdered in 1966 by two white youths when he was just 36 years old.

Mike was a toddler at the time; his mother, Alice, never remarried. She died in 1994 having never spoken to her son at length about his father.

"I always sensed there was this pain within her. I didn't want to open up old wounds," says Mike, 59, a physical education teacher at the University of Chicago Lab School.

But Alice—herself a brilliant, longtime science teacher at the Lab School—was a fastidious archivist. She collected everything of her husband's: manuscripts, paintings, photos, newspa-

per clippings from when he wrote art criticism for the *Chicago Daily News* and the *Tribune*, even high school yearbooks. With each move to a new Hyde Park apartment, Mike dutifully carted the boxes along.

Now, Paul Moses's story has been brought out of storage and into public view. "Paul B. Moses: Trailblazing Art Historian," on display at the University of Chicago's Regenstein Library through December 16, traces the many milestones of Moses's life, as told by items from Alice's collection. It also dusts off Moses's pioneering scholarship on Edgar Degas's prints, from his pivotal 1964 Renaissance Society exhibition on the subject to reams of research for a book which, sadly, never came to fruition.

Ever since he first pored over the collection's contents a decade ago, Mike dreamed of creating a show about his father. How, though, was beyond him.

"If you'd asked me maybe three, four years ago, what curating meant, I would have said, 'Well, I'd have to google that,'" Mike says, chuckling.

But a chance encounter during the pandemic,

at a makeshift dog park on a patch of green next to a defunct U of C dorm, changed all that. There, Mike met Stephanie Strother, a graduate student in art history, when their dogs Riley and Jasper took a liking to one another. When Strother told Mike her area of study, "bells went off."

Their meeting felt nearly as charmed for Strother, who happened to share the same research interests as the late Professor Moses: turn-of-the-century and early 20th-century French art. She was especially impressed by Moses's early focus on Degas's prints, an area of scholarship relatively unprobed until decades after his death.

"I was struck by how interesting his life sounded, and by the fact that I didn't know who he was—there was no historical knowledge of him in the department. That seemed really wrong to me," Strother says.

Once they'd assessed the material, they approached the University of Chicago the following spring to pitch their idea. The school enthusiastically agreed, and the exhibition opened at the beginning of the academic year.

Mike and Strother uncovered additional

items to supplement Alice Moses's collection. While Paul was living abroad as a teacher at the Overseas School of Rome from 1957 to 1959, he was cast as an extra in *Ben-Hur*; stills in the exhibition identify him as the servant who helps remove Messala's armor at the beginning of the film. Moses, a talented artist in his own right, had gifted a watercolor of the Haverford campus as a graduation memento to his friend William Wixom, who himself became a noted art historian. When Wixom died in 2020, the watercolor, on display here, was still among his treasured possessions.

The exhibition also nods to the professional dynamics Moses navigated as one of the only Black professors at the University of Chicago. While teaching a general humanities course, Moses advocated for removing *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* from the assigned reading list for incoming freshmen, citing its racist stereotypes. At the time, many of his white colleagues, literary critic Wayne C. Booth among them, criticized Moses's objections as anti-intellectual and insufficiently "objective."

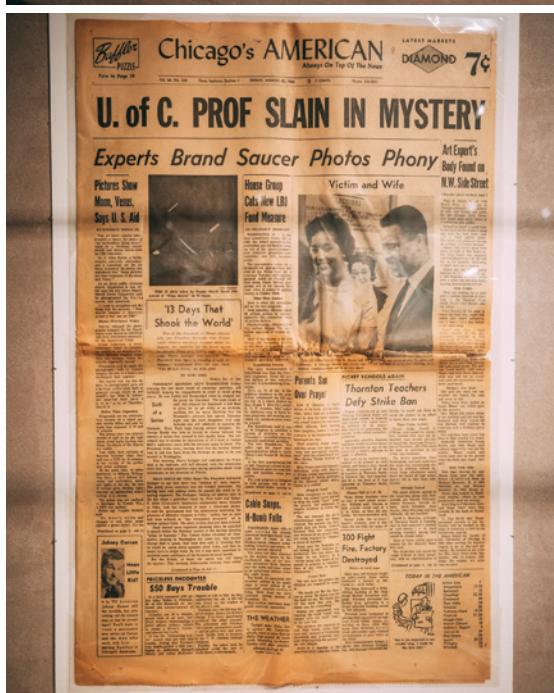
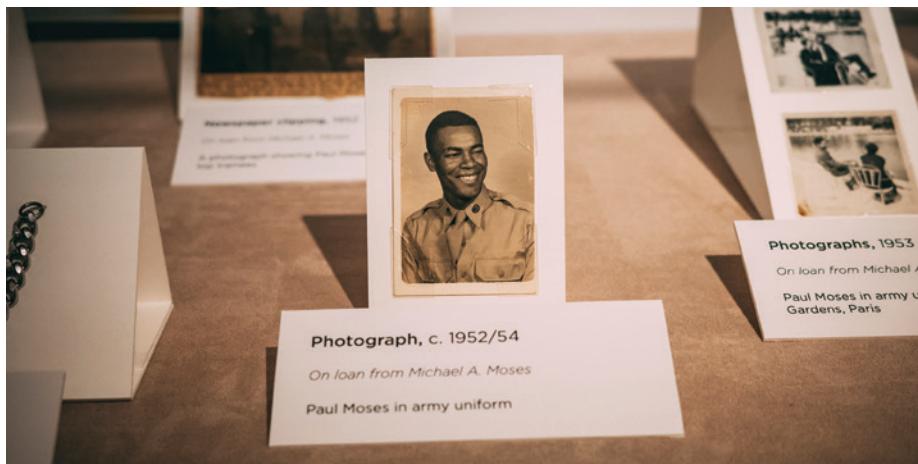
Years later, however, Booth acknowledged not only that he grew to understand Moses's stance, but that it inspired his 1988 book *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction*.

"*The Company We Keep* can perhaps best be described as an effort to discover why that still widespread response to Paul Moses's sort of complaint will not do," Booth wrote. "Though I would of course resist anyone who tried to ban the book from my classroom, I shall argue here that Paul Moses's reading of *Huckleberry Finn*, an overt ethical appraisal, is one legitimate form of literary criticism."

Clearly, Booth was among the many awed by Moses's compelling personality and intellect. When *Daily News* critic Franz Schulze took a yearlong personal leave, Moses, who had already written on occasion for the Sunday *Tribune*, was the paper's first choice to replace him. His critiques from that period are warm, witty, erudite, and utterly persuasive—persuasion which piqued in urgency when it came to Chicago artists whom he felt weren't getting their due.

"Nobody could debate him. It was well above a debate, because he knew what he was talking about," Mike says.

Just a week before his death, Moses made his last public nonteaching appearance at the Art Institute, lecturing on Matisse for its



Archival material on the life of Paul B. Moses © CLAYTON HAUCK FOR CHICAGO READER



Mike Moses co-curated the exhibition on his father's life and work. © CLAYTON HAUCK FOR CHICAGO READER

women's board. On March 24, 1966, after he and Alice returned home from a dinner party, Moses offered to drop off Mike's babysitter, who lived a short drive away in Bronzeville. For unknown reasons, after dropping her off, Moses drove to the north side, perhaps stopping for something to eat or for a nightcap. Along the way, he crossed paths with 20-year-old Patrick Kennedy and 16-year-old Richard Tolowski. His body was later discovered in Portage Park, a gunshot wound in the back of his head.

When Kennedy and Tolowski were apprehended, both initially claimed that Moses had "proposed they take part in an unnatural act," prompting the argument that led to Moses's murder inside the vehicle. During the murder trial that June, however, the city's homicide investigation unit commander reported that Kennedy and Tolowski had been looking for someone to hold up—Tolowski wanted to run away to California, and Kennedy had already been placed on probation for serving as an accomplice to a carjacking some years before. Police concluded that Kennedy shot Moses outside the car, as he attempted to escape. Kennedy was sentenced to 14 to 30 years in prison; Tolowski, a minor, was turned over to the Illinois Youth Commission and vanished from the press record.

It's still unknown exactly what happened that night, and unclear how much time either served. Mike Moses isn't particularly interested in finding out.

"I just don't see what I would have gained from that. To me, it kind of glorifies them," he says. "Instead, it's out of sight, out of mind. Gone and forgotten."

Though very few of them remain, those who knew Moses made it their mission to ensure he was *not* forgotten. Alice was inundated with condolence letters from her husband's students the world over, from Chicago to Rome. The University of Chicago's radio station honored Moses with a half-hour memorial program that offers just a sampling of the lives Moses touched, including Booth, Schulze, artist and critic Harry Bouras, composer Ralph Shapey, and humanities scholar Alice Benston (whose son Kimberly is now a professor and onetime president of Haverford, Moses's alma mater). They recalled a man whose prodigious gifts—in scholarship, art, teaching, even cooking—were dwarfed only by his more-prodigious curiosity.

"You could be walking along and a building you passed a good number of times would make him stop . . . or the arching of the trees with a new snowstorm," Benston remembered. "Whatever you were working on stopped at the moment for his expression of his delight."

Haverford plans to house an abbreviated version of "Paul B. Moses: Trailblazing Art Historian" in fall 2023. Earlier this month, the college also dedicated an undergraduate research conference to his memory. Both bring greater visibility to Moses, who, thanks to an anonymous benefactor, has had a scholarship at the school named in his honor since 1982.

Mike, for his part, is at peace knowing his mother's decades of devotion paid off.

"I'm a happy guy . . . It was a fact-finding mission of getting to know my father. And I know my father now." ■

ARTS & CULTURE

BOOK REVIEW

Rethinking equity in the built environment

Blair Kamin's *Who Is the City For?* comes across as a curated selection of where criticism has been.

By ANJULIE RAO

The house next door to mine was torn down. My neighbors don't quite remember the year, but the resident local historian, Maurice, who has lived on the block since the late 60s, was shipped off to Vietnam and, upon his return in 1972, the house had vanished. The product of "slum clearance" on Chicago's west side, the home's demolition was swiftly met by the efforts of Maurice's mother, Audrey, who took to the land with a shovel, bulbs, and saplings. The lot soon became a garden: a grassy oasis that grows apples, roses, and other flora. A place that could have been yet another vacant lot became a gift for the people of our block.

I imagine that if I asked Audrey who the city is for, she'd say: "It's for everyone." And she made her own corner of this city just that.

I wax poetic about the garden next door because, as a critic who writes about the built environment, it is a blessing to be able to attend to such seemingly minor interventions designed and built by seemingly minor actors. Where I place my attention speaks volumes about my values. Blair Kamin's new book begins with that same question in the title: *Who Is the City For?* It's a collection of 55 previously published reviews from his 28 years as the *Chicago Tribune* architecture critic, featuring new photographs by *Sun-Times* editorial board member, independent photographer, and author Lee Bey. The book assembles a menagerie of evaluations of some of the city's most prominent projects: the Chicago Riverwalk, Maggie Daley Park, the 606, among others. He also includes commentary on the role of appointed commissioners and political powers in shaping our city. But I finished the



book without a clear answer to the question at hand. Instead, I walked away with a different inquiry: What is the purpose of built environment criticism?

The reviews are divided into five sections, each addressing different themes related to "the public realm." Each review includes a postscript that updates the project with current information. I won't spend time parsing through each review—all capture Kamin's memorable watchdog ethos that had architects fuming or trembling every week.

But I turn my attention to his introduction, wherein Kamin attends to the fundamental question of who the city is for, through the premise of equity.

What can architecture, traditionally the provenance of the rich and powerful, do to make cities like Chicago more equitable, serving poor, working, and middle-class people, not just the one percent?" he writes. He goes on to define his terms of engagement: "I take equity," he says, "to mean fairness or justice in the way that people are treated rather than the term's economic meanings—a share of stock or the value of a piece of property after debts are subtracted." He goes on, however, to say that evaluating "the share" in the context of public built spaces—the spaces we share as citizens such as parks and transit—can reveal for whom a city is designed and built.

Therein lies my fundamental issue with framing this book around equity: Kamin's definition of equity might include justice, but in the stories where the idea is directly addressed, it is reduced to, "what happens in wealthy neighborhoods should also happen in impoverished neighborhoods." If one place

The Emmett Till and Mamie Till-Mobley House

© LEE BEY

has more amenities, so should the other.

In his 2019 article, "Rating Chicago's Latest Wave of Parks and Public Spaces by the Three 'E's: They're Better on Entertainment and Ecology than Equity," Kamin revisits public parks—Millennium Park, Lincoln Park Zoo Nature Boardwalk, and Northerly Island—to comment on their successes creating new, engaging landscapes. Toward the end, he writes: "The trouble is location: most of these projects are along parts of the lakefront lined by affluent neighborhoods or in areas of Chicago that have gentrified or are gentrifying—in part due to the presence of these alluring public spaces. Their benefits need to be spread to other parts of the city, particularly the South and West Sides, which Mayor Lori Lightfoot and her chief planner, Maurice Cox, have targeted for revival."

LEE BEY, BLAIR KAMIN, LAURIE PETERSEN, AND JEN MASENGAR DISCUSS CHICAGO'S URBAN DESIGN.

Tues 11/29, 6 PM, in-person tickets sold-out, virtual tickets available from \$0-15, 312-397-4010, mcachicago.org

This is not justice. Instead, that ideology only addresses "fairness" using a snapshot view of "haves" and "have-nots." It does not attend to repairing decades of disinvestment or the results of Chicago's long-standing, systematic political decisions that blighted and starved our most vulnerable neighborhoods. Focusing on the "haves" and "have-nots" continues to center the needs of the "rich and powerful," and, in his introduction, he extends that centering to their safety, too. He writes:

The recognition that cities are shared ventures...represents a far more viable long-term strategy than its opposite: containment of the poor, whether in ghettos, public-housing projects, or dysfunctional neighborhoods...The shootings and thefts that have spread from Chicago's South and West Sides to the downtown and affluent North Side neighborhoods like Lincoln Park make clear the costs of failing to address the root causes of long-festering problems associated with high concentrations of poverty.

WHO IS THE CITY FOR? ARCHITECTURE, EQUITY, AND THE PUBLIC REALM IN CHICAGO BY BLAIR KAMIN
University of Chicago Press, hardcover, 312 pp., \$29
press.uchicago.edu

Using this logic to advocate for greater investment in Black and Brown neighborhoods frames precisely my struggle with this book. Public housing was founded under the ethos of "housing as a human right" and failed because of specific, racist political decision-making. Neighborhoods where vulnerable people struggle—not always unsuccessfully—to make their lives rich and full, despite generations of extraction, are not "dysfunctional," nor are they "ghettos," as Kamin refers to them; they are the results of exploitation.

To have a "viable long-term strategy"—one that centers justice, not fairness—we must move our attention beyond comparative dichotomies. We must evaluate equity and justice in ways that don't center the needs and desires of affluent neighborhoods, or their safety. After all, those two priorities are precisely what produced disinvestment in the first place.

But that brings me to my first question: What is the purpose of built environment criticism? While Kamin's writing is thoughtful and proves he can wield the pen, I cannot recommend this book to a reader seeking to understand the complexities of how architecture and infrastructure relate to equity. Instead, it comes across more as a curated selection of criticism's past priorities. He invokes the need for the "activist critic," citing his earlier book, *Why Architecture Matters*: one who, "[places] buildings in the context of the politics, the economics, and the cultural forces that shape them." But the activist critic is limited, by Kamin's own definition, to projects that are completed or in progress. Can critics, instead, amplify communities' visions for the future, while practicing activist criticism?

I might say that the next generation of critics should take a page from my neighbor Audrey's handbook and make our task one of imagination. Criticism can, and perhaps should, actively participate in the grander project of radical, reparative world-building, while also holding powerful actors in architecture and city-making accountable for lackluster justice initiatives. No longer is this a question of who has nicer urban amenities; "who gets what" is a tired trope. Rather, critics should turn our attention to justice's long view by not only contextualizing projects in history or politics but also in the ability of city dwellers to actualize a better future on their terms. 

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FEMINIST THEATER

Our bodies, but whose choice?

Artemisia's Julie Proudfoot talks about exploding anti-choice myths in *Title Ten*.

By JACK HELBIG



Julie Proudfoot (left) and Willow James in rehearsal for Artemisia's *Title Ten*. © JABARI KHALIQ

It was around 2010 that writer-actor-director Julie Proudfoot was sitting in a Starbucks at the IC station downtown, waiting for the South Shore line to take her home, when she became aware of two young couples sitting at an adjacent table. "And the males were not only saying sexist things to the young women," Proudfoot recalls, "they were saying pointedly violent things to them. And the girls were laughing. And that was it. That's when I said, 'Wow, how have we gotten to this point?'"

Proudfoot had noted for years that "a rollback of women's rights that the far right has been working on for decades now was really starting to take its toll." But this was the tipping point for her. "I knew I had to do something."

And what she did was found Artemisia, a feminist theater now celebrating its 11th season. Named in honor of Artemisia Gentileschi, the until recently greatly overlooked feminist Baroque-era painter, the theater is "a 100% women led organization . . . committed to creating career-altering opportunities" for women.

The idea had been brewing for years, ever since she and her husband had moved to Chicago from LA in 2006. Tired of LA, the cost of living, and the crazy life, they were hoping for a fresh start in the midwest, but soon after Proudfoot started auditioning for roles, her excitement was dampened.

"I was very surprised by, at that time, the lack of opportunities for women in Chicago. There was so much great theater that was not female focused. The idea of a fully complex leading female character and it being her journey and her world—I was not seeing that."

Artemisia was created to remedy that. And over the years, Artemisia has carved out a niche on the theater scene, producing plays

and an annual Fall Festival of works on feminist themes.

Proudfoot's current project is codirecting a play she began writing during the time we all sheltered in place two years ago. The play is called *Title Ten*, and it is Proudfoot's take on the state of women's rights and ways women's bodies are controlled in America during and post-*Roe v. Wade*.

Proudfoot first began thinking about the play that became *Title Ten* when she was hired in 2016 to research Donald Trump. "I read like 18 books about Donald Trump. So I learned way more than anyone would ever want to know about him. One of the things Trump did was use the right-to-life base as a way to really garner votes and momentum politically."

Proudfoot continues explaining how once he was elected, he naturally began messing around with Title X to please his right-to-life voters.

"Title X was started in the 1970s," Proudfoot explains. "Its purpose really was to help lower-income women and families plan their families and get prenatal care. Title X funding required three things: When a woman went to be examined at a clinic that was funded by Title X and discovered she was pregnant, the clinic first—if she wanted to have the child—referred her for prenatal care. If she wanted to give the child up for adoption, they also had to refer her for legal and free adoptive services. And if she chose to exercise her right to have an abortion, they had to refer her to a clinic that performs a safe, legal abortion. Trump imposed a gag order. If you got Title X funding, you were no longer allowed to tell the woman that she had abortion as a choice."

"When I first read about this, I saw red. And I started to think about the way in which women's rights are constantly on the chop-

ping block. Whether we're talking about safety in the workplace, equal pay for equal work, or the right to exercise your right to choose. So that's what got me cooking on *Title Ten*."

Title Ten consists of the stories of eight characters, all women in some way touched by Title X. In the play, which spans two and a half decades, Proudfoot presents "very different women in very different places in their lives, in very different settings and environments who are making a decision or struggling to win an argument."

"So we have Rachel," Proudfoot continues, "in the Long Island Clinic, Long Island City Clinic in New York, of course, in '78. We have Norma, who is part of Operation Rescue. [Right-wing activist Randall Terry's anti-abortion campaign]. So she's at an abortion clinic in Lafayette, Indiana, in '88 as part of an Operation Rescue protest."

Proudfoot interrupts herself, "I don't want to give too much away, but there's a setting of a gay woman in the early 2000s in Central Park, and we don't know it at the beginning, but she's meeting her daughter."

"But the first scene and last scene is anchored by the same character, Rachel, who at 17 in the beginning, is in a clinic in Long Island City to see if she's pregnant, talking to herself in the room alone, trying to figure out what she's going to do if she is pregnant. And the same woman comes back to us at the end as a mature woman and talks about the impact of the right to choose on her life."

Proudfoot references Anna Deavere Smith's plays (which include *Twilight: Los Angeles* and *Fires in the Mirror*, about the 1992 LA riots and the 1991 Crown Heights riot, respectively) as an influence, though unlike Smith, her play is not based on interviews with real people. They are, however, based on Proudfoot's research—research that led her to read material by and about people at the opposite end of the political spectrum.

One of the characters in *Title Ten*, for example, is loosely based on a woman who served in Congress from Nebraska and is an active pro-life advocate. "The character is rallying her pro-life crowd," Proudfoot explains, "but she's coming at it from the opposite place of a Randall Terry, who came at it violently, almost, and criminally. She's coming at it with Christian love. And she's coming at it from, 'We will

rescue these poor women.' Because the whole trauma story that the right to lifers like to tell is that, 'Yes, well, you had an abortion, but now you're traumatized by it, and you are a victim of your own choice."

Proudfoot pauses a moment to reflect. "I thought about that a lot, and I thought about the sincerity of some of these young—especially these young women, who are the pro-life generation, and they really believe that they're coming from a place of love. When you listen to them, when you watch them being interviewed, when you see how they dress and how they interact with each other, when you saw them weep with joy after *Roe* was overturned, you begin to understand how this is based on a fable—the idea that you can have a perfect world in which every fetus can be born into a happy, healthy family, right? And that no women will get sick and no women will die and no pregnancy will be complicated. This is a fable. This is a sentimental, ridiculous lie."

"These young women have become the pro-life generation, and they're talking about all these babies they're going to save and all these innocent lives they're going to save. And these are the same folks that don't care about day care, childcare tax credits, school lunch programs, any of the things for mothers, any of the things that allow a woman, especially a single parent, a female single parent, or a male single parent for that matter, to raise a child effectively and lovingly and in a safe home."

Every story Proudfoot tells serves her larger goal of portraying the struggle of being a woman in a world dominated by men, she said.

"The stories don't all directly deal with abortion rights," Proudfoot continues. "Some deal with the lack of equality in the workplace, which leads to, often, sexual harassment, sexual violence against women. But the play unifies around an overarching theme of where we are right now, of where we find ourselves in America. As a parent, as a person who loves and knows people, as a concerned citizen, you're just looking at probably one of the worst, worst periods of my life for women's rights and trans rights. It's really shocking and horrifying, and the only way to deal with it is to move through the mess and start challenging and confronting the choices." □

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RR Mosque4Mosque

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REVIEW

Mosque4Mosque upends stereotypes

A queer Arab Muslim man tries to balance romance and family in About Face's comedy.

By BOUTAYNA CHOKRANE

Mosque4Mosque is not a monolithic representation of the Arab American Muslim experience, and perhaps that's exactly the point.

Written by Omer Abbas Salem and directed by Sophiyaa Nayar, this charming production challenges all preconceived notions of a play about an Arab American Muslim family.

In this sitcom-esque dramedy, Ibrahim (played by Salem) and his family navigate their lives in Chicago prior to and after Trump's inauguration. Ibrahim is a queer Syrian American millennial working through his first relationship ever, with his white boyfriend James (Jordan Dell Harris). Having helped raise his 18-year-old sister Lena (Gloria Imseih Petrelli) after his father died from cancer, Ibrahim is accustomed to taking care of his family first, even if that means living a hushed life. His mother Sara—"Sa like sorry, Ra like

ramen"—(Rula Gardenier) on the other hand, has other plans; she is determined to find him the perfect Muslim man to marry.

Salem, who is also Syrian American, first wrote *Mosque4Mosque* in 2019 through Jackalope Theatre's Playwrights Lab. In July 2020, the play was workshoped and performed virtually through the Criminal Queerness Festival and Dixon Place, directed by Sharifa Elkady. Steppenwolf Theatre Company then selected the play, under the direction of community advocate Arti Ishak, for its SCOUT New Play Development Initiative, a groundbreaking accomplishment for MENA artists like Salem and Ishak. But a seat at the table is not enough. "They have made it very clear to us they are ill-equipped to predict what our needs may be because they've never worked with a group of Arab actors and they don't have any Arab actors in their ensemble," Salem said in an

From left: Gloria Imseih Petrelli, Rula Gardenier, and Omer Abbas Salem in *Mosque4Mosque*

© JENN UDONI

interview with the *Reader*.

Now produced at About Face Theatre and supported by Silk Road Rising, *Mosque4Mosque* deconstructs stereotypical and harmful media portrayals of MENA communities and Muslims. The Den's Bookspan Theatre becomes Ibrahim's family kitchen—the heart of an Arab home. The subtle details can be easy to miss but are indispensable. In front of the shoe rack, a pair of cream balgha—traditional heelless slippers from the Maghreb region—sit next to a pair of hot-pink fluffy sandals. Vibrant oriental rugs cover the wooden floors and complement the Arabian vermilion armchair. A hookah and a massive jar of pickled green olives rest on their white refrigerator, which is decorated with family photos and receipts. Some props almost feel ironic, like the ceramic camel by the kitchen sink. (Steven Abbott designed the set, with props by Lonnée Hickman.)

But it is Salem's witty writing style that shines throughout this production. Through his use of comedic relief, Salem drives sensitive topics forward in a way that allows the audience to lean into the conversation. We first meet Ibrahim in a church. Ibrahim's holy confession is amusing, but it is a monumental scene because it instantly forms a reverent connection between religions and dissects the contrasts between Catholic and Muslim guilt.

In his depiction of an Arab American family, Salem avoids creating unrealistic portrayals by poking fun at the family's eccentricities. Gardenier's heartwarming performance as Sara is an enjoyable representation of the hospitable, lovable, and sometimes quirky nature of Arab, Muslim, and immigrant mothers. She immediately wins our hearts, and we recognize her controlling behavior as a form of love. Sara's naivete is hyperbolized to reflect her desire to be a part of Ibrahim's life. Who else would google "famous Muslim gay men" to better understand her son?

In just 100 minutes (including an intermission), Salem even manages to weave in subplots to highlight the multifaceted complexities of these characters. Lena, for example, is a walking paradox. We first see Lena coming home late, fumbling to put her hijab back on, which she occasionally wears, mainly for her mother. As she struggles to tell her mother that she quit the Scholastic Bowl to join the cheerleading team, she reflects the internal

pressures children of immigrants experience to please their parents.

In between two cultures, young Arab Americans often struggle with the fear of disappointing their parents and their aspiration to live shamelessly. This message really resonates when Ibrahim says, "There's a little bit of a lie in every truth I tell her," referring to his mother. Still, this is a play about identity and belonging, highlighting universal struggles that everyone can relate to.

Even with all the hardships, Salem never forgets what makes these families so special. It's the chaotic family dinners. It's the unbreakable sibling bond between Lena and Ibrahim. It's Sara's willingness to create a dating profile for her son on a queer Muslim "rearranged arranged marriage" website.

This play also addresses the immigration issues caused by Trump's Muslim ban, but it skims the surface. In the end, Sara returns home after her trip to Damascus but is stopped by immigration. While this story line felt rushed, its call to action couldn't be clearer. In an era where Arabs and Muslims are either invisible or perceived as problems, *Mosque4Mosque* demands for us to be seen as whole. At the same time, it sends a message to MENA and Muslim communities that they are seen. ■

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OPENING

RR Elf off the shelf

Drury Lane's holiday musical is delightfully insubstantial.

Like much that passes for entertainment during the holiday season, this 2010 musical, based on the 2003 movie, lives on the infinitely thin line between charm and utter stupidity. The characters are all derived from earlier entertainments and holiday advertising—jolly old Santa Claus, his myriad elf slaves, the sweet naif who believes in “the spirit of Christmas,” the sour workaholic/nonbeliever/misanthrope who doesn’t—and the happy endings they find themselves trapped in are no less well-worn and formulaic. The naif redeems, the skeptic learns to love Christmas, the orphan finds his father—and a family.

The true miracle is that director/choreographer Lynne Kurdziel Formato and her cast and crew are able to weave a pretty entertaining evening out of this insubstantial stuff. Part of the credit surely must go to book writers Thomas Meehan and Bob Martin and composer Matthew Sklar, who were inspired enough, and respectful enough of the original movie (which is not bad), not to ruin it. Chad Beguelin’s lyrics are even at times pretty witty (“to thine own elf be true”).

But most of the credit for creating a holiday show that actually entertains must go to the folks at Drury Lane. The whole production is imbued with a happy, playful spirit that, like a clever TV commercial, makes every familiar trope and cliche feel shiny and new. The pace of the show is live and quick. And whenever things slow down, Formato speeds things up with her inventive choreography. Ben Dow is delightful as the show’s protagonist Buddy the Elf; God bless him for playing a character made famous by Will Ferrell and making it his own. —JACK HELBIG *ELF* Through 1/8: Wed 1:30 PM, Thu 1:30 and 8 PM, Fri 8 PM, Sat 3 and 8 PM, Sun 2 and 6 PM; also Thu 11/24 3 PM only, Tue-Wed 12/20-12/21 1:30 and 7 PM, no performance Sat-Sun 12/24-12/25, Wed 12/28 1:30 and 8 PM, Sat 12/31 and 8:30 PM, Sun 1/1 2 PM only; Drury Lane Theatre, 100 Drury Lane, Oakbrook Terrace, 630-530-0111, drurylanetheatre.com, \$75-\$85

RR Of Apartheid and Antigone

The Island gets a rousing revival at Court.

Exquisitely paced and intellectually explosive, *The Island* at Court Theatre is a profoundly moving work of art. From the first moment, this production (directed by Gabrielle Randle-Bent, Court’s associate artistic director) seizes the audience and thrusts them into the world of two political prisoners of apartheid and doesn’t let go, even long after the play (written by Athol Fugard, John Kani, and Winston Ntshona) has ended. The exceptionally talented Ronald L. Conner and Kai A. Ealy play Winston and John (roles originated in 1973 by Ntshona and Kani), two affable cellmates on Robben Island, the same island where Nelson Mandela was imprisoned before apartheid fell. The stage is set starkly in Yeaji Kim’s design; in the center, a giant stone slab implying a scale swings heavily from back to front, soberly reflecting the lack of nuance in law. The tableaux is encircled with amber sparkling sand, evoking images of a magical circle of protection: a sacred space where one’s fundamental humanity might be retained, even amidst the brutality of cruel captors.

Within this circle Winston and John toil in painfully repetitive hard labor, and make plans to perform Antigone for the other prisoners. As complications

arise, the bonds of their friendship are tested, and the *Antigone* performance takes on deeper meaning. The men and the audience are spurred to interrogate difficult questions. Is fighting for justice worth your life? What meaning is there in life without freedom? These are the kinds of questions not easily answered with words, and Randle-Bent deftly leverages silence and humor to illuminate the darkness. *The Island* is a riveting, philosophically sophisticated play that is a must-see for fans of meaty theater. —SHERI FLANDERS *THE ISLAND* Through 12/4: Wed-Fri 7:30 PM, Sat-Sun 2 and 7:30 PM; no show Thu 11/24, audio description Sat 12/3 2 PM (touch tour 12:30 PM), open captions Sun 12/4 2 PM, ASL interpretation Sun 12/4 7:30 PM; Court Theatre, 5535 S. Ellis, 773-753-4472, courttheatre.org, \$40.50-\$82

What's new, pussy cat?

The latest tour of *The Lion King* feels a little long in the tooth.

At 25 years old, *The Lion King* has been seen by more than 110 million people and played every continent but Antarctica. Between global warming and ticket demand, it’s probably just a matter of time.

The latest U.S. tour to stop in Chicago feels significantly less lavish from earlier versions that blew audiences and critics away with its visually, aurally stunning Hamlet-but-with-lions tale of an African king, Mufasa (Gerald Ramsey), murdered by his evil brother Scar (Peter Hargrave). Mufasa’s cub Simba (Darian Sanders) flees the kingdom, and the journey of Simba from reckless cub to royal king is the nexus of Elton John’s soaring, percussive score (lyrics by Tim Rice).

The production at hand feels far too “Hakuna Matata,” as if the producers calculated that it didn’t matter if the savannah was a few creatures short of a “Circle of Life” because the show would sell regardless.

John’s magnificent score is ever in the service of *The Lion King*’s glorious visual aesthetic, famously the costume/puppet creations designed by the show’s original director Julie Taymor (who became the first woman to win the Tony for director of a musical in 1998). But at the Cadillac Palace, the creatures are starting to look a little long in the tooth. The human cast is fine. Those puppets look tired. The iconic wildebeest stampede appears weirdly akin to an early Atari game. The flora inflatables look like they’re close kin with those inflatable men who live on used car lots. Rafiki (Gugwana Dlamini) looks vaguely like a neglected Christmas tree, all manner of bits and bobs sagging from her bulbous costume.

The cast is competent and energetic and kids are apt to be delighted regardless. They probably won’t even notice how droopy the vultures are. —CATEY SULLIVAN *THE LION KING* Through 1/4: Wed 2 and 7:30 PM, Thu-Fri 7:30 PM, Sat 2 and 7:30 PM, Sun 1 and 6:30 PM; also Tue 12/20, 12/27, and 1/10 7:30 PM, Fri 11/25 and 12/23 2 and 7:30 PM, Mon 12/26 7:30 PM, Fri 12/30 1 and 6:30 PM, Sun 11/27 1 PM only, Sat 12/24 2 PM only, Sat 1/7 7:30 PM only; Cadillac Palace, 151 W. Randolph, 800-775-2000, broadway-inchicago.com, \$55-\$195

A mixed quartet

Theatre Above the Law takes a trip through time with its program of one-act plays.

Theatre Above the Law’s sampler platter of four one-acts from the late 19th and early 20th centuries (most of them seldom produced) offers mixed results. The opening piece, *A Dollar* by Yiddish playwright David



Kai A. Ealy (left) and Ronald L. Conner in *The Island* at Court Theatre © MICHAEL BOSILOW

Pinski, feels like an extended acting exercise in which archetypes (the Comedian, the Villain, the Ingenue, etc.) fight over the titular object. But things improve quickly with Thornton Wilder’s *The Wreck on the S25*, an odd and haunting piece about Mr. Hawkins (Nick Barnes), a “family man” who seems to be having big doubts about his life. It’s a cunning taste of Wilder’s ability to find the mysterious in the quotidian (as in *Our Town*), with a scosh of Cheeverlike dark suburban angst woven in.

Alice Gerstenberg’s *Fourteen* is a madcap feminist comedy of manners, presented like a sitcom, applause track and all. A society woman (Jamie Redwood) attempts to achieve the perfect number at a dinner party, as represented in the title. As guests drop on and off the RSVP list, her frustration grows, and she also berates her shy daughter (Lena Valenti) about the need to entice the wealthy bachelor Mom’s chosen as her seatmate. (Gerstenberg was a pioneer of the “little theater” movement in Chicago, probably best known for her play *Overtones*.) Finally, Anton Chekhov’s *The Proposal* (perhaps most popular of the four) is a silly confection in which a neurotic and hypochondriacal young man attempts to win the hand of the farmer’s daughter next door—only to find that they cannot stop arguing over who owns a slice of meadowland, and whose hunting dog is superior. (Andrew Cawley as the suitor demonstrates excellent physical comedic skills.)

Under Tony Lawry’s direction, the cast generally finds the tonal shifts between the pieces. The Wilder and Chekhov selections are easily the standouts, but for anyone with an interest in theater history, the 90-minute show provides an opportunity to delve into lesser-known works. —KERRY REID *A NIGHT OF CLASSIC AND UNIQUE ONE ACTS* Through 12/18: Fri-Sat 8 PM, Sun 3 PM; also Mon 12/5 7:30 PM (industry night); no performances Fri-Sun 11/25-11/27; Jarvis Square Theater, 1439 W. Jarvis, theatreatl.org, \$25 (senior/student \$20)

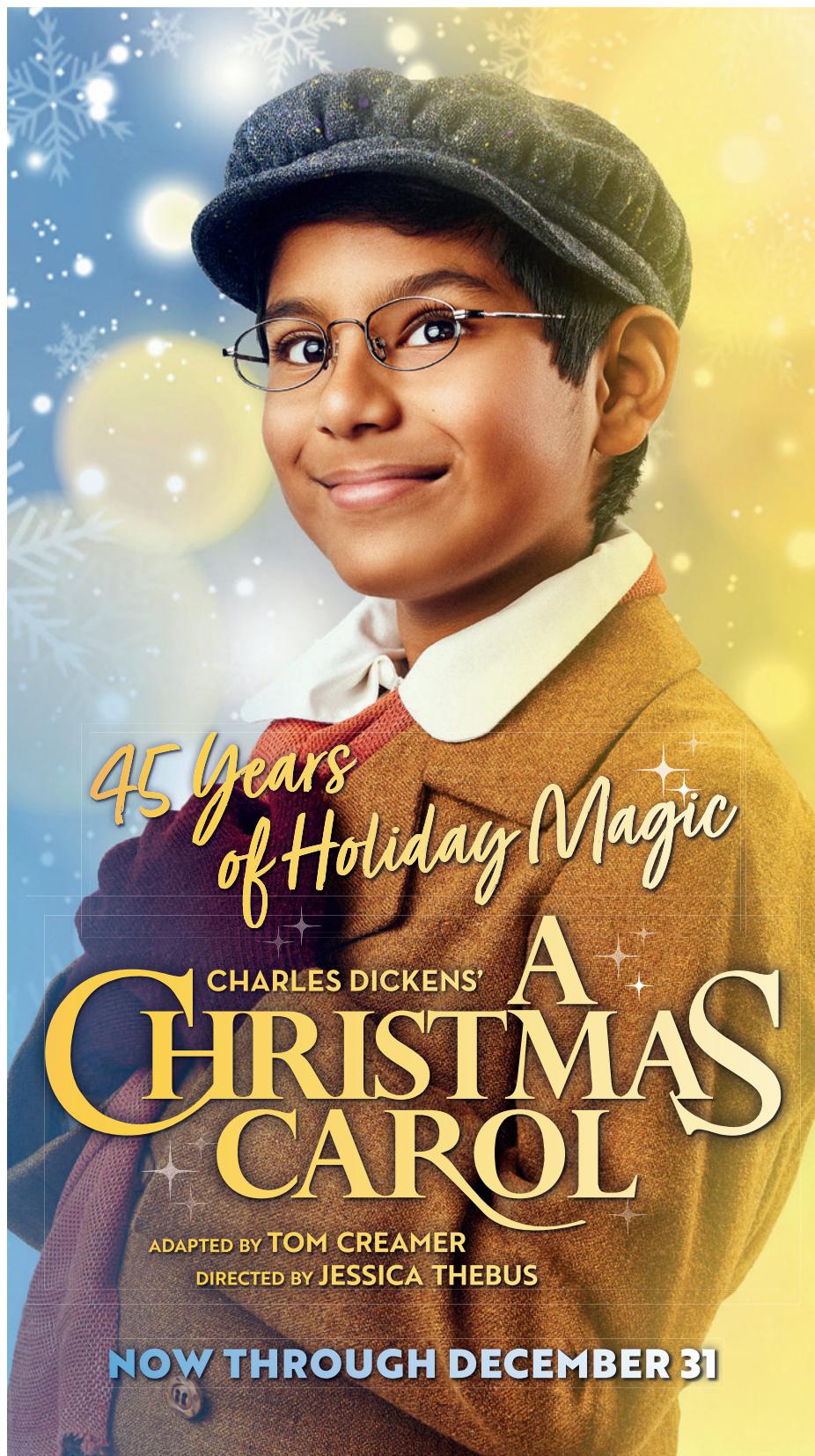
RR Steadfast seasonal favorite
Lookingglass brings back their popular
holiday Andersen adaptation.

It begins festively enough with a giant advent calendar revealing hints of the story to come. Some symbols are cheering, like wreaths and a violin. But others are mysterious—why a giant fish and a wheelbarrow?

In *The Steadfast Tin Soldier*, created and directed by Mary Zimmerman (from the story by Hans Christian Andersen), we soon see all of these symbols appear in the plot through the ancient art form of pantomime. The immensely entertaining cast of five players and four very interactive musicians tells a big story (with the help of some astounding puppets from the Chicago Puppet Studio). The tale is fraught with devilish clowns, stern adults, and naughty bullies who try to thwart the imagination of one toddler (played by a giant puppet) during his playtime. More importantly, the action follows his favorite tin soldier, who is earnest, brave, and disabled. The soldier wishes only to be with his true love, a paper ballerina in the nearby dollhouse.

Like any great adventure/romance, the obstacles are many, and highly improbable, making space for hilarity. The cast is seasoned to perfection (standout performance by Adeoye playing the Tin Soldier), and the orchestra adds such a festive mood to the show that you might want to bring along multiple generations to wonder at this charming holiday-inspired gem.

As in most Andersen fairy tales, there is a glum little sliver of realism peeking through the magic, perhaps to prepare children for some of life’s crueler plot twists. This production did not shy away from that, but serves it up on such a pretty platter, going so far as to add a particularly moving musical number at the end, that the audience can find the courage to leave the warm world of candlelight, fairy tales, and orchestra pit for the bluster and freeze of winter, feeling all the stronger for it. —KIMZYN CAMPBELL *THE STEADFAST TIN SOLDIER* Through 1/8: Tue 1:30 and 7 PM, Wed 7 PM, Thu 1:30 and 7 PM, Fri 7 PM, Sat 1:30 and 7 PM, Sun 1 and 6 PM; Fri 11/25 1:30 and 7 PM, Wed 11/30 6:30 PM only, Tue 12/13 7 PM only, Sat 1/7 2 and 7 PM, no performances Thu 11/24, Tue 11/29, 12/6, and 1/3, and Sun 12/25; Lookingglass Theatre, 821 N. Michigan, lookingglass theatre.org, \$65-\$75



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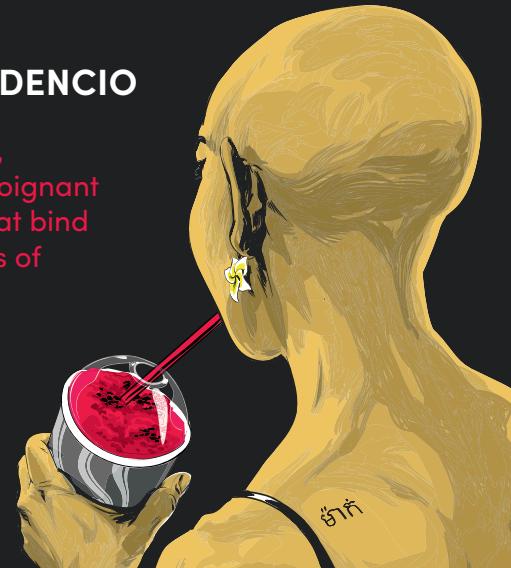
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Amir George and Gordon Quinn

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Kartemquin Films continues to grow

Longtime artistic director Gordon Quinn succeeded by local filmmaker Amir George

By KAT SACHS

Kartemquin to me is like a giant tree in the middle of the documentary world," says Amir George. "I want to just keep watering that tree and help it grow and expand."

It's a gray Chicago day when George—a local filmmaker and programmer who was recently appointed the new artistic director of Kartemquin Films—makes this verdurous proclamation at the offices of the storied nonprofit documentary film organization. Inside, however, is aflush with color, from the array of movie posters decorating the walls of the stairwell to the enviable assemblage of memorabilia that adorns the workplace.

In the washroom, for example, there's this framed quote from Britney Spears: "Sundance is weird. The movies are weird. You actually have to think about them when you watch them."

Less humorously but much more impressively, the six Emmy Awards that Kartemquin has won over the years are collected atop a shelf (to say nothing of the four Academy Award nominations their films have garnered), while Camera #1 peers out through French doors from an adjoining office.

This was the camera used by the early Kartemquin filmmakers to shoot their very first films, like their founding endeavor *Home for Life* (1967), following two retirees in their first months at an old-age home; and *Inquiring Nuns* (1968), in which Kartemquin filmmakers Gordon Quinn and Jerry Temaner document two nuns who they conscript to go around Chicago asking people if they're happy, à la Edgar Morin and Jean Rouch's *Chronicle of a Summer*.

Upon hearing George's remark, Quinn points to a robust topiary dominating the interview tableau.

"My parents sent us some plants for this building [in 1971]," he tells us, "and this is a remnant of that plant. It's the same tree that's been watered all these years."

Quinn founded Kartemquin in 1966 along with fellow University of Chicago graduates Stan Karter and Jerry Temaner (parts of each of their surnames make up the organization's name), and until just recently, he served as its longtime artistic director. He has been the most consistently integral figure in its over 50-year history.

"We had this idea about how documentary film, particularly vérité documentary film,



The incoming and outgoing artistic directors tour Kartemquin Films. © YIJUN PAN FOR CHICAGO READER

FILM



George and Quinn converse in front of Kartemquin's awards and honors. © YIJUN PAN FOR CHICAGO READER

could play a role in democracy," he says, referring to the mode of nonfiction filmmaking distinct for its unaffected and often low-budget qualities. "I think we had some naive ideas about holding a mirror up to society, and if you did that, people would change."

Though it's difficult to identify when a piece of art accomplishes that, Kartemquin has inarguably succeeded in the herculean task of reflecting society back on itself with such films as: *Trick Bag* (1974), in which community members from factory workers to those involved in gangs discuss various forms of oppression; Quinn and Jerry Blumenthal's *The Last Pullman Car* (1983), about the closing of the Pullman-Standard Passenger Car Works in Chicago (the last factory in America to manufacture subway and railroad passenger cars) and the long fight by the United Steel Workers Local 1834 to try to prevent it; Steve James, Frederick Marx, and Peter Gilbert's *Hoop Dreams* (1994), which centers on two Chicago-based high school students with aspirations of playing pro basketball (Roger Ebert called it "[t]he great American documentary"); and, most recently, films such as Bing Liu's wildly successful *Minding the Gap* (2018) and Jiayan "Jenny" Shi's true-crime adjacent breakout *Finding Yingying* (2020).

"I was about seven years old when my brother brought home *Hoop Dreams*," George, a native Chicagoan, recounts of his earliest experience with the organization. "I was like, what, what is this? You know, you never saw just kids growing up in Chicago and a story about them as a film. That was something that really was inspiring. It's a memory I haven't forgotten."

A local entity in his own right, George is an

accomplished filmmaker and co-curator of Black Radical Imagination, a now-dormant annual touring short film series. He has recently programmed for the Chicago International Film Festival and True/False, a documentary film festival based in Columbia, Missouri. As artistic director he will work closely with executive director Betsy Leonard, who joined Kartemquin in 2021 after 29 years at Heartland Alliance.

"The opportunity to work for Kartemquin—I just saw that as building on the work I've been doing throughout the years," George says. "To be in a more advanced position to serve the overall community in Chicago as well as abroad."

About the decision to hire George, Quinn explains, "We really wanted someone we felt was going to help transform us into what the next iteration of Kartemquin would be." He expands on how crucial the ideas of change and progress are to the organization's success: "We're over 50 years old. Why did we survive? Because we didn't keep doing the same thing. We changed enormously over the years, both in our vision and our mission, and how we made our money."

One thing on everyone's mind is how Kartemquin can help filmmakers sustain themselves through their practice. For example, "The other thing that there's a lot of interest in, that we're looking at now, is what's the next step for people who come out of Diverse Voices?" says Quinn (who will stay on as a senior advisor, going part-time at the beginning of the new year), referring to the Diverse Voices in Docs mentorship and development program. Founded in 2013 and organized

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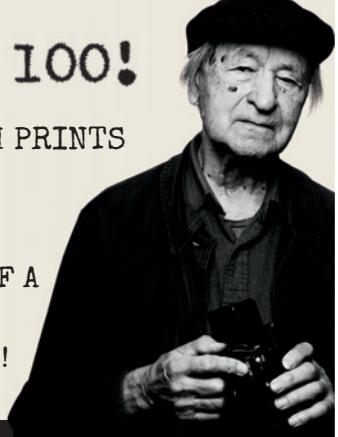
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in collaboration with the Community Film Workshop of Chicago, the program specifically serves documentary filmmakers of color. The evolution of that program (in which George previously participated as a mentor) is but one of the many things that he hopes to continue expanding upon in his new role.

"It's definitely an ongoing thought process as I learn more about Kartemquin and about the films that we're currently working on,"

says George. "Growth is what I'm interested in. Growth within the community and beyond to the places that Kartemquin hasn't been yet. Inviting new audiences to experience Kartemquin, building those audiences, and creating spaces for people to have access to films, to have access to learning more about filmmaking, and to becoming better filmmakers." **J**

 @Chicago_Reader



Director Remsy Atassi and star Mykele Deville
COURTESY REMSY ATASSI

Marlene wrangles with defining herself and questioning whether the sacrifices she's made were worth the strife.

The film flutters nonlinearly between the halcyon days of Marlene and Sembré's early relationship and their fracturing present. Atassi confronts the pressurized scrutiny of fame and how autonomous choices can define our most intimate relationships.

Bad Animal is at its most successful when it steeps in the magnetism of its leads and Atassi allows his formalistic muscles to shape the mood. Intimate close-ups of Marlene and Sembré performing seem to excavate the intent of each song, and a later drug-fueled visual sequence impressively revels in nightmarish high contrasts and droning riffs.

Even so, the film often impedes its impact when it inelegantly overstates its themes, particularly within the brief yet pivotal conversations between Sembré and his mother. The conversations never fully trust in their subtext, but it's not enough to grind the emotional momentum to a halt.

Romantic dramas are propelled by the connection and ineffable chemistry of their leads, and *Bad Animal* is no different. Reyes and Deville's previous history as friends and classmates in the University of Illinois Chicago's theater program is deeply felt throughout.

"Mykele and I go way back to UIC. We used to sit in the green room and run lines for *Fool for Love* by Sam Shepard," Reyes says.

Reyes, a Chicago native turned LA transplant, learned about the film through Kelly after they completed a photo shoot together. Knowing they were scouting for rapper actors, Reyes connected them to Deville and threw their own hat into the ring to audition.

"Mykele and Rivkah ended up actually being paired together in their audition, which is really kind of fortuitous because I didn't know they knew each other," Atassi says. "They had great chemistry together. A lot of my favorite stuff in the film is their mundane interactions."

Reyes mentions how much they enjoyed their time on set, working alongside Mykele again and being able to pay tribute to the city and its vibrant community.

"Mykele was great to work with because he's just such a present performer. His musicality translates to how he acts as well... I was just really grateful that I got to be a part of a story that is so rooted in Chicago's art scene," Reyes says. "Some of the shots in the film just give you chills." □

FEATURE

Bad Animal captures Chicago's glimmering indie music scene

The dreamy romantic drama is the first feature-length movie from local production company Emulsion Lab.

By CAM CIESZKI

Since the early 1920s, Chicago has flourished as a beating heart of cultural music export, steadily pumping its sounds, textures, and grooves across the midwest and beyond.

It began with gospel and blues, sprawling from its roots in the Great Migration and fostering a new generation of storytellers and devotees. From that came Windy City jazz, nourished by the bustling crowds and intimate dives of Rush Street between the 50s and 70s. Then, mostly queer and Black clubs near the West Loop melded disco with R&B and electronic four-on-the-floor beats to forge Chicago house, and by the 90s, the city had become an often overlooked epicenter of hip-hop.

Remsy Atassi, director and cofounder of production company Emulsion Lab, pays homage to the city and its rich musical tapestry with his first feature-length romantic drama *Bad Animal*. The partially crowdfunded film features original music from scene staples such as The Palmer Squares, Pixel Grip, Chris Crack, Malci, and more.

Cofounded in 2017 by Atassi and cinematographer Sean Robert Kelly, Emulsion Lab started as an online platform dedicated to supporting local Chicago music artists. Through blog posts, photo essays, and music videos produced on shoestring budgets, Emulsion Lab expanded their clientele between independent artists and corporate patrons. By 2018, Atassi

and Kelly consolidated focus and conceptualized producing their own feature film.

"[Emulsion Lab] is now more of a development and distribution company for our indie films and other indie filmmakers in Chicago," Atassi says. "Next year, we have a bunch of new projects that we're trying to take under this banner, so it's kind of evolved."

Bad Animal feels like the natural progression for their fledgling production company, marrying the indie music locus that inspired their start with the drive for creating projects that rival the scale of their DIY counterparts.

The film sprawls across the autumnal Humboldt Park to the skylines of Chicago's metropolitan center, featuring scenes set inside Roscoe Village's Beat Kitchen (where actor, musician, and producer Rivkah Reyes of *School of Rock* fame had their first gig in their high school band) and by the historic Fine Arts Building.

The independent drama follows Chicago rapper Sembré (local rapper/poet and former program director of The Hideout Mykele Deville) and his romantic partner-turned-manager Marlene (Reyes). As Sembré's latest record *Bad Animal* builds buzz and critical acclaim, he's propositioned by producer Evie (Angie Bullaro) with the opportunity for a major label deal.

But as Sembré's profile heightens, so does the scrutiny of his public image, and all the while his relationship begins to strain as

NOW PLAYING

RR *Bones and All*

Addiction, eye color, boob shape, serotonin deficits: we're all encumbered by our genetic hand-me-downs. Sometimes, all they require is therapy and/or time to sort out. Sometimes, like for Maren (Taylor Russell) and Lee (Timothée Chalamet) in *Bones and All*, it's a bit more complicated. Or as Maren'spedo-vibey, would-be mentor Sully (Mark Rylance) puts it: "I ate my own granddad while we were waiting on the undertaker." For cannibals, it's a lot more complicated.

Despite its preponderance of blood and guts and sinew-slathering, bone-smacking gore, *Bones and All* isn't exactly a movie about cannibalism. Based on the novel by Camille DeAngelis and directed by Luca Guadagnino (screenplay by David Kajganich), it's more about trying to survive when your damage has no cure and is embedded in your very DNA. And, in the case of Maren and Lee, when your noncannibal parent leaves you to figure it out on your lonesome because they can no longer deal with you snacking on the neighbors.

Maren's father (André Holland) leaves Maren on her own following a sleepover gone very wrong. He leaves behind a cassette and a birth certificate. These are clues that set Maren on a picaresque adventure across the country in search of the mother she's never known but who shared her dietary proclivities. Along the way, she learns to smell out other "eaters," Rylance's grotesquely paternal Sully and Chalamet's fiercely protective Lee predominant among them.

Chalamet and Russell deftly navigate this over-the-top horror, buddy comedy, coming-of-age drama, and sweet romance. As for Rylance, he is an International Treasure for his ability to sell the relatability of anyone, even a gross old man in tighty-whities up to his chin in the innards of somebody's dead grandma. —**CATEY SULLIVAN** *R, 130 min. Wide release in theaters*

RR *In Her Hands*

In Her Hands starts 19 months before the fall of Kabul in 2021, when the Taliban—whose territory surrounded the capital of Afghanistan—captured the city where 4.6 million people live.

Tamana Ayazi and Marcel Mettelsiefen's film centers on Zarifa Ghafari, the female mayor of Maidan Shahr, and her efforts to bring light to women's rights and keep girls in school. The documentary, produced by Hillary and Chelsea Clinton, is a bold portrait of the youngest mayor in Afghanistan. We see her cry in front of citizens, helpless and frustrated, and we watch her mourn her father's death, as he was shot in front of his house by the Taliban.

It isn't a conventional biography by any means. We don't know a lot about Ghafari's childhood, background, or personal life. We are introduced to her bodyguard, Massoum, who believes in the future Ghafari can offer, and we also see locals who believe in the country's

conservatism.

Various scenes in the documentary are tense—Massoum driving with a gun on his lap, Ghafari's scorched hands reading a death threat, she and her mother holding on to one another on a boat—but we don't see much of what Ghafari actually does. We see her talking to a sea of men in rooms or on the street, but we hardly get more than her impassioned speech. Scenes are short and abrupt; they move from one motion to the next. We are given a baseline understanding of Afghanistan's struggles, but the viewer is often left with more questions than answers. The film is an introduction to Ghafari's activism and career, but it shouldn't be the end of it.

Once the Taliban take over the city and Kabul falls, the viewer is thrown into the midst of the conflict and expected to hang on. —**S. NICOLE LANE** *PG-13, 92 min. Netflix*

RR *The Inspection*

Elegance Bratton's autobiographical story *The Inspection* is one of learning to accept love on one's own terms. Ellis French (Jeremy Pope), a young gay man in New York, is rejected by his religious mother (Gabrielle Union) and left to fend for himself on the streets. Searching for a sense of self-worth and meaning, French enlists in the Marines, discovering some harsh realities while building bonds of camaraderie.

The Inspection is a relatively conventional boot-camp drama—recruit joins with lofty ideals, unprepared for what's truly in store for them—elevated by Pope's performance and Bratton's understanding of conveying cathartic moments. Bratton heavily uses stylization and dream sequences, at times creating a feel that is less narrative drama and more a working through of his own internal trauma. There are moments of brutality, primarily doled out by recruits under the eye of drill instructor Leland Laws (Bokeem Woodbine), interspersed with moments of poignant reflection and connection.

Where *The Inspection* doesn't quite come together is largely in the limited range of character dynamics, as the secondary characters, though critical to French's development, receive only tentative spurts of development themselves. It's truly a one-man narrative, which is perhaps fitting for a story focused on the process of coming to terms with finding love for oneself before negotiating the messy and sometimes difficult ways in which others love us. —**ADAM MULLINS-KHATIB** *R, 95 min. Wide release in theaters*

RR *The Last Manhunt*

With *The Last Manhunt*, the epic story of Willie Boy the Desert Runner reclaims the narrative of a Native hero long portrayed by white men as a bloodthirsty child kidnapper.

Helmed by director Christian Camargo with a story by Jason Momoa and Thomas Pa'a Sibbett, the 1909-set



Bones and All
YANNIS DRAKOULIDIS / METRO
GOLDWYN MAYER PICTURES

western explores an intricate, vibrant world on the cusp of annihilation thanks to the violent nationalistic genocide perpetrated in the name of "Manifest Destiny." Somewhere in hell, John Wayne is fuming like 45 after the midterms.

History is agreed on the fundamental events that sparked the titular manhunt (although the script alters some of the names). In 1909, Willie Boy (Martin Sensmeier) and Carlotta (Mainei Kinimaka), both members of the same tribe, are in love. Her father Mike (Zahn McClarnon) forbids their union because they are cousins. There's a brutal confrontation and horrific accident. Willie Boy and Carlotta are forced to flee into the Mojave.

They travel some 600 miles in 27 days across unbroken desert, eluding a posse of heavily armed white lawmen and Native scouts. What they can't fight is a reporter (Mojean Aria) determined to make his name by painting Willie Boy as a homicidal predator who has abducted a child. Willie Boy and Carlotta have the skills to survive in the desert, but they're no match for the historical forces they're caught up in.

In Camargo's austere, visually stunning release, the story is at once an epic romance and gripping thriller. It's also a reverent portrayal of Native traditions in the Chemehuevi Valley at the turn of the century. The story of Carlotta and Willie Boy is at times Romeo and Juliet-esque, but it also highlights in merciless terms how the west was not won but brutally stolen.

Early among many powerful scenes, we see McClarnon's Mike—chief of a tribe that counts 26 members left—leading a ceremony of "Salt Songs," prayers for the dead. In the circle of chants and drumming, *The Last Manhunt* spins an elegy for how the west was killed, or at least the west as it existed for the ancestors of Willie Boy and Carlotta. McClarnon is simultaneously soaked in grief and defiance. Salt Songs may be for the dead, but the reverence for tradition and historical fact in

The Last Manhunt shows that—against all odds—culture endures. —**CATEY SULLIVAN** *R, 103 min. Wide release in theaters*

RR *The People We Hate at the Wedding*

When thinking about wedding guests who might drive you crazy, a slew of characters come to mind. The new comedy *The People We Hate at the Wedding* showcases exactly who you wouldn't want at your nuptials; unfortunately for viewers, that can be a bit annoying at times.

The People We Hate at the Wedding, based on the book of the same name, tells the story of a blended family whose lack of communication leads to a whole big mess on the eldest daughter's wedding day. From the jump, the film is cheesy and silly, slightly elevated from a Lifetime movie. As middle child Alice, Kristen Bell's effortless charisma and enticing screen presence help carry the movie alongside Ben Platt's surprisingly delightful comedic chops as youngest brother Paul. Cynthia Addai-Robinson is sweet to a fault as the somewhat naive eldest, Eloise, a character so set on having a great family reunion that her efforts become obnoxious.

The movie has a brevity to it that makes the silliness

and embarrassing antics pass by quickly, and it delivers a decent amount of chuckles and even some outright laughs. Those laughs are met with heavy moments that seem out of place at times, but they give the movie a bit more direction. The family is messy; Alice has an inappropriate workplace relationship and Paul has an uncomfortably pushy partner. But there are relatable pockets in the disarray, like Alice and Paul finding their older sister insufferable or growing up in the midwest with Taco Bell as a backdrop to some of their most precious memories. It's a bit predictable, but if you're looking for a sweet movie that'll give you a laugh, and you don't mind a little stupidity, this will do. —**ALANI VARGAS** *R, 99 min. Prime Video*

The accidental TikTok star

Chicago rapper Sonny went viral on a platform he didn't use with a remix he hadn't made—and it hasn't changed his old-school grind a bit.

By LEOR GALIL

Sonny had spent years making music for an audience of himself when he began to understand that other people liked it too. The Chicago rapper can pinpoint a few key moments: At a party he went to in 2019, the crowd was dead, and his manager at the time commandeered the sound system to throw on some songs. When he played Sonny's unreleased track "Shollam," the temperature changed in a hurry. Sonny's funky flow shimmies over a sly, chintzy piano loop and minimalist percussion reminiscent of blog-era Cool Kids. "The whole room got up and started turning up when the song came on," Sonny says. He remembers getting a similar response in September 2021, when he opened for Chicago pop chameleon Dreamer Iosioma at Lincoln Hall.

But nothing compared to the surprise Sonny got in April 2021. "I'm getting, like, hella notifications on my phone, talking about, 'Your song's blowing up on TikTok,'" he says. "But I can't find it."

The song was "Kill Bill," and Sonny couldn't find it because it had gone viral in an unauthorized remix. It had first appeared on his project *Golden Child*, released in 2020 under the name HateSonny. Foreboding church bells set a chilly mood, given a serrated edge by Sonny's growled vocals and clipped, efficient lines.

Once friends started forwarding Sonny videos from TikTok, he noticed that they all used a version of "Kill Bill" that sounded off to him. It was a sped-up edit that smeared his vocals and distorted the bass—this "Kill Bill" sounded as jittery and disorienting as lotto balls in a raffle drum, as though it were shaking itself apart.

The huge number of people hearing Sonny's music this way presented an unusual problem. "We hadn't released a fast version," says Erich Siebert, Sonny's manager. "So there was no



Sonny, formerly HateSonny © MYLES WRIGHT VIA AGENCEGRAPHIQUE

metadata in the sound that pointed it back to us. Nobody knew it was his song." Classick Studios founder Chris Classick helped connect Siebert to a TikTok employee who updated the audio file on the platform. Siebert also reached out to the creator of the viral edit to get the stems, so that Sonny could release "Kill Bill (Fast)" as an official track.

"Next day, we got like a million streams on the fast version in 24 hours," Sonny says.

After the metadata update and the release of the official version of "Kill Bill (Fast)," the

track became a minor sensation. As early as April 2021, YouTube users were posting compilations of popular TikToks that featured it. Since the formal release of "Kill Bill (Fast)" on all major digital platforms, it's accumulated more than ten million streams on Spotify alone. Labels came calling almost immediately when the official track dropped. "We were on the phone with A&Rs every single day for five days," Siebert says. "And we had, like, three calls per day."

"Some of them had literally called Erich and

were like, 'Yo, how would y'all feel if I gave you a 360 deal right now and y'all had six figures tomorrow?'" Sonny recalls. "I'm like, 'I don't know you. I don't want to take no money from you—I don't know what your back-end policy will be.'" Sonny turned everyone down, though he did sign a distribution deal with boutique label Fashionably Early. It helped him put out his debut under the name Sonny, a self-titled album that came out this past August.

"I never really expected to make any money off music," he says. "So the fact that I was able to make that a reality for myself, it's really fulfilling for me."

Sonny, 22, grew up in Greater Grand Crossing. In his teenage years, in the late 2010s, he spent a lot of time hanging out in and around the Loop, where he met some of his closest friends. Rapper NOMBREKARI says he met Sonny at a pizza place near Jones College Prep. Kari basically introduced himself by asking to borrow Sonny's phone, as Sonny remembers it—though he didn't know at the time what Kari wanted it for.

"He go on my phone and like and repost this song that him and some of the other guys had," Sonny says. "He gave me my phone back, and later on I peeped and I was like, 'Who is this little motherfucker that liked and reposted and pasted on my Soundcloud and my Twitter?'" But then I listened to it and I'm like, 'Oh, this is hard.'" Kari and Sonny both spent time making music after school at Harold Washington Library's YouMedia youth arts lab, where their friendship blossomed.

Kari had cofounded a collective called HL when he was 12, about four years before he met Sonny. "We call ourselves High Life, Honorable Legends, Honest Legends—got a bunch of different interpretations," Kari says. HL started as a dance group, but several members took an interest in music in their teens. Gus Chvany and MyFriendNate became producers,

and both would later collaborate with Sonny, who joined HL in high school.

Not everyone in HL makes music. Makafui Searcy, for example, founded creative company FortuneHouse five years ago. It started as a management firm (Sonny was an early client) and has since evolved. "Our work is centered on empowering artists, creating access to creative entrepreneurial resources, and ultimately serving the long-term goal of empowering Black and Brown people in Chicago—and globally," Searcy says.

FortuneHouse has coproduced a youth fashion show at the MCA, hosted visual art exhibits and musical performances, and organized free community activities at Cornell Field in Kenwood. "FortuneHouse is like an engine to a lot of the values that myself and my peers hold," Searcy says, "when it comes to what a collective future looks like for not only us as peers, family, and friends but as people who have grown up in the city that want to give back to the city."

Searcy's aspirations for FortuneHouse are rooted in the friendships he's forged with Kari, Sonny, and the rest of their collective.

"HL, more than it being founded on a collective interest in art, it was founded on brotherhood, beyond music," Kari says. "We've supported each other in that way, whether I'm about to go to a party and I need a shirt to wear, if I'm spending a night over at Sonny's house and I need some pants to wear, or if I was broke and I needed some food. That's how we operate as a group of friends—supporting each other beyond music."

Sonny says he's made more than 300 songs, and he started posting them online in the mid-2010s. He's deleted a lot of material, though—his oldest song on Soundcloud says it's just five years old, and only 40 remain, including the tracks on *Sonny* and *Golden Child*. He picked the name HateSonny because he thought it'd help him stand out.

"I wanted you to be able to find me and my music, and I thought it was a bunch of Sonnys [out there], so I just threw the 'hate' in front of it," he says. "I was very young, and I was going through a really depressed era. And it was really some self shit I was dealing with."

In 2019, he and Kari spent a lot of time at MyFriendNate's north-side home studio. They had both graduated high school by that point, and Kari noticed that the more Sonny could focus on music, the more he flourished creatively. "In high school, we didn't have that much freedom to go to Nate's house and

make music for days on end," Kari says. "Once we did have that freedom, that allowed him to cultivate a more distinct sound—it allowed him to find his voice."

That period of intensive development allowed Sonny to graduate from loosies on Soundcloud to his first full-length project: after he dropped *Golden Child* in July 2020, he got enough positive feedback to persuade him to see music in a new light. "I was already making music for me—I didn't get into the habit of considering other peoples' perception of my music until after I put that project out," Sonny says. "I did shrooms in 2020, and I had a whole 180. I was like, 'If I like this music, somebody else that's similar to me probably likes it. Just put it out.'"

That same summer, Sonny and his friends joined the racial justice protests spreading across Chicago. Because several of them lived at home with parents at high risk from COVID-19, Sonny and a few others rented an Airbnb in Bronzeville so they could move around the city without worrying about infecting their elders—vaccines were still a long way off. "I stayed there for three months," Searcy says. "We was cooking dinner—all of us cooking dinner for each other every night. We was all in there listening to music. They was recording music."

Searcy began envisioning plans for a physical FortuneHouse space where he could hold events and nurture community; he'd been helping host art shows at Airbnbs, but he wanted something stable. Searcy, his mother, and longtime collaborator Ryel Williams opened FortuneHouse Art Center in June 2022 at 4410 S. Cottage Grove. Sonny provided input and support the whole way through. "His words have definitely inspired FortuneHouse's mission and direction," Searcy says.

Those months at the Bronzeville Airbnb in summer 2020 proved pivotal for Sonny too. "We was in there brainstorming and plotting on all the stuff that's came to fruition since then," he says. It's also when he first heard the remix that he didn't know would change his career. "I looked myself up on Soundcloud, and I saw a remix of 'Kill Bill'—it was a fast version," he says. "It had, like, 10,000 plays of the song. I was like, 'This is cool.' I didn't really think much of it."

Sonny's manager also picked up on a shift in the rapper's approach around the release of *Golden Child* in 2020. "He started making his transition—thinking more long-term and being more methodical," Siebert

says. "That was when he started to really find himself. He was more in touch with his identity and had a better understanding of where he wanted to go with his music."

Sonny's TikTok bump boosted his visibility—the success of "Kill Bill (Fast)" meant he no longer had to worry about getting lost among other artists called Sonny. He officially dropped the "Hate" from his name with the August release of *Sonny*, a full-length made up entirely of previously released material, including the fateful TikTok edit. "I'm like, 'Yo, I want to rerelease these songs and package them with a project,'" he says. "So people who are unfamiliar with me, they can hear the fast version of 'Kill Bill,' but also hear, like, 'This is what I've been working on since I was 17, up until this moment when I'm finally getting recognized for this music.'"

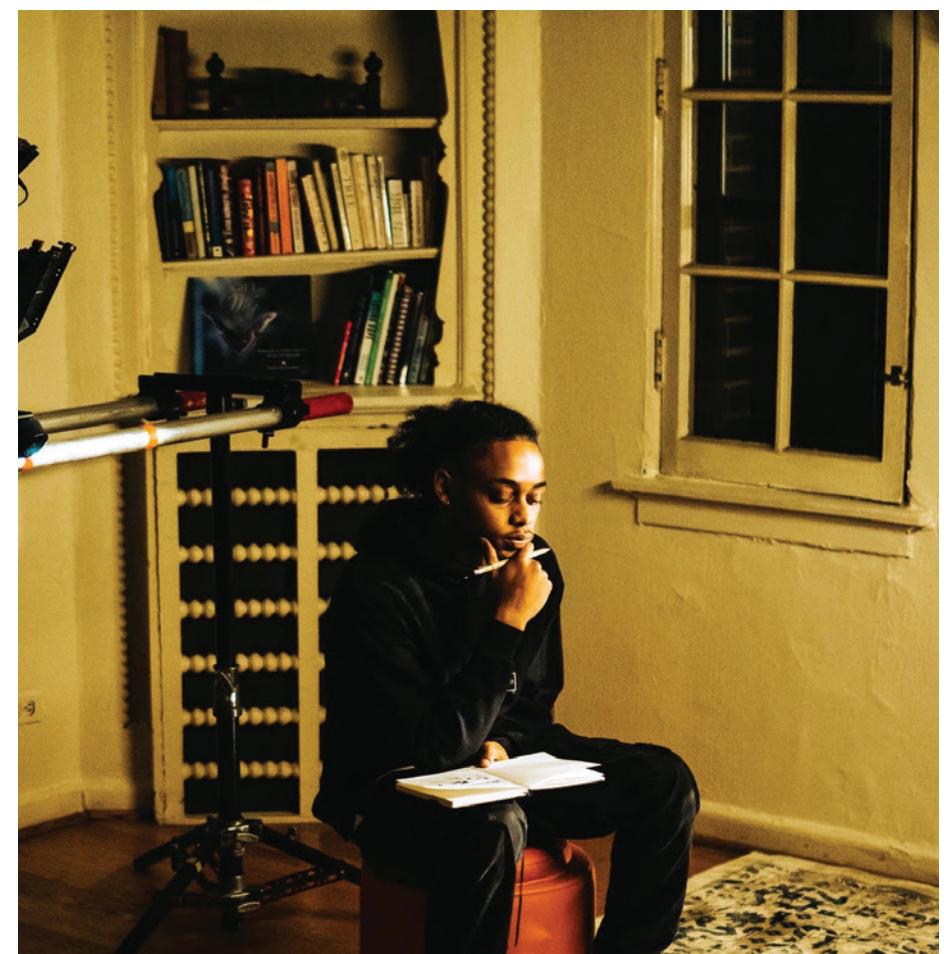
Since *Sonny* came out, he's put out a few singles. The October loosie "All I Hear" opened that month's edition of "The Garden," a Spotify playlist of local hip-hop and R&B curated by

local indie marketing agency the Ghetto Flower. Andrew Barber of Fake Shore Drive also included the song on "The New Chicago," Apple Music's weekly Chicago hip-hop playlist.

In August, Sonny joined TikTok, but if he has another viral success there, it seems unlikely to be his own doing. Not only did he wait more than a year to join the platform that'd given him his biggest buzz, but so far he's posted only five videos. "I was never really, like, big on TikTok, for real," he says. "I scroll through like everybody else do. But in terms of making TikToks, I'm like, 'I don't really know what to do on here.'"

Sonny is focused on putting in the work—recording more music, making traditional music videos—and he isn't counting on lightning striking twice. He's got an EP in the works called *All Gas No Brakes*, according to Siebert, and if all goes well we'll see it in the first quarter of 2023. ■

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During summer 2020, Sonny developed a new focus in his approach to music. © MYLES WRIGHT VIA ABGALLERY



Meta Mo, aka Brian Hines, in his later years
© COURTESY KEVIN JOHNSON

shared the mike with Michael Gilmore (aka SPO) and Jon Bostic (aka Lumba). He was a sturdy leg of that tripod, but he was also clearly the rapper with the star-power wattage. "He was the front man," says Rubberoom producer Kevin Johnson, who went by Fanum at the time (he calls himself Mr. Echoes now). "He did an incredible job of captivating people. And that's all that we wanted him to do."

You can also hear Hines's charisma on Rubberoom's recordings. "If you listen to the music, Meta Mo is, always was, and always will be the biggest voice," Dirty MF says. "No disrespect to my brothers Lumba and SPO. Meta Mo was the attraction—when he came on, you were like, 'What?' It's like when Busta Rhymes hits the stage. It's like, 'What is this? Why is he able to do this?'"

Rubberoom began self-releasing cassettes and 12-inch singles in 1994. They built up to high-profile shows opening for the Roots and DJ Shadow en route to inking a deal with Zero Hour imprint 3-2-1 in 1998. The group's work ethic not only helped them land big breaks but also inspired their peers. "Meta Mo was the first guy I saw perform onstage as a real MC, you know, outside of just rapping at parties and doing little stuff at the parks," says rapper Legendary Baller, aka LB (fka Sawbuc). "Rubberoom was the first time I'd seen somebody from our community get a record deal and take it that far. He inspired me to actually pursue my music."

But Rubberoom's debut album, 1999's *Architechnology*—the release that should've been their breakthrough—didn't get much of a chance. Zero Hour declared bankruptcy shortly after its release. The album was officially on the market for just three weeks, and though the label pressed 15,000 copies, Rubberoom couldn't get access to them. The group stayed together, despite having the rug pulled out from under them, and even booked some dates for Warped Tour in 2000. But a few years later they quietly called it quits.

"At the height of 90s hip-hop, we really, really, really would've bet the farm on them taking off, and they should have," Zeke says. "I think the tragedy of the group was that they were so far ahead of their time."

Rest in power to Meta Mo of Rubberoom

The blowtorch of a rapper also known as Brian Hines helped weld together Chicago's 90s hip-hop scene.

By LEOR GALIL

In the early 90s, Chicago hip-hop first began making waves around the country. Several local acts put out albums on national labels in 1992: Smash Records released Ten Tray's *Realm of Darkness*, Loud Records dropped Tung Twista's *Runnin' Off at da Mouth*, and Relativity issued Common Sense's *Can I Borrow a Dollar?* That same year, rapper and promoter Duro Wicks began hosting an all-ages Sunday hip-hop night at Lakeview club Lower Links, which became a nucleus for the city's growing grassroots scene.

The community was small enough that it

seemed like every MC, producer, DJ, graffiti artist, and breaker knew every other one, but it was also strong enough to sustain a burgeoning nightlife with homegrown talent alone. And the one group everyone knew was Rubberoom.

"The whole 90s belonged to them, as far as I'm concerned," says rapper Zeke. "I say that without fear of contradiction. I dare anybody to say otherwise."

Back then, Zeke and an MC named Gravity rapped as Indigenous Theory, and their duo belonged to a crew called Elements of Nature. Rubberoom, who had three MCs and three

beat makers on their earliest releases, were also part of EONs. Rubberoom rapper Brian Hines, aka Meta Mo (short for Metamorphosis), gave Elements of Nature their name. "He was captain," says rapper and EONs member Dirty MF. "He definitely brought us together in a lot of ways."

Hines passed away at age 52 on Saturday, October 29, and no cause of death has been made public. But even now he continues to bring people together. Over the past few weeks, Dirty MF has reconnected with lots of old friends from those days.

In the initial Rubberoom lineup, Hines

Hines grew up in the west suburbs, not far from Johnson's home in Maywood. In the late 1980s, they occasionally bumped into each other as students at Proviso East High School. Johnson recalls first connecting with Hines during some downtime in gym class. "Brian just started cracking jokes and entertaining everyone," Johnson recalls. "Everyone was laughing—like it was a comedy show almost."

After Hines and Johnson graduated, they'd cross paths at talent shows and hip-hop parties. They'd hang out at Johnson's house and listen to music; Johnson had a soft spot for Depeche Mode, and Hines was into Public Enemy. "I'm gonna go ahead and say that's probably the reason why he started rapping in the first place," Johnson says. "He was so in love with Chuck D and his voice, and what they stood for, and the music."

In the early 90s, Hines began recording with a producer named Chauncy Arnold. Around the same time, Johnson and Bostic started collaborating with beat maker Aaron Smith (aka the Isle of Weight). "The more we started making these interactions with people that did exactly what we were doing, the closer and closer we got," Johnson says. "At one point, we made a decision: we should all come together as one big clique."

Budding hip-hop entrepreneur Jason "J-Bird" Cook learned of Rubberroom as they were taking shape. Gilmore had hired Cook to manage his solo career, and when he became the sixth member of the group, Cook came with him. Cook was impressed by how the MCs clicked. "The chemistry between all three of them being really different, and just them coming together, was something you don't experience much," Cook says. "You always knew when Meta came in. You always knew when he kicked off the track. He had this projection of his voice, live even. He just stood out."

Cook worked promotions around the city, and DJ Jesse de la Peña, who ran a south-side hip-hop shop called the Yard, saw him frequently. "He would come to the store, and he would bring artists through for meet and greets," de la Peña says. After Rubberroom recorded their 1994 debut demo, *An Introduction to the Savage Six*, Cook began circulating it in his network.

"I don't know if he explained at the time that he was working with these guys—I thought it was just another artist he was promoting," de la Peña says. "It was like a four-song demo, and that was my introduction to Rubberroom. Through just knowing Jason, through the

hip-hop scene and the open mikes and doing parties, I met some of the guys individually. It coincided with me doing the early stages of Blue Groove Lounge."

The Blue Groove Lounge was a weekly hip-hop party that de la Peña organized at Elbo Room, and it became one of the most important events in the local scene. When de la Peña needed a host to launch the series, he turned to Rubberroom rapper SPO.

Hines, like Cook, rubbed shoulders in the Chicago scene and networked furiously—it was almost like he was making up for his less

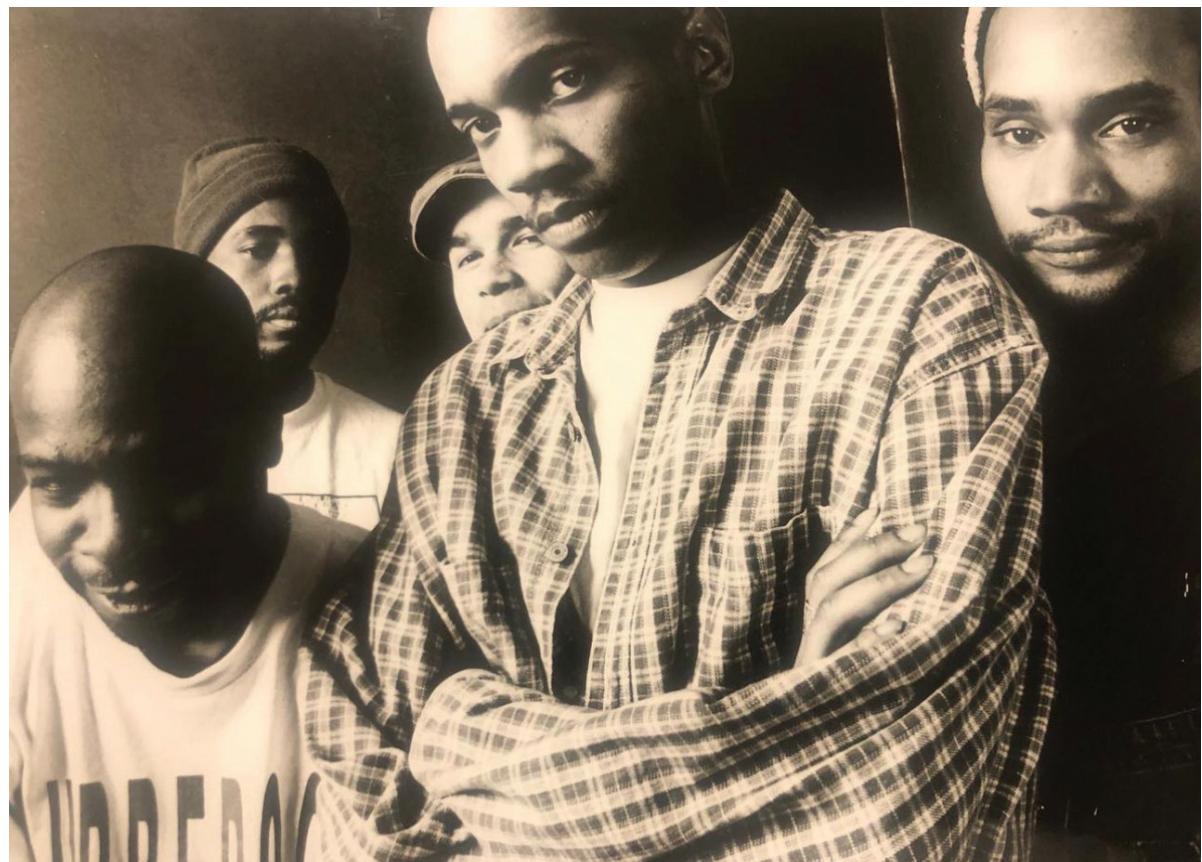
do you make a record? Where do you make a record? How do you make a record sound good on vinyl? How do you get it in stores?"

This labor paid off—Rubberroom have one of the most extensive discographies from that era of Chicago indie hip-hop. Many acts popular at the time have all but disappeared from collective memory because they released so little music formally. Nineties recordings by EONs group Spalaney's, for example, were extremely thin on the ground until Chopped Herring put out the archival *Spaghetti & Biscuits* 12-inch this year.

then we'd go back to the south side if we had to. It was *The Real World* for Chicago hip-hop."

Four people had their names on the EONs house lease, one for each bedroom. But Dirty MF recalls reliably finding ten to 15 people there, no matter what hour of day he dropped by. "That house was a clubhouse," he says. "That house was a safe house. It was a rehearsal house. It was everything. And it was one of the shittiest houses you could ever live in in your life." One of the two bathrooms rarely worked, and when housemates didn't go elsewhere to shower, they'd sometimes just wash

Late-period Rubberroom: Brian "Meta Mo" Hines, Aaron Smith (aka the Isle of Weight), DJ Stizo, Kevin Johnson (aka Fanum), and Jon "Lumba" Bostic
© LORI SAPIO



social bandmates. Johnson, for example, was a father and couldn't get out often. "He was always out making connections with people," Johnson says. "He'd come back, like, 'Oh Kev, such and such wants to interview us. Kev, they want to book us at this show at whatever place.' He was always the front man in social scenes."

"It was always hard, being in Chicago, being hip-hop, getting record labels to pay attention—it was a grind for years," Cook says. He worked with Johnson and Smith to figure out how to self-release Rubberroom's music. "[We] did a lot of that side of it, learning, like, 'How

Rubberroom, they showed a lot of MCs how to do it,' says Duro Wicks. "Like, 'Here's how you record. Here's how you finish a project. Here's how you put out a project.' They definitely laid a blueprint for everyone else to follow."

In summer 1993, Dirty MF and Hines lived in Oak Park on its border with Austin, sharing a place they called the EONs house. "It was the meetup house before we went to any shows," Dirty MF says. "I don't care where you live; you live on the south side, you would come to our house on the west side first, and

in a sink. If you didn't wear shoes inside, you'd get splinters in your feet."

Hines kept recording equipment in his first-floor bedroom, right next to the front door. The other three bedrooms were on the second floor. "All of the freestyle cyphers would be in Meta Mo's room," Dirty MF says. "All the sessions would be in Meta Mo's room. All the weed-smoking sessions would start in Meta Mo's room. Everything was in his room."

Hines commanded respect on the mike; he could shift speeds cleanly midflow and concoct verses that astounded and amused his peers. He also advised others about their

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craft. Hines and Dirty MF were the shortest members of EONs, but they had the biggest voices—and that helped Hines figure out what his friend needed.

"We are polar opposites when it comes to rapping. I'm laid-back and smooth; he's boisterous," Dirty MF says. He recalls that Hines told him to "never do what I do"—meaning never scream, never get loud. "So I was like, 'All right, I'm never gonna raise my voice unless I have to.' That was from Meta Mo—he taught me how to project my voice and everything."

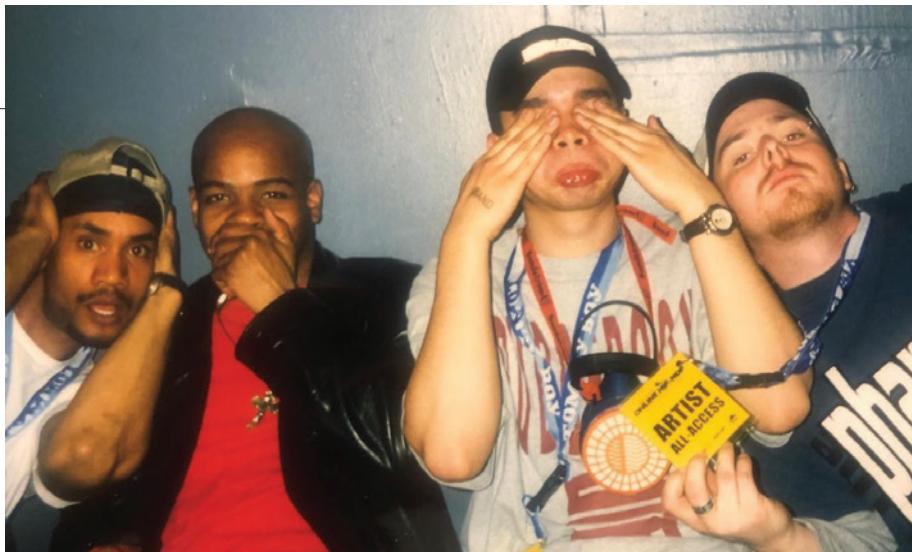
Zeke's favorite rapper at the time was Kool Keith, but it was Hines he wanted to impress. "Anytime I'm writing something, I would write as if I'm getting ready to battle Kool Keith and Brian was the judge," Zeke says. "Anytime I would think I had something written, and if I happened to stumble upon something from Brian that he wrote for Rubberroom, nine times out of ten I'd ball mine up, go back, and rewrite what I wrote. Because if Brian didn't say 'Thumbs up,' then it absolutely sucked."

"He was awesome to work with, but sometimes he'd make me very mad in the studio," Johnson says. "He'd come into the studio sometimes and lay down one take, full-blown—it was incredible. He was powerful—he used to overpower the mike. He used to overpower the system itself."

But Hines would sometimes come to sessions with verses he hadn't finished writing. That didn't sit well with Johnson, since Rubberoom couldn't afford much studio time. "It was a little frustrating—I'm more logistical in a sense, where I would like to have things done," Johnson says. "It'd be the equivalent of me showing up in the studio and not having a beat completed—I could never do that." Still, Hines always came through in the end, and he kept his bandmates' spirits up while he did it. "He was fun to be with in the studio," Johnson says.

Hines could turn any place he went into a party. In the 90s, he and Zeke would perform on the sidewalk for anyone in earshot. "He and I would sit outside and sing Frank Sinatra songs in front of the liquor store, just to freak people out," Zeke says. Hines loved Sinatra—he liked to sing "Strangers in the Night" and quote Ol' Blue Eyes. "It's not authentic unless you hear him, with that raspy voice, trying to sing Frank Sinatra," Zeke says. "His favorite quote from Frank Sinatra was, 'Live every day as if it's your last, because one day it will be.'"

Rubberoom were a four-piece when Archi-



technology came out in 1999. SPO and Chauncy Arnold had left, and the group used 13 different guest DJs across the album. By that point, Hines was the only member who didn't have a child. Bostic took a day job that kept him from touring, and his chemistry with Hines began to change. "When they were together, both doing it at the same time, it was great," Johnson says. "They weren't even writing together anymore, and it became increasingly difficult for them to get on the same page."

In the early 2000s, Rubberoom played an opening set for Atmosphere (who'd previously opened for Rubberoom), and the whole production was so plagued by miscommunications that the group ended up just calling it a day. A brief Rubberoom reboot in the early 2010s didn't stick.

Johnson and Smith continued producing together as the Opus, and in 2004 they dropped an EP called *Earthwalkers*. Hines wrote narration that he read over the music like a radio play. "We stayed in contact, because I loved him like a brother," Johnson says. "I knew him when we weren't even remotely close to doing anything in rap. I knew him when there was no rap art form in Chicago. We always had a good relationship in that sense." This past February, Hines announced on Facebook he'd been working on a series of EPs, and he listed Johnson as one of his collaborators.

Facebook is also where Hines reconnected with a woman named Damira Bell he'd known from the scene in the 1990s. "This person literally showed up for me in my life, was just irreplaceable," Bell says. "Just the best friend you could have. The most understanding person, the most candid person, just open about everything. I didn't even know a person could exist like that."

Bell lives on the south side with her twin daughters. She and Hines began dating earlier this year, and at the time she was suffering

from a bout of agoraphobia. Often Hines would bike down from his place on the northwest side to support her.

"He dedicated himself to making sure that I came outside every day," Bell says. "He always came around to see if I was going out and living, and he made sure I did. As weird and awkward as it was, he literally came to my door and he held my hand, to my elevator, on my elevator, to my stairs, outside. He sat with me in the park. He watched me shake like a leaf, and he held my hand and told me it was gonna be OK. He said, 'I'm here. I'm never gonna leave you.'"

During the seven months of Bell and Hines's relationship, they spent as much time together as they could. On their nights apart, they'd get on the phone and stay on the line till morning. "That's what we did every night," Bell says. "Every single night. We didn't miss a night of having our phones open and waking up and hearing each other's voices." Bell didn't hear from Hines the night before he died. "It was a lot for me," she says. "Because I knew something was different."

Hines shared a lot online, and he could be frank when he addressed his struggles. A couple of his friends mentioned in passing that he'd had a spotty history with drugs and the carceral system. According to Johnson, though, Hines put in the work over the past few years to create a more stable life for himself. "I saw that pattern of him getting better and better and better," he says.

Other things, Hines kept close to his chest—including the imminent possibility of new Rubberoom music. He and Johnson had started working on a solo Meta Mo project, and Hines recruited Jon Bostic to rap on the recording. "Me, Brian, Jon, and Aaron, we all decided, 'You know what? Why don't we just

Jon "Lumba" Bostic, Brian "Meta Mo" Hines, DJ Stizo, and Jason "J-Bird" Cook during Rubberoom's initial run © COURTESY KEVIN JOHNSON

do another Rubberoom project on top of it?'" Johnson says. "I started a group chat, and they were writing rhymes on the group chat and developing ideas and concepts. It completely reminded me of when we first started back in 1994. It totally had that feel—it was all about the music."

The group had a rollout plan: Hines would drop a solo EP, followed with one by the Opus. "And then over the wintertime, we can work on this Rubberoom LP," Johnson says. "We're like, 'Don't say anything to anybody, keep it off of the Internet, keep it off social media. We want to surprise people. Let's get a few songs recorded and then possibly make an announcement that we're going to put out a Rubberoom LP. But let's keep it under wraps for now.'"

Johnson and Hines talked weekly about their music making. Johnson set aside time to work on beats the last weekend in October. "Saturday, I was out for a little bit in the daytime, running errands," Johnson says. "And got the call that he was gone."

After Hines died, Bell was in touch with his relations. "His family knew about me in such a way that I was shocked," she says. "When everything happened, they were like, 'Oh, Brian loves you so much.' They were just going on and on, and I was getting more full with tears and pain, because I didn't know he thought that much of me like that. I mean, I knew he loved me, but my God, these people, they were like, 'He loves you so much, and he told everybody, 'That's my wife, that's my wife.''"

Dirty MF has been having long phone calls with friends. "Meta Mo brought us together again," he says. "Our brother Butch, he called me—that's how I found out. He's in Maryland. How does he find out before me? I live here. That's because Butch has his own relationship with Meta Mo. Zeke has his own. We all have these personal relationships. We love each other as a conglomerate—everybody in our crew had a personal and special relationship with Meta Mo. And I don't think we all have that with each other."

"There's a lot of love coming out of this tragedy," Dirty MF says. "And I want it to continue, because that's what he would want." □

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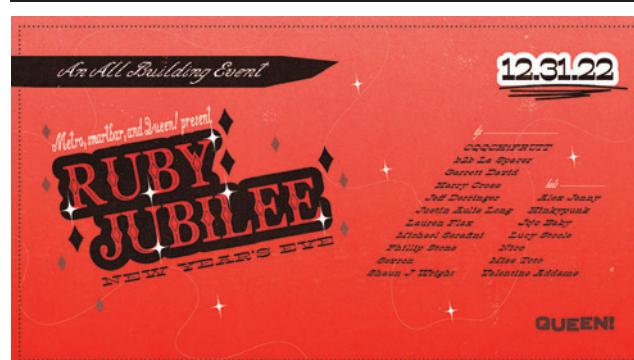
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Recoechi touches on health and spirituality in his lyrics. © THOUGHTPOET

East side flavor

Stony Island Park native Recoechi's assertive bars carry a positive message.

By ALEJANDRO HERNANDEZ

Pressure can burst pipes. It can fracture bones. It can cause even the coolest of heads to lose their grip on reality. Under extreme circumstances, pressure can also forge diamonds, and one of the city's brightest hidden gems is east side representative Recoechi.

"Growing up on the east side, you had times where it was bad, you had times where it was

good. I'm a product of my environment, but I chose to take the knowledge I got from the streets and do something differently with it," he explains. "People where I'm from, we know about the robberies, we know about the killings, we know about all these things. Me choosing to express my story through music and inspire people going through it, that's the most powerful thing. I could have chose to do

spiteful things with my music, but I chose to uplift people instead."

Recoechi was robbed at 15, and describes the experience as a turning point that made him more conscious of his actions and inspired him to find a way to lift himself and others out of that environment. He began writing raps and freestyle in high school but didn't start making music seriously until he got into college, where he won multiple talent shows with his spoken-word poetry. Growing up in Stony Island Park during the rise of Chief Keef and growth of drill music into a global phenomenon, he says it wasn't until he really listened to Kendrick Lamar and J. Cole that he realized he could still maintain his street persona while rapping about a positive message.

"I'm saying the things I took from the streets, the lessons that I embody, but I put them on wax in a different way. These are my experiences," Recoechi says. "I did a poem one time and I saw the reactions of people just hearing my story. That's when it really clicked for me. I used to rap about that drill shit, but then I switched it up and made it more personal."

Listen to Recoechi's music, and you'll hear an assertive voice spitting stories of the streets with the utmost confidence, over grimy, bass-knocking production reminiscent of the east coast's Griselda crew. Pay attention to his lyrics, and you'll find that he touches on topics of spirituality, physical health and wellness, and self-mastery.

Even without a full-length project under his belt, he's managed to earn cosigns and production credits from the likes of C-Sick, Thelonious Martin, and Renzell, all of whom rank among the city's most respected producers. Recoechi plans to soon unveil his debut project *Flavaz*, which he says will be a versatile display of his ability to create different songs for different moods. The album will be executively produced by Renzell Wav.

"It's my first project ever, so this represents me coming out of growing into my sound, period. Renzell is a musical genius, and he played a strong role in developing my recording process," he says. "*Flavaz* is me giving different types of flavors. That's something me and him would say a lot when we was cooking up in the studio, 'that shit flavorful,' which turned into its own thing. It's also a reference to me always being on my lil smoothie shit because I stay with a different flavor. That's a real strong

part of me because I wanna promote healthy eating."

Music isn't the only thing Recoechi is developing. He also helps run Eastside Collective (ESC), which C-Sick started last year as a clothing brand. After hearing Recoechi's music for the first time, C-Sick got in touch with him, calling him a "breath of fresh air." They developed a personal relationship, and after seeing Recoechi's dedication to his craft and discussing ways they can give back to the east side, C-Sick gave him the reins to run the organization on a more grassroots level.

"We work in collaboration with other people in the field of giving back to the community, like charities and things of that sort. That's all I want for the east side because a lot of the park districts don't have the sports like they used to when we were coming up . . . A lot of these baseball programs and basketball got cut down because of the lack of funding. It's up to us to really give back . . . By linking up with more people that's doing things in the community, you make it cool for everybody to do the same. This is what we really should be doing with these influences . . . The phrase from ESC is 'there's unity in community.'"

Recoechi is helping lead the charge with ESC's first-ever seminar, inviting high school students with an interest in music production to learn directly from C-Sick and Renzell. At the end of the day, he's a man who understands that community is bigger than him. In order for us to grow as individuals, we have to take what we learned through our personal trials and teach it back to the next generation so they can avoid the same mistakes and break generational curses.

"I am a true believer that music is made through something divine. So my key goal with music is to gravitate people towards God, in a sense, or just go within themselves. Believe in the inner child and be as free as you want to be . . . People got this sense of this hardcore rap street guy for me, but it's like people don't know that I'm down to earth. I am just so serious about what I believe in. If you ever heard my music, I really spit my truth. Whether I'm singing on the hook or tapping into different grooves and sounds, I'm really tapping into that creative child, so stay connected to the inner child. This is what I try to get people into."

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THE SECRET HISTORY OF CHICAGO MUSIC

Walter Jagiello defined the polka sound of Polish Chicago

"Li'l Wally" built a cottage industry—with his own label, studio, and pressing plant—powered by dancers on the old Division Street strip.

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.

I'm part Polish, but in 18 years of the Secret History of Chicago Music, I've somehow never covered a polka musician. By certain generous estimates, around 1,900,000 people of Polish descent live in the Chicago metropolitan area—it's the largest such community in the United States and the second worldwide only to Warsaw. Polka originated in the early 19th century in Bohemia (now part of the Czech Republic), and during its long history it's been wildly popular in many countries and on several continents. But here in Chicago, it's powerfully associated with the city's Polish enclaves.

Polka relies on accordion or concertina, and depending on its region of origin, it might also employ fiddle, clarinet, trumpet, trombone, tuba, bass, or drums. It tends to use upbeat rhythms in 2/4 time, and it's usually music for couples dancing. Chicago polka is its own thing, with roots in the postwar years, and generally has slower tempos (for easier rug



cutting) and a more improvisational bent. It spawned two substyles: the "Chicago honky" and the fuller-sounding "Chicago push." This week's SHoCM subject, Walter "Li'l Wally" Jagiello, played a major role in creating this modern polka sound.

Singer, drummer, and concertina player Walter E. Jagiello (aka Władysław Jagiełło) also performed as "Mały Władzio" and "Mały Władzio"—both of which mean "Li'l Wally" in Polish. He was born in Chicago's East Village

neighborhood on August 1, 1930, near the Polish Triangle—the symbolic heart of the city's oldest Polish settlement. The son of Polish immigrants, Jagiello often said "he came out of his mother's womb singing," according to his wife and business partner, Jeanette, who was quoted in his *Chicago Tribune* obituary in 2006.

At eight years old, Jagiello would get hoisted onto picnic tables to belt out tunes at Sunday Polish gatherings in Caldwell Woods

near Milwaukee and Devon. He earned his nickname "Li'l Wally" while still actually a little kid, but even as an adult he only grew to five foot six. When Jagiello was ten, future polka concertina legend Eddie Zima, himself still in his teens, hired him to sing in his orchestra, which played up and down "Polish Broadway"—the busy Division Street strip between Ashland and Western, reputed to have been home to more than 50 Polish clubs in its heyday.

Jagiello never went to high school—instead he became a bandleader at 15, when Stanley Korzeniak, owner of the Lucky Stop Inn on Division, booked him for a gig and insisted he start his own group. Jagiello had already made a habit of sneaking out to see concerts at night: “I’d leave the window open a few inches,” he told *Reader* contributor Carl Kozlowski in 1999. “When I got back, if the window was closed, I knew I was in trouble.” But while his parents may have figured out he wasn’t abiding by his bedtime, they didn’t realize he was a neighborhood star. “They thought I was a crook because I always had all this money,” Jagiello said.

Jagiello had his first recording session in 1946, at which point he was still singing entirely in Polish. He released the tunes via his own small label, Amber Records, which he’d founded when he was 16. (Poland is associated with amber because of the large deposits in the Baltic Sea, some of which have been carried into the country by rivers and glaciers.)

While still in his teens, Jagiello signed to Columbia Records, though it didn’t go well for him. He disliked the sound of the recordings Columbia released, and he hated the loss of control that came with working for a big company. In 1951 he launched another label of his own, Jay Jay Records (slogan: “Be happy and gay! With Jay Jay”), which he’d continue to operate for the rest of his life.

Jagiello was intimidatingly prolific on Jay Jay—he averaged more than ten albums per year in the 1950s and released more than 150 in total, according to the International Polka Association. The IPA, chartered in 1968, would induct Jagiello and Frankie Yankovic as the first two members of its hall of fame in ’69.

Jagiello more than earned his other most famous nickname—the Polka King—by building his own cottage industry devoted to the music. He bought an office building on South Kedzie, built his own studio on the premises with help from Motorola engineer Jim Hogan, and acquired vinyl-pressing equipment from the Finebilt company of Cincinnati, Ohio. He gigged all over the midwest, usually with a trio of concertina, trumpet, and drums; for bigger shows he’d bring in clarinet, bass, or violin. He

usually called his band some variation on “the Harmony Boys” (the Happy Harmony Boys, the Lucky Harmony Boys Orchestra, et cetera), but backing musicians came and went constantly—most of them worked day jobs in factories and couldn’t commit to extended runs.

In 1954, Jagiello made his first English-language recording and scored his first national hit: Li’l Wally’s version of the old favorite “Wish I Was Single Again” sold 150,000 copies in Chicago alone and climbed to number 22 in the national charts. He made his Aragon Ballroom debut in 1955, drawing a crowd that Jeanette estimated at almost 5,000 people.

He also recorded a popular version of the standard “No Beer in Heaven” (aka “In Heaven There Is No Beer”) and an exhaustingly long list of beloved original tunes, including “Li’l Wally Twirl,” “Johnny’s Knocking” (“Puka Jasiu”), “She Likes Kiolbasa,” “Seven Days Without You,” “Chicago Is a Polka Town,” “Za Dwa Dalary” (“For Two Bucks”), and “To Be in Love With Someone.” In 1959, Jagiello and his friend Al Trace, a former White Sox minor leaguer, cowrote “Let’s Go, Go-Go White Sox,” recorded by Captain Stubby & the Buccaneers with the Li’l Wally Orchestra. This rousing sing-along became the team’s official fight song, and though it soon fell out of use, the Sox brought it back during their 2005 World Series championship run.

At the height of his popularity, Jagiello had his own local radio show and opened a club called the Carousel. Polka had its heyday in the 1940s and ’50s, but he stayed popular much longer, and would appear in front of a huge national TV audience on *The Lawrence Welk Show* several times in the 60s. He’d made 17 gold and four platinum albums. Success came with a price, though—Jagiello was working furiously, and notwithstanding the upbeat, boisterous feel of his music, he was developing ulcers and other health problems. Still in his 30s, he recognized he needed to slow down. He sold his studio and pressing plant, closed his club, and moved to Florida with Jeanette in 1965.

Jagiello bought a new studio in Florida and kept touring and recording, albeit at a slower pace. He’d return to Chicago to gig, but as

the city’s Polish enclaves began to decline, he started booking suburban banquet halls instead. “I still come back two or three times a year to show all the club owners I’m still alive, and to show the other bands how it’s done,” Jagiello told Kozlowski. “Other musicians are always spreading rumors that I’ve died, gotten sick, or have dropped my price. . . . Polka’s a competitive scene.”

In 1982, Jagiello recorded “God Bless Our Polish Pope,” which led to what he considered the absolute highlight of his career. In 1984, he performed the tune at the Vatican for Pope John Paul II. “He thought his part was over once he played his song,” Jeanette told the *Tribune*, “but a cardinal came over and said, ‘Wally, the pope wants you to keep on playing while he goes around blessing the people.’” So Jagiello kept the polka going while John Paul II made his rounds. When he finally offered a blessing to the bandleader, Jagiello broke down in tears.

In the late 90s, Jagiello would collaborate with Chicago polka punks the Polkaholics, who’d gotten started in ’97—an oddly appropriate pairing, given Jagiello’s traditional roots and stubborn independent streak. Polkaholic Don Hedeker (formerly of art-punk bands Algebra Suicide and the Trouble Boys, both covered in SHoCM way back) told the story in a 2017 interview with Mystery Street Recording Studios.

“He would come to Chicago about once a year, play at some banquet hall like the White Eagle out in Niles,” Hedeker said. “So in 1999, we set up this show at Zakopane Lounge, which is on Division there, and the idea was the Polkaholics were going to be his backing band. I thought, ‘Wow, his vocal with our way of playing polka would be super cool. It would give us so much legitimacy right there!’ That’s what I thought anyway.”

Jagiello might have approved of the Polkaholics in principle, but he didn’t care for their sound. “At practice, as soon as we start the first song, he yells, ‘No, no, no, no, no!’ He was kind of a control freak,” Hedeker said. “He basically neutered us. He said, ‘What’s wrong with your guitar?’ I said, ‘It’s distortion.’ ‘I don’t want that!’ . . . It was very much like that

[Chuck Berry] movie, *Hail! Hail! Rock ‘n’ Roll*—except I’m not Keith Richards!”

The Polkaholics weren’t prepared to deal with the expectations of an old-school bandleader either. “We spent that whole summer trying to learn as many of his songs as we possibly could, and then at that practice he changed the key on everything,” Hedeker recalled. “It was just a waste of time!”

The concert turned out to be a good time, but not for the reasons Hedeker expected. “So we do the show the next night, and I can’t even tell you how pumped up I was for that show—opening for Li’l Wally was like a dream come true,” he said. “As we were playing our set, he was at the bar and all these people were buying him shots. So by the time he comes on, he was just tanked! So it was quite an event, but musically, it wasn’t all that great, really.”

Jagiello died of heart failure six years later, on August 17, 2006, in Miami Beach. The Polkaholics weren’t done with him, though. Hedeker had the “crazy idea” to do a polka rock opera—a sort of musical Jagiello biography—that the band recorded at Mystery Street and released as the concept album *Wally!* in 2009.

“This guy’s story is unbelievable. He was this child star, and a super hustler,” said Hedeker. “He was first signed to Columbia. He put out two 78s, but he didn’t like the way they sounded because they brought in their own musicians and just had him singing. He didn’t like that at all, so he said, ‘Fuck you, I’m gonna start my own thing!’ So he started his own label, started recording with his own band, and became a great success. That’s the part of him that really intrigued me. He’s just so punk rock!”

It might take a Polkaholic to see Jagiello as punk rock, but there’s no arguing that he threw his whole heart and soul into the music he loved. If there’s any justice in the world, he’ll be remembered forever—and not just by the International Polka Association Hall of Fame. ■

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.

MUSICALL AGES **FREE****PICK OF THE WEEK****TheMIND** celebrates the deluxe version of *Don't Let It Go to Your Head* with his first headlining gig

© RILEY (HULL) HULLIGAN

THEMIND, QARI, MOYANA OLIVIA
Fri 11/25, 9 PM, Schubas, 3159 N. Southport, \$20. 18+

CHICAGO SINGER AND PRODUCER Zarif Wilder, aka theMIND, has lent his gilded vocals and carefully crafted instrumentals to more hip-hop and R&B releases than I could possibly list here. He's worked with practically every important rapper to emerge from the city in the past decade, including the three in the supergroup Ghetto Sage: Smino, Noname, and Saba. So I'm a little surprised to learn that this is Wilder's first local headlining show, since he's long been capable of drawing a crowd around here. This gig celebrates a new deluxe edition of his 2020 album, *Don't Let It Go to Your Head* (TheMIND/Cinq). Wilder recently told Revolt he thought the original release wasn't complete. "There were a lot of songs we couldn't put on there due to time," he said.

The album's sumptuous, casually sophisticated R&B is already enriched by Wilder's autobiographical touches and restrained vulnerability. As Tara C. Mahadevan detailed in a 2020 *Reader* profile of Wilder, *Don't Let It Go to Your Head* is as much about the challenges faced by disenfranchised communities as it is about Wilder's own struggles navigating a system stacked against him. His down-to-earth warmth prevents these clean, polished-sounding songs from feeling disconnected from reality, like background music at a chic boutique. Much of that warmth comes through in his singing: he can contort his downy voice into an expressive rasp or sweeten it till it bursts out of the song like light through a stained glass window. The five new tracks on the album's deluxe version further extend comfort to the afflicted. On the dramatic "Sacrilegious," Wilder sings about finding romantic love amid oppression and despair, offering solace with his soft, supple vocals. Even when society leaves you out of its plans and freedom seems beyond reach, he seems to say, love can get you through the day. —LEOR GALIL

CONCERT PREVIEWS
FRIDAY 25

THEMIND See Pick of the Week at left. Qari and Moyana Olivia open. 9 PM, Schubas, 3159 N. Southport, \$20. 18+

THEY ARE GUTTING A BODY OF WATER
Modern Color headline; *They Are Gutting a Body of Water*, Soft Blue Shimmer, and Mofie open. 8 PM, Beat Kitchen, 2100 W. Belmont, \$17. 17+

While on tour in 2018, I played a show in a dusty Philadelphia warehouse with locals They Are Gutting a Body of Water, a ragtag four-piece of young shoegaze revivalists. They really connected with me: they looked awkward and out of place, and they played beat-up old gear, but they put so much heart and beauty into the layers of their sad but massive hooks that I immediately bought their first tape, *Gestures Been*, and still listen to it regularly today. TAGABOW continue to play loud, heavy shoegaze, but over the past few years they've also toyed with more experimental sounds and flourishes. On their brand-new *Lucky Styles* (Smoking Room), they smash their influences and interests together to create a weird, fun record that doesn't sound like anything I've heard a shoegaze band do before. The album crashes lush *Loveless* worship into oscillating samplers, spaced-out synths, and crispy trip-hop. Its second track, "Kmart Amen Break," starts out fuzzy and dreamy before breaking into an alien-sounding pitch-shifted vocal bridge, while "Behind the Waterfall" could be a rock band playing the score to a *Zelda* game. Best of all, even when They Are Gutting a Body of Water throw a curveball, it isn't at the expense of the kind of stuff that hooked me back in the day: catchy, heavy nugs of forlorn rock for the weirdos. —LUCA CIMARUSTI

SUNDAY 27

BRAKENCE Jane Remover opens. 7:30 PM, Lincoln Hall, 2424 N. Lincoln, sold out.

Over the past few years, Randy Finell—the enigmatic 21-year-old Ohioan releasing music as Brakence—has avoided interviews and other press appearances while racking up tens of millions of streams. He lets his openly confessional music speak for itself. On "Fifthennigma," a Soundcloud upload from 2016, he mixes samples and jittery beats under his warbling vocals, crafting a moody tapestry that recalls the early work of electronic producer Baths in its playfulness and sincerity.

Brakence's formula has remained the same ever since, though his productions have become increasingly complex. His self-released breakthrough album, *Punk2*, ended up shoehorned into the "hyperpop" box when it came out in 2020, but putting him in a category with anyone else does a disservice to the distinctiveness of his pop. Brakence wraps up midwest emo and emo rap into a sharp, glitchy package; his genre blending is always precise and thoughtful, and he's adept at creating fric-

tered landscapes that capture Gen Z malaise. On "Dropout," an account of his decision to leave Ohio State University in 2019, lurching hip-hop percussion and on-the-brink-of-tears vocals infuse the song with equal parts confidence and anxiety—despite his uncertain future, he sounds victorious singing "Now I've got more freedom than I've ever seen." When he raps about relationship issues and flirting on Instagram, moments of catharsis arrive jaggedly, with record scratches ("Fuckboy") and slipshod pop-punk excursions ("FWB") telegraphing ambivalence.

Brakence's latest singles, which precede his second album, *Hypochondriac* (out in December on Columbia), coat his clever songwriting in a glossier sheen. "Argyle" makes twinkly guitar melodies and IDM-style production feel one and the same, while "Venus Fly Trap" ends with an elegant intertwining of piano, vocal melodies, whispering, and agile beats. His sampling is more effective than ever too: loner anthem "CBD" lets the sound of a buzzing fly soundtrack its chorus, and "Caffeine" folds shouts from a famous Super Smash Bros. Melee match into its frenetic production. Brakence may have only a couple albums under his belt, but his music already feels emblematic of his generation's sonic ingenuity.

—JOSHUA MINSOO KIM

TUESDAY 29

GILGAMANIANS, MAKU SICA 8 PM, *Elastic Arts*, 3429 W. Diversey #208, \$15. [MIL](#)

The Gilgamanians and Maku Sica (formerly Mako Sica) sound profoundly different from each other, but these two local ensembles share a commitment to using improvisation to tap into ideas they would never find any other way. The **Gilgamanians** are percussionist Michael Zerang and shortwave-radio operator Don Meckley. This is the duo's first concert, but their history stretches back 40 years. In the early 1980s, they enlisted Daniel Scanlan, who played guitar, violin, and cornet, to found the electroacoustic improv group Liof Munimula. Their concerts were as legendary for the bristling abstraction of their music as they were for their vast and improbable array of equipment—in Meckley's case that included one-of-a-kind inventions such as the radiotar (a shortwave radio tuned with a hinged guitar neck) and the hydro-kalimba (a row of cords or pipes that dripped water onto "keys" cut into a miked cafeteria tray) as well as a 40-foot antenna that enabled him to tap into a world's worth of broadcast sounds. Liof Munimula disbanded in 1997, but Meckley and Zerang reunited after learning that Scanlan had died in 2018 in a Florida nursing home. While the Gilgamanians' current setup is decidedly more portable than that of their earlier ensemble, the fluctuating mixtures of vibrations, textures, and caught-and-released sounds on their debut CD, this year's *Escape From Dark Matter* (Pink Palace), are as hallucinatory as anything they did back in the day.

Singer, bassist, and guitarist Brent Fuscaldio and trumpeter, mandolinist, and guitarist Przemyslaw Krys Drazek first convened as **Mako Sica** in 2007. Third members have come and gone, and in recent years they've initiated an open-door policy that has dramatically diversified their sound. Beginning with their 2018 double LP, *Ronda* (Astral Spirits/Feeding Tube), made with master percussionist Hamid Drake,

they've invited eminences from the worlds of free jazz and experimental music to join them in improvising unspooling grooves and eerily atmospheric melodies. At this show violinist Mark Feldman, drummer George Marich, and Cheer-Accident bandleader and multi-instrumentalist Thymme Jones will join them to celebrate the release of their new CD, *Formless* (Feeding Tube). This is also the first time they've played out since changing their name from "Mako Sica" (the Lakota term for the South Dakota Badlands) to "Maku Sica," which Fuscaldio says is intended to show respect for the people to whom the original name belongs. —BILL MEYER

WEDNESDAY 30

SPECIAL INTEREST CB Radio Gorgeous and Conjunto Primitivo open. 8:30 PM, *Empty Bottle*, 1035 N. Western, \$18. 21+

New Orleans punk band Special Interest have been blowing wigs back since 2018, when they dropped their debut record, *Spiraling*, a chaotic romp through hard-hitting social themes and wildly divergent musical directions. On "Young, Gifted, Black, in Leather" the sentiment is self-explanatory, yet the mighty wails of vocalist Alli Logout peel back new layers of meaning in an iconic ode to Blackness, wrapping a sample from a vintage Nina Simone interview in modern sounds, kink, and a fury born of oppression.

Special Interest's tunes are sometimes punk, sometimes industrial, sometimes glam, and always so endearingly rough around the edges that you don't mind them pushing you around. Their new record, *Endure* (Rough Trade), shines free of rules or boxes; it's quintessentially punk, though you can turn a corner and find yourself in the middle of a thumping disco set with electronic dance beats smacking you upside the head. Their lineup also includes synth and drum-machine player Ruth Mascalci, bassist Nathan Cassiani, and guitarist Maria Elena, whose fusion results in tunes that feel simultaneously stripped-down and full. Logout's lyrics overflow with socioeconomic angst, let-your-hair-down debauchery, alienation, and rage—and hit all points in between.

Endure is scornful, horny, and pulsating in its acceptance of and resistance to our fates, whatever they may be. "Midnight Legend," which features rapper Mykki Blanco, is a delightful surprise and a bouncy good time. With Special Interest, you can always expect the unexpected, but you'd better believe they're doing it for them—it's a treat that we get to witness them kick ass. —CRISTALLE BOWEN

THURSDAY 1

THE O'MY'S 9 PM, *Sleeping Village*, 3734 W. Belmont, \$15. 21+

The O'My's sound like a band reincarnated from generations ago, as if they were dreamed up by a kid who knows too much about their grandparents' past. How do they do it? Wisdom, skill, poise, restraint, and hazy fun pepper their music and demeanor. Their members may have been



Special Interest ALEX GROSS



The O'My's RENÉ MARBAN

born after the "boomer" generation, but their soul and funk tunes explode with effortless swing and intention.

The Chicago outfit have been playing for more than a decade, moving between small clubs and big stages with a magical brand of experimental soul architected by their two core members, keyboardist Nick Hennessey and vocalist-guitarist Maceo Vidal-Haymes. Whether they're crafting their own tunes or working with some of the city's brightest stars (among them Chance the Rapper and Saba), the duo's music always feels authentic and breezy, with melodies and arrangements straight outta the cloudy part of paradise. Getting on their page is

a gift; their music is as restorative as a warm bath after a particularly grueling physical day.

On the recent O'My's release *No Swimming (Live)*, a live version of last year's studio EP *No Swimming*, Hennessey and Vidal-Haymes are joined by saxophonist Kenneth Leftridge Jr., drummer Alfonzo Jones, and bassist William Corduroy. The music is as smooth and beautifully aligned as ever. When it's loose it feels like an impromptu jam where everyone coincidentally knows which direction to take. When it's tight it shines above its grooves, transporting us into that blissful musical space we all pine for—that floaty feeling where the vibes rule and nothing else matters. —CRISTALLE BOWEN



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continued from p. 51

WEDNESDAY 7

THE SOFT MOON *Nuovo Testamento* open.
8 PM, Metro, 3730 N. Clark, \$26, \$21 in advance.
18+

"I'm starting to turn into someone else . . . again," moans Luis Vasquez on "Monster," from his latest album as the Soft Moon, *Exister* (Sacred Bones). It's true that Vasquez, who'd been holed up in Berlin during the pandemic, moved to Joshua Tree to record this effort. But whatever else might've changed about him, his signature sound remains in place—a mix of postpunk, darkwave, and industrial, held together by the binding influence of Trent Reznor. Vasquez knows what his listeners want, and he reliably brings the mope and rage and throb. "Monster" is a bleak and lovely midtempo ode to self-alienation and self-recrimination that nods equally to werewolves and mental illness. As the synths swirl, Vasquez's vocals alternate between numb, distorted dread and soaring regret.

Similarly, opener "Sad Song" touches on shoegaze and ambient before its slow drone and amped-up crystalline feedback crescendo into the full-bore pop-industrial dance-floor assault of "Answers." The refrain of that song, "I can't live this way," is an effective fist-pounding call to stomp out your frustrations beneath your (very black) boots, but it's so catchy that goths won't be the only people headbanging and wailing along. Vasquez is joined by a couple of guests, but they don't change his sound so much as demonstrate its flexibility. Hip-hop artist Fish Narc ramps up the beats on "Him," and Special Interest vocalist Alli Logout takes a turn ominously intoning on "Unforgiven," but Vasquez confidently steers the music back to the same inky well. There may be multiple personalities on *Exister*, but they're all agonized. —NOAH BERLATSKY

ALBUM REVIEWS

BLACK OX ORKESTAR, *EVERYTHING RETURNS*

Constellation

[blackoxorkestar.bandcamp.com/album/
everything-returns](http://blackoxorkestar.bandcamp.com/album/everything-returns)

The Yiddish language originated in the 900s and peaked in the early 1940s with around 11 million speakers, primarily in Europe's Ashkenazi Jewish communities. But of the six million Jewish people murdered by the Nazis during World War II, 85 percent of them were Yiddish speakers. Just as the worldwide Jewish population has not yet fully rebounded from that extraordinary loss of life, neither has Yiddish; in 2014 UNESCO labeled it endangered, and as a daily language it continues to languish, at least outside ultra-orthodox communities.

The klezmer revival that began in the 1970s carried Yiddish to new ears, and in 2000 four musicians from Montreal's vibrant postrock and experimental-music community built on that foundation, convening as Black Ox Orkestar and producing two darkly powerful acoustic Yiddish-language albums. Overlapping in membership with Godspeed You! Black Emperor, Thee Silver Mt. Zion Memorial Orches-



Black Ox Orkestar © STACY LEE

tra & Tra-La-La Band, Sackville, and other groups, Black Ox Orkestar aimed to explore their Jewish heritage, especially the musical and cultural traditions of the Jewish diaspora, combining influences from Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East. Pressure from outside commitments broke up the band after 2006's *Nisht Azoy*. Godspeed and Mt. Zion bassist Thierry Amar became a studio producer; violinist Jessica Moss (also a member of Mt. Zion) established a solo career; clarinetist and guitarist Gabriel Levine (from Sackville) leaned into his work as a teacher of performance and cultural theory; and vocalist and multi-instrumentalist Scott Levine Gilmore (Mt. Zion), the group's main composer, became a human-rights attorney in Washington, D.C.

Black Ox Orkestar reunited in 2020 after coming together for a group interview with the magazine *Jewish Currents*. The new *Everything Returns* (recorded with Greg Norman at Electrical Audio and released by the group's old label, Constellation) mixes Black Ox Orkestar's classic sounds with a heavier dose of jazz and the dark, piano-driven music of singer-songwriters such as Leonard Cohen and Nick Cave. Their storytelling and their arrangements of folk instrumentalists arise from Jewish diasporic traditions, but the material is also a product of today's tumultuous sociopolitical climate, with its progressive uprisings (the Black Lives Matter movement) and its atavistic regressions (the rise of neofascism). The band see things through the lens of Gilmore's human-rights work: "Perpetual Peace" recalls his great-grandfather's flight from religious persecution in tsarist Russia and invokes the refugee experience in all times and places, a theme that also emerges on songs such as "Mizrakh Mi Ma'arav" and "Viderkol." The title of the latter is the Yiddish word for "echo," and it weighs the hope of finding familiarity and comfort against heart-wrenching displacement. Though Yiddish

remains Black Ox Orkestar's primary language, the richly textured instrumentation and broader musical palette of *Everything Returns* are sure to draw new listeners, no matter what they speak—it's message of strength, compassion, and defiance is universal.

—JAMIE LUDWIG

ELDER, *INNATE PASSAGE*

Stickman

[beholdtheelder.bandcamp.com/album/innate-
passage](http://beholdtheelder.bandcamp.com/album/innate-passage)

When Elder emerged in Massachusetts in the mid-2000s, they worshiped at the altar of stoner-doom heavyweights such as Sleep and Eyehategod. But in the years since, they've emerged from behind the weed to establish a voice of their own. By their fifth LP, 2020's *Omens*, most of the band had relocated to Berlin, and as a group they'd shed much of their early sludge and grime in favor of heady strains of prog, psych, postrock, and more. Unfortunately, it came out just as the music industry shut down. Elder's new album, *Innate Passage*, arose from that period when the very definition of time felt like it'd come unmoored—days and weeks blurred together, and it became a morbid half-joke to wonder how many months long March 2020 could possibly be. Though a global pandemic is by definition a collective experience, prolonged isolation rendered each person's experience of it intensely personal. *Innate Passage* loosely explores the notion of life and time as an individual journey—not just the paths we take, but the lenses we use to filter reality. Heard in that light, it feels appropriate that the record's five long-form tracks sometimes feel simultaneously kaleidoscopic, fantastical, and yearning; "Coalescence" pairs motorik chug with celestial melody and delves into forlorn atmospheres, then jets off to space with intergalactic synths. *Innate Passage* is a milestone

MUSIC

from musicians who've proved themselves unafraid of reinvention. There may be more rocky waters ahead, but Elder's silky, exploratory rock doesn't get mired in turbulence—and it's inspiring to hear them sail on through it. —JAMIE LUDWIG

WHITE LUNG, PREMONITION

Domino

whitelung.bandcamp.com/album/premonition

It's always rare to see a band graduate from DIY rabble-rousers to PTA presidents, especially when they start out as legendarily raucous as Vancouver punks White Lung. Who knew that a decade after front woman Mish Barber-Way sang "Steel-toed boots / Smash rubber chains" on "Thick Lips," she'd be a mother of two waxing poetic about baby weight and antidepressants? But this was always her master plan—she's a writer as well as a musician, and she's published pieces that grapple with the duality of carousing with "professional drunken idiots" (as she put it in an essay for *Somesuch Stories*) while yearning for motherhood. Plenty of change has befallen the trio since the 2016 release *Paradise*, and they say that their new fifth album, *Premonition*, will be their last. During their 12-year run White Lung have attracted critical praise, opened for giants such as Refused, and earned a cosign from Courtney Love, all while remaining underground darlings.

White Lung have studded their final outing with jewels of the past. Barber-Way's yawp is as catty as ever, Kenneth William's riffs are still whiplash inducing, and Anne-Marie Vassiliou's drumming tears hell for leather. Longtime producer Jesse Gander (Japandroids, Brutus) also returned to the fold, building a backbone for the trio's chaotic compositions, kicking drums, and unhinged riffs. Adding to the album's significance, *Premonition* is by Barber-Way's admission the first time she wrote and recorded vocal tracks sober. Pregnant and hungry for inspiration, she used her sharp-tongued storytelling as an avenue for understanding the changes within and beyond her body. As a result, Barber-Way devised some of her most compelling narratives, offering letters to an unborn son ("Bird"), cautionary tales for infant daughters ("Girl"), and romps with a cigarette-smoking God who's got whiskey on His breath ("Date Night").

If we're to learn anything from the fumbled farewell of the Clash or the stilted goodbye (and unwarranted reunion) of Black Flag, it's that punks often don't do well with breakups. But while many bands recording a swan song might fizz in their own hubris—reach too far or say too much in hopes of crafting the perfect farewell—White Lung are self-assured enough to bid godspeed with ten songs in 30 minutes. *Premonition* proves that growing up doesn't mean forfeiting the ferocity of youth; it means making room for the future. —SHANNON NICO SHREIBAK

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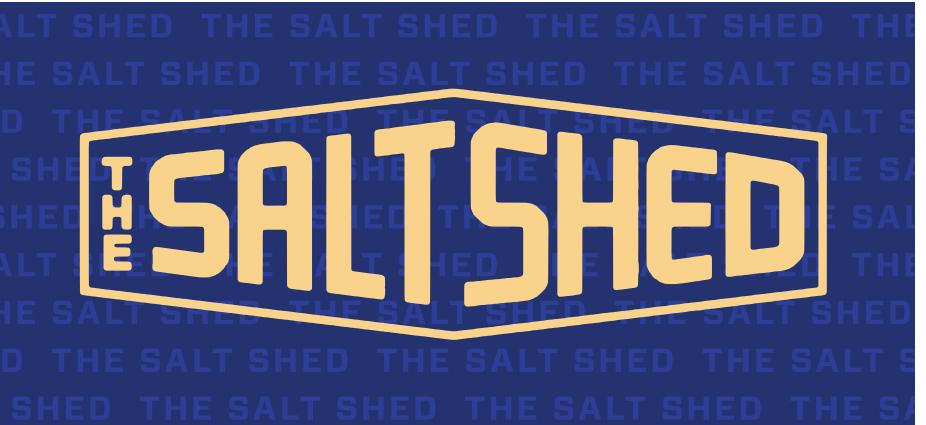
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EARLY WARNINGS



Ari Lennox © GIZELLE HERNANDEZ

NEW

- Adi Oasis** 4/13/2023, 9 PM, Sleeping Village
Aly & AJ 4/8/2023, 7:30 PM, Riviera Theatre **✉**
Anthrax, Black Label Society, Exodus 1/29/2023, 6:30 PM, Radius Chicago, 17+
Ari Lennox 3/8/2023 and 3/10/2023, 7 PM, House of Blues **✉**
August Burns Red, the Devil Wears Prada, Bleed From Within 4/29/2023, 6:30 PM, Concord Music Hall, 17+
Anita Baker 6/30/2023, 7 PM, United Center **✉**
Beanie Sigel, DJ Mile High 1/6/2023, 10 PM, the Promontory
Eric Bellinger 3/18/2023, 8 PM, Bottom Lounge **✉**
Big Gigantic 2/18/2023, 8 PM, Salt Shed, 17+
Blue October 3/3/2023, 8 PM, the Vic **✉**
Brendan & Jake's 20th Annual Holiday Show featuring Brendan Bayless & Jake Cinniger 12/10, 8 PM, Park West **✉**
Cadillac Three 1/27/2023, 8 PM, Joe's Live, Rosemont
Vanessa Carlton 3/14/2023-3/15/2023, 8 PM, City Winery **✉**
Channel Tres 12/30, 9 PM; 12/31, 10 PM, Thalia Hall, 17+
Chicago Farmer & the Fieldnotes, Head for the Hills 3/3/2023, 8 PM, Martyrs'
Chisel 2/16/2023, 9 PM, Empty Bottle
Kiely Connell 1/11/2023, 8 PM, Schubas, 18+
Daisy the Great 4/15/2023, 8 PM, Beat Kitchen **✉**
Dark Canyon 12/17, 8:30 PM, Constellation, 18+
Dogs in a Pile 3/4/2023, 8 PM, Martyrs'

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WOLF BY KEITH HERZIK

GOSSIP WOLF

A fury ear to the ground of the local music scene

ERICA MEI GAMBLE has been a key part of Chicago's DIY experimental- and dance-music communities for more than a decade. She has several musical projects—including **Sarica**, **A+E**, and her S&M-themed goth horror duo with Sarah Leitten, **Dungeon Mother**—and she's also the scene's most diligent video preservationist. Gamble has posted sets by hundreds of artists dating back to 2010 on her YouTube channel, **Temporary Correspondence**, and nearly all are worth watching. (Seeing Gamble set up her tripod and camera before a show is a good sign it'll be especially juicy.) For the past few years, Gamble has been recording bracingly minimal jams as **Temp.**, and earlier this month she compiled nine of them for a CD release, **Taking Notes**, via Jordan Reyes's label **American Dreams**. Tracks such as "What's Beyond?" (with a haunting monologue by Leitten) and "Evening" oscillate between eerie soundscapes and glitchy, downtempo electronics.

On Saturday, November 26, **Metro** hosts the fifth annual **John Walt Day**, which features sets by **Pivot Gang** rappers **Saba**, **MFN Melo**, **Joseph Chilliiams**, and **Frsh Waters** as well as crew producer **daedaePivot**. Chicago duo **DCG Brothers** share the bill—they aren't part of Pivot, but they're fellow west siders. This wolf hopes the Pivot MCs will team up to perform their recent group singles, the sweltering "Aang" and the light-on-its-feet "911."

This month Chicago rapper **Matt Muse** is running the fourth annual **Love & Nappyness Hair Care Drive**. You can donate new or unused personal-hygiene and hair-care products at six drop-off points—including the Silver Room, Semicolon Bookstore, and FortuneHouse. All items will be donated to **Maria Shelter** and **Saint Leonard's Ministries**. The drive ends Sunday, December 11, and that night **Thalia Hall** hosts the **Long Hair Don't Care Show** with Tobi Lou, Matt Muse, and Senite and sets by DJ Ca\$h Era. —J.R.

NELSON AND LEOR GALIL

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SAVAGE LOVE

VOYEUR

Cuckhold in Seattle

"The dick up here is damp nine months a year."

By DAN SAVAGE

Q: I'm a married gay man in southern California. I also have a boy who has his own partner. Both my boy and his partner used to live nearby. But in August they moved to Seattle. The "why" of their move continues to bother me. They didn't move for a job, or to be closer to family, or any of the other reasons people normally relocate. My boy said it was a combination of the weather and people. The problem, as I see it, is that both my boy and his partner have introverted

tendencies—they don't go out much—so I don't see how the weather or people really make a difference.

The bigger issue is that my boy has tried to "pimp" his partner on me throughout our relationship. I usually rebuffed his suggestions, but one night I gave in. His partner and I started to kiss and feel each other up, and it was fine. The weird thing—the thing that troubles me to this day—was how my boy reacted. He watched us with this bizarre look in his eyes,

like he was really getting off on watching the two of us go at it, like some creepy voyeur. His expression freaked me out so much that I ended things and gave some dumb excuse. I recently had an encounter with another person who had a similar experience with my boy. He described how he would cam with my boy and how my boy would always bring his partner in.

My boy had expressed to me on multiple occasions how his partner cannot

find sexual partners on his own. I think the real reason my boy moved was to find a new dating pool in the hopes of eventually finding a match for his partner. If my thoughts are correct, then my boy did a horrible thing to our relationship. I don't know much about cuckolds and I'm looking for advice. How do you have a relationship with a boy when that boy's sole focus is the sexual satisfaction of their partner?

—CONFUSED ABOUT LAD'S DEPARTURE AND DECEIT

A: Moving to Seattle for the "weather" seems a little counterintuitive. But I can see why a pair of introverts might prefer gray Seattle, where I live, to sunny southern California. When it's nice outside, you feel obligated to go outside. But it's never nice outside in Seattle. We have a rainy season that stretches from November through July (too wet to go outside) and now, thanks to catastrophic climate change, we have a wildfire season that stretches from August through October (too smoky to go outside). So, looking out a window in Seattle you never think, "I should go for a walk and risk a chance encounter with another human being," but rather, "I should go back in the basement and keep playing video games."

As for the people here in Seattle . . . even the most extroverted newcomers complain about the "Seattle Freeze." But if your boy and his partner are just looking for fuckbuddies, well, they're in luck. The dick up here is damp nine months a year and tastes like smoke the other three, but there's plenty to go around.

As for the host of other issues you raise . . .

Look, I'm not your boy, CALDAD, so I can't tell you exactly what's going on in his head. But I do feel confident saying he's not your boy anymore. Not only did

he move away (with his partner) and leave you all alone in southern California (with your husband), CALDAD, but you seem to hold him in contempt—contempt for his motives, his kinks, and his partner—and contempt is a hard place to come back from. So since you aren't in a relationship with him anymore, you don't have to worry about making this relationship work. (I'm sorry if that seems harsh, CALDAD, but better to hear that from me than from the commenters.)

So is your ex-boy a cuckold? He could be. Based on your description of his behavior the night you hooked up with his partner, it certainly sounds like he gets off on watching his partner get fucked by other guys. It's also possible that he shares the dick he's getting elsewhere with his primary partner. There's nothing wrong with being a cuckold, of course, and there's nothing wrong with "pimping" a partner out . . . so long as 1. your partner wants to be pimped out and 2. you're not pressuring other guys to do things with your partner that they don't wanna do.

But if your ex-boy was only interested in you for his partner, CALDAD, he was certainly playing the long game. Establishing an ongoing D/s relationship with a married man when all you really want is someone to fuck your partner in front of you . . . that seems like an awful lot of effort when Grindr is full of men who would be up for fucking your ex-boy's boyfriend while he watched without him having to go through the trouble of entering into a long-term relationship first. Setting you up with his partner may have been an interest, but I don't think it's fair to say it was your ex-boy's sole interest.

And honestly, CALDAD, I find myself wondering what

you expected from your ex-boy when you started to fuck his partner in front of him. Did you think he was going to sit there impassively, with a look of total indifference on his face, not feeling anything in particular? If so, CALDAD, that wasn't a very realistic expectation on your part. And I suspect if he had sat there looking bored or indifferent, you would've found that just as weird and off-putting. If I was fucking some guy's boyfriend in front of him, CALDAD, I would hope that guy got off on it. Hell, I would call it off if the guy whose boyfriend I was fucking didn't react like some creepy voyeur.

Frankly, CALDAD, I don't think your ex-boy did a terrible thing. He was honestly into you, that's why he was your boy, and he wanted to share his partner with you. If you didn't want to fuck his partner, you should've continued to say no. Once you started to fuck his partner, you should've wanted (and expected) your ex-boy to enjoy the show.

P.S. On the off chance that CALDAD's ex-boy is reading this: Welcome to Seattle! Cuckold or pimp, both or neither, you need to be clearer with your sex partners (in person, online, wherever) about what you're doing, what you want them to do, and why you want them to do it. There are plenty of guys out there into threesomes, cuckolding, and guys who are pimping out their partners, so there's no need to be a manipulative-by-default creep, which is how you risk coming across when you aren't clear about what you're doing (sharing your partner) and why (you're a cuck or your partner has no game or both). ☕

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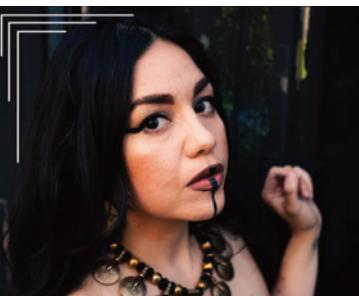


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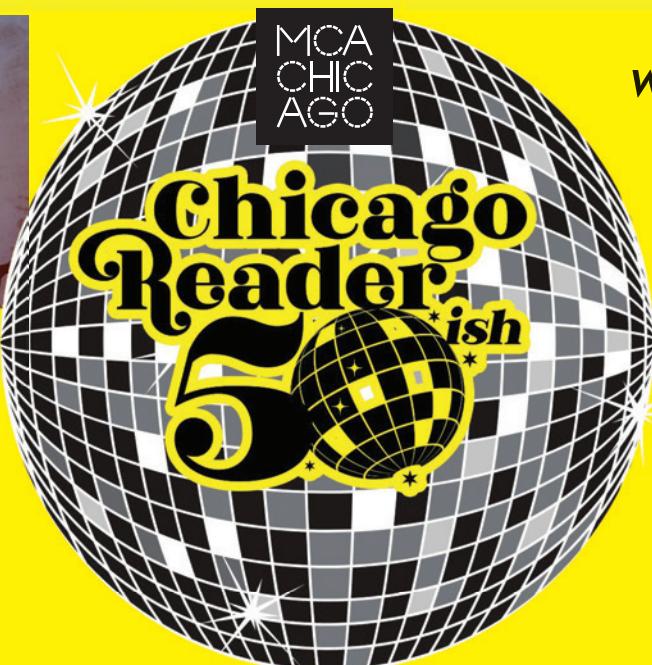
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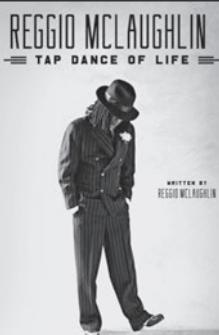


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2022

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For the return of the *Chicago Reader Nonprofit Guide*, we decided to highlight a specific section of our continually updated online database. The Arts & Culture section of our Nonprofit Guide is dizzyingly vast, with organizations representing a diversity of locations within Chicagoland, a variety of communities served, and the entirety of the visual and performing arts celebrated. This section reflects the strength in numbers of our service-based nonprofit community in the Chicago area, a community that the Reader Institute for Community Journalism is proud to be a part of.

The *Chicago Reader Nonprofit Guide* is maintained on a regular basis by Reader staffers and includes Chicago area organizations and projects. We partnered with Executive Service Corps in 2021 to include many of the more than 1,000 nonprofits in their database.

This guide includes 501(c)(3) nonprofits, fiscally sponsored grassroots, arts, media, and other organizations, and some social enterprises. There are many thousands of these in this area, so this guide is meant to be a starting point in the exploration of this vibrant part of our region.

Don't see your organization here? Go to chicagoreader.com/nonprofitsurvey to add your group or request corrections.

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<https://www.architecture.org>

Chicago Artistic Alliance
<http://www.chicagoartisticalliance.org>

Chicago Artists Coalition
<https://www.chicagoartistscoalition.org>

Chicago Artists for Action
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Chicago Ballet Arts
<https://www.chicagoballetarts.org>

Chicago Ballet Center
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Chicago Botanic Garden
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Chicago Chamber Musicians
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Chicago Children's Choir
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Chicago Children's Museum
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Chicago Children's Theatre
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Chicago Chorale
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Chicago Composers Orchestra
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Chicago Cultural Accessibility Consortium (CCAC)
<https://chicagoculturalaccess.org/>

Chicago Cultural Alliance
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Chicago Dance Crash
<https://chicagodancecrash.com>

Chicago Dance History Project
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Chicago Danztheatre Ensemble
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Chicago Dramatists

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The Chicago Ensemble

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Chicago Fashion Incubator at Macy's

<https://www.chicagofashionincubator.org/>

Chicago Film Archives

<http://www.chicagofilarchives.org>

Chicago Film Society

<http://www.chicagofilmsociety.org>

Chicago Filmmakers

<http://www.chicagofilmmakers.org>

Chicago Gay Men's Chorus

<http://www.cgmc.org>

Chicago Heights Drama Group

www.dramagroup.org

Chicago History Museum

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<https://www.chicagotap.org>

Chicago Humanities Festival

<https://www.chicagohumanities.org>

Chicago Japanese American Historical Society

<http://www.cjahs.org/>

Chicago Jazz Philharmonic

<https://www.chicagojazzphilharmonic.org>

Chicago Latino Theater Alliance

<https://www.clata.org>

Chicago Magic Company

www.themagicparlourchicago.com/

Chicago Mosaic School

<https://chicagomosaicschool.org/>

Chicago Multicultural Dance Center (CMDC)

<http://www.cmdcschool.org>

Chicago Opera Theater

<https://www.chicagooperatheater.org>

Chicago Poetry Center

<http://www.poetrycenter.org>

Chicago Public Art Group

<http://www.chicagopublicartgroup.org/>

Chicago Shakespeare Theater

<https://www.chicagoshakes.com>

Chicago Sinfonietta

<https://www.chicagosinfonietta.org>

Chicago Sunday Evening Club

<https://www.csec.org>

Chicago Symphony Orchestra

[cso.org](http://www.csso.org)

Chicago Tap Theatre

<http://www.chicagotaptheatre.com>

Chicago Urban Art Retreat Center

www.urbanartretreat.com

Chicago Veterans

<http://www.otherworldtheatre.org>

Chicago Women's History Center

<https://www.chicagowomenshistory.org>

Chicago Youth Shakespeare

<https://www.chicagoyouthshakespeare.org>

Chicago Youth Symphony Orchestras

<https://www.cyso.org>

Child's Play Touring Theatre

<https://www.cptt.org>

Children's Theatre of Winnetka

www.childrenstheatrewinnetka.com/

Chimera Ensemble

www.chimeraensemble.com/

Chinese American Museum of Chicago

<https://ccamuseum.org>

Chinese Fine Arts Society

<https://www.chinesefinearts.org/>

Chopin Theatre

www.chopintheatre.com

CircEsteem

<https://www.circesteem.org>

Citadel Theatre Company

www.Citadeltheatre.org

City Lit Theater Company

www.citylit.org

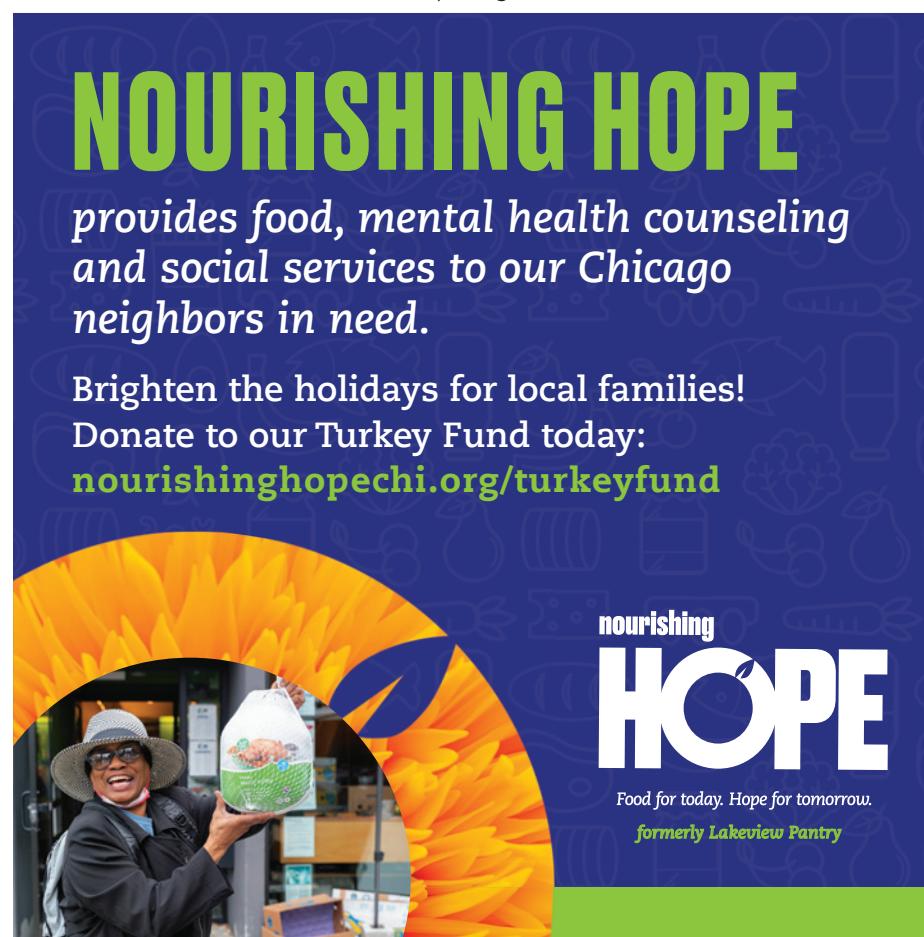


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Compass Creative Dramatics
www.ccdramatics.com

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<https://www.compasstheatre.org/>

Congo Square Theater Company
<https://www.congosquaretheatre.org/>

Connective Theatre Company
www.connectivetheatrecompany.com/

The Conspirators
www.conspirewithus.org

Corn Productions
www.cornservatory.org

Court Theatre
<https://www.courttheatre.org>

Courtroom 600
<https://courtroom600.org/>

CPA Theatricals
<https://www.greenhousetheater.org/>

Crossing Borders Music
<http://crossingbordersmusic.org/>

Dance Data Project
<http://www.dancedataproject.com>

Dance for Life - Chicago Dancers United
<https://chicagodancersunited.org/dance-for-life>

DANK Haus German American Cultural Center
<http://www.dankhaus.com/>

Deeply Rooted Dance Theater
<https://www.deeplyrooteddancetheater.org>

Definition Theatre
www.definitiontheatre.org/

Descendants Media Group
<http://www.descendantsmediagroup.org>

Design Museum of Chicago
<http://www.designchicago.org>

Dragonfly Theatre Company
www.dragonflytheatrecompany.org/

Dreamstreet Theatre
<https://dreamstreettheatre.org/>

Driehaus Museum
<https://driehausmuseum.org>

Drunk Shakespeare
www.drunkshakespeare.com

Drury Lane Theatre
drurylanetheatre.com/

DuPage Children's Museum
<https://www.dupagechildrensmuseum.org>

DuPage Graue Mill and Museum
<http://www.grauemill.org/>

Dusable Museum of African American History
<https://www.dusablemuseum.org>

Eclipse Theatre Company
www.eclipsetheatre.com

Edgewater Historical Society and Museum
<http://www.edgewaterhistory.org>

Elmhurst Art Museum
<http://www.elmhurstartmuseum.org>

Elmhurst Symphony Orchestra
<http://www.elmhurstsymphony.org>

Ensemble Espanol Spanish Dance Theater
<http://www.ensembleespanol.org>

Evanston Dance Ensemble
www.evanstondanceensemble.org

Evanston History Center
<https://www.evanstonhistorycenter.org>

Exit 63 Theatre
www.exit63theatre.com

Facets Multi-media
www.facets.org

Facility Theatre
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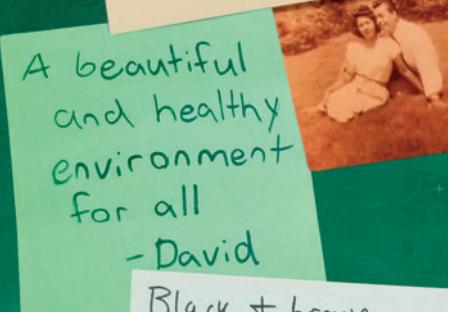
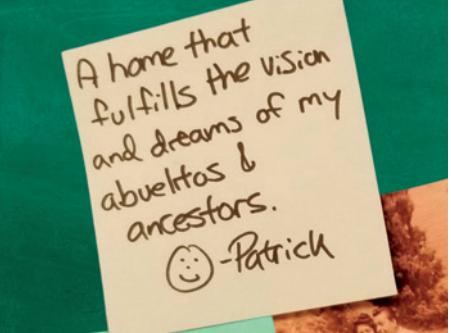
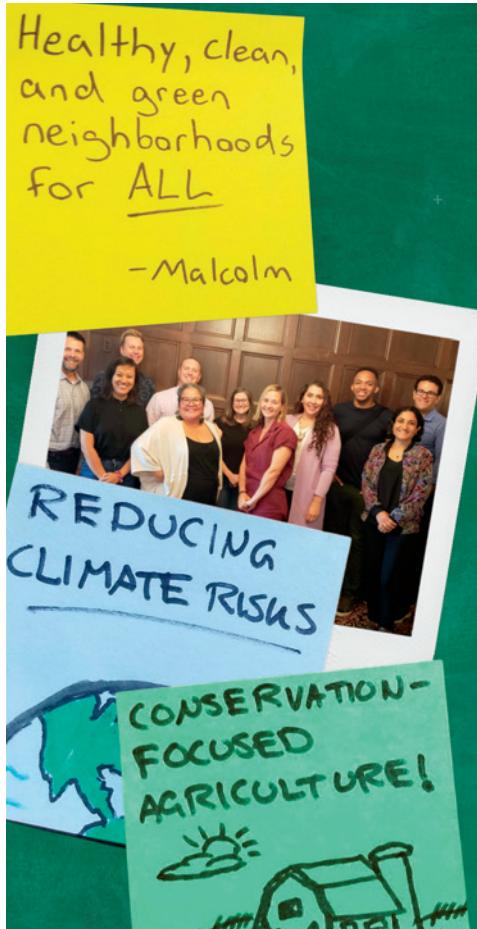
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Bonnie Jones in concert. Photo: Fridman Gallery.

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WITH OLIVER HAGEN, CONDUCTOR**

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SAT, DEC 3 / 2PM

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**UNITING VOICES CHICAGO:
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WINTER CONCERT**

Performance Hall
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**LAMPO PERFORMANCE
WITH BONNIE JONES**

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SUN, DEC 11 / 5PM

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Filipino American Historical Society of Chicago
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Fine Arts Building
<http://www.studebakertheater.com/>

First Floor Theater
<http://www.firstfloortheater.com/>

First Folio Theatre
<http://www.firstfolio.org/>

Fleetwood-Jourdain Theatre
<http://www.fjtheatre.com/>

Forward Momentum Chicago
<https://www.ForwardMomentumChicago.org>

Free Street Theater
<https://www.freestreet.org>

Fremont Street Theater Company
<http://www.fremontstreettheater.com/>

Friends of the Chicago River
<http://www.chicagoriver.org>

Friends of the Edgewater Library
<http://www.foelchicago.org>

Fulcrum Point New Music Project
<https://www.fulcrumpoint.org>

Gene Siskel Film Center
<https://www.siskelfilmcenter.org>

Geneva Cultural Arts Commission
<http://www.geneva.il.us>

Geneva History Museum
<https://genevahistorymuseum.org>

Ghostlight Ensemble Theatre Company
<http://www.ghostlightensemble.com/>

The Gift Theatre
<http://www.thegifttheatre.org/>

Gilbert & Sullivan Opera Company
<https://www.gilbertandsullivanoperacompany.org/>

Gilloury Institute
<http://www.silkroadrising.org>

Gingarte Capoeira Chicago
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Glass Apple Theatre
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Glessner House
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Golden Ticket Productions
<http://www.goldenticketproductions.org/>

Goodman Theatre
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Gracia Inc, NFP
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Green Star Movement
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Greenhouse Theater Center
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Griffin Theatre
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Haitian American Museum of Chicago
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Halcyon Theatre
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Harris Theater for Music and Dance
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Haven Chicago
<https://havenchi.org/>

Haymarket Books
<http://www.haymarketbooks.org>

Hell in a Handbag Productions
<http://www.handbagproductions.org/>

Her Story Theater
<http://www.herstorytheater.org/>

Hibernian Media
<https://www.hiberniantransmedia.org/>

High Concept Labs
<http://highconceptlaboratories.org/>

Highland Park Historical Society
<https://www.highlandparkhistory.com>

The House Theatre of Chicago
<https://www.thehousetheatre.com>

Hubbard Street Dance Chicago
<https://www.hubbardstreetdance.com>

Hyde Park Art Center
<http://www.hydeparkart.org>

Hyde Park Suzuki Institute
<https://www.hydeparksuzuki.com>

Idle Muse Theatre Company
<http://www.idlemuse.org/>

Ignition Community Glass
<http://www.icg-chicago.org>

Illinois Council of Orchestras
<https://www.ilcouncilorchestras.org>

Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center
<http://www.ilholocaustmuseum.org>

Illinois Humanities
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Illinois Rock and Roll Museum on Route 66
<http://www.roadtorock.org>

Imagination Theater
<http://www.imaginationtheater.org>

Inner Sense Healing Arts Collective
<https://www.innersensehealingarts.org/>

Institute For Arts Entrepreneurship
<https://iaeou.me/beta/>

Institute of Cultural Affairs
<http://www.ica-usa.org>

International Latino Cultural Center of Chicago
<https://www.latinoculturalcenter.org>

International Voices Project
<http://www.ipvchicago.org/>

Intuit: The Center for Intuitive and Outsider Art
<http://www.art.org>

Invictus Theatre Company
<https://www.invictustheatreco.com/>

Irish American Heritage Center
<http://irish-american.org/>

Irish Theatre of Chicago
irishtheatre.org

Jackalope Theatre Company
<http://www.jackalopetheatre.org/>

Jane Addams Hull-House Museum
<https://www.hullhousemuseum.org>

Japan America Society of Chicago
<https://jaschicago.org>

Jazz Education Network
<http://jazzednet.org/>

Jazz Institute of Chicago
<https://www.jazzinchicago.org>

Joel Hall Dancers & Center
<http://www.joelhall.org>

Joffrey Ballet
<http://www.joffrey.org>

John G. Shedd Aquarium
<https://www.sheddaquarium.org>

KidsWork Children's Museum
<http://kidsworkchildrensmuseum.org/>

Know Your Chicago
<http://www.knowyourchicago.org>

Korean Cultural Center of Chicago
www.kccoc.org

Lake Forest and Lake Bluff History Center
<https://www.lflbhistory.org>

Lake Forest Symphony
<http://lakeforestsymphony.org>

Lakeside Pride Music Ensembles
<https://lakesidepride.org>

Latvian Folk Art Museum
<https://www.facebook.com/people/Latvian-Folk-Art-Museum/100057623230639/>

League of Chicago Theatres
<https://www.chicagoplays.com>

Lifeline Theatre
<http://www.lifelinetheatre.com>

Lincoln Park Zoo
<http://www.lpzoo.org>

Lira Ensemble
<https://liraensemble.org/>

Little Black Pearl Workshop
<https://www.blackpearl.org>

Lookingglass Theatre
<http://www.lookingglasstheatre.org>

Lubeznik Center for the Arts
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Lucky Jefferson
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Lyric Opera of Chicago
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Madison Street Theater
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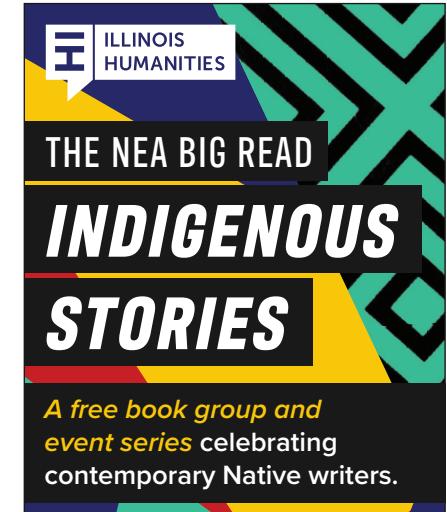
Magura Cultural Center
<http://www.magurabcs.com>

MAKE Literary Productions
<http://www.makemag.org>

Mandala Arts
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MCA Stage
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McAninch Arts Center
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Metropolis Performing Arts Centre
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Midsommer Flight
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The Miracle Center
<https://themiraclecenter.com/>
Mitchell Museum of the American Indian
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Mordine and Company Dance Theatre
<https://www.mordine.org>
The Morton Arboretum
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Mudlark Theater Company
<http://www.mudlarktheater.org/>
Muntu Dance Theatre
<https://www.muntu.com>
Museum of Broadcast Communications
<https://www.museum.tv>
Museum of Contemporary Art
<http://www.mcachicago.org>

Museum of Contemporary Photography
<http://www.mocp.org>
Museum of Science and Industry
<https://www.msichicago.org>
MUSIC Inc. (Music in Urban Schools Inspiring Change)
<http://www.musicincchicago.org>
Music Theater Works
<https://www.musictheaterworks.com/>
NAJWA Dance Corps
<https://www.facebook.com/najwadancecorpsorg/>
Naperville Art League
<http://www.napervilleartleague.com/>
National Cambodian Heritage Museum and Killing Fields Memorial
<https://www.cambodianmuseum.org>
National Hellenic Museum
<https://www.nationalhellenicmuseum.org>
National Indo-American Museum
<http://iahmuseum.org/>
National Museum of Gospel Music
<http://www.nationalmuseumofgospelmusic.org>
National Museum of Mexican Art
<http://nationalmuseumofmexicanart.org>
National Museum of Puerto Rican Arts & Culture
<http://nmprac.org/>

National Public Housing Museum
<https://www.nphm.org/>
National Veterans Art Museum
<http://www.nvam.org>
Navy Pier
<https://navypier.org>
The Neo-Futurists
<https://neofuturists.org/>
The New Coordinates
<http://thenewcoordinates.org/>
New Moon Chicago
<http://www.newmoonchicago.com>
The Newberry Library
<https://www.newberry.org>
noisivelvet
<www.noisivelvet.org>
The Norris Cultural Arts Center
<https://www.norrisculturalarts.com>
North Riverside Players
<http://www.nrplayers.com/>
Northlight Theatre
<https://northlight.org>
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- Otherworld Theatre Company**
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<http://www.peoplesmusicschool.org>
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<https://www.perceptualmotiondance.com>
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<https://www.poetryfoundation.org>
- Polish Museum of America**
<http://www.polishmuseumofamerica.org/>
- Porchlight Music Theatre**
<https://porchlightmusictheatre.org>
- Preservation Partners of the Fox Valley**
<http://www.ppfv.org>
- Pride Arts**
<https://pridearts.org/>
- Pritzker Military Museum & Library**
<https://www.pritzkermilitary.org>
- Project Onward**
<http://projectonward.org>
- Project&**
<https://projectand.org>

- Promethean Theatre Ensemble**
<http://www.prometheantheatre.org/>
- Prop Thtr**
<https://www.prophtr.org/>
- Public Media Institute**
<http://www.publicmediainstitute.com>
- Puerto Rican Arts Alliance**
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- Pullman Porter Museum**
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- Quiet Pterodactyl**
<quietpteroactyl.org>
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- Raue Center for the Arts**
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- Raven Theatre Company**
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- Red Clay Dance**
<https://www.redclaydance.com>
- Red Orchid Theatre**
<http://www.aredorchidtheatre.org>
- Red Tape Theatre Company**
<http://www.redtapetheatre.org/>
- Red Theater Chicago**
<http://www.redtheater.org/>
- Redtwist Theatre**
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<http://www.rembrandtchambermusicians.org>
- Remy Bumppo Theatre Company**
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- Rendezvous Arts**
<https://www.rendezvousarts.org/>
- Repertorio Latino Theater Company**
<http://www.repertoriolatino.org>
- The Rising Stars Theatre Co.**
<http://www.risingstarschicago.com/>
- Rivendell Theatre Ensemble**
<https://rivendelltheatre.org/>
- River North Dance Chicago**
<http://rivno.sandboxstaging.net>
- Rush Hour Concerts**
<http://www.rushhour.org>
- Saint Sebastian Players**
<http://saintsebastianplayers.org/>
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- Sixteenth Street Theater**
<https://www.16thstreettheater.org>
- SkyART**
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- Snow City Arts**
<http://www.snowcityarts.org>
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<http://www.southsidejazzcoalition.org>
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<https://spotlightac.com/>
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- Stage 773**
<http://www.sideshowtheatre.org/>
- Stage Left Theatre**
<https://www.stagelefttheatre.com>
- Steep Theatre Company**
<https://steeptheatre.com/>
- Steppenwolf Theatre Company**
<https://www.steppenwolf.org>
- Stepping Stone Theater**
<steppingstonechicago.com>
- Stillwell Institute for Contemporary Black Art**
<http://www.thestillwellinstitute.org>
- Stockyards Theatre Project**
<http://www.stockyardstheatreproject.org/>
- The Story Theatre**
<http://thestorytheatre.org/>
- Storycatchers Theatre**
<http://www.storycatcherstheatre.org>

StoryStudio Chicago
<https://www.storystudiochicago.org/>

Strawdog Theatre Company
<https://www.strawdog.org>

Subtext Theatre Company
<http://www.subtextnfp.org/>

Swahili Institute of Chicago
<http://swahiliinstitute.org/>

Swedish American Museum
<http://swedishamericanmuseum.org>

Symphony of Oak Park & River Forest
 SymphonyOPRF.org

T. Daniel Productions
<http://www.tdanielproductions.org/>

Teatro Vista
<https://www.teatrovista.org>

Teatro Zinzanni
<https://zinzanni.com/chicago/>

Teen Arts Pass
<https://teenartspass.urbangateways.org/>

Tellin' Tales Theatre
<Tellintales.org>

Territory NFP
<https://www.territorychicago.org>

Theater Oobleck
<https://theaterobleck.com/home/>

Theater Wit
<http://www.theaterwit.org>

Theatre Above the Law
<http://www.theatreatl.org/>

Theatre of Western Springs
<https://www.theatrewesternsprings.com>

Theatre Seven Chicago
<https://www.theatreseven.org>

Theatre Y
<http://www.theatre-y.com/>

Theo Ubique Cabaret Theatre
<http://www.theoubique.com/>

Three Brothers Theatre
<http://www.threebrotherstheatre.com/>

Threewalls
<http://www.three-walls.org>

TimeLine Theatre Company
<https://www.timelinetheatre.com>

Transcendence Global Media Peace On Earth
<https://www.peaceonearthfilmfestival.org>

Trap Door Theatre
<http://www.trapdoortheatre.com/>

Trickster Cultural Center
<https://www.tricksterculturalcenter.org/>

Turkish American Cultural Alliance
<http://www.tacaonline.org/>

Turning the Page Chicago
<http://www.turningthepage.org>

Ukrainian Institute of Modern Art
<http://uima-chicago.org/>

Ukrainian National Museum
<http://www.ukrainiannationalmuseum.org/>

Underscore Theatre Company
<http://www.underscoretheatre.org/>

United States Artists Inc.
<http://www.unitedstatesartists.org>

Urban Gateways
<https://www.urbangateways.org>

UrbanTheater Company
<http://urbantheaterchicago.org/>

Valiant Theatre
<http://www.valianttheatre.org/>

Vaudeville Chicago
<http://www.vaudevillechicago.org>

Victory Gardens Theater
<http://www.victorygardens.org>

Vision Latino Theatre Company
<https://www.visionlatino.com/>

Walkabout Theater
<http://www.walkabouttheater.org/>

Water People Theater
<http://www.waterpeople.org/>

West Point School of Music
<http://www.westpointsom.org>

WildClaw Theatre
<http://www.wildclawtheatre.com/>

Williams Street Repertory
<http://www.wsrep.org/>

Wilmette Arts Guild
<https://www.wilmetteartsguild.org>

Windy City Performing Arts
<https://windycitysings.org>

Windy City Playhouse
<http://www.windycityplayhouse.com/>

Woman Made Gallery (WMG)
<http://www.womanmade.org>

Wrightwood 659
<https://wrightwood659.org>

Writers Theatre
<https://www.writerstheatre.org>

YEPP: Youth Empowerment Performance Project
<https://www.wesayyepp.com>

Young Chicago Authors
<https://www.youngchicagoauthors.org>





Just what exactly is an UnGala, you ask?

Well, it's a gala *Reader*-style. Meaning that while you'll be able to rub shoulders with Chicago glitterati adorned in your finest garb (whatever that means to you), you'll also have a chance to enjoy the Museum of Contemporary Art's new exhibit "Forecast Form: Art in the Caribbean Diaspora, 1990s–Today" as you take in a performance by a feathered, loudmouth puppet while sipping on a glass of bubbly.

We've marched to the beat of our own drum for five decades, and in keeping with this theme, UnGala entertainment runs the gamut from an Englewood beatmaster to a close-up magician; a *cumbia* goddess to Chicago's premier balloon artist.

Wanting to keep it all in the family, even a couple of *Reader* staffers will be in on the performance action. Need further convincing to come out and get your groove on? Scan the QR code at the bottom for full line-up and ticket information.

Half a century never looked this good.

— Enrique Limón, editor in chief

Wednesday, Nov. 30

Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago
220 E. Chicago
chicagoreader.com/ungala

VIP: 6-7 PM
GA: 7-11:30 PM

