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TABLE OF CONTENTS

9

WHAT THE HELL IS MAKE BELIEVE SEATTLE?

Finally, a Film Festival for Fellow Weirdos

13

FIVE FILMS YOU NEED TO SEE AT MAKE BELIEVE SEATTLE

Starring Ethical Vampires, Ridiculous Puppets, and a Dude Who Pretends to Be George Lucas for Funsies

15

TESSA HULLS'S *FEEDING GHOSTS* IS INSTANT CANON FODDER

Too Bad She'll Never Write Another Graphic Novel

19

QUEEN OF OUR WORLD

When Sasha taqwšəblu LaPointe Writes, the Revolution's Coming

23

ART, ILLNESS, AND AUTO REPAIR

Cherdonna Makes a Compassionate Comeback

27

ISABEL HAGEN'S COMEDY STRINGS YOU ALONG

How a Juilliard-Trained Violist Found Harmony as a Stand-Up

30

IT'S IMPORTANT THAT THE BUG UNDULATES

How Anida Yoeu Ali Uses Wiggling Worms and Glitter as Forms of Protest

33

THE POWER OF MAKING PEOPLE OF COLOR INVISIBLE

Stephanie Syjuco Empowers the Oppressed with Just a Finger

35

BLOWING MINDS AND MELTING FACES

Thunderpussy Celebrate Their Survival with a Surprising Benaroya Hall Takeover

39

SINCERELY JOKING

Chastity Belt Live, Laugh, and Love 10 Years On

45

BETTER, STRONGER, FASTER

The Seattle Repertory Jazz Orchestra Pays Tribute to the Legendary Oliver Nelson

47

PERSONS OF INTEREST

Get to Know Hardcore Pop Star TeZATalks, Calming Fashion Critic Arson Nicki, and Seattle's Coolest Tree Expert Taha Ebrahimi

53

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WHAT THE HELL IS MAKE BELIEVE SEATTLE?

Finally, a Film Festival for Fellow Weirdos

BY CHASE HUTCHINSON



IMAGES COURTESY OF MAKE BELIEVE SEATTLE.

Make Believe Seattle's creative director Billy Ray Brewton (center), king of the weirdos. (We mean that in the nicest way possible.)

What the hell even is a genre film festival? Is it just for the weirdos (a compliment!) among us who like horror and sci-fi? Isn't every film festival technically a genre film festival, since every film fits into some kind of definable category?

To hear it from Billy Ray Brewton, the creative director of Seattle's genre film festival Make Believe Seattle, genre film festivals leave room for unpredictability or surprises.

After the demise of the North Bend Film Festival (RIP) last year, Washington has needed an event that is bursting with weirdness at every turn. Brewton said Make Believe is here to not only fill this gap but also to stand out from other such festivals that are already running.

"We're not a traditional genre festival intentionally," Brewton said. "The bigger genre festivals like Fantastic Fest or Beyond Fest

or Fantasia or Sitges—we're very different from festivals like those. They really focus hardcore on horror, sci-fi, fantasy, and we go so far outside of that. Our definition of genre, it does meet all of those criteria, but it's also just anything that deals in a heightened imagination."

This year, that includes stories about ethical teenage vampires, killer deer, and a man pretending to be George Lucas. The festival will be holding showings at the Northwest Film Forum like last year, but they'll also be at the Grand Illusion and the Erickson Theatre for the first time. For Brewton, who moved to Seattle years ago but now lives in Los Angeles, this is the place to be.

"Seattle and the Pacific Northwest in general is probably the weirdest, creepiest, strangest area of the country. This is the perfect place to have this festival."

With Make Believe, Brewton is also try-

ing to be as inclusive as possible in a genre space he sees as still having a lot of work to do when it comes to putting on events of this size and scale.

"Part of the reason that this film festival exists is because I've been going to genre festivals for years and years and years and I just never found them to be particularly inclusive," he said. "I don't think it was an intentional thing on most of their parts, I just think it's the nature of the beast. For the longest time, genre festivals catered to cis white men, and they still do to a large degree. So if you went as a person of color, if you went as a queer person, if you went as a woman, you didn't always feel seen."

While Brewton said making sure everyone is welcome is part of the focus, there also is a specific commitment to expanding programming, as they've done with the Native American Showcase. This year, that involved

bringing in programmer and filmmaker Colleen Thurston to put it together.

"Indigenous genre films? That's my jam," Thurston said. "It was really exciting for me to platform some of these films and bring them to an audience that might not otherwise get to see them."

The Native American Showcase's main feature is the experimental film *Gush*, in which director Fox Maxy breaks down and rebuilds traditional filmmaking styles by weaving together personal archival footage shot over a decade.

"It premiered at Sundance, and Fox Maxy is really kind of a radical filmmaker," Thurston said. "She's really working in this unabashedly direct and confrontational, yet playful, style that feels wholly original. Combining iPhone footage and this collage-style narrative-building is really unique."

Elsewhere, there is the short *The Hand-*

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some Man, which stars the great Lily Gladstone, a former Seattleite who has been in a run of fantastic films including *Certain Women*, *Killers of the Flower Moon*, and the upcoming *Fancy Dance*, which screened at last year's Seattle Queer Film Festival.

"[*The Handsome Man*] was submitted and made by two local Washington filmmakers," Thurston said. "That being local to the region is really exciting. It's also Lily in a role that does feel a little bit different."

To hear it from Misty Shipman, who wrote and directed the film with her sister Hope, the selection of her film and the Native American Showcase itself is an exciting development in the local film festival scene.

"For a brand-new festival, it's a very respectable thing that they're doing," she says. "Making sure that Native voices are heard and included from the jump."

Shot on the Kalispel Tribe Reservation located north of Spokane, the short was inspired by Gladstone herself. It was when Shipman saw Gladstone's performance in the 2013 feature *Winter in the Blood* that she decided she wanted to become a filmmaker. Years later, it was brought full circle as they worked together post-*KOTFM*.

"Lily was the very first person that I thought of," Shipman said. "She emailed me back and she said, 'I would love to do your film, I resonate deeply with this story, for better and worse. I'll be in Osage Country for the next six months. When I get back, are

you still wanting to do it?' And I said yes."

The Handsome Man isn't the only film with local ties. The micro-budget horror *A Most Atrocious Thing*, one of the festival's two world premieres, was made by a bunch of young Chapman University students in Colorado, and the opening credits were shot in North Bend and Gig Harbor. This is because the central car they'd used throughout production, which belonged to Washington-born filmmaker Will Ammann, broke down en route back home.

"Seattle, and the Pacific Northwest in general, is probably the weirdest, creepiest, strangest area of the country. This is the perfect place to have this festival."

"It died on the road so we couldn't bring it down to Colorado or LA for any more reshoots," Ammann said. "Anything else we needed the car for was done in the Pacific Northwest."

Unexpected car breakdowns aside, the film also had to shoot around the pandemic and their respective work schedules. Shot over approximately 50 days spread out over three years, the film originally was built as a surreal horror movie before taking on a more comedic bent. Ben Oliphint, who co-wrote and co-stars in the film alongside Ammann, said this was necessary.

"It was a completely different movie [in July 2020]," Oliphint said. "We were all being very democratic about it and not having it be anyone's film. None of us had directed a feature, none of us knew. That meant there were a lot of cooks in the kitchen so we couldn't actually figure that one out. So we completely pivoted after two weeks of toiling away."

The pivot was to fully dive into the silliness and have everyone play versions of themselves on a trip gone very awry. That the film is now premiering in Seattle, where Ammann grew up making shorts and participated in the National Film Festival for Talented Youth, is a fitting homecoming moment.

"It's very exciting for me," Ammann said. "I can get all my friends and family to come to this."

As for how he thinks about the future of filmmaking in the state, Ammann sees a lot of promise.

"I really do believe this with Seattle, I think it's trending in the right direction."

I think with the new incentives that have come out that have been gifted for more independent productions, I think that's really huge. I really feel like the people in the Pacific Northwest are just as driven, just as talented as anyone I would meet in California or New York. There's a drive. With Make Believe getting genre films out there, I feel like that's just gonna make it bigger.

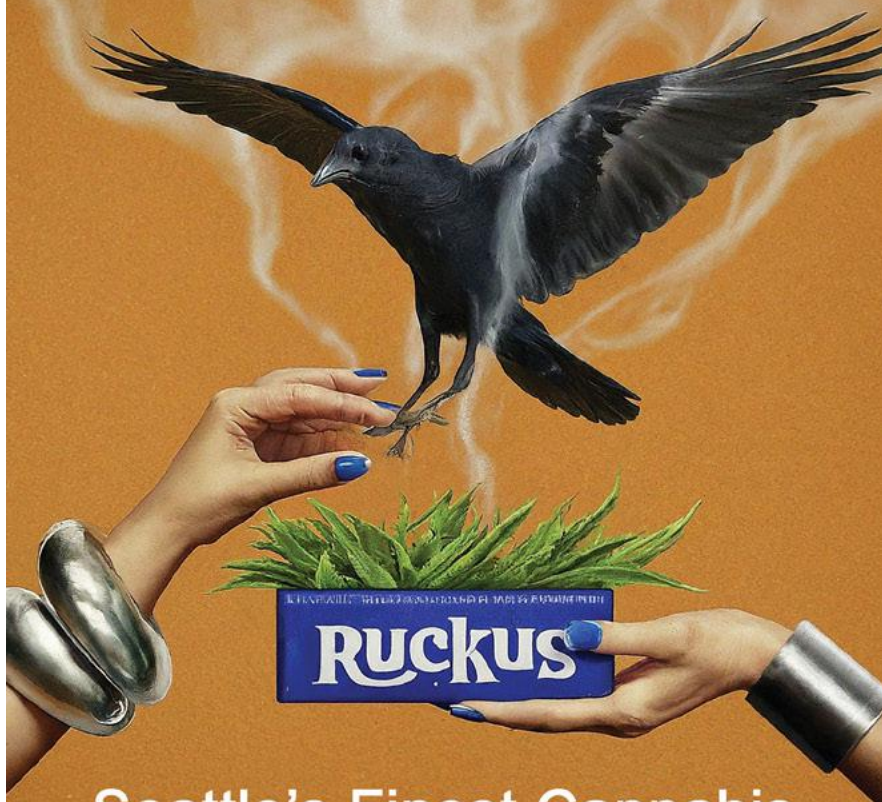
"We're spoiled. It's a beautiful area. There is so much you can do. If you want to get desert, just cross the Cascades. Or if you want water, there are so many options close by."

When it comes to the status of Make Believe, Brewton said they broke even in their first year. While this was encouraging, local support is still needed to ensure the festival can last.

"We're just still building the house," Brewton said. "Whatever your film festival of choice is in Seattle, if you want these amazing things to stay around, you have to support them. I wish it was a situation where that wasn't necessary. I wish we lived in a country that supported arts programs as well as a lot of other countries do. We don't. That's just not the current reality. So if you want these organizations to stay around, you have to support them."

.....
Make Believe Seattle runs March 21–26 with screenings at Northwest Film Forum, the Erickson Theatre, and the Grand Illusion. Tickets are available at makebelieveSeattle.com. ■

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FIVE FILMS YOU NEED TO SEE AT MAKE BELIEVE SEATTLE

Starring Ethical Vampires, Ridiculous Puppets, and a Dude Who Pretends to Be George Lucas for Funsies

BY CHASE HUTCHINSON



COURTESY OF MAKE BELIEVE SEATTLE

From left: *A Most Atrocious Thing*, *For Night Will Come*, *Humanist Vampire Seeking Consenting Suicidal Person*, *I'm "George Lucas": A Connor Ratliff Story*, and *The Wheel of Heaven*.

Teenage vampires, killer deer, and a man pretending to be George Lucas are just some of the terrifying and strange things that await you at this year's Make Believe Seattle Film Festival. No, they aren't all in the same movie—that would be too much chaos for one feature to contain. (Or, for you filmmaking maniacs reading this, I dare you to try so we can see the result!) But even when considering the broad strokes of your average film festival, one would be hard-pressed to find programming more wonderfully eclectic than what Billy Ray Brewton and the Make Believe crew have pulled together. Seattle has plenty of great festivals to experience, but this one has a whole heaping of much-needed weirdness. Here are five of the most surprising, delighting, and entertaining films from Make Believe Seattle's schedule that you really shouldn't miss.

A Most Atrocious Thing

United States, 2024, 75 min.,
Dir. Ben Oliphint, Christian Hurley
Fri Mar 22 at 8 pm at Northwest Film Forum

Starting things off is one of two of the festival's world premieres and also its most endearingly scrappy feature. Embodying the true spirit of independent film with its potential to make a charming genre pastiche from humble origins, *A Most Atrocious Thing* tells a timeless story of enduring friendship, the beauty of the natural world, some tainted deer meat, and sweet, sweet murder. It follows a group of friends who all get together to spend a weekend at a remote Colorado cabin for drinking, hunting, and bonding with the boys, but things soon go awry. The movie is gleefully absurd with a ridiculous puppet, farcical characters, and nonsensical dialogue that pokes fun at itself, staying light on its feet and never taking itself too serious-

ly. Though more than a bit rough around the edges, particularly when it comes to some effects and transitions, when the violence starts, the film reaches its gore potential as an antlered killer pulverizes the characters one by one. It may just be the best—or worst depending on your perspective—thing to happen to deer since coyotes.

For Night Will Come

France, 2023, 104 min.,
Dir. Céline Rouzet
Sat Mar 23 at 9 pm at The Erickson Theatre

The first of two vampire movies showing at the festival, *For Night Will Come* follows a family that have just moved to a nice new neighborhood where they must fit in while seeking out an ethical blood supply for their teenage son. We've all been there. Boasting a visually striking opening that only feels more tragic the longer it goes on, the film explores the dark comedic awkwardness of playing by the rules of "polite society" before getting appropriately grim when we see the steep cost that comes from operating outside these lines. The question, then, is: Who is the real monster in our cruel world? Thus, there are allegories galore while the film maintains a bloody strong core. Though it may elicit comparisons to *Let the Right One In*, *For Night Will Come* feels most like an extension of the classic *Ganja & Hess* or the recent *My Heart Can't Beat Unless You Tell It To*. In the end, it's a work of vampire horror that holds all of us up to the light.

Humanist Vampire Seeking Consenting Suicidal Person

Canada, 2023, 92 min.,
Dir. Ariane Louis-Seize
Sun Mar 24 at 8:15 pm at Northwest Film Forum

There are some universal elements that most of us go through when growing up. We rebel

against authority, question the choices our parents may have made, try to carve out our own identity in a world of conformity, and also search for that special someone who is willing to die so that we may continue our vampiric existence by feasting on their blood. Okay, while that last part might be unique to the young vampire Sasha, played with deadpan perfection by Sara Montpetit in *Humanist Vampire Seeking Consenting Suicidal Person*, the rest of her eternal life is relatable, defined by the desire to forge her own path. When her parents cut off her blood supply so she'll finally grow up and kill someone already, she forms a connection with a troubled young boy who just wants to end it all. As the two then spend one last night together righting wrongs so he can go in peace, they discover that there may be something to living after all. Like if *What We Do in the Shadows* was crossed with *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night*—it's a low-key film about death with plenty of life. By the time it arrives at a delightfully sweet end, you'll only wish you could dance along with it a bit longer.

I'm "George Lucas": A Connor Ratliff Story

United States, 2024, 90 min.,
Dir. Ryan Jacobi
Sat Mar 23 at 2:15 pm at The Erickson Theatre

Some documentaries explore the most existential issues of our time. Some take us absurdly deep into a specific topic we never thought would warrant such focus. Then there is *I'm "George Lucas": A Connor Ratliff Story*, which somehow manages to do both. The film is a profile of comedian Connor Ratliff who has been doing an improv show in New York where he sprays his hair white and pretends to be the creator of *Star Wars* as he interviews actual big-time guests as part of his fictional talk show. If you're think-

ing to yourself, "Why the hell would anyone spend years of their life doing that?" the real question you should be asking is "Why the hell do any of us do *anything*?" Ratliff is just a maniac here, armed with hairspray, a fascination with movies about space wizards, and friends willing to do terrible impressions. It's all about seeing through an idea not because it will make you successful, popular, or any such nonsense. No, this is a film about one man taking to a stage to perform to a bunch of weirdos (a compliment!) as George Lucas for the love of the game. Cinema at its most profound, this is.

The Wheel of Heaven

United States, 2023, 103 min.,
Dir. Joe Badon
Tue Mar 26 at 6:30 pm at the Grand Illusion

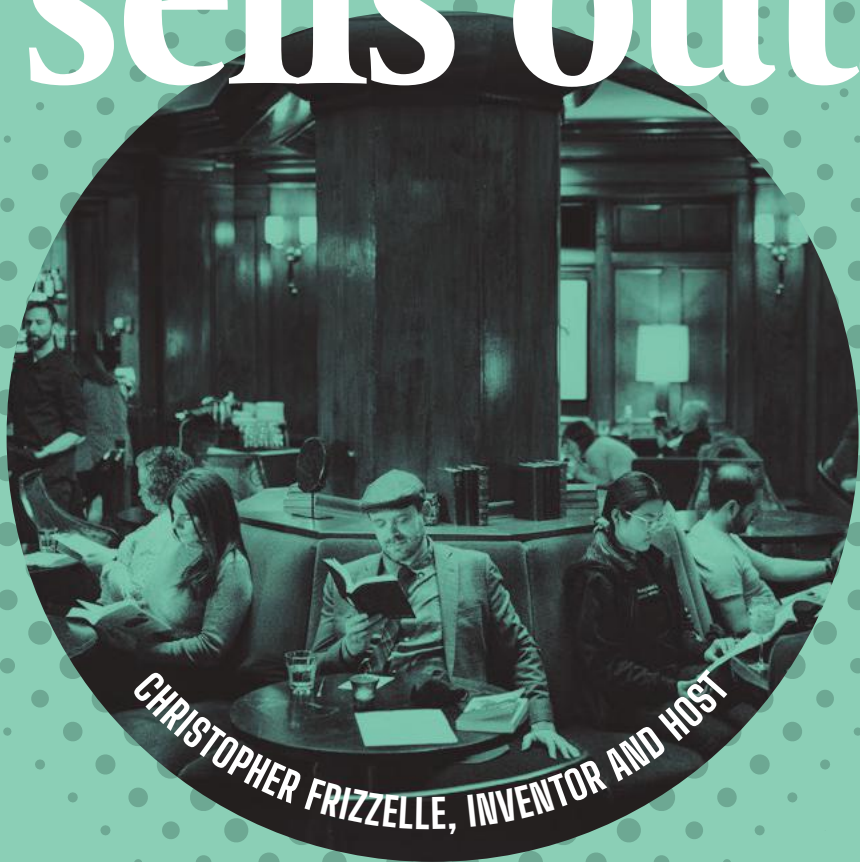
There is no better film to end with than Joe Badon's *The Wheel of Heaven*. It is like a cinematic hallucination that you wouldn't ever want to wake up from, a film of many films that are all distinct from one another while still being part of a wild and chaotic whole. It takes us into the life of a woman named Purity who, in the first of several incarnations, is played by Kali Russell. When her car breaks down, we get sent through a choose-your-own-adventure book, a feature, a series, a public access channel, and a behind-the-scenes doc all at the same time. Such a description is only a fraction of what the film feels like as you're ripped along for the ride. Whenever we eventually die, there's a good chance *The Wheel of Heaven* is what it feels like to see all of the many lives that you could have lived flashing before your eyes.

Make Believe Seattle runs March 21–26 with screenings at Northwest Film Forum, the Erickson Theatre, and the Grand Illusion. Tickets are available at makebelieveSeattle.com. ■

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TESSA HULLS'S FEEDING GHOSTS IS INSTANT CANON FODDER

Too Bad She'll Never Write Another Graphic Novel

BY RICH SMITH

It's a shame that Tessa Hulls will never write another graphic novel.

Even though *Feeding Ghosts* represents her first foray into the genre, the 400-page odyssey holds its own in the company of Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*, Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, Thi Bui's *The Best We Could Do*, or any of the other major comic works that feature immigrants, the children of immigrants, and refugees processing the generational traumas sparked by the horrors, bloodshed, and diasporas of the 20th century.

No shit. It's just that good.

Nevertheless, Hulls remains adamant about hanging up the keys. "I will take any bet that anyone wants to make with me on that," she said in an interview over some above-average fried chicken at Fort St. George in the Chinatown-International District, just a few blocks from her studio at Inscape Arts, where she works when not teaching students how to build stuff at Sawhorse Revolution or cooking with Coyote Central.

Even if the book does mark her as one of the genre's most able practitioners, you could hardly blame her for calling it a day. Feeding her family's ghosts with ink was a long, intense, and—perhaps most problematically for the ever-wandering adventurer—all-consuming process. "I have always needed to work in a bunch of different streams simultaneously, and this book has been like a fucking cataract, just one big thing eroding, washing away. I hated it," she said with a bit of pained laugh.

Seattle has long known Hulls as a gifted polymath. She's an accomplished painter, an entertaining lecturer (remember her fascinating presentation on the lost history of women bicycle-explorers?), and her



GRITCHELLE FALLESGON

the only way I could tell this story, and so I learned for this," she said.

And learn she did. Over the course of the last 10 years, she consumed the graphic novel canon whole. She traveled countless miles, devoured reams of research, blew through dozens of Japanese ink brush pens, and marshaled a tremendous amount of physical and emotional labor to complete this beautifully hand-drawn, intricately woven, meticulously reported recitation and analysis of her family's myth, which takes readers from the birth of communist China up to the shores of capitalist Seattle and nearly everywhere in between.

And I'm not being cute when I say "everywhere in between." The inspiration to begin the project came to her during a solo bike ride up a mountain in Mexico. Over the next decade, she'd retrace her family's steps in mainland China and Hong Kong, filling up notebooks along the way. She holed up in "probably 10 artist residencies"—in the Seattle area alone, she squatted in her ex's studio in Rainier Beach and spent time at Gasworks Gallery.

She completed the bulk of the book's framing during a stay at the Margery Davis Boyden Wilderness Writing Residency, which offers writers a cabin on 94 acres in Southern Oregon so long as they know their way around a chainsaw and promise to do an hour of caretaking per day along the Rogue River. There, physical work begot creative work. As she busied her hands with trail maintenance, her brain found the forms the book wanted to take, and she concocted the "completely batshit crazy" blueprint for *Feeding Ghosts*.

With no cell phone service, no internet, and only a solar panel with enough juice to keep a computer charged, she strung together the 11 epigraphs that structure the narrative and busted out a 10,000-word outline from which the story would materialize like a photo slowly coming clear.

The story that emerged begins (chronologically) with Hulls's grandmother, Sun Yi, a journalist who escapes the oppressive cadres of communist China in a false-bottom boat. After reaching relatively calmer waters, she writes a memoir about her expe-

rience. The book blows up, but she descends into a mental illness shortly after its success. Her daughter, Rose, witnesses her mother's dissolution until an incident triggered institutionalization. After a colonial education in Hong Kong followed by a few years enjoying the pleasures of 1970s United States, she takes up caretaking responsibilities for Sun Yi and ultimately settles down in a remote town in Northern California. Hulls grows up there as a member of the only Asian family in town. Cultural and emotional divides lead to major conflicts with her mother, spurring Hulls to adopt a kind of internal cowboy who longs for the frontier—a persona she takes up wholeheartedly. She spends her twenties doing seasonal jobs in places such as Antarctica, Oregon, Ghana, Alaska, and Washington, until she finds herself and her family's ghosts on that mountain in Mexico.

That's a lot. And Hulls knows it's a lot. To help the reader keep it all together, Hulls draws herself as a friendly tour guide narrator who reads these stories through various lenses: she plays the historian wary of grand narratives, the journalist hyper-aware of all the angles and facets she could be missing, the sociologist drawing parallels across generations and borders, and the tightly structured maximalist cartoonist who knows her way around literary and visual metaphors.

As she applies all of these lenses, the language and the story itself takes the overwhelming tone of a Type A+ person *processing*. Hulls's material is emotional, but her language rarely reads as emotive, a choice that reflects the communication problems she has with her mother, who feels as if Hulls doesn't feel enough. A page toward the end of the book illustrates this dynamic perfectly. As narrator-Hulls explains a breakthrough moment she had with her mother, she depicts both women sitting in armchairs across from one another. The thought bubble above her head shows her and her mother embracing each other on their knees, crying, "THE DARK! THE DARK!" Meanwhile, the thought bubble above her mother's head shows Hulls rendered as a robot, saying, "Traumatic incident J398 has been logged and cataloged. Closure achieved. Analyzing next incident."

Hulls's narration isn't at all robotic, but it is straightforward. This mode gives the book tremendous momentum, clarity, explanatory power, and room for humor. It also sets up the reader for a tiny but tremendously important moment in the epilogue that hit me like an oar to the face.

After 368 pages of first- and third-person narration, Hulls delivers a brief, plainspoken, direct address to her mother that reframes every drop of ink in the book "as my attempt at an embrace," one that would reach across the cultural and temperamental distances

"I have always needed to work in a bunch of different streams simultaneously, and this book has been like a fucking cataract, just one big thing eroding, washing away. I hated it."

CHOP comics went viral in 2020. But she never wanted to be a graphic novelist. And though she does draw comics, she's never really had passion for the form. "This was

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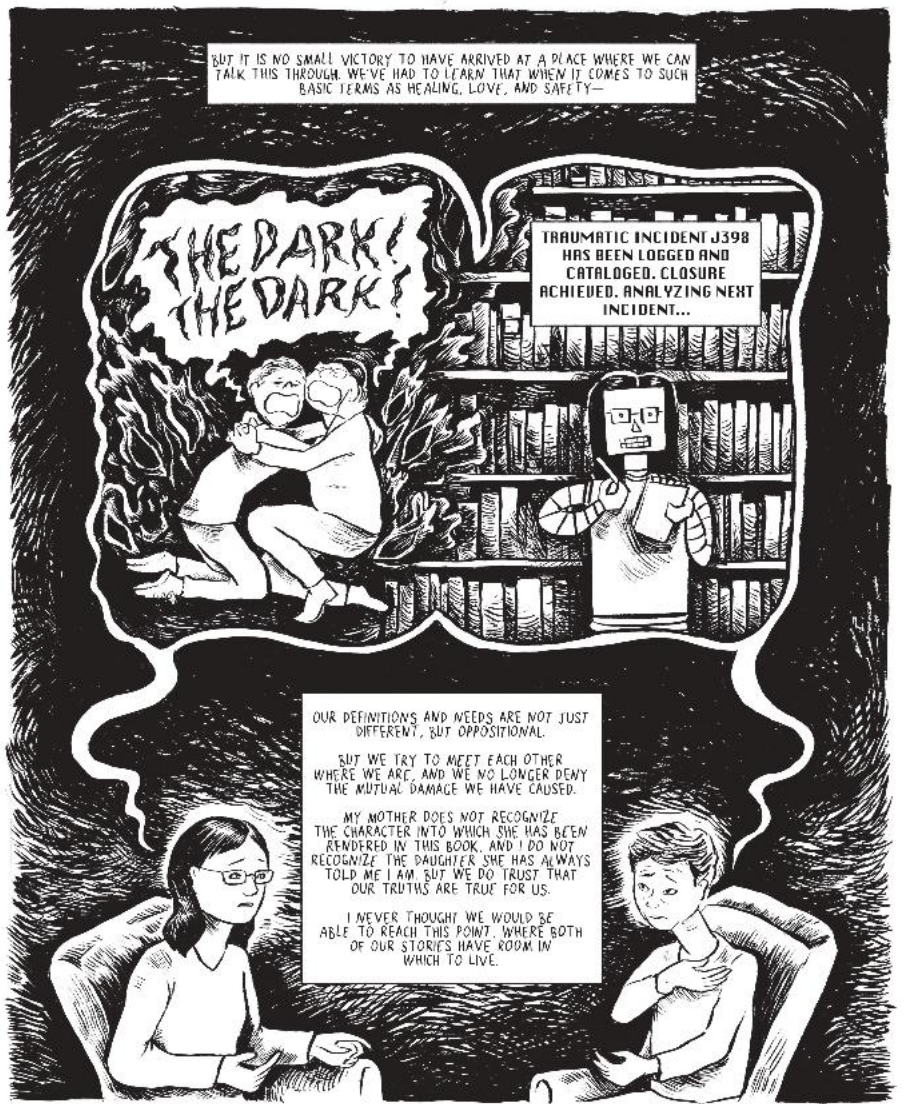
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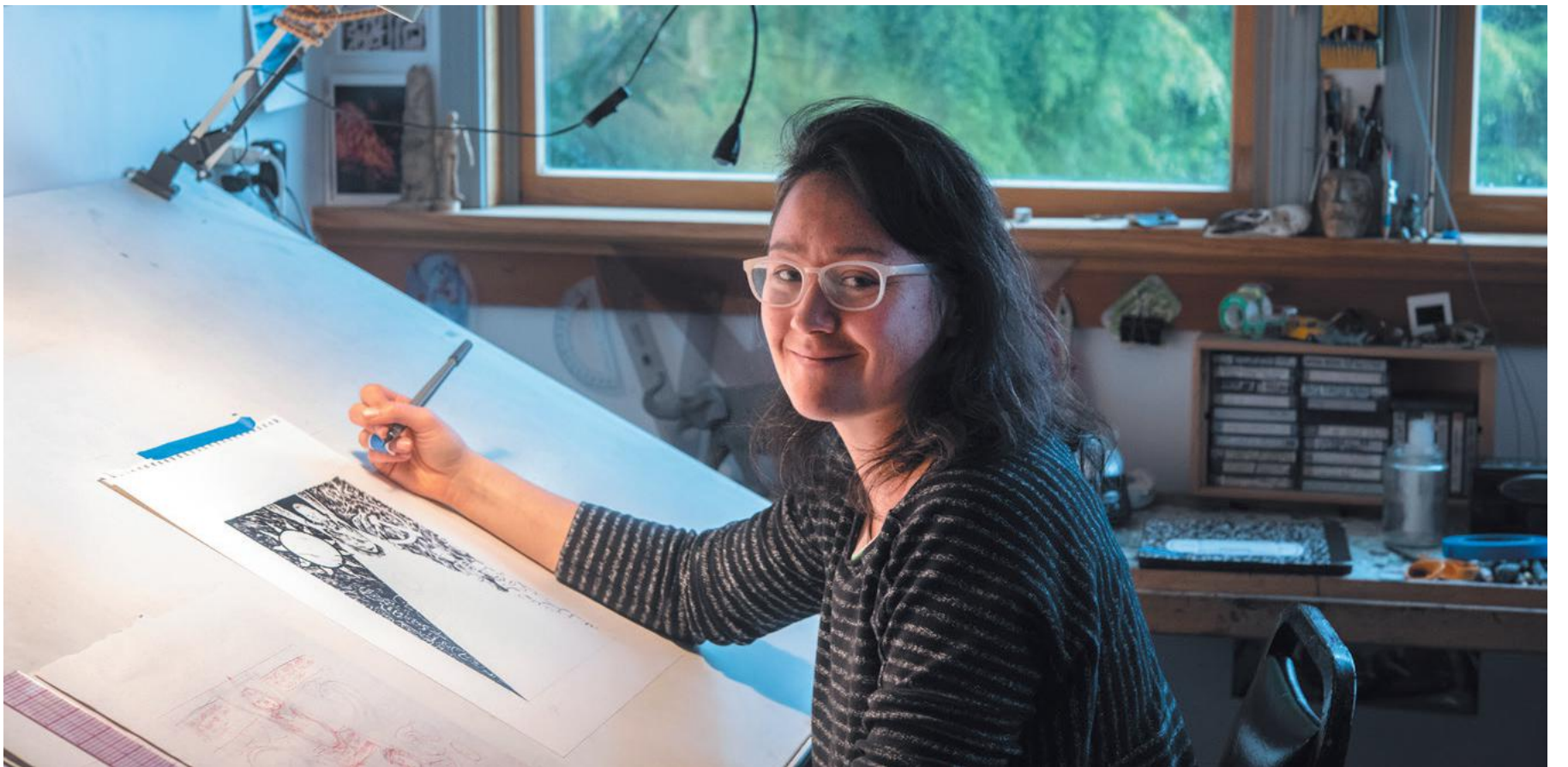
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COURTESY OF TESSA HULLS



HALL ANDERSON

Tessa Hulls confronting three generations of ghosts, armed only with a pen.

that separate them. That moment recasts every mile traveled, every frigid night in the studio, every crumpled page, every frown she adopted on her own face so she could more accurately draw the frown on a character's face, practically every second of the last 10 years as an extraordinary act of love delivered to her mother in a language she could understand.

(As a Jew, I now believe this is what Mom must really be asking for when she says, "You know, you never call.")

Jokes aside, Hulls said she began the book project resigned to the fact that her mom

would never see the compassion and love she holds for her. "Then hell froze over, and she did see that," she said. Now, they're in a place where things remain complicated, but Rose now knows she's loved.

So, as far as Hulls is concerned, her mission was accomplished long ago, which makes perhaps the hardest part of this process for her even harder: promoting the book.

In an Instagram post a little while ago, she compared the work of promoting *Feeding Ghosts* to carrying around a corpse. She's quick to recognize the "extraordinarily privileged

position" of landing a book deal with a Big Five publisher who put up a "hefty advance," but she's just not cut out for the work of turning herself into a billboard. Still, she feels a sense of duty to try to help make the project succeed. "Maybe that pressure is in the zeitgeist more than from my publisher, because I see everyone just pushing so fucking hard, so it doesn't feel like it's an option not to," she said.

Despite the ick she feels about the publicity, she welcomes the road. She looks forward to talking to people about the relationship they have with the book "without feeling like

it needs to continue to be the guiding force in my life." She'll present *Feeding Ghosts* at Elliott Bay Books on Tuesday, April 23.

Then she'll ride the wave until November, when she plans to move to Juneau, Alaska, as a present she wants to give herself for her 40th birthday. There, she'll return to her natural, feral state. And then, after some time on autopilot, return to creative work on her own terms.

See Tessa Hulls at Elliott Bay Book Company Tuesday, April 23, at 7 pm with Michelle Peñaloza and Jane Wong. ■

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QUEEN OF OUR WORLD

When Sasha taq^wšəblu LaPointe Writes, the Revolution's Coming

BY ADAM WILLEMS



BRIDGET MCGEE HOCHINS

With just a handful of pages to go in *Thunder Song*, a series of essays from award-winning Coast Salish author Sasha taq^wšəblu LaPointe, LaPointe asks her reader, “Are you listening yet?”

She breaks the fourth wall, but she isn't speaking for just herself. With poignant essays that center her own experiences, the Coast Salish landscapes, livelihoods, and people who were lost to colonialism—while unapologetically celebrating those who survive—LaPointe sees herself preventing Indigenous erasure in multigenerational company. She traces the ongoing struggle from Chief Seattle, to her great-grandmother and namesake, Upper

Skagit elder Vi taq^wšəblu Hilbert, to herself.

In an interview with *The Stranger*, LaPointe, who says she read *The Stranger* as “a little twerp on the rez” and decorated her bedroom walls with its print covers, picks up where her previous book, *Red Paint*, left off. She discusses the forms of loss that inform her writing, revisits her experiences as a Native punk rock artist, and highlights the local communities and groups sustaining her today.

Place is a big part of what your book is about—everything from “the landscape of your identity” to “the landscape of your body”—but there’s also such an emphasis on

time. You write how, in the thick of lockdown, “All these white women on Pinterest are baking loaves of sourdough, and I am trying to time travel.” Which is a great zinger, but is also reflective of how you’re connecting pandemic loss to how Chief Seattle must have been grieving, and naming the fact that you’re the descendant of survivors of smallpox. So I’m curious how much the reality and compartmentalization of the COVID-19 pandemic is something you’re consciously trying to emphasize in these essays.

[Laughs] Not to just like, you know, outwardly throw shade to all the people making sourdough, but there came a time where I felt like, as a Coast Salish person still living on the res-

ervation, it felt different, it hit different. I remember crawling out onto my roof and seeing construction stopped for months; things are already so hard to get done on the reservation or to develop. And then it would be frustrating and almost rage-inducing, to see people on social media in their “baking era” while thinking about, you know, my ancestor Comptia Koholowish, who was the sole survivor of smallpox that wiped out her entire village. So it wasn't like a cute break from work for me. Writing about it was absolutely intentional and something I was grappling with.

You write that, “To honor grief, one must first acknowledge loss.” There’s a lot of acknowledgment of loss in your book: the loss of landscapes, of your great-grandmother, the list goes on. It seems like something that really strings this book together. You have this refrain, “Are you listening yet?” And I feel like a big part of that is you trying to say, “Look at how much loss is around you—everything from tulips, which reshaped the geography of Skagit Valley in settlers’ image, to, like, sourdough eras.”

This is such a great point. Your observation means a lot to me because I think the through line of these essays is this confronting of erasure. Even the city that I was so enamored with and couldn't wait to get off the rez to get to: It erases something. As an adult, I learned more about the landscape of Seattle. Settlers literally had to bring in dirt from elsewhere to build it up. Settlers had to transform the tide flats to make them livable. There's grief and loss, even anger, sometimes, over the erasure of people who were here and thriving. You know, Pike Place Market is built over a place where there were abundant shellfish gathering, and, even worse, I've heard that there were burial sites. This place that I was so enamored with is also just another kind of representation of erasure.

In the essay “Reservation Riot Grrrl,” you mention the old-school femme attendee in the crowd of a local punk concert who was a total shithead to you, a time capsule for what the punk scene looked like 15 years ago. How have you seen these spaces change, and where do you think they're headed?

I 100% see it changing; these spaces were predominantly white dude spaces and white feminist spaces. I love that you brought up that show, because the crowd was multigenerational, part of the crowd was brown and Native folks, and then of course, the woman who was really nasty to me, an older-generation probably OG riot grrrl. She wasn't quite getting it right. And so to see these two generations butted up against each other in the same space was frustrating at one point, but also gave me hope for the future of punk spaces that even just 15 or 20 years ago I felt really outside of. Now I see Native bands coming up, I see more representation and less of a white boy party, and I think that's really exciting.

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Speaking of music, how do you see it influencing your writing? It seems you're multi-hyphenate in many of the same ways that your great-grandmother was: being really skilled in music, writing, and storytelling.

Well, major props to my great-grandma, because she was my biggest inspiration and influence. She was incredible. Someone asked me once, "You have punk in the title of your memoir [*Red Paint: The Ancestral Autobiography of a Coast Salish Punk*]. How would you apply that term to your great-grandma or your ancestors?" If you think about activism and the things that drew me into punk when I was younger, she was the OG activist. She literally saved a language from extinction and did a lot of language revitalization activism. So I feel like I have to give her a lot of credit for that.

And in the early days where *Red Paint* leaves off, I had never been able to be in a band. That had to do a lot with the crowd that I was hanging out with in my teens and twenties. It wasn't until my thirties that the folks in Medusa Stare approached me and said they wanted me to be in their band. And that was really empowering for me. It lined up with that point in my life when I was burning my entire life down and walking away. I think it inspired my writing, supported it, nurtured the little voice in me saying, "Hey, you can be loud." I finally had permission. And I think that that absolutely carried over into my writing, where I was less intimidated to write about the things I wanted to write.

When I was writing *Thunder Song*, I

was playing music with Kari, who was the drummer of Medusa Stare. When we started playing music together, it was just a two-piece and it was super weird. I think we got a review once in *Razorcake* that was like, "If you want a slumber party with your girlfriends and watch *The Craft* and have a séance, they're great for that." I thought that was the coolest review ever. So it was just really experimental and strange.

Kari would write music and be like, "Do you have lyrics for this?" My essay about tulips in *Thunder Song* came out of a song because I had more to say about that. I think that my relationship with music, and especially my connection with Kari, nurtured my writing process.

It seems like your initial contact points for both punk and writing were really empowering. You talk about having punk songs making you feel less alone. And then you describe the experience of contributing to a zine as a teenager, cutting up a shitty ex-boyfriend's nudie magazines that he gave you into a collage. It sounds like the relationship between music and writing was kind of there for you, even before working with Kari.

Punk was like a gateway drug into poetry for me. As a teen runaway and alternative high school dropout—who does that?—I didn't arrive at writing through any academic way. I didn't go to college until I was in my

mid-twenties. So the first time I heard bands like Bikini Kill, that kind of opened this doorway. I heard spoken word, and then Sylvia Plath—so predictable, right?—and then I got real into the confessionals. And then I wanted to see more performance poetry and then and then it just grew and grew and grew from there.

So both really connected you with a community, even if they're imperfect?

Definitely. The "Reservation Riot Grrrl" essay is half a love letter to Riot Grrrl. Even though it ended by the time I had stumbled upon it, that movement still had such an impact on me and fired me up. It opened up doorways into more of the underground DIY kind of music scene that was in Seattle, which saved my life in a lot of ways.

Are there communities or groups sustaining you now in the Seattle area?

When I think of community, it's impossible not to think of the Native Pathways Program. I started teaching with them last year. It's so incredible. To be in community, especially academic community, and to be able to teach creative writing at a program that is geared for Native students and Indigenous pedagogy... it feels like a family to me. Even yesterday, I drove out to the Peninsula College House of Learning, the longhouse there, to

see my friend and coworker have her first big art opening. It was so badass. Her photos were all of Indigenous women, and were multigenerational. Being in that space, walking around the gallery, and seeing all of my buddies while she was playing this cover of Blondie's "Heart of Glass," but singing it in a traditional language, I was like "I am where I need to be."

What do you hope people glean from *Thunder Song*?

It's not just "Please listen to my stories and my experiences." I hope there's more visibility of the culture, the language, the people who were here pre-contact. I hope the book shifts their thinking about what it means to be a guest on this land, to occupy Coast Salish territory. There are really beautiful things happening around the city, like Real Rent Duwamish, the yəhaw Indigenous Creatives Collective, that can help people shift how they are occupying this territory.

And hopefully, that should carry over in the sense that attempted genocide is not unique to the Coast Salish experience. Settler-colonial trauma happens all over the world. I guess I'm hoping that people pick up this book and experience some of these stories, some of these histories, and can try to see the world through a more decolonial lens.

.....
Sasha taq̓w̓šəblu LaPointe will be at Third Place Books Lake Forest Park Tuesday, April 16. Tickets are available at thirdplacebooks.com. ■

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ART, ILLNESS, AND AUTO REPAIR

Cherdonna Makes a Compassionate Comeback

BY NICO SWENSON

think there is one thing we can agree on—we love Cherdonna Shinatra.

If that name escapes you, let me catch you up. Cherdonna is a self-described “movement artist who works in persona.” She’s been a key component of Seattle’s arts and entertainment scene for years—she won a Stranger Genius Award in 2015 and an Artist Trust Fellowship in 2017 and has held successful residencies at the Henry Art Gallery and the Frye Art Museum—and she’s internationally recognized as a profoundly

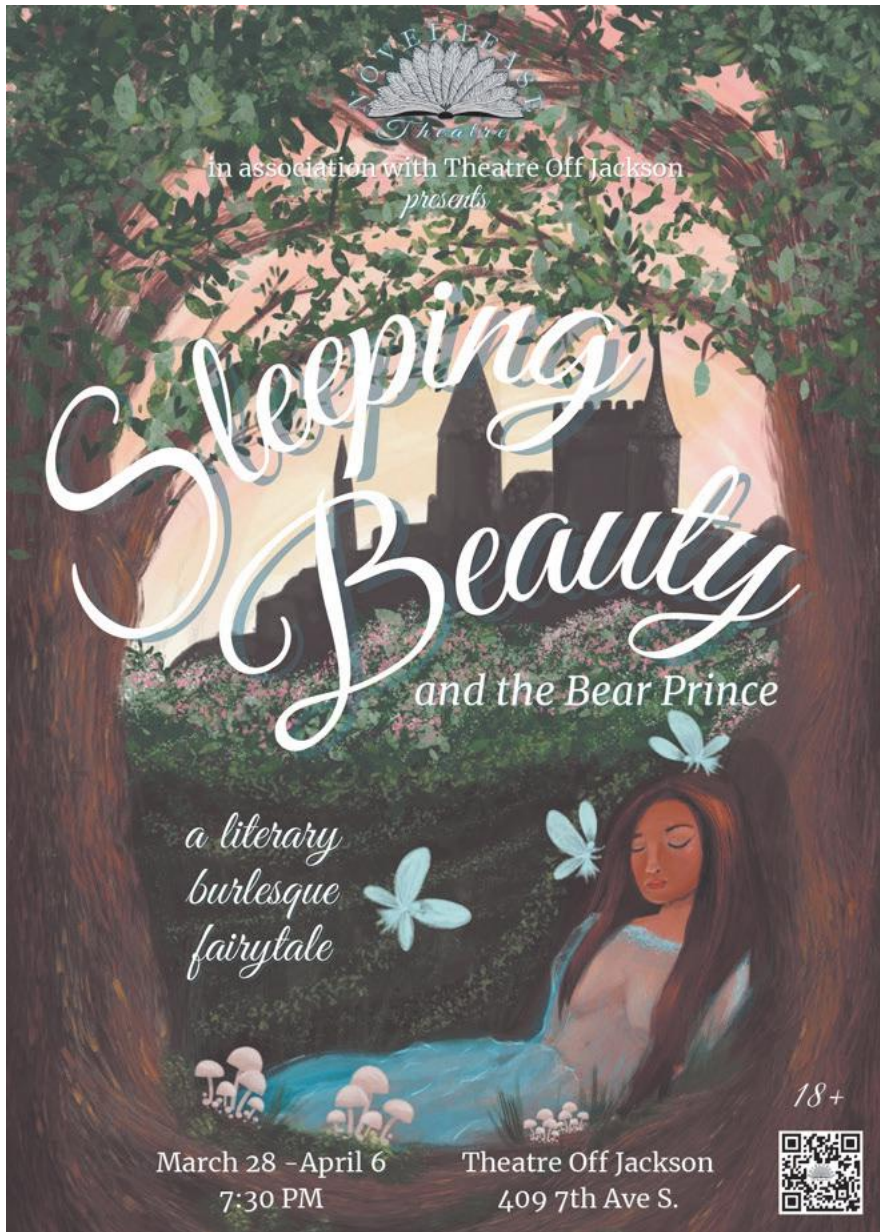
creative solo artist. But over the past year, a health crisis has taken Cherdonna away from the stage.


In March 2022 Jody Kuehner, aka Cherdonna, had a calendar packed with gigs and was at the height of her career. Having rebuilt opportunities from the stress of lockdown, she cranked into the year with her concurrently touring shows *Goodnight Cowboy* and *DITCH* in addition to a myriad of other bookings and residencies. She told herself, “Okay, this is what it is to be a profes-

sional artist. I just have to do all this, take all these jobs,” and “suck it up,” because that was the model of a successful working artist. Of course, as a solo artist, that drive came with a substantial amount of behind-the-scenes tasks and obstacles—from tight budgets and endless rehearsals to securing support for highly technical productions that had to be moved from state to state and across oceans. By January 2023, “weird stuff was starting.”

Kuehner had already been grappling with the feeling that her workload was too

much—she didn’t want to do anything but be an artist but faced the economic pressures of making an income from her craft. After enduring push and stress and keeping Cherdonna’s wild and wacky persona going at full speed, Kuehner’s immune system collapsed. She became susceptible to a dormant viral infection, developed a fever and rash, and was rendered bedridden. For the first three months, her thoughts were not focused on art but on whether she’d ever feel normal again. “This too shall pass” became her




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mantra as she confronted dramatic change. For the past year, she's been redeveloping her nervous system, focusing on her breathing, and redefining her relationship with work and creativity. The process has given her a new perspective on her body compared to her rigorous dance background. She's shifted her attitude on things like breaks and rehearsal schedules and generally learned to speak to herself with a more compassionate voice. Now all of this is getting put into prac-

“One of the biggest things that's helped and actually created change for me was compassion.”

tice as she steps back into her work. Through *On the Boards*, *Threesome* by Cherdonna & the Bearded Ladies opens April 18 at Repair Revolution, an LGBTQ-owned and operated auto repair shop in SODO. The performance stars Cherdonna Shintatra, Martha Graham Cracker, and Jarbeaux in a collaboration that explores the pertinent subject matter of “searching for stability while living in uncertainty.” *Threesome* was originally slated to premiere in 2023 but was postponed due to a separate health crisis of one of her fellow collaborators. Between the two experiences, the show has shifted in both content and process. As Kuehner explained, “The show has really become about our relationship to our bodies. We're working with this question of ‘How are you?’ and how it's become a thing in our language that's just a form of ‘hello.’” For Kuehner and her collaborators that's a real question right now. “My training has

come from the world of dance [where] you work and you work a bajillion hours and you push, push, push. Everything is for the work,” she said. “So much of what I just went through has to do with that, and so now as we pick up this show, I was like ‘I have to do things differently. I have to be a dance maker differently.’ That felt really hard and also just like new territory to me.”

The group has been practicing the best ways to be creatively equitable as a set of three traditionally solo artists. With distance and ongoing health recovery, they have utilized video rehearsals and different structures of the content they had been developing over the last three years. Trust in herself and her fellow entertainers has armored Kuehner against the pressures of the art world demanding that everything be constantly “new and different.”

Outside of *Threesome*, Kuehner is assessing other changes in her life and creative process moving forward. “Somehow this is going to come out in my work, but also just in what I decide to do in my life as a person.” When asked if the experience has changed her perception of success, she said, “It totally has. I followed this rule of, like, you put your career as an artist first—above all other work, above my housing, above my relationships. It just was, like, you have to do this if you want to make it, and I have gained a lot of success by doing that, but I think by ignoring all these other parts of my life, of course, it's now coming up as a detriment to me as a human... yeah, I don't want to do that anymore.”

Kuehner plans to explore what the typically wild Cherdonna is like in a capacity that poses less risk to her body. She's also looking into exploring more of her interests in general, including working with fabrics, materials, and music. “It feels like, after this April show is over, it feels a little wide open. That can be cool and exciting and also... I'm curious. I feel pretty open to go with whatever impulse happens.”

She also had some words of wisdom when asked what she would say to artists who are currently struggling on a similar path of potential burnout: “The hustle of it is bullshit... be on the internet less. Put your blinders on and stay your course. Really, what are you interested in? That's what I'm trying to enter into, too.” She encourages following your muse rather than industry pressures and approaching things with a lighter touch.

She says she has so much more understanding and compassion for those who are experiencing a health crisis or struggling with long COVID, chronic pain, a lasting illness, or any other curveball. That includes herself. “One of the biggest things that's helped and actually created change for me was compassion,” she said. “Talk about rigor! It's almost like rigorous compassion for yourself. This is where I'm at, and it is okay. That is way easier said than done. It can be so frustrating when you're like ‘I can't even get out of bed today; how am I going to be an artist?’ To have compassion for yourself is the hardest work and probably the most important work that a human can do in any scenario.”

.....
Cherdonna & the Bearded Ladies will perform Threesome at Repair Revolution April 18–20 and April 25–27. Tickets are available at ontheboards.org ■



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ISABEL HAGEN'S COMEDY STRINGS YOU ALONG

How a Juilliard-Trained Violist Found Harmony as a Stand-Up Comedian

BY DAVE SEGAL

Isabel Hagen has made the rare transition from in-demand session violist to stand-up comedian. To be sure, there's nothing funny about the New Yorker's sonorous contributions to works by revered minimalist composers Steve Reich and Max Richter, art-pop genius Björk, and jazz-funk wizards Medeski Martin & Wood, among others. But while she was bowing her way through courses at Juilliard and at prestigious concerts and studio dates, her mind was teeming with humorous ideas—concepts so rich that she began filming videos and winning stand-up awards, including one at Montréal's Just for Laughs festival.

All of this success culminated in an appearance on *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon*, a few days before the world

shut down in 2020. Now, Hagen stands out from the stand-up masses with a unique act in which she can segue from finessing a snippet of classical music to cracking a snappy joke about threesomes.

In an email interview with *The Stranger*, Hagen talks about her unusual entertainment-biz trajectory in advance of her May 31 performance at Benaroya Hall.

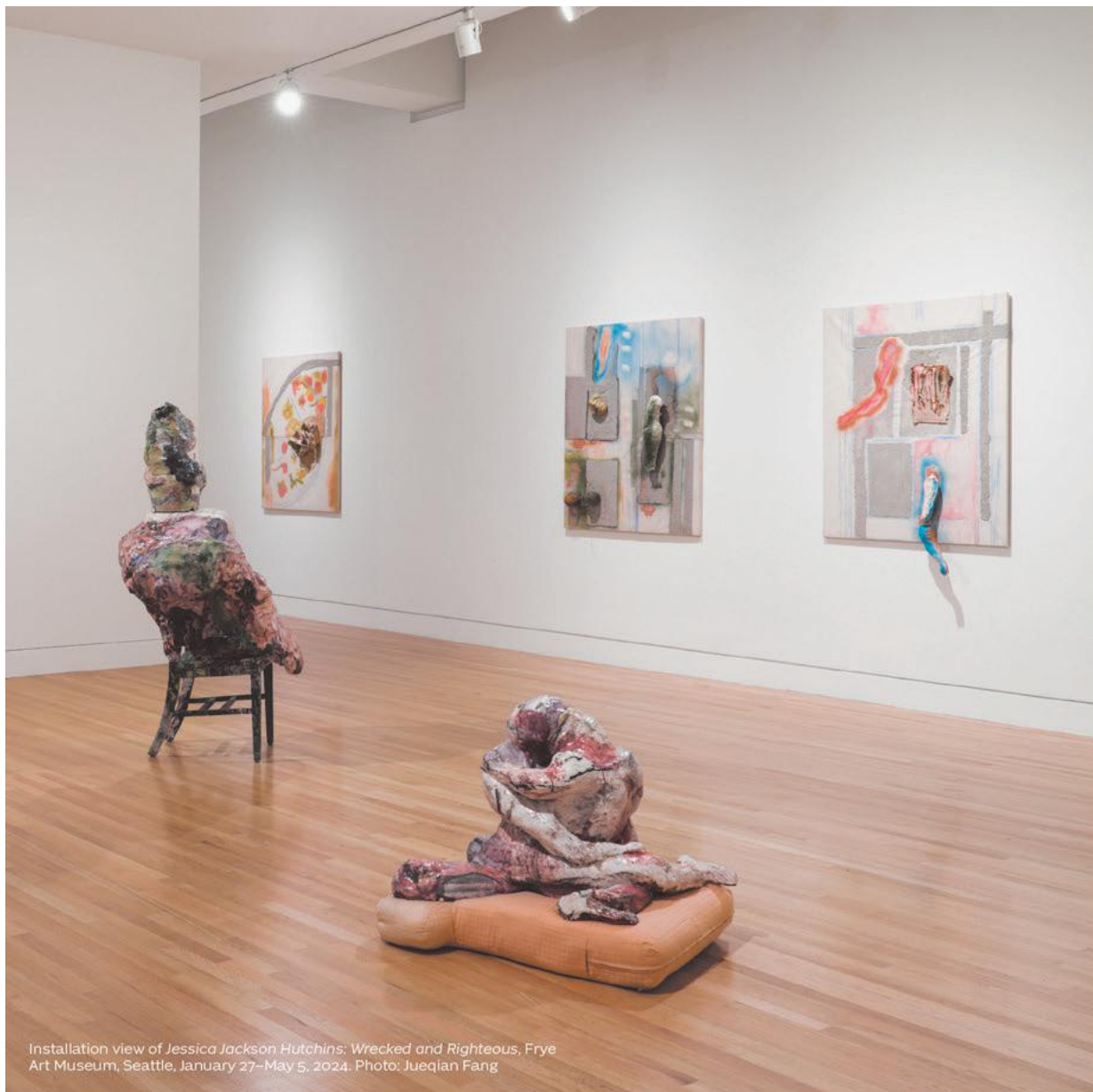
Why did you switch from violin to viola at age 10?

My older brother had a friend who played viola and I had a crush on him and thought viola seemed cooler than violin. Then after switching, I was much more in demand at my music school because not that many 10-year-olds played viola (most switch from



ARIN SANG-URAI

The world's only living stand-up who pairs classical music and comedy, probably.



Installation view of Jessica Jackson Hutchins: *Wrecked and Righteous*, Frye Art Museum, Seattle, January 27–May 5, 2024. Photo: Jueqian Fang

JESSICA JACKSON HUTCHINS

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violin at an older age), so I enjoyed being needed. I also enjoyed being the inner voice of chamber groups and the “team player” aspect of the viola.

What has been your most fulfilling musical gig, and why?

Probably touring with Max Richter and ACME, since Richter’s music is some of my favorite, so I got to play my favorite music with the composer himself. Also ACME members (American Contemporary Music Ensemble) are some of my good friends and best players.

What’s the funniest thing that’s happened to you or that you’ve observed in a musical context?

One time I played with a string quartet for a private dinner (just the couple and the quartet). We were in their mansion serenading them as they had a romantic dinner for two, and it was awkward.

Comedians who combine humor with music—such as Bo Burnham, Reggie Watts, and Tim Minchin—have risen to popularity in recent years. But—correct me if I’m wrong—you’re the only living comic who plays classical music in your stand-up sets. Initially, it seems like a dubious strategy, but in practice, the ultra-seriousness of the music enhances your humor, makes it pop harder. Will musical interludes remain a part of your act until further notice, or will they just be a sporadic thing?

I am constantly trying to grow and evolve as a comic and an artist. What I do on stage

is what feels right at the time, and it’s really hard to predict how I’ll continue to evolve. So I guess the answer is, I have no idea. I would imagine the viola will always remain a little part of what I do. But who knows?

You’re making a movie based on the *Is a Violist* video series. Do you find that it’s innately more difficult to derive humor from a classical musician’s circumstances, compared to other subjects that you explore in your stand-up sets? From what I’ve seen so far, the humor in those *Violist* clips is very subtle and tinged with darkness.

So far, deriving humor from my life as a classical musician has come very naturally, because it’s the world I’m most familiar with, and it’s easier for me to find the humor and to write about what I’m most familiar with. The humor in the series is subtle less because of the subject matter and more due to the medium—with narrative on-screen material, I enjoy humor that is less contrived and that depicts what actually happens in life and how funny/weird/uncomfortable it can be.

Which topics will you never address in your act, and why? Or are taboo subjects for the spineless?

I’ll never say never, and I rarely think of my

jokes within a topic, because the core of a joke is usually about something deeper, or at least is something that could be applied to a number of subjects—the topic is just the vehicle. But I try to not offend on stage, not because I’m spineless, but because if a joke is offensive, it’s more likely because it’s just not a good-enough/funny-enough joke. So if I say something and the audience tightens

“I’ve found just as much awe and wonder in a well-crafted fart joke as I have in a joke about what love is.”

up, I usually think, “Okay, the joke still needs work,” rather than “You can’t say anything anymore!”

What’s your take on bodily function jokes—lowest form of humor or universal bonding agent? Both? Are there fresh angles to be explored with them, or should we flush them down the toilet once and for all?

Again, I truly believe the topic is the vehicle. I’ve found just as much awe and wonder in a well-crafted fart joke as I have in a joke about what love is.

Is your music career on hold while you focus on comedy, or are you leaving it behind for good? I imagine the ego gratification and potential for more lucrative gigs make comedy the more attractive path, though I could be mistaken.

For many years, I’ve been gradually trying to shift where my income comes from. In the last couple of years, I’ve finally been making more as a comedian than a musician. From the

beginning when I started comedy open mics, and even before when I struggled with a recurring wrist injury and crippling performance anxiety (that manifested itself as shaking, which negatively affected my viola playing but not my joke-telling), I’ve felt like comedy was more of a true calling, as it taps into a more creative part of myself. Also, I’m just more suited for the life of a comic, I’ve found. But I don’t feel I’m leaving anything behind (except for some specific types of gigs I didn’t enjoy doing), more just expanding myself.

Please hype all of your current/near-future projects. How is *On a String* going, and do you know when will the public be able to view it?

I have a newsletter where I write more in-depth about some of the topics these questions covered. It’s weekly-ish and it’s the best way to stay up-to-date on everywhere I’ll be performing and everything I’m up to. I’m trying to gradually shift away from algorithm-based social media and more towards the newsletter [*Notes from a Successful Failure*] as a slower, more intentional way to connect with those who enjoy my work.

On a String is in post-production. We are getting it ready for 2025 festival submissions. It’s hard to predict when it will be available to the public, since we probably won’t premiere it until it premieres at a festival.

.....
Isabel Hagen performs at Benaroya Hall Friday, May 31. Tickets are available at seattlesymphony.org. ■

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IT'S IMPORTANT THAT THE BUG UNDULATES

How Anida Yoeu Ali Uses Wiggling Worms and Glitter as Forms of Protest

BY LINDSAY COSTELLO

Anida Yoeu Ali deals heavily in dichotomies and paradoxes. As a first-generation Muslim Khmer artist born in Cambodia and raised in Chicago, Ali's works tease out the spiritual and political underpinnings of her hybrid transnational identity. Her textile works simultaneously veil and draw attention to the form that wears them; in performance, she becomes both dazzling and obscured, a solitary mythopoetic entity who also fosters face-to-face public encounters. Ali identifies as a political agitator, and she's one you might have spotted before. On November 9, 2016, the day after Donald Trump was elected president, she appeared in the center of Pike Place Market as the Red Chador, carrying a sign: I AM A MUSLIM on one side, BAN ME on the other.

Hybrid Skin, Mythical Presence, Seattle Asian Art Museum's first solo exhibition of

a Cambodian American artist, celebrates two of Ali's most monumental performance installations: *The Buddhist Bug*, a 300-foot undulating worm who represents both Islam and Buddhism, and *The Red Chador*, a glittering protester of Islamophobia who emerged, died, and was reborn again, a rainbow-hued phoenix from the ashes.

Ahead of her performances this spring, I spoke with Ali about absurdity, grief, the diasporic dilemma, cosmogonies, and *Dune*.

How did you land on the title of your exhibition, *Hybrid Skin, Mythical Presence*?

A lot of my performance installation work uses textiles, which I consider to be an extension of my skin and a way to extend my body into public space. It's a metaphor for when I used to write poetry—the words would fill a space. Those words were often narrative-driven, but they failed me internationally. When I started to share the English-based

spoken-word poetry with an international audience, it fell short. People didn't understand the nuance of the stories in the work. They would understand that I was angry or enraged or passionate, but they missed the stories themselves because of the translation, or because it was, to them, a foreign language.

So I made a shift. From 2004 on, I started to develop performance installations and create things that were more rooted in being silent, using performative gestures, colors, and textiles. Essentially, it made sense to use the word *hybrid* [in the show title] because my work has always been a fusion, and my identity as someone who's multi-ethnic is a fusion of multiple cultures. *Hybrid Skin, Mythical Presence* made sense because I was also thinking about heroine figures and the creation of larger-than-life personas. Each time I create them, it feels like they are all rooted in a creation mythology.

I'm interested in how you center textiles in your performances, particularly wearables. When you wear these pieces, do you enact any specific mythical heroines—feminist, queer, or otherwise? Or are you constructing a character that's entirely your own?

It's the latter. I'm completely constructing it—an entity that's different, new, original to me. These entities are, in many ways, grabbing onto people's curiosities. In the case of *The Buddhist Bug*, the creature moves very, very slowly and has no arms, but they can beckon people forward, just by motioning and softening with their eyes. [Ali uses "they" and "she" interchangeably when referring to the bug.]

I think the most memorable instance of this was in Malaysia. There was a patron who visited a gallery there who I was told later was a pretty difficult person. This man was standing in the doorway for a while, and he was so curious: *Why is this woman artist in this orange, worm-like creature outfit? What is*



IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST, © STUDIO REVOLT, PHOTO: DYLAN MADDUX

Abbey Road, *The Red Chador: Genesis I*, Main St. & 102nd Ave, Bellevue, Washington.

he supposed to do? I had a moment of locking eyes with him and beckoning him forward. He got down on his knees. We smiled, and then he let me put my head on his shoulders.

I think that these performances are powerful to witness and powerful to experience. That's what I love about the costumes being wearable—they become part of me, and I take on these characters, but each one is also semi-autobiographical. There is an element of science fiction in them; they have my love of flamboyant fashion. I'm also thinking about the bug representing both Islam and Buddhism and the Red Chador being Muslim and Catholic. I have a real love for Catholic pageantry, bishops, cardinals, and their regalia. I think of these wearables as a kind of regalia.

The story you just told brings me to another question I had about the bug. I saw a video on your Instagram feed of children exploring and playing around the bug in the museum space. Could you elaborate on your choice to snake this 300-foot piece throughout the gallery? How do you envision the sheer physicality of it landing with viewers, and how does that physicality tie in with the wider themes of the work?

The bug often becomes an immersive installation. I want people to come up close, to extend the narrative of the bug further. It's made of soft textile—just thread, tubing, and fabric. I do very simple sketches; I have no 3D modeling going in. Sometimes it's difficult for installers to understand my process. It's important that the bug undulates.

When you're looking at the sculpture, you're looking at an entity that is trying to figure out why and how their body fits into the space. It's an amazing structure and precious to me, but not so precious that the viewer doesn't get to be close to it. It's very important that they are immersed in it, and that they see the complexity of the twists and turns. When it's down on the ground and trying to move up, it is trying to discover itself.

I love it when kids have that moment of wonder when they enter the space. That's the interventionist quality of my work, that aspect of absorbing you into the world of the bug, which is so orange. That concept comes from my experience of overwhelm as an ethnic minority in Cambodia, where it's 98% Buddhist. When you travel to Southeast Asia, you do feel the overwhelming presence of Buddhism. It's everywhere. It's reflected through the saffron robes of the Buddhist monks. I realized how hard my parents tried to give us their Islamic culture because that was what they prized and that

was what got them through the genocidal period—preserving that part of our heritage as Cambodian Muslims.

I've read that you also describe the bug as an assertion of paradoxes. Can you speak more about the paradoxes that you see within this fluctuating, stretchy being?

I think that, to me, paradox is also rooted in the complexity of what is called a diasporic dilemma—constantly fluctuating between insider and outsider perspectives at any one point. You're never quite an American in America. You're never quite Cambodian in Cambodia. When the bug is in Cambodia, they traverse through the rural and the urban. It's also playing on nostalgic ruminations. Often, diasporic people have an idea of the motherland that's rooted in their parents' past and ideals. The ideal landscapes that we think of as quintessentially Cambodian are often rooted in rurality. You see the bug traveling through these luscious rural landscapes—a lagoon, palm trees, rice fields—and they emerge out into the city of Phnom Penh, with rapid urbanization and rapid globalization.

The bug makes a realistic image surreal—another paradox I'm setting up. *What is going on in this picture? What is it that the bug is trying to mediate at this moment? What am I looking at, and why?* In most of the images, people are not looking into the camera or not even mindful of the bug's presence. Maybe one or two people will gawk, but everybody else is going about their business. That's done intentionally—the bug thinks they belong perfectly in a classroom amongst Cambodian children [for example], but as their body coils around the room, their classmate looks at them a little strangely. So perhaps they don't belong, or they've been questioned about whether they belong in this place.

Speaking of the surreality of the bug character, can we talk a little bit about your choice to inject your work with absurd humor? Is that a more recent choice for you?

It's an extension of my personality, for sure. When I was making spoken-word work and my one-woman show, the work was heavy and dealt with personal history—my rage as a young Asian American woman growing up in America. I felt like, *Wow, being political really makes you serious*. Those who know me know my ridiculousness and my strong sense of humor, but it wasn't coming out in the work. That was when I shifted to creating these personas. Being in silence made the work more complex. The humor and the absurdity emerged through creating an entity out of enormous

amounts of fabric. It's over the top. The Islamic part of [the bug's design] is modeled after hijab, and the bug is exercising the rules of modest dress in Islam. I'm going over the top in fulfilling those rules of modest dress by only showing the face and the feet.

In the first iteration of *The Red Chador*, she was an executioner of French baguettes in a 12-hour durational piece at the Palais de Tokyo. Again, I used my sense of humor. She made 12 absurdist demands over 12 hours. They were intended to be rhetorical demands that you couldn't fulfill unless you thought creatively. I'm holding the baguettes hostage, and if the demand isn't met, just like a kidnaper, I would then proceed with beheading a French baguette. What surprised me the most in that durational performance was that the French audience was so engaged. They really wanted to save the baguettes.

As the Red Chador, I was a very kind executioner. One of my demands was for someone to bring me all the flags of the former French colonies. A group of students researched and drew all of the flags, then presented the drawings to me. They had to say all the names of the different countries. The French refuse to talk about their colonial pasts, and they refuse to talk about race issues. They don't even take data on race. As the Red Chador, I said, *I will accept this answer. You have fulfilled the demand. Here's the baguette*. The room erupted with clapping. So as absurd as some of these requests were, they weren't impossible.

I read that the original Red Chador garment was dubiously lost in transit in Tel Aviv, after which you publicly commemorated, memorialized, and grieved it. You've since decided to resurrect the performance. I'm curious if you could explain a little more about that work's themes, and why it feels important to continue sharing it.

Initially, when the garment disappeared, I needed a period to grieve. It was a really deep loss. I've dealt with so much loss within my work—from a gallery fire, to termites, to flood damage, and an assault on my work in 2010. This loss put me in such a horrible place that I didn't feel like I could recreate the garment at that time. I was really sad for her and how she died—trapped, alone, inside luggage in a dark place, never to see the light of day after the Kuala Lumpur performance, where the last version of the original *Red Chador* was performed. I'd packed her up in my luggage to come to Tel Aviv for a talk I did in Ramallah. A friend mentioned that I should grieve her properly, and that maybe if I saw [the garment] as a person, not as a persona, then I

should give a eulogy.

It wasn't until 2019, when I had the opportunity for a commissioning residency with the Shangri La Museum of Islamic Art, Culture & Design in Honolulu, that the idea of reclaiming the work arose. I felt disrupted; it was taken from me before *The Red Chador* was fully realized. This commissioning residency gave me the resources, but it also felt like it was meaningful and poetic to reclaim it in Hawaii. I thought, *Why Hawaii? Does this feel like the right moment to reimagine this and add to the creation mythology of the Red Chador?* In my research, it felt right that it was an Islamic museum that was supporting the work, and it felt right that it was in Hawaii, because Hawaiian legislatures were the first to stand up against Trump's attempted Muslim ban.

Also, *ānuenuē* is the word for “rainbow” in Hawaiian. In Hawaiian culture, *ānuenuē* carries bodies. There's a celestial element to it—it helps to bridge the living and the dead. So I thought, maybe from the cracks of the American empire, this creature could re-emerge. That's part of the creation mythology aspect of the work. I felt that the original work had died alone, and I didn't want to set that up again. She was rebirthed with friends—a rainbow brigade—that she can now walk with as a strong, protective sisterhood collective. The use of the different colors of the rainbow spectrum in the piece is intentional to align struggles. If I fight Islamophobia, I want to align that with the struggles with homophobia. It's something that all religious communities need to be interrogating—let's look at other alignments and let's create a sense of solidarity and inclusivity.

One last question—I've heard you're a sci-fi fan. Are there any specific sci-fi influences present in this show?

Well, the bug obviously has resonance with [the sandworm] in *Dune*, and you can see the costuming of the Imperial Guards in *Star Wars* in *The Red Chador*. The funny thing is, when I conceive of a project, I don't intentionally reference sci-fi characters in my sketches or color choices. I realize it later on because I'm such a fan of science fiction that it's embedded in me.

.....
Hybrid Skin, Mythical Presence is at the Seattle Asian Art Museum through July 7. Anida Yoeu Ali will perform The Buddhist Bug at the Seattle Asian Art Museum Saturday, March 23, 11 am–2 pm. She'll perform The Red Chador (Afterlife) at the Seattle Art Museum Saturday, June 1, 9 am–3 pm. Tickets to both are available at seattleartmuseum.org. ■



Kathy Ross, *The Bird's the Word*, 2022, Cynthia Sears Artists' Books Collection

MARCH 1 - JUNE 2, 2024

An inventor of worlds and a narrator of stories, Kathy Ross (Harstine Island) has been a favorite in BIMA's past group exhibitions. Ross sculpts the "cookie-sharing, tea-packaging, grocery and thrift store worlds" of tin into serious fun. A circus of sorts, this solo exhibition will entertain, scare, and predict futures all at once.



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THE POWER OF MAKING PEOPLE OF COLOR INVISIBLE

Stephanie Syjuco Empowers
the Oppressed with Just a Finger

BY CHARLES MUDEDE



Block Out the Sun (detail), 2019.

PHOTO: STEPHANIE SYJUCO

My appreciation for Stephanie Syjuco's impressive and influential body of work—the latest of which, *After/Images*, will be on display at Frye Art Museum in June—begins with Alfred Hitchcock's 1959 thriller *North by Northwest*.

The key scene in this movie, for me, is when Cary Grant is on the Chicago-bound 20th Century Limited train. What gets me every time we are in the dining cars is not the Hollywood hunk (Cary Grant) or the blonde bombshell (Eva Marie Saint), but the unnamed and silent Black men working the bars and tables. They are on the edges of the scene. But I no-

tice them and not the white-bright stars. I see members of my family in them. Those who worked jobs just like they do. Even the Black hand that serves Grant a cocktail is recognizable. That is a big part of the film for me, and also why I have a deep and lasting appreciation for Syjuco's work. Her zone of interest is the visible and invisible at the edges of her and my culture, Western culture.

Second, I'm a neo-structuralist. I still very much believe in the theoretical regimes developed in this period (the 1960s), and mostly in France (though continued in the UK by the Black sociologist Stuart Hall). Structuralism's explanatory power has, even in our

time, yet to be exhausted—and, fundamentally, never needed post-structuralism in the way modernism needed post-modernism. I believe in the basics of this movement (semiotics) and its founders and refiners (Ferdinand de Saussure, Roland Barthes, Julia Kristeva). This is why the work of early Barthes (structuralism) can explain Syjuco's artistic interventions better than the work of Gilles Deleuze or Michel Foucault (post-structuralism). The Manila, Philippines-born and San Francisco-raised Syjuco recognizes that there is no document in "civilization" that's not coded. The question for her is, then: What does the code represent? What is its historical context? What structures it? Is it liberating? Or is it oppressive? And if the latter, how can we recode (liberate) the code?

At times, for Syjuco, all it takes is a finger.

In her series *Block Out the Sun*, Syjuco makes the visible Filipinos in archival black-and-white photographs invisible with her hand. The exploitation, the humiliation (those, for example, performing Filipino village life during the St. Louis World's Fair in 1904 for white gazers) are made invisible. You can't see them. You see instead their

setting (the "living exhibit's" fake village) or their superiors (white Americans). This simple intervention unexpectedly makes those we do not see more visible. And here we find the strange power of Syjuco's invisibility. It's strange because it's also the very opposite of the Black visibility in my Hitchcock scene. Here, when I placed the finger in my mind on Cary Grant and Eva Marie Saint, what I saw was the Black life on the edge of the narrative's core. I saw someone who looks just like my uncle—the one who likes fishing and lots of sugar in his morning tea. That's him at work. There, behind the bar. But in *Block Out the Sun*, we enter the other

side of my recoding at the edges. Those not seen are empowered. How is this possible?

The key is found in the final essay, "Escaping the Archive's Gaze," in Frye's superb book for the exhibit, *After/Images*. Aruna D'Souza, the essay's writer, presents—after explaining the massive amount of time and energy Syjuco committed to the archives in several American institutions, and how this research has been at the center of her recent work, and the installations, footage, modified photographs, photographs of photographs, time-spoiled photographs, texts, and images from Seattle's Filipino community in Frye's exhibit—"one of the key ideas in the Martinican poet and post-colonial theorist Édouard Glissant's *Poetics of Relation*." It was "originally published in French in 1990." The idea is simply this: "the right to opacity." But the idea's simplicity (and even obviousness, particularly in the present age of AI) is also sophisticated, as it "stands in opposition to Western ontology's demand for transparency—a demand to probe the secrets of the Other (whether an individual or a culture) as a precondition for understanding them."

What is this right to opacity about? D'Souza writes:

The demand for transparency, Glissant points out, has determined every aspect of the West's colonial enterprises: it motivated the colonial authorities who wanted to count, classify, and catalogue the inhabitants of their newly conquered lands... For a colonial subject to insist on opacity in the face of this demand to bare oneself to the gaze of colonizers and their knowledge gatherers was to assert the right to remain unknown, to reveal oneself only within a relationship of equality and consent—in other words, quite the opposite of the relationships produced by imperial domination.

In a nutshell, it's the right to be seen and also not seen. The Filipinos in the images Syjuco found in the archives did not have this right. They were forced to be seen. And so, in this sense, visibility was not empowering. It was violently oppressive. And this is the genius of Syjuco's *Block Out the Sun* series—a genius found in her other projects, such as the textual "Blind Spot"—she can recode by the direct act of un-coding. The code does not vanish when it's unseen. It does not become invisible. It is, in the most fundamental sense, recoded.

.....
Stephanie Syjuco: *After/Images* shows at Frye Art Museum June 1–September 8. ■

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BLOWING MINDS AND MELTING FACES

Thunderpussy Celebrate Their Survival with a Surprising Benaroya Hall Takeover

BY NATHALIE GRAHAM

Thunderpussy almost didn't make it. The future looked bright for the band when they released their debut full-length *Thunderpussy* in 2018. They earned critical acclaim for their riff-filled brand of '70s-inspired rock, got featured in *Rolling Stone* as Mike McCready's "favorite new band," and ended the year signing to a major label, Republic Records's subsidiary Stardog.

In the years that followed, though, things took a turn. It wasn't clear whether the band would ever release a second record, let alone exist. But, after years full of heartbreak, loss, and uncomfortable but necessary metamorphosis, Thunderpussy are back, they're stronger than ever, and they're ready to blow the lid off Benaroya Hall in May.

In the ultimate celebration of the band's survival, Thunderpussy will (finally!) release their second full-length, *West*, alongside the full 54-piece Seattle Symphony in a boundary-pushing immersive show.

"We've had ups and downs and love and loss and transitions," said the band's vocalist Molly Sides. "At the end of the day, knowing that I can come home to my community in Seattle as my anchor, as my nest—I want to celebrate that as much as I do the music and the performance and the environment. Benaroya feels like such a special fucking space to do that."

The big, hair-whipping sound of Thunderpussy—Sides's at-times-crooning, at-times-growling vocals; the stuttering, thumping heartbeat of the drums; the thrill of the electric guitar—has always birthed big, outrageous, over-the-top performances. That's how Sides intended it.

"We first started Thunderpussy to create a space where people can come in and forget what's happening out in the world, connect to each other, rock out, dance, and feel something different from before," she said.

Sides and guitarist Whitney Petty have dreamed of a show like this for years.

"Molly and I have wanted to combine dance and rock in a way that is more orchestral and cinematic and a sort of rock opera," Petty said.

That dream, complete with the orchestra and the dancers, will be coming true on May 10. But it couldn't have happened without the years-long gauntlet they navigated both as a band and as individuals.

The Gauntlet

Sides and Petty founded Thunderpussy about 10 years ago, right around the time when the two first started dating. Sides, from Idaho, and Petty, from Georgia, found each other in Seattle. The two's love story became intertwined with their independent love affairs with the city. Sides was a dancer at Cornish College of the Arts. Petty had been a deckhand on boats who

looked forward to every time the boat docked in Seattle because of the culture and the life in the city. At the first opportunity, she moved to Seattle.

During the pandemic, while working on *West*, the two broke up. With the split and other challenges the pandemic wrought—they lost their record deal, their agents lost their jobs, and performing live, the band's lifeblood, was temporarily banned—Thunderpussy's future looked bleak.

"We thought Thunderpussy might disappear," Petty said. "I definitely didn't think we'd be able to finish the record, let alone perform together."

"That was another question: 'Can we continue to do this? Are we making Fleetwood Mac's *Rumours* right now?'" Petty said, adding with a laugh, "[That's] their best record, so I hope we are."

Then, in 2022, Alice in Chains invited Thunderpussy to open for them on their summer tour.

"It was hard for us to be together and try to dig it out," Petty explained. "Then, to be onstage together and sing 'The Cloud' together—that was our love song—how are we supposed to do it?"

But, they couldn't pass up the opportunity. They performed and things felt normal. "It was fucking sun and rainbows and everyone was happy," Petty said.

Petty's voice caught in her throat as she talked about the breakup. While things are much healthier between the two now, she still feels the pain.

"Losing the relationship between Molly and I was a huge loss," she said. "That will be present for a long time in my life. It's been devastating in so many ways—and beautiful in so many others that we continue to fucking love each other."

West was born out of this loss as well as the grief both Sides and Petty experienced when their last living grandparents died.

"Isn't it weird that you feel all of a sudden like a grown-up when you lose your last ties to your parents' parents?" Petty asked. Even though both she and Sides are in their mid-to-late thirties, they both felt a weird maturation that came with this grief.

The album is about maturing, Petty explained, both personally and as artists. She said she started writing one of the songs, "Misty Morning," almost 10 years ago, but she wasn't a talented-enough writer or guitarist to finish it back then.

"This record has absolutely been an exercise in patience," Petty said.

For Sides, *West* is "fueled by a color wheel of emotions. It's a labor of love and grief and sadness and every emotion in between. COVID shattered everything apart. Now we get to put the pieces back together again to make everything glow. To bring light into the darkness we've been in."



PHOTOS: SARAH CRAIG

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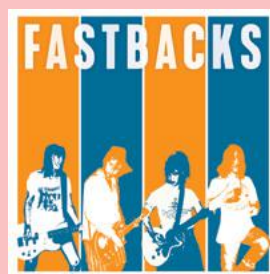
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PHOTOS: BRITTNE LUNNISS

Blowing Minds and Melting Faces

Around 40% of the shows the Seattle Symphony presents are “pop culture” shows rather than classical music, according to Carissa Castaldo, popular programming administrator at the Seattle Symphony and Benaroya Hall. But “it is not every day that an orchestra gets to drop a pop album to the public,” Castaldo wrote in an email.

A symphony collaboration like this album debut allows a completely different

experience from a regular show, Castaldo explained.

“More and more, we are finding pop artists who want to collaborate with a symphony because they are craving a more robust musical presentation—something that cannot be done in a big arena and that makes the audience focused on the music versus the production,” she said.

The collaboration only happened because Sides made it happen. Working with Andrew

Joslyn, a Seattle-area composer and producer who arranged the strings for *West*, the two went to the Symphony with the idea for the show. Sides made a PowerPoint presentation. She hopped on a litany of conference calls.

“I feel so incredibly grateful that they’re taking a chance on us, that they’re open to saying ‘Thunderpussy’ in the campaign and the marketing,” Sides said.

The Thunderpussy name has been polarizing since the band’s inception—it took five years and two US Supreme Court Cases before they could legally trademark the name for the first time in 2020. Now, the symphony is fully embracing it, though admittedly, “it took a minute for some staff to get used to hearing

“Like walking through a thick fog to the center of the witch’s brew.” And the symphony understood. “They’re like ‘That’s what we’re going for!’ I feel very David Lynch in that way.”

She hopes that witchy feeling, and all the other feelings embedded in this production, come across to the audience. She’s been working nonstop on the show to ensure the result is far more than just a concert.

“My hope is we are creating an environment—it is not a show, it is not a performance—it is an all-encompassing, all-embracing, supportive environment,” she said.

That means dance performances before the show, during the show, and after the show from local dancers and choreographers Alice Gosti and Amy J. Lambert.

Sides wouldn’t say much more about the performances except that “Thunderpussy is taking over Benaroya Hall. The *whole* hall.”

In the meantime, the band, which also includes bassist Leah Julius and drummer Michelle Nuño, is rehearsing like crazy so they can “blow minds and melt faces,” Petty said. They’ll only rehearse twice with the full symphony before showtime, so that independent work is crucial.

Petty said that Thunderpussy had gotten to a point where they knew each other so well that they could just show up to a show without rehearsing and nail it. This show won’t be like that, she said.

“We are going to rehearse our butts off for this like it’s our first-ever show,” Petty said. “This is probably the most important thing I’ve done in my life.”

Whatever happens on May 10, you can bet your ass it will be one of a kind.

“We try to thread the line between classy and trashy, swanky and janky,” Sides said. “This feels more classy, and yet still a little unhinged.” ■

“COVID shattered everything apart. Now we get to put the pieces back together again to make everything glow. To bring light into the darkness we’ve been in.”

“Thunderpussy’ in meetings,” Castaldo said.

“I feel like this has been such a new can of worms that has opened for everybody and we’re all ready to get into the can together and shake it up,” Sides said.

One of the most gratifying parts of this experience for Sides has been communicating with the symphony about her vision.

When describing how she envisioned the orchestral arrangement of the song “Misty Morning,” Sides didn’t speak in “music terms.” Instead, she explained it as a feeling:

.....
Thunderpussy play Benaroya Hall Friday, May 10, with the Seattle Symphony. Tickets are available at seattlesymphony.org.

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SINCERELY JOKING

Chastity Belt Live, Laugh, and Love 10 Years On

BY VIVIAN McCALL



LOL, JK.

JENA FELDMAN

It's been nearly five years since the Seattle indie band Chastity Belt released a full album, and you can blame that on life circumstances, said drummer Gretchen Grimm on a recent Zoom call.

For example, school and work has scattered the bandmates across the world. Grimm was calling from Seattle, where she works full-time for a home care and hospice company, while bassist Annie Truscott was calling in from LA, where they're currently studying Chinese medicine and acupuncture. Julia Shapiro, who lived briefly in LA but moved back to Seattle, works at two record labels. Guitarist Lydia Lund is furthest from home

base—she currently lives in London and is studying for a master's degree in plant and fungal taxonomy. She just started her thesis on a group of nettles native to Hawaii.

"I'm spending a lot of time in the herbarium with my little light-up magnifying glass looking at tiny flowers trying to distinguish, like, are there four sepals or five?" she said with a laugh. "It's kind of ridiculous. I don't know how to feel about it completely, but I'm on an adventure."

It's all very adult, and living far apart doesn't leave much time for playing music together on a regular basis. As much as they would love to, "We also need to be able to do

other things in life," Shapiro said.

The band formed as a joke in 2010, when the four members entered a battle of the bands at Whitman College in Walla Walla, Washington. From the start, they have been cool critical darlings who never took themselves too seriously, despite whatever praise Pitchfork (RIP), NPR, and even us at *The Stranger* threw their way. They remain as they always were, four friends who like making music together and do it well.

Their smart, funny punk songs that threw real gravity behind post-grad concerns—like the highs and lows of fucking and drugs, or zooming out on life at a dumb party—caught

fire with 2013's *No Regerts*.

They were the antithesis of the conceited, self-consciousness-masking, indie rock glut of the early 2010s and thumped out a banger record every two years up to their self-titled in 2019. They retained a sense of humor while writing bigger, slower, more gorgeous songs. See any video—no, any image—they've ever created, from their (in-) famous steak-padded-to-the-crotch photoshoot to spoofing Temple of the Dog's "Hunger Strike" in the video for "Different Now," or trouncing around Seattle in clown makeup for their 2021 single "Fake."

Their new release, *Live Laugh Love* (due



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March 22 via Suicide Squeeze) is no exception. The songs are honest confessions about frustrated aimlessness, loneliness, and finding purpose and beauty with the people you love, but delivered with their trademark sense of humor.

Take the influencer-spoofing video for the first single and opening track, "Hollow." It's as funny as it is sad, a parody of our late-capitalist hellscape that features Shapiro stuffing a mustard-smeared raw chicken breast with baby spinach, like one of those rage-inducing-for-some, porn-for-others food videos all over social media (minus the obligatory meathead holding the camera and moaning about how good it looks). Truscott plays a fitness guru, Grimm a skincare girly grifter, and Lund a wellness vlogger with a bundle of sage and a singing bowl. In the end, they're dancing in a room decorated in white millennial autumn-core and taking selfies on the couch with a glowing pseudo-neon sign behind them that reads "it's a vibe."

At the shoot, they were just taking turns trying to make one another laugh. They wanted to try out a bit as a mom influencer but, as it turns out, "It's hard to find a baby."

The *Laugh* title itself isn't a complete joke. I asked if it was a comment on how people mask those three emotions.

"The title was funny, or tongue-in-cheek," Shapiro said. "Then, earnestly, it's like, well, yeah, the songs are about, you know, living, laughing, and loving. [Laughs.] So it's layered."

Laugh came together very intentionally during three once-a-year intensive recording sessions starting in January



Hashtag blessed.

JENA FELDMAN

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2020. The band gathered in LA, rehearsed for one or two days, and then went to Seahorse Sound to record for four or five days with engineer Samur Khouja, who also recorded 2019's *Chastity Belt*. Khouja, a collaborator of the electric Welsh singer-songwriter Cate Le Bon, performs as Conscious Summary and has worked with

indie acts such as Devendra Banhart, Feist, the Garden, Deerhunter, and Regina Spektor. Recording their parts on the spot after almost no preparation left little room for overthinking, said Shapiro. The slow stylistic drift to songs with dreamier textures has been a natural progression.

"We've never been the sort of band that's

like 'We're gonna sound like this band,' or whatever," she said. "I think that part of the reason is because this is all our first band. We started playing music together, and our sound is just, like, what we sound like when we all play music together."

For instance, "Tethered" began as a joke song with joke lyrics (they didn't say what about) that existed as a voice memo for years before they decided to record it for real. Af-

"The title was funny, or tongue-in-cheek. Then, earnestly, it's like, well, yeah, the songs are about, you know, living, laughing, and loving."

ter listening back to learn their parts, they still weren't sure, because all they had was a nice vocal melody and no lyrics. One late night, Grimm started layering percussion. She pulled out a whip, snapping it to the beat, knocking things down all around the room.

"It was incredible to witness," Truscott said. "It was just like uncontrollable laughing moments of, like, 'What the fuck?'"

"Gretchen is a genius," Shapiro said.

"In my mind, I was like 'That's not gonna make it on there,'" said Truscott. "And then, hearing them mix it, I was like 'There it is.'"

Last year, the band celebrated the 10-year anniversary of *No Regerts* with a party at Linda's on Capitol Hill. They had no plans to record their breakout until their friend Matt Kolhede asked if they wanted to record something for their new tape label Help Yourself Records. Listening back now is a fun and sweet reminder of a different time, said Lund. Truscott said the songs carried over from their college days don't fit with the others. Grimm said it's almost hard to talk about what's changed about the band in that time period, but what keeps bringing them back together is that they still have fun together. Shapiro said that, at the time, they didn't have an audience and were writing the songs for themselves. They didn't know what they were doing, and that's why it sounds so pure, she said. The industry side of music can weigh on her.

"I've personally become way more jaded," Shapiro said. "Doing the album cycle over and over again. It gets a little old, you know? ... It'd be nice if it was all just like writing and playing songs, and that's all we had to do. But I think that we've gotten a lot better at our instruments and playing together, just like how quickly we can write our parts to songs is pretty amazing. I think we've just like grown together in a nice way."

Chastity Belt play the Crocodile Thursday, April 18, with Peel Dream Magazine. Tickets are available at thecrocodile.com. ■

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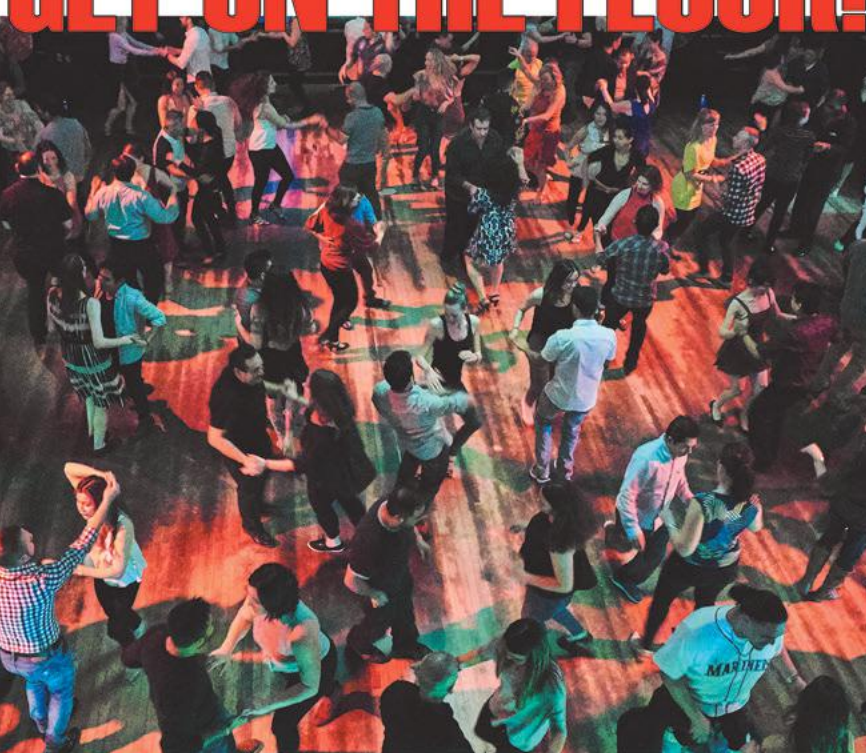
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BY CHARLES MUDEDE

Let's begin with *The Six Million Dollar Man*. The TV show ran from 1973 to 1978. The star, Lee Majors, played an astronaut who, after his body is damaged in the crash of a test plane/spacecraft, is transformed, with the top technology of the day, into a cyborg: part human but mostly wires, circuits, metal gears, and synthetic skin. The operation cost \$6 million (roughly equal to \$40 million in today's money). The opening for the show is just mesmerizing.

After the test craft hits the ground and explodes, an off-camera narrator, Oscar Goldman, speaks to the members of a secret government agency with the deepest pockets. He says: "Gentlemen, we can rebuild him. We have the technology. We have the capability to make the world's first bionic man. Steve Austin will be that man. Better than he was before. Better... stronger... faster." At the last word, the show's theme erupts into accelerating bongos, whirling and blasting horns, and a hard-funk bass line. By the end of the sequence, you are sold. Indeed, the show could never be as good as that opening: Lee Majors's fast-motion running to a funky beat. It has to be downhill from there. But no matter. All of the garbage in the show had nothing on the music, which was written and produced by one of jazz's greatest intellectuals, Oliver Nelson.

This arranger, composer, conductor, and saxophonist also made, in 1961, the jazz classic *The Blues and the Abstract Truth*, a work that is everything that *The Six Million Dollar Man* theme is not. It is not the kind of music that can capture the incredible speed of a human/machine. Its structure, pace switches, and harmonic innovations are too heady for that sort of entertainment. Here we are presented with the art of a highly educated musician.

In the late '50s, Nelson studied composition and music theory at universities in his hometown, St. Louis, Missouri. (He also studied, according to an article on JazzProfiles, "taxidermy and embalming" because his family was "in the funeral home business.") A few years after obtaining a master's degree in music, Nelson released his first masterpiece, *The Blues and the Abstract Truth*, which featured some of the best jazz musicians of the time—Freddie Hubbard, Eric Dolphy, Bill Evans, and Paul Chambers—and contained the definitive version of Nelson's most famous piece of music, "Stolen Moments." After that



PAUL HOPPE

work, his future in the funeral business closed permanently. The rest of his life, which was tragically short (a heart attack killed him at the age of 43), was devoted to writing, conducting, and arranging music during jazz's modern period (the 1960s)

“SRJO is not just one of our city’s core jazz institutions but one of its most vital art institutions.”

and composing scores for movies and TV shows. Had he lived a long life, there is no doubt that his name would be as recognizable, as mainstream as Quincy Jones.

“You know, I just love *Blues and the Abstract Truth*, I just love the way it bounces around to different meters and the angularity of the melody, and the sound of the ensemble—all of these things appeal to me greatly,” says Michael Brockman, the artistic director of Seattle Repertory Jazz

Orchestra (SRJO). We are on the phone. We are talking about the orchestra's upcoming tribute to Oliver Nelson, “SRJO Plays Blues and the Abstract Truth.” A few moments before, Brockman, who founded SRJO with Clarence Acox in 1995, said Nelson is one of “the leading icons in the history of jazz. And, in the jazz industry, he’s recognized as one of the people who established the art form into something composers could take part in.” SRJO is primarily devoted to the work of composers—“Charles Mingus, Gil Evans, Thelonious Monk... and of course, Count Basie and Duke Ellington.”

Indeed, one of the best musical shows I experienced last year was “SRJO Plays Charles Mingus.” It happened on February 11 at Benaroya Hall. The players, many of whom will be on the stage for “SRJO Plays Blues and the Abstract Truth,” were just in top form. Mingus had a spirit that was as huge as it was singular. For musicians, even our city's best ones (Randy Halberstadt, D’Vonne Lewis, Kate Olson, Jay Thomas), to successfully capture that singularity and even revisit the extraordinary expansiveness of the composer was nothing less than

remarkable. The performance made it very clear to me that SRJO is not just one of our city's core jazz institutions but one of its most vital art institutions.

“For the [“SRJO Plays Blues and the Abstract Truth”] show, we’re going to do most of the pieces from the original album [*The Blues and the Abstract Truth*] and the second album [*More Blues and the Abstract Truth*],” says Brockman near the end of the interview. “So we’ll do ‘Stolen Moments,’ ‘Hoe-Down,’ and ‘Cascades.’ I’m still considering whether to do the entire [first] album or draw from music from his other records, but we will definitely play *Blues and the Abstract Truth*.”

But what about the theme for *The Six Million Dollar Man*? He does not answer the question because he never heard it; it never left my mind. *The Blues and the Abstract Truth* is for this great orchestra; the theme for the battery-charged android is for me and my American childhood.

.....
The Seattle Repertory Jazz Orchestra will perform “SRJO Plays Blues and the Abstract Truth” at Benaroya Hall Saturday, April 20, at 7:30 pm. Tickets are available at srjo.org. ■

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PERSON OF INTEREST

TEZATALKS

Harbinger of Horror-Filled Hardcore Pop

BY KEVIN DIERS

There is no doubt in my mind that TeZATalks is destined for greatness. Decked out in ripped-up fishnets and *The Crow*-like face paint, she certainly stands out onstage, but underneath the goth makeup and spikes is a fierce performer who was raised in a church choir. She has a powerhouse singing voice but isn't afraid to get raw with it and belt out an ear-ringing scream. Did I mention she can rap her ass off, too?

TeZA won't go into too many details on the precise launch date of her upcoming release *Black Girl American Horror Story*, but here's what we do know: It's recorded and ready to go, and during our interview, she mentioned that you'll be able to play it both backward and forward.

"It's to be horror, it's to experience horror, and to know horror, and I find peace in that," she said. "It's not what you think it's about; it's about what you feel. And I hope that's what makes you think."

Regardless of the details, if the rollout of her stellar first single "SILYMI" is any indication, TeZA has a big year ahead of her.

You were recently awarded a grant from Sonic Guild. Congratulations! Do you have any plans for the money awarded to you?

I think that's always the big question, right? I have plans to definitely work more with the people who have been pouring into me. I have friends who have selflessly given themselves to me artistically and I just want to make sure that with the ideas we have for the album... they are made whole. That I'll be able to properly, for the first time in my career as an independent artist, have a rollout with my debut album, *Black Girl American Horror Story*.

I plan on showcasing some other mediums of art that I touched a little bit on during the pandemic with the Not Your Body campaign. Then the rest I've kind of left up to how the year goes. I definitely am not spending it quickly. I'm trying to just be intentional with everything. It's not a million dollars, but for me, it's life-changing.

When did you first fall in love with music?

The sound of my mother playing piano and



GHIRLBAND STUDIOS

the sound of my father singing to me as a kid. I grew up in a Baptist church on the island [Oahu]. I loved how the congregation was moved by this unseen energy. It was like magic to me. And I watched people change and become different. I was like "I want to do that." That's always been my happy place. That's why the stage is my second home. It's where I feel like I come the most alive because I feel like I am truly in my full purpose.

I could say your music is part industrial, part punk, part hip-hop, part pop. But how do you describe your sound?

I'm coining it as hardcore pop. You are not wrong, in all the things that you just described.

Hardcore pop? That's awesome. I've never heard that before.

It's because it's not a thing. I mean, it is now. But it felt the most true to all my favorite things and even speaking to the explanations or the genres that pick up in other people's minds when they hear the music. I think it kind of blankets it in a way where I'm like "Yeah, this is... this is the sandwich."

What do you love about the Seattle music scene? And how would you like to see it change or improve?

What I love about the scene is people are unapologetically themselves. I love that there's still this energy of... we really just enjoy music. It's not a popularity contest,

What I think should change is we got to find a way to get kids to the shows. I mean, I love the fact that venues are coming back and they're surviving. But it's the kids, man. These all-ages shows... They're next and they know what's going on. There's nothing that's being hidden from them. They have the internet. So keeping them from the thing that I know healed me from every trial and tribulation I had in my fucking life is vitally important to the generations behind me. And as we do that, we need to make sure that the representation, inclusivity, and diversity match that. Like I said, kids are being exposed to a lot, which means they see exactly what's going on.

You covered Limp Bizkit's "Break Stuff." What made you want to cover that song?

That song is timeless. It was one of those perfect storm moments where I think we all got sucked into the Woodstock '99 documentary. We were all inside for crying out loud. So I'm sitting here watching this documentary and I'm already upset because I'm inside. And that moment that they got on stage, I could taste it. It was so potent. I

was like "Where is that happening? Where is this?" There are so many fucking rules at venues before there's a chance to perform. I'm really trying to bypass that in the most respectful way. I love my friends who are talent buyers and friends who own venues. Thank you so much for having me. Love it, love it, love it. But like...

Let's mosh.

Let's fucking mosh! You know, I understand the controversy that comes with that documentary. I understand that there were some atrocities that took place. However, nobody forgot about that set. And I feel like whatever energy was intended, I wanted to take that, and as a Black woman, as a Black queer artist, as an anomaly in this whole situation, I wanted to transform it into now. I feel like it has. It's doing the thing.

I highly respect Daddy Limp Bizkit. I wanted to continue the legacy and I wanted it to look different. Representation is so important. I'm a woman. I'm Black. Let's fucking rage. What does that look like? Let me show you. ■

"Representation is so important. I'm a woman. I'm Black. Let's fucking rage."

at least not to the people and the kids that are in the scene. There are pockets of the music scene that break off into these other realms, that if you are in the right place at the right time on a weekend, you can run into some really fucking great bands. It's all over the state, but Seattle... because it has this magnetizing energy of bringing some of those bands together, you get a chance to see that.

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PERSON OF INTEREST

ARSON NICKI

Finally, a Fashion Expert for the People

BY RACHEL STEVENS

I stressed for *weeks* about what I was going to wear to interview fashion expert Arson Nicki. When I first saw Nicki, it was May 16, 2019, on the SIFF Opening Night red carpet. Arson Nicki was in drag and looked nothing short of iconic: she was in a yellow latex dress, a matching pussycat wig, and the mod white makeup of another life form and/or decade.

Turns out, I had nothing to worry about. Today, Nicki is in black clothing. He has swapped drag performance for fashion critiquing and tells me that there's so much happening in his brain these days that he doesn't have the creative energy to wear anything other than head-to-toe black.

"I can't be picking out outfits. I can barely get laundry done."

While I have noticed a significant Arson Nicki-sized hole in Seattle's fashion when I'm out and about, there's been a big uptick in my fashion knowledge in general, thanks to the @arsonnicki Instagram account. For his almost 100,000 followers, Nicki does "quick fashion recaps" of designer runway shows, in 30 seconds or less.

He delivers his video reviews in a black shirt and black beanie, with an ASMR-worthy voice that somehow both titillates and soothes simultaneously. Each review is filled with history, knowledge, and the perfect amount of judgment. It's like watching 30-second episodes of *Project Runway*, but the main judge also doubles as a meditation guide. Nicki reviews new lines by the likes of the design houses of Helmut Lang and Maison Margiela to an audience of trend experts, the fashion curious, *RuPaul's Drag Race* alumni, and the legendary stylist Law Roach.

"Let me tell you. The day I saw Law Roach followed me, I just... I... I just..."

He had no words.

One of Nicki's most-viewed videos features an educational breakdown of this year's Met Gala theme—Sleeping Beauties: Reawakening Beauty. He explains that this year's gala hosts, Zendaya, Bad Bunny, Jennifer Lopez, and Chris Hemsworth, are actually looking for fashion where technology and nature intersect. OKAY, ZEN-DAYA, HOW WAS I SUPPOSED TO KNOW THAT? The glorified outdoor pajamas I'll likely be wearing on May 6 to watch the Met Gala red carpet will probably pass, because there's no way I'm getting invited to that party. But Arson Nicki might get invited to the Met Gala—again.

"Last year, a couple days before the Met Gala, someone from Meta—Instagram—reached out to me asking if I wanted to get put up in a suite in the Carlyle Hotel

across from the Met Gala and do coverage of the event. I absolutely thought I was being scammed."

He wasn't. Within 48 hours, Nicki was posted up with a handful of other content creators, trying to pick their jaws up off the ground when RIHANNA FINALLY WALKED IN THE DOOR OF THE HOTEL. Arson Nicki was there.

any pronouns. He hasn't been in drag "for fun" in the last five years and doesn't plan to go back to it. (Much to my disappointment, but WHATEVER.) Nicki is finding his people through little screens, but his love for the bigger fashion scenes has me scared that he would evolve right out of Seattle.

"No no, my roots here are too deep. Plus there are a lot of fun brands here—Nord-

Whether he realizes it or not, Arson Nicki is bringing the DIY spirit of drag to the fashion world. He's making fashion accessible to those of us whose bank accounts are less equipped for Tom Ford and more equipped for Taco Bell.

When talking to Arson Nicki, I kept trying to get him to read me. I thought at any second he would tear into my looks, Seattle's fashion, or at least a fellow former drag queen. But for a critic, Nicki didn't seem to have a judgmental bone in his body when it came to our one-on-one interaction. Quite the opposite, actually. In seeking some cattiness, I asked Nicki what trends are coming into fashion, especially for the everyday woman in Seattle (asking for a friend). He told me that right now, it's all about quiet luxuries (which I understand in theory), mob wife fashion is having a mo-



COURTESY OF ARSON NICKI

"I tell people that I did drag for a decade and they don't question my fashion credentials."

ment (which I will have to Google), and that Seattleites are already and always ahead of the game, because as Nicki said, "A big part of fashion is not caring what other people think of you." As if hearing that last part not at all and wanting constant coolness validation, I asked, "Do I have to burn all my skinny jeans?"

Nicki chuckles as he says, "As a recovering millennial, I wore skinny jeans from the year 2010 to a couple years ago. And I was hesitant to change styles, but then I started wearing wider-legged pants and I love them. They're so much more comfortable! The thing about trends is sometimes they're good for you and you shouldn't resist."

Wow. Arson Nicki, I get it. You can't evolve into your best self if you're afraid of what you don't have; if you're resistant to change; and/or you don't follow your bliss. For five years, I've thought that the glammed-up, dragged-out version of Arson Nicki was my muse, but it turns out this confident fashion expert with dark clothes is the light I craved all along. This era of Arson Nicki is the muse I didn't know I needed.

"But Seattleites," Nicki says, "get your wide-legged pants hemmed or tailored. Having the bottom few inches of your pants wet is not a good look." ■

"I used to give myself a hard time that I don't own any designer clothing," he said. "Not a piece. I have one designer scent that I was given at the Met Gala. And I used to think that meant that I wasn't qualified to talk about designer brands, but I just immersed myself in fashion and read so many books and watched so many runway shows online. And then I tell people that I did drag for a decade and they don't question my fashion credentials."

Arson Nicki is evolving. He has gone from using they/them and she/her pronouns to

strom, REI, Tommy Bahama, Filson—and I would love to do some stylist work with those brands someday."

It's cool to see the confidence of someone who is doing what they love and what they're—obviously—supposed to do. Nicki didn't go to fashion school and doesn't have the uber-privileged background many high-end fashionistas have.

"I just have to focus on what I can do and what I know how to do and what I want to do and be unapologetically me. I feel good in my role as a critic and trust myself."

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PERSON OF INTEREST

TAHA EBRAHIMI

Seattle's Coolest Street Tree Expert

BY MEGAN SELING

It was kind of by accident that Taha Ebrahimi wrote a book. Especially an illustrated one about trees.

"This is a kismet, happenstance COVID project," she told me. "Basically, during COVID, I had all this extra time, and I was always interested in trees, but I don't have any background in illustration or horticulture. I always thought people who knew stuff about plants and trees, those were the people who had authority. I don't know why! Those Latin names, they just give you this impostorism."

She started taking walks to get out of the house during lockdown, and it was on those walks that a deeper love for trees began to, ahem, blossom. She picked up a copy of *The Sibley Guide to Trees*, which is mostly pictures, and Arthur Jacobson's *Trees of Seattle*, which has tons of data and specific locations of specific species but is mostly text, and she slowly began to piece together her own map of notable specimens while wandering from neighborhood to neighborhood.

The result is *Street Trees of Seattle: An Illustrated Walking Guide*, a charming book full of hand-drawn maps, detailed sketches of leaf and petal shapes and bark patterns,

"Being outside in nature, doing nothing else but walking, it forced my brain to process things in a different way."

and tons of very nerdy, very fascinating history about how certain species of trees got to Seattle in the first place.

For instance, the giant sequoia at Fourth Avenue and Stewart Street, the one a man climbed and lived in for 24 hours in 2016? It was "originally on Aurora," says Ebrahimi. Or, have you ever wondered why there's so much holly in Beacon Hill? In the book, Ebrahimi explains, "...the story of holly in Seattle truly begins in 1927, when Lillian McEwan (wife of the owner of Ballard's Seattle Cedar Lumber Manufacturing Company) founded the Washington State Society for the Conservation of Wild



KELLY O

Flowers and Tree Planting and began her inexplicable personal mission to plant so much English holly that Washington could one day become 'the Holly State.'

Today, Ebrahimi adds, "The King County Noxious Weed Board classifies holly as a 'weed of concern.'" Thanks for nothing, McEwan!

On a chilly February afternoon, when it was too cold to go tree spotting, I hopped on a call with Ebrahimi to learn more about her favorite Seattle trees and, of course, to inquire about a few secret spots to see those dopamine-triggering cherry blossoms.

You mention in the book that the average lifespan for a street tree is something like 13 years. I didn't realize it was so short! Do you know, is it because that dataset includes trees that were maybe moved or cut down to make room for development?

People would be very surprised to know that many new trees that we plant don't make it to maturity. There are always tree-planting events, then people will forget about the tree. It's a grand idea to say we're going to plant trees, but the resources have to go into also taking care of them. A mature tree provides 10 times the human health benefits as small trees. They're still trying to do a lot of research to find out how these health benefits tend to come to us, but I felt it on my walks. Just being outside in nature, doing nothing else but walking, and having a destination, it forced my brain to process things in a

different way and to go slower. I was born and raised in Seattle, but I found myself seeing the city in this completely different way.

Since you grew up here, you know, then, about all of the hikes and mountains that are just outside of the city—or even wooded areas in the city, like Discovery Park—and we're encouraged to go enjoy those places, but what people don't realize is that nature is also right there, right outside your door.

One hundred percent. When I started doing this project, it was largely out of wanting to share this experience with those who might have been in the same situation as I was. I didn't have a car, and Seattle isn't a



great city to get around if you don't have a car, and it was during COVID. I wanted to see some trees, and the only ones that were available were the ones that were right outside my door, which more people have access to. Although we do know that there are fewer street trees in areas of low income, more people do have access to the street trees, and it's this overlooked forest that is literally right there. You forget that they're there, but they're doing us good.

Was there one tree that kind of sparked this love affair with trees, or was it just the experience overall?

I think it was the experience overall, but there have been a couple of really cool trees that stick out in my memory. One is the giant sequoia on Capitol Hill. It's near Volunteer Park. It's this massive tree and it's leaning a little bit like the Tower of Pisa, and it is just so grand and majestic. And

there's this really cool—it's the second-widest-diameter pine in Seattle, I believe. It's up in Wedgwood, and it blocks somebody's stairway, their entryway to their door. And they haven't cut it down. I ran into the owners when I was looking at it and they told me that the previous homeowners remembered having like a Tarzan swing or something that they hung on the branch so that they could swoop down to the sidewalk from their home. I love that no one cut that tree.

Do you have any secret tips for people who want to enjoy the spring flowers but in a less obvious place than, say, the University of Washington? People climb on the cherry blossom trees at the UW for Instagram! How do you stay out of that mess while still getting out there and loving some of the spring trees?

Street trees are really the secret spot where you can go visit these beautiful cherry blossom trees without those massive crowds. There's actually two streets I would recommend in Seattle—there are so many! To narrow it down is really difficult, but 33rd Avenue Northwest in Ballard, kind of above Northwest 75th Street, that street is lined with beautiful Yoshino cherries that bloom at the same time as the UW cherries. Kind of late March, early April-ish. Also, around the same time—these are also a variation of the Yoshino cherry—on Capitol Hill at 21st Avenue East, above East Aloha Street. That is a little-known secret. [Laughs] Maybe not so much anymore. ■

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BY AUDREY VANN, JULIANNE BELL, LINDSAY COSTELLO, MEGAN SELING, AND SHANNON LUBETICH



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Nine-Tenths of the Law: Squatters' Cinema

Various showtimes through March 30

Squatters are not a group of folks that I'd previously associated with cinema, but I'm not afraid to admit that I was wrong. "In 2019, a radical group calling itself the Cinéma La Clef Revival Collective forced

their way into the derelict building which housed La Clef (The Key), a '70s-era cinema," The Beacon explains. The French collective revitalized the space, which had shuttered in 2015 because the owners wanted to sell the property for redevelopment. Booo! La Clef Revival has fostered a community-programmed space for "squatter's cinema" ever since, shouting a gargantuan "fuck you" at exclusionary rental practices and vampiric landlords and developers. Show up to this screening series throughout March for a selection of squat-centric flicks like *Occupied Cinema*, *Winstanley*, and many others. One of my personal faves, *Robinson's Garden*, will screen March 18 and 20—it's a clear-cut punk statement offering up a rare glimpse of a multicultural Tokyo sans city pop and financial prosperity. Not to gush too much, but the film draws from underground No Wave aesthetics (think Jim Jarmusch) to tell an anticapitalist story of a bohemian drug dealer who discovers an abandoned building lush with vegetation. Promise you'll dig it. (*The Beacon*, 4405 Rainier Ave S, various showtimes through March 30, \$12.50) **LINDSAY COSTELLO**



KUOW/MEGAN FARMER

Text Me Back Live With Lindy West and Meagan Hatcher-Mays

FRI, MARCH 15

Lindy West, the former *Stranger* film editor and sharp wordsmith behind the essay collection *Shrill: Notes from a Loud Woman*, co-hosts the podcast *Text Me Back* with the similarly brilliant Meagan Hatcher-Mays, a lawyer and democracy policy expert. At its core, their pod focuses on making you laugh. Each week, they swallow down whatever garbage has hit the news cycle so you don't have to—the result is like a regurgitated owl pellet in podcast form, but instead of being full of crushed bones and indigestible fur, it's a combination of political smartiness, sincerity, and snark. Now that I've conjured that image for you, head to this live edition of *Text Me Back*, in which they'll take audience questions and discuss their favorite animals. (Town Hall, 1119 Eighth Ave, 7:30 pm, \$20-\$25) **LINDSAY COSTELLO**



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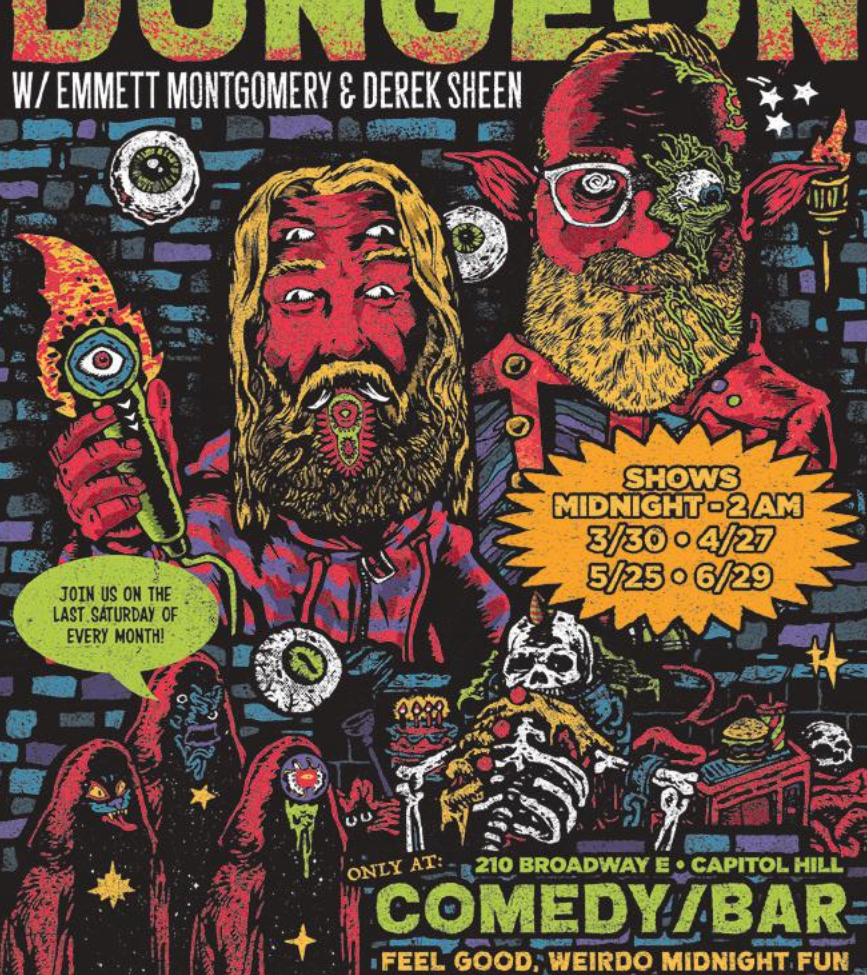
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JESSIE ROSE VALA, ACE OF WANDS, 2019. COURTESY OF SOIL GALLERY

Sleepless Nights

Every Fri–Sun through March 30

Curator Hannah Newman's *Sleepless Nights* explores the horrors that would've kept Edgar Allan Poe twisting and turning at night, had he been born in the last 50 years or so: Doomscrolling, mental health struggles, grind culture, inflation, all that very scary stuff. Describing busyness as a survival tactic ("The moment we slow down, our worries catch up," the promotional materials explain), *Sleepless Nights* posits that artists distract themselves by creating beauty. The exhibition, which features works by Marcelo Fontana, Pamela Hadley, Nicholas Moler-Gallardo, Jessie Rose Vala, Morgan Roskopf, Katherine Spinella, and Newman, will unfold in a "dark room via blacklights, nightlights, phone screens, and projectors...infused with a continuous stream of audio, a background score of current events, news updates, podcasts, and other data." Nothing we're not accustomed to, right? (SOIL, 112 Third Ave S, every Fri–Sun through March 30, free) **LINDSAY COSTELLO**



DOROTHY GALE DRESS WORN BY JUDY GARLAND IN THE WIZARD OF OZ, 1939, MOPOP PERMANENT COLLECTION

Massive: The Power of Pop Culture

EVERY THURS–TUES STARTING MARCH 16

The Museum of Pop Culture (MoPOP) has unveiled a new long-term exhibit that asks visitors to consider their role as creators and consumers of modern pop culture. Across 2,400 square feet, the showcase will feature 80-plus artifacts, films, and interactive experiences that range from Judy Garland's iconic gingham dress from *The Wizard of Oz* to Kim Kardashian's gaudy neon sneaker pumps. (Side note: Can you imagine what those pieces would look like if styled together? Iconic.) The exhibit will dig deeper than a traditional artifact display with thought-provoking questions about appropriation, celebrity culture, and representation. (MoPOP, 325 Fifth Ave, every Thurs–Tues starting March 16, included in general admission) **AUDREY VANN**

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Spring Splendor

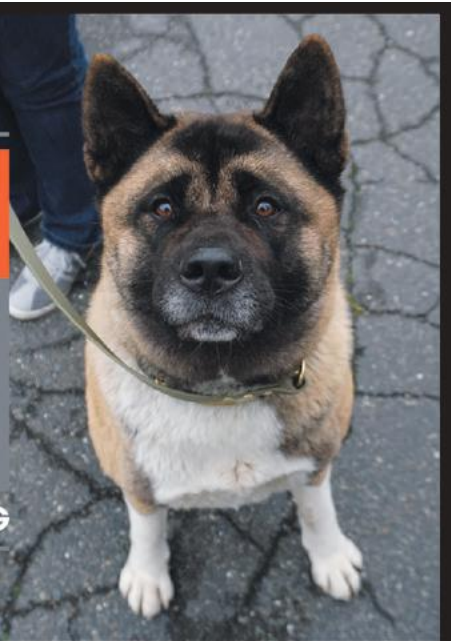
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Jaune Quick-To-See Smith: Memory Map

Every Wed-Sun through May 12

Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, a citizen of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Nation, is one of the 20th century's most innovative artists—she blends references to pop art and abstraction with Native perspectives on Americana and mass media in brilliant, layered compositions. This solo exhibition curates from across five decades of the artist's paintings, drawings, and sculptures; I'm especially drawn to the Bush Administration critique of *War is Heck* and *Indian Map*, Smith's "first recognizable map of the country in which brushstrokes and drips blur states' borders and collaged texts and photographs tell stories of the land's vast Indigenous presence." (Seattle Art Museum, 1300 First Ave, every Wed-Sun through May 12, free-\$32.99) **LINDSAY COSTELLO**



POONEH GHANA

Cheekface

SUN, APRIL 21

A band since 2017, Cheekface really captured the voice of our generation with the song "We Need a Bigger Dumpster" in 2021. KEXP wouldn't stop playing it, and for good reason, with its guitar-driven rhythms and tongue-in-cheek lyrics like "I caught a cold / I coughed on all my friends / Now everyone is coughing on everybody else / And we're coughing on our doctors and our doctors cough out / 'EVERYTHING IS FINE.'" Equal parts catchy indie rock and social commentary, lead singer Greg Katz's talk-singing puts the message front-and-center as we bob our heads and smile wryly to the beat in spite of (because of?) existential dread. Hazy bedroom pop artist Yungatita opens the show. (Madame Lou's, 2505 First Ave, 8:30 pm, \$22, all ages) **SHANNON LUBETICH**

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- Ravi Albright, Tabla
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CHRIS GRADY

Mary Timony

Sat, March 23

Best described by Carrie Brownstein as "Mary Shelley with a guitar," indie rock innovator Mary Timony has made an undeniable mark on rock music as a member of bands like Helium, Ex Hex, Autoclave, and Wild Flag. Now, Timony is back with her first solo album in 19 years, *Untame the Tiger*. The album is a perfect encapsulation of her 30-plus year career with melodic guitar riffs, melancholic lyrics, and signature deadpan vocals. It simultaneously sounds like it was recorded in 1998 while finding pockets of fresh experimentation—a true feat if you ask me! Don't miss an opening set from Philadelphia-based folk rock artist Rosali.

(Clock-Out Lounge, 4864 Beacon Ave S, 8:30 pm, \$20-\$22) **AUDREY VANN**

PDX Jazz Presents: Laurie Anderson

Sat, March 30

Just in time for Women's History Month, pioneering electronic musician and performance artist Laurie Anderson is bringing her groundbreaking works to Benaroya Hall. Her latest show, *Let X = X*, revisits songs from her 42-year-long music career with a reinvigorated perspective, spirit, and sound—thanks in part to her backing band, New York jazz ensemble Sexmob. Anderson is known for her '80s art pop albums full of electronic experiments and spoken-work quips. Some of my favorite Laurieisms include "I don't know about your brain, but mine is really... bossy" ("Babydoll") and "I met this guy / And he looked like might have been a hat check clerk at an ice rink / Which, in fact, he turned out to be" ("Let X=X"). (Benaroya Hall, 200 University St, 8 pm, \$59.75-\$100, all ages) **AUDREY VANN**

Seattle Restaurant Week

April 14-27

Gourmands across Seattle rejoice over this twice-yearly event, which gives diners the opportunity to try curated menus for \$20, \$35, \$50, and \$65 at dozens of restaurants. It's an excellent opportunity to branch out of your usual rotation of tried-and-



JALEESA JOHNSTON, BONE AND FLESH

Alterations

EVERY SAT-THURS, MARCH 28-JUNE 2 WITH AN ARTIST RECEPTION THURS, APRIL 11

I confess that, even though it is a 20-minute walk from my home, I had never been to Photographic Center Northwest until their last exhibit featuring the works of Jon Henry. It humbled me and inspired me to return. I typically have a hard time understanding "art," and gravitate toward photography where I expect things to be more real. The latest PCN exhibit, *Alterations*, challenges that idea, as it features six Pacific Northwest artists who burn, tear, and paste various ephemera into their photographs. The works use collage to enhance, challenge, or twist the image, providing commentary on various aspects of our reality from gender stereotypes to environmental destruction. (Photographic Center Northwest, 900 12th Ave, every Sat-Thurs, March 28-June 2, free)

SHANNON LUBETICH

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10:30 -10:50 am - Kids Flamenco ages 8-10
11:30 - 11:50 am - Adult Flamenco ages 12 & up



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Lions Mane by David Hoekje



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true favorites and cross some destinations off your culinary bucket list. Round up some friends to join you, and don't forget to tip your server generously. (Various locations, April 14–27, see the full lineup at srweek.org) **JULIANNE BELL**



HANS CANOSA

Gabrielle Zevin

Thurs, April 25

If you follow the goings-on in contemporary literature, you've probably seen more than a few nods to Gabrielle Zevin's *Tomorrow, and Tomorrow, and Tomorrow*, which was released in 2022 to significant fanfare, including *New York Times* bestseller status and a lofty 4.18 review ranking on Goodreads. In my opinion, one of the book's merits is that it might get your non-reader friends to pick it up: The plot follows three friends who begin a video game company together. (This perked up my partner's ears—try it yourself.) Zevin will visit Seattle for a Q&A session with Ruchika Tulshyan, who covers diversity and leadership for *Forbes*. (Town Hall, 1119 Eighth Ave, 7:30 pm, \$12-\$116) **LINDSAY COSTELLO**



BRETT LOVE

The Master and Margarita

VARIOUS SHOWTIMES, MARCH 22-APRIL 13

Mikhail Bulgakov's masterpiece, *The Master and Margarita*, was first published (in a censored form) in 1967, and it's beautifully weird. It's about the devil and his entourage; there's a scene-stealing chain-smoking cat; it's full of pranks and hypocrisy, metaphysical elements, beheaded bureaucrats, haunted theaters, Communism, and Stalinism. It's gothic and fantastical and anti-totalitarian. I mean, what's not to love? Director Mike Lion has adapted the tome for this production, which attempts to preserve its Russian sensibilities but also includes musical numbers, puppetry, physicality, and clowning. (12th Avenue Arts, 1620 12th Ave, every Fri–Sun, March 22–April 13, \$1-\$60) **LINDSAY COSTELLO**

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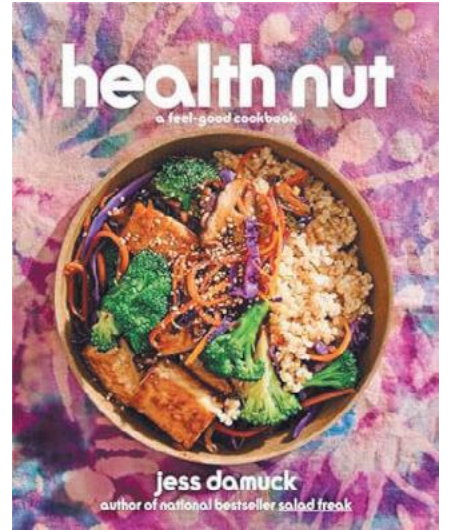
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COURTESY OF SIFF



Author Talk: Health Nut, Jess Damuck

Thurs, April 25

Recipe developer and food stylist Jess Damuck worked for Martha Stewart in various capacities for over a decade—including a stint as her personal chef, when she'd craft her signature "three-hour salads" for the legendary home and cooking mogul herself. Her 2022 debut cookbook *Salad Freak* detailed how to make these leafy masterpieces. With her latest release *Health Nut*, Damuck's set her sights on updating traditional "hippie health food" like smoothies, stir-fries, and grain bowls, adding a modern twist to these granola-core staples. This results in nourishing, well-rounded dishes like brothy white beans with parmesan and pesto, or crispy rice and salmon bowls with quick pickles and greens. She'll visit Book Larder to chat about her fresh approach to wholesome cuisine. (*Book Larder*, 4252 Fremont Ave N, 6:30 pm, \$39.50, admission includes a signed copy of *Health Nut*) **JULIANNE BELL**

Seattle International Film Festival 2024

MAY 9-27

SIFF will return for its 50th year with the best in international and independent cinema à la mode from across the globe, and you know the drill—the city's most well-recognized hybrid festival, which boasts an impressive selection of films from more than 70 countries this year, will present screenings virtually at both SIFF and non-SIFF venues citywide, including Pacific Place, Majestic Bay Theatres, Museum of History and Industry, and Shoreline Community College. (In 2023, I liked *Art for Everybody*, a surprisingly thoughtful documentary on—insert groan here—Thomas Kinkade, universal basic income doc *Free Money*, and *26.2 To Life*, which followed a marathon race at California's oldest state prison.) (Multiple locations, May 9-27, see the full schedule at siff.net) **LINDSAY COSTELLO**

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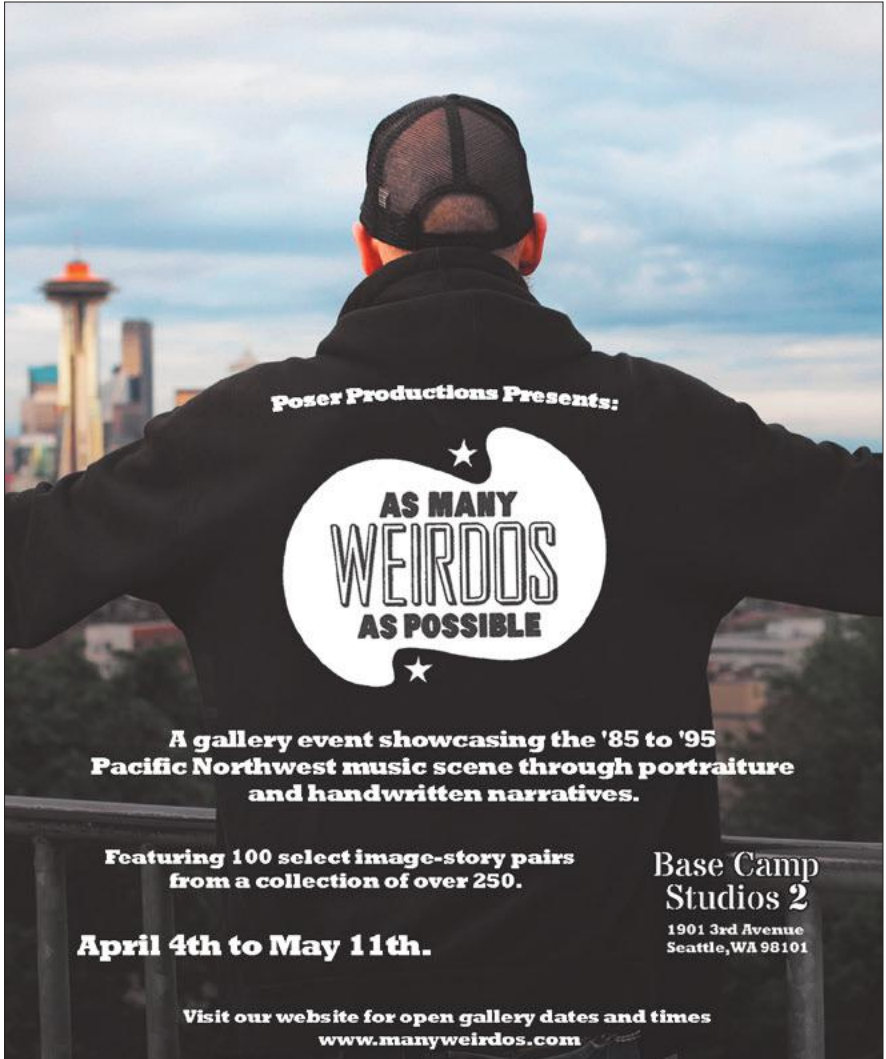


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ROSEMARY DAI ROSS

The Lehman Trilogy

Various showtimes, April 27–May 12

When I asked my play-obsessed friend in New York about *The Lehman Trilogy*, he responded "I've heard it's quite good. It's veryyy long." He's not wrong. The show won five (!) Tonys in 2022 (Best Play, Best Actor, Best Direction, Best Scenic and Lighting Design) and it has a runtime of almost three-and-a-half hours with two intermissions. The *Lehman Trilogy* tells the story of three young Jewish brothers immigrating to the Big Apple in the 1840s, and how they found tremendous success. But those of us living in the modern era associate these brothers (the *Lehman* brothers) with the 2008 financial crisis. So how did we get from those humble yet successful beginnings to triggering one of the largest modern financial crises? I'll be putting my butt in a seat (for longer than I might like) to find out. (*ACT - A Contemporary Theatre*, 700 Union St, various showtimes April 27–May 12, \$50–\$89) **SHANNON LUBETICH**



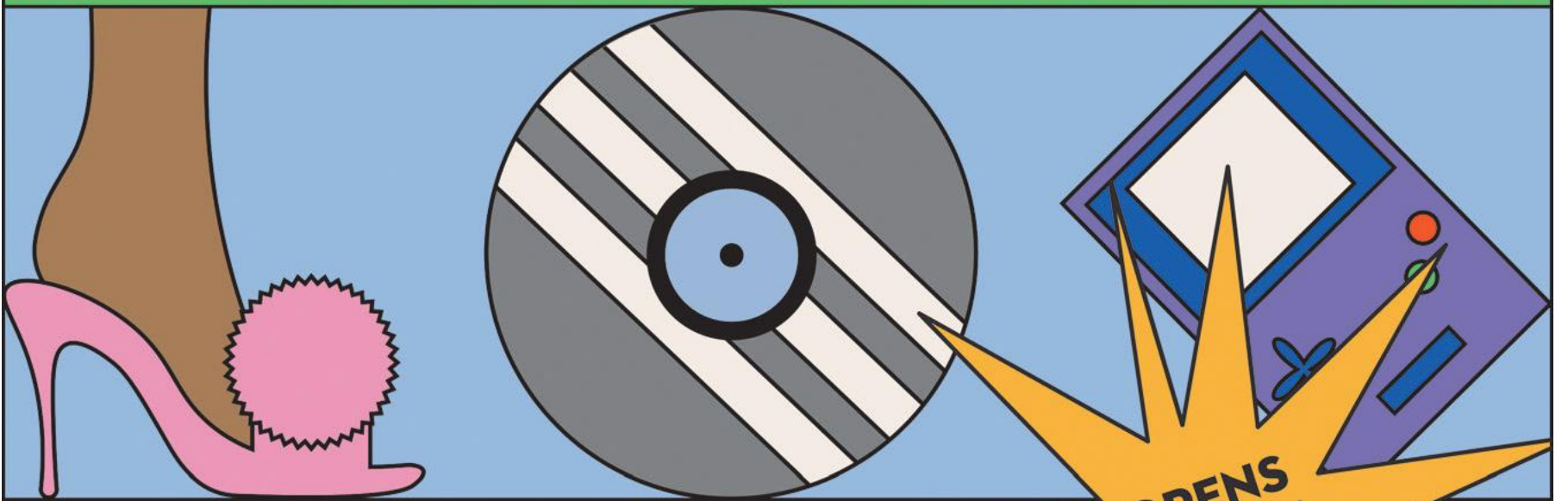
MADDIE MCGARVEY

Hanif Abdurraqib

WED, APRIL 24

Hanif Abdurraqib is the best friend I never met. Having spent years reading his work—his essays, his poetry, his music criticism—it feels as though we've spent half a lifetime together sitting on floors, listening to records, and exchanging observations about everyone from Aretha Franklin to My Chemical Romance. He doesn't write *at* you, as so many culture critics do—his prose opens up and pulls you into whatever little world he's spinning in his brain. You don't just understand his observations, you often *feel* them, too. He'll be at Town Hall in April in support of his new book *There's Always This Year: On Basketball and Ascension*, which NPR, *Time*, Chicago Review of Books, and Lit Hub, among many others, have deemed as one of the most anticipated books of 2024. I can't fucking wait. (*Town Hall*, 1119 Eighth Ave, 7:30 pm, \$5–\$25) **MEGAN SELING**

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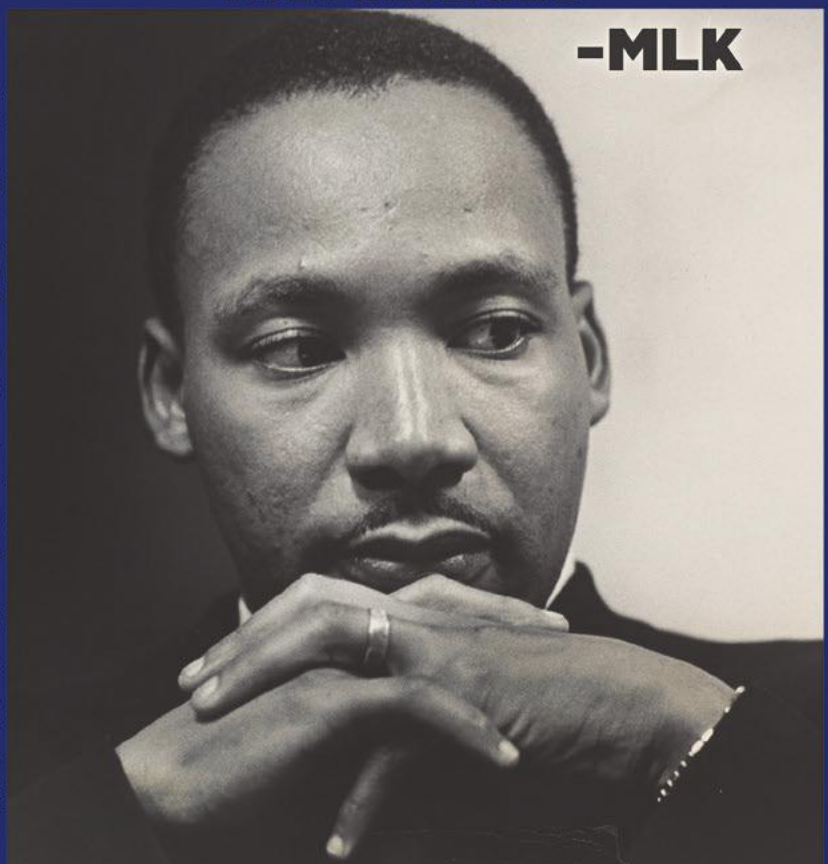
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- 3/21 OK SWEETHEART, QUINN DEVEAUX, CUMULUS
- 3/23 AYLA NEREO, LUKA, BROTHA JAG @WA Hall
- 4/03 HATIS NOIT @Fremont Abbey
- 4/06 VICTORIA CANAL @Fremont Abbey
- 4/12 JULIANNA ZACHARIOU, CUCHULAIN @Fremont Abbey
- 4/14 SAM AMIDON, SHAZAD ISMAILY @Ballard Homestead
- 4/19 PORANGUÍ, SONYA ROBIN, MICAELA KINGSLIGHT
- 4/20 YAIMA, RAFE PEARLMAN, ANDY FISCHER-PRICE, ALEXA SUNSHINE ROSE +MORE] @WA Hall
- 5/03 THUNDERSTORM ARTIS @Ballard Homestead
- 5/11 SNOW RAVEN @St. Mark's Cathedral
- 5/14 ANDREW VAIT, BRYAN APPLEBY, SHAINA SHEPHERD
- 5/16 JENN CHAMPION @Fremont Abbey

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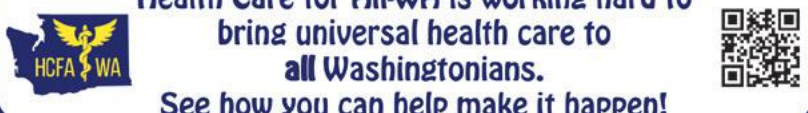


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Sporkful Live: Anything's Pastable with Dan Pashman & Lindy West

Thurs, April 30

In 2021, a new pasta shape entered the scene. With a convincingly Italian-sounding name, cascатели took the foodie world by storm (to be fair, the root of the word, *cascate*, does mean "water-falls"). Dan Pashman, James Beard Award-winning host of *The Sporkful* podcast, invented this pasta shape because he was frustrated by all others in existence (see the "Spaghetti Sucks" episode) and wanted to create a shape that was more

"forkable" and better at holding sauce. Social media featured tons of people cooking the new shape, but Pashman was disappointed by the lack of creativity in the dish as a whole. His response: releasing his first cookbook, *Anything's Pastable: 81 Inventive Pasta Recipes For Saucy People*. Hear him discuss it with local comedian and writer Lindy West in the first-ever live taping of a *Sporkful* episode. (Fremont Abbey Arts Center, 4272 Fremont Ave N, 7 pm, \$28.50-\$59.50, all ages) **SHANNON LUBETICH**

The Bloody Mary Festival

Sat, May 4

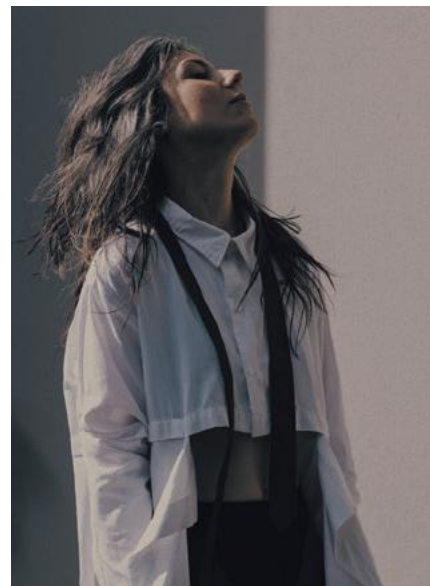
With its savory vodka-spiked tomato juice base and garnishes ranging from the humble (celery) to

outlandish (mini cheeseburgers), the bloody mary is a bona fide brunch classic. At this event, you'll get to enjoy an unlimited supply of the umami-rich cocktail in a myriad of iterations from local bars and restaurants, not to mention coffee, food and drink samples, temporary tattoos, and photo opportunities. Plus, cast a vote for your favorite bloody mary to win the People's Choice Award. (Seattle Center Exhibition Hall, 301 Mercer St, 10:30 am-6 pm, \$49.95-\$67.50) **JULIANNE BELL**

Belltown Bloom 2024

May 4-5

Technically, spring starts in March, but in Seattle, it's more like May. Welcome the season of blossoms with a two-day festival where women in music take over the entire Crocodile complex. Headliners include global stars, like AlunaGeorge, dance music DJ TOKIMONSTA, and poet laureate/folk star Kara Jackson. The fest was started by sisters Valerie and Veronica Topacio, who are also in the local rock band La Fonda, and they're doing the work to highlight PNW acts as well, like Glitterfox, a folk group formed by a Portland wife-and-wife duo. I'm also stoked for Gustaf, a Brooklyn art-punk band that seems to have the time of their lives onstage. (*The Crocodile Complex*, 2505 First Ave, May 4-5, 6 pm, \$105-\$165) **SHANNON LUBETICH**



CAMILLE BLAKE

Julia Holter

Mon, May 6

If you're ISO an exploratory and uplifting time, California-hailing symphonic singer Julia Holter should help you shake something loose—she's a low-key baroque pop queen whose surreal music is widely hailed by critics. If you're into pop girlies, you'll like Julia. If you're more avant-garde, you'll like, Julia, too. Her dewy, harpsichord-filled 2015 track "Sea Calls Me Home" and its lilting chorus ("I can't swim! Its lucidity! So clear!") helped me glide through the last nine years—as I navigated the end of college, my first "real" writing jobs, and the pandemic, every listen was a swan dive, a rest on a chilly rock as I gazed at the sparkle of sunlight against ocean waves. Since the birth of her daughter and the death of a loved one, though, Holter's brand of dream pop has expanded to become more sensual and nocturnal. Her new album, *Something in the Room She Moves*, will be released on March 22. (*The Crocodile*, 2505 First Ave, 8 pm, \$20) **LINDSAY COSTELLO**

A Conversation with Pailin Chongchitnant: In-Person & Online

Thurs, May 9

Over 1.7 million subscribers tune in to watch the ebullient Cordon Bleu-trained chef Pailin "Pai" Chongchitnant on her cooking channel Pailin's Kitchen, where she breaks down Thai cuisine

for home cooks of all levels, demonstrating how to whip up dishes like pad kra pao and coconut pancakes. Chongchitnant grew up in southern Thailand and osmosed the fundamentals of cooking from hanging out in the kitchen as a kid. Today, she's the author of two cookbooks, *Hot Thai Kitchen* and *Sabai: 100 Simple Thai Recipes for Any Day of the Week*. She'll discuss the book with local author J. Kenji López-Alt. (Town Hall Seattle, 1119 Eighth Ave, 7:30 pm, \$12-\$85) **JULIANNE BELL**

Book Signing: The Paris Novel by Ruth Reichl

Sat, May 18

As a restaurant critic for the *New York Times* in the 1990s, legendary food writer Ruth Reichl gained renown for her acerbic observations and penchant for donning disguises to maintain her anonymity in restaurants, and she went on to become the editor-in-chief of the now-defunct *Gourmet* magazine. Reichl has since penned five best-selling memoirs as well as a cookbook and a novel, has won six James Beard Awards, and is known for her warm voice and fierce advocacy of home cooking. In her latest fictional work, *The Paris Novel*, she tells the story of Stella, a woman who receives a one-way ticket to Paris after her estranged mother dies. Of course, Reichl's cozy ode to the City of Light is full of sparkling descriptions of decadent French cuisine, vintage fashion, and dazzling art, making it a perfect escapist romp for when you're consumed by wanderlust. (*Book Larder*, 4252 Fremont Ave N, 2 pm, \$32.75, admission includes a signed copy of *The Paris Novel*) **JULIANNE BELL**



RACHEL BRIGHT

Kathleen Hanna - Rebel Girl: My Life as a Feminist Punk

Wed, May 22

As a longtime student of Riot Grrrl, I've annihilated every piece of literature about the movement that I can get my paws on. Some favorites through my life have included Sara Marcus's *Girls to the Front*, Carrie Brownstein's *Hunger Makes Me a Modern Girl*, and Marisa Meltzer's *Girl Power: The Nineties Revolution in Music*. Most of these music memoirs and anthologies tell the story of the precocious Evergreen State College student Kathleen Hanna, who propelled the movement with the creation of feminist art space Reko Muse, and later, with the trailblazing feminist punk band Bikini Kill. Now, Hanna is telling her own story in the memoir, *Rebel Girl: My Life as a Feminist Punk*. The book chronicles her life of activism, music, friendships, illness, love, and limitless amount of determination. Hanna will be joined in conversation by Seattle's own *Shrill* author Lindy West. (Town Hall Seattle, 1119 Eighth Ave, 7:30 pm, \$68-\$104) **AUDREY VANN**



BRUNO HADDAD

Caetano Veloso

WED, MARCH 27

Revolutionary Brazilian artist Caetano Veloso is known as one of the founding fathers of the Tropicália movement for his distinctive blend of pop psychedelia, traditional Brazilian rhythms, and anti-authoritarian lyrics. The loss of fellow Brazilian psychedelia trailblazers Rita Lee and Gal Costa still feels fresh, so I am elated to see that Veloso is still peddling his songs around the globe. Not to mention, he also came out as bisexual at the age of 80—that's king behavior if you ask me! If you're new to Veloso's music, then drop everything and listen to his 1972 album *Transa*. It seamlessly floats between English and Portuguese, detailing his experiences with loss, loneliness, and British culture while living in political exile in London. (*Moore Theatre*, 1932 Second Ave, 7:30 pm, tickets start at \$46, all ages) **AUDREY VANN**

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