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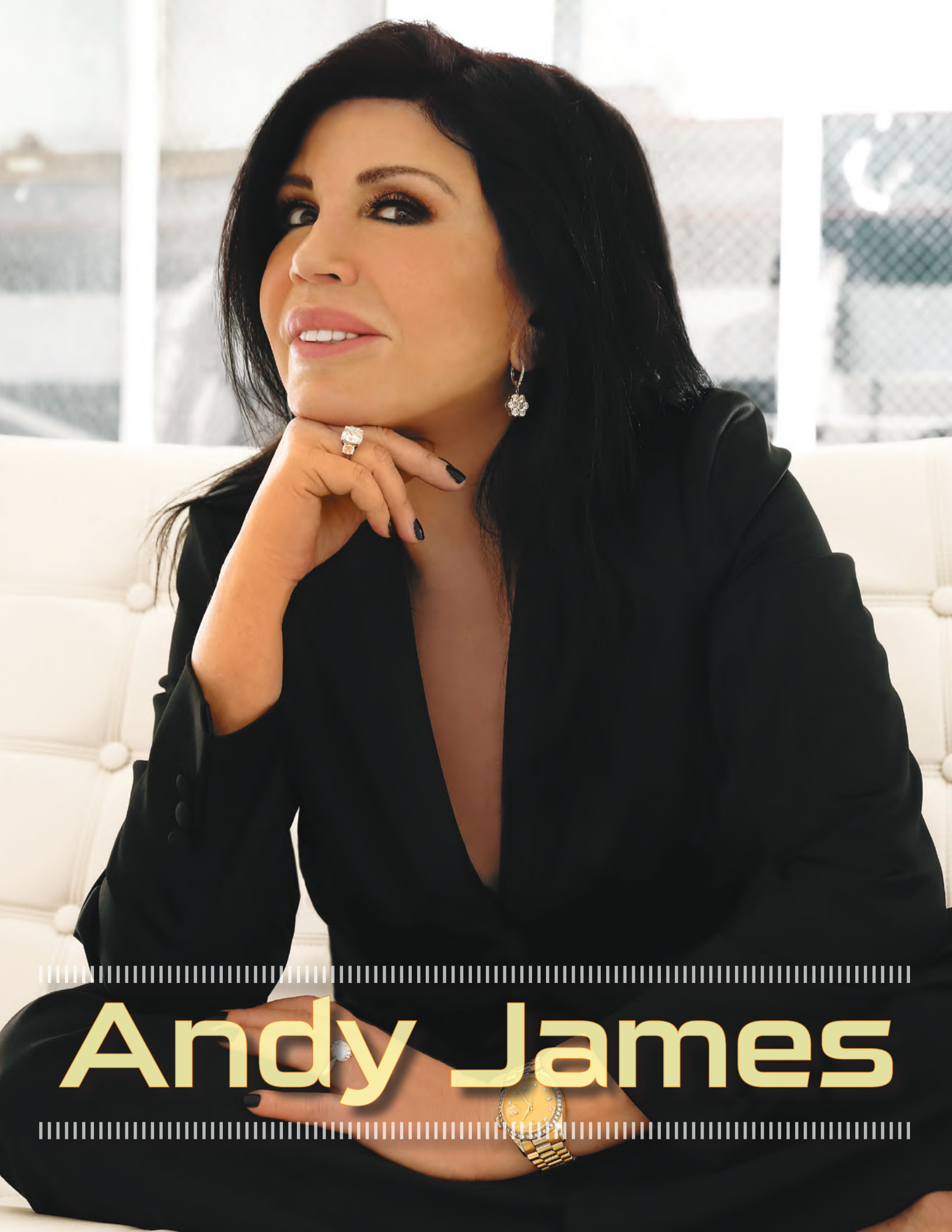
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Host of the Month



Andy James

We're super-excited to have some time today with acclaimed jazz vocalist Andy James; greetings and salutations Andy, and thanks for carving time from a busy schedule to speak with us and our readers here at Vents Magazine! Before we meander down the proverbial Q&A music-lined pathway, how is the latter half of 2025 finding you and yours?

The latter half of 2025 has been very fulfilling for me! I've been able to tour some of my favorite cities Rome, Bari, Madrid, Washington DC, Austin, NYC, and New Orleans. I've also been able to write and record my second Jazz/Flamenco album, which was also recorded in Italy. It's a follow-up to my first release *Happy People*, which came out earlier in the year. Hopefully, it will drop around mid-2026! I'm very excited to have finally finished and to be releasing my next album *The Architect of My Blues* on November 14, 2025. It's been a while in the making. It was recorded a few years ago at United Studios Los Angeles and has turned into a large work with so many wonderful people involved.

Major kudos and accolades on your eagerly anticipated new album, THE ARCHITECT OF MY BLUES, which is set to light up record charts across the ever-loving globe when it debuts this November 14 on all major digital streaming platforms! Starting at the top, can you talk about what inspired one of the best LP releases of '25?

The Architect of My Blues has been a very different and fulfilling adventure for me. Being able to write with so many other talented writers in Nashville, rather than just myself, was a thrill — and about time too! There's nothing wrong with taking a creative risk now and then. The style is also a departure for me, with a jazz/western/blues groove this time. I wanted to show a different side to my writing character and personality. There were so many heroes of this style in my youth. I've always loved the writing of Dolly Parton, for example — she's a standout with so many timeless hits.

Can you introduce our ever-inquisitive readers to the amazing and legendary musicians who contributed their musical wares to THE ARCHITECT OF MY BLUES?

I've been lucky enough to work with some of the finest musicians imaginable for this adventurous project. Jon Cowherd, my arranger and pianist, along with John Patitucci on bass, were the pulse and groove that made interpreting the songs so natural. Nicholas Payton was a gem on trumpet, supported beautifully by Joel Frahm, Michael Dease, and Bob Sheppard on horns. Greg Leisz, who's played with Joni Mitchell, added the perfect touch-

es on pedal steel guitar. Alex Acuña, from Weather Report and Miles Davis fame, was superb on percussion. Ronnie Foster, who's performed with Stevie Wonder and George Benson, brought amazing energy to the title track "The Architect of the Blues." Clarence Penn, as always, played great on drums. On the only instrumental piece on the album, "Wilson's Gospel," Vinnie Colaiuta (Sting), Charlie Bisharat (violin), and James Genus (Herbie Hancock, SNL) were magnificent. I can't forget Steve Cardenas on guitar — his playing had such finesse and taste.

How is THE ARCHITECT OF MY BLUES similar to your recent *Happy People* LP? How is it different?

My last release *Happy People* and *The Architect of My Blues* couldn't be more different musically which was completely intentional. I find it rewarding to challenge my approach now and then and, in doing so, keep my audience guessing about what's coming next. *The Architect of My Blues* is my way of showing another interpretation of style compared to the Flamenco/Jazz groove of *Happy People* and my life and career in Spain. I hope it surprises my audience to discover there are many sides to my artistic expression and performance.

We're big admirers of the tune *Sleeping Heart* which stands proudly front-and-center on the upcoming THE ARCHITECT OF MY BLUES album! What's the story behind this gem of a ditty?

I'm happy *Sleeping Heart* is a favorite — it's one of mine too! It's an uplifting song about how a great relationship can bring a fulfilling and fruitful life, even when you think it's too late. In Nashville, while writing the song with Jon Cowherd and Nicole Atkins, we all felt we had each found that kind of person in our lives. It's always satisfying to sing about what you know will happen — it allowed me to deliver the vocal with warmth and a real sense of the lyric's journey.

In the wake of the November 14 release of THE ARCHITECT OF MY BLUES, can fans look forward to catching you on the touring/performing circuit, perhaps in the form of a European tour?

I'll be touring Europe this November during the album release, returning to some of my favorite places from my past life working and living in Europe — Germany, Greece, and Italy. I have a wonderful fan base there, and performing these new songs in those romantic settings feels perfect.

THE ARCHITECT OF MY BLUES was beautifully produced by highly respected industry mensch's Piero

Pata and Jon Cowherd. What was it like collaborating with these two on the new LP?

Collaborating again with Piero Pata and Jon Cowherd was such a gift, as it always is. Their teamwork gives me the freedom to express the emotion and interpretation that I think is essential for conveying my inner thoughts through melody and lyric. They allow the performance to breathe and give it the soul it deserves. For me, interpreting the message is everything.

Who are some of the folks both in and out of the world of music who have informed and inspired you?

Inspiration comes from so many artists who shaped me in my youth. My mother was a jazz singer, so I grew up hearing Sarah Vaughan as she rehearsed. I even sang backups in her shows, which led me toward becoming a vocalist myself. Ella Fitzgerald, Ray Charles, and Carmen McRae were all major influences as well. Chick Corea and Paco de Lucía gave me a great sense of rhythm, arrangement, and timing — their interpretation and performance shaped my love for both jazz and flamenco. I only wish these greats were still here for me to lean on.

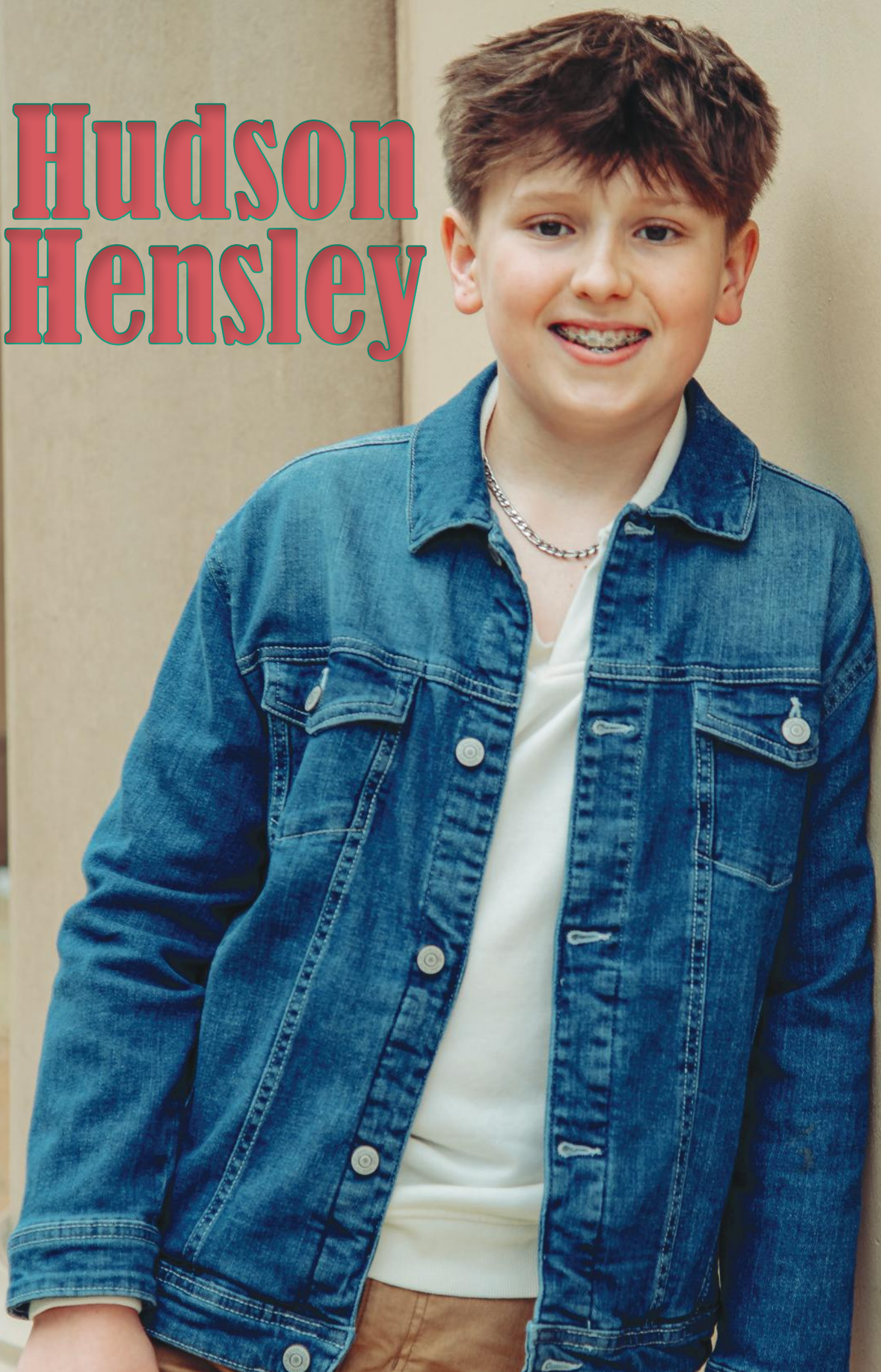
Le Coq Records is the brilliant record label which is releasing THE ARCHITECT OF MY BLUES! What makes Le Coq the perfect home for you and your music?

Le Coq Records is a label I started with Piero Pata when I moved from Spain to the United States in 2014. It allows me to tailor my own and other artists' compositions so that the music and performance remain the focus — the true center of everything. It's about artistic freedom and pure expression, something every musician hopes to achieve.

At the end of the day, what do you hope listeners walk away with after giving many-a-spin to your drop-the-mic of a new album THE ARCHITECT OF MY BLUES?

I hope that after a few spins of the LP, listeners feel that the lyrics and melodies symbolize what my writing is truly about — storytelling and sentiment. With such a wonderful team of collaborators — Jon Cowherd, Nicole Atkins, Dexter Green, Emily Levi, Aaron Lee Tasjan, Tre Burt, and Ryan Scott — I found the perfect partners for such intricate work. Jon's arrangements captured the exact mood I wanted, and my longtime engineer Josh Connelly (Lady Gaga, Usher, Santana, Green, Bieber) brought everything to life in the mix. Our Creative Director, Santiago Interiano, and his team beautifully crafted the album's visual identity, along with production by Piero Pata, Jon Cowherd, and myself, gave this album its soul.

Hudson
Hensley



We're super-excited to have some time today with one of the best young actors on the movie scene today, Hudson Hensley; greetings and salutations Hudson and thanks for taking time from a very busy schedule to speak with us and our ever-inquisitive readers here at Vents Magazine! Before we dive down the Q&A celluloid-lined rabbit hole, how is the remaining part of 2025 treating you and yours?

I have some really exciting things coming up between now and the end of 2025! First, I am looking forward to the New York City premier of Song Sung Blue! In addition to that, I will have holiday performances with my theater group. I am hoping to go on a ski trip with my family to California or Colorado. And of course, I am really excited about Thanksgiving and Christmas.

Major kudos and accolades on your bravura turn in one of the most buzzed-about movies of the year, Song Sung Blue, which is set to wow audiences when it premieres theatrically nationwide on Christmas day! Starting at the top, and for anyone late to the party, can you explain what the film is about and how your character of Dayna figures into the proceedings?

Song Sung Blue is a film based on a true story about a Neil Diamond tribute band. The film is centered around two musicians who follow their dreams and stick together through it all. My character Dayna is the son of Claire, played by the amazing Kate Hudson, and the stepson of Mike, played by the very talented Hugh Jackman. Dayna is the loving youngest child in the family.

Did you know as soon as the script for Song Sung Blue crossed your professional desk that this was a production you wanted to be a part of? What was it about this motion picture which intrigued you as an actor?

Yes! Every single thing about this movie intrigued me. The script was phenomenal and told a powerful story about everyday people who defy the odds. When I heard Hugh Jackman and Kate Hudson were the leads, my jaw dropped. I also knew the opportunity to work with the renowned Craig Brewer would be a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

Your director on Song Sung Blue is the insanely talented Craig Brewer, who also wrote the screenplay. What was your collaboration process like with Craig on the film? Is he what some actors might refer to as 'an actor's director'?

When I first met him — talk about being star struck! I remember thinking, "My life is crazy." It really wasn't hard at all for us to create a strong bond because he is such a kind individual. Yes, he is what actors refer to as "an actor's director." His style of directing is so special. Unlike many directors, he allows the actors to experiment with the characters and improvise the lines, making the film that much more authentic and real.

Speaking of collaborations, you work with such an incredible cast on Song Sung Blue, including the star-studded likes of Kate Hudson, Hugh Jackman, Ella Anderson, Michael Imperioli, King Princess, Mustafa Shakir, Fisher Stevens, and Jim Belushi among others! What was it like exercising your own considerable acting chops alongside this seasoned ensemble?

The only word to describe my experience is "surreal." I'm just so grateful that I got to work with this amazingly talented cast. All of the actors in Song Sung Blue were unbelievably kind and gave me very valuable advice, and overall took me under their wings and made me feel welcomed and special. Therefore, I felt comfortable showcasing my acting skills and making improvements on set.

Working with Ella Anderson was a wonderful experience because her show Henry Danger was my favorite show as a kid. We developed a bond instantly and she now feels like my real big sister. The crew was also great and we had a lot of fun.

One of my favorite memories that made me feel like I was a member of the cast family was when we had a late-night shoot on the day of the Jake Paul and Mike Tyson fight. In between takes, Hugh, Kate, and I watched the fight and shared the same ice cream together.

Song Sung Blue is based on a true story. Did you go all 'Method' and really dig into researching the true story behind the film, or was everything you really needed as an actor already laid out in Craig's script?

As I mentioned before, Craig Brewer did a wonderful job on the script. He wrote it in such a way that I had a very clear understanding of my character. However, to portray Dayna as best as I could, I did extensive research on his family. I even had the opportunity to meet the real Dayna, who I have kept in contact with since. This was a truly special experience.

Learning from him about his childhood, his life experiences, even things like the music he listens to, really helped me to step into the role. I just really wanted to do Dayna's character justice because he is such an awesome individual.

Many critics are raving that another film which you can be seen in — The Wildman of Shaggy Creek — tonally shares the spirit of such classic films as Stand By Me, The Goonies and E.T. As a young up-and-coming actor, how aware of those three specific films were you while shooting the movie and do you feel that the comparisons are pretty right on?

Going into the filming of The Wildman of Shaggy Creek, I was very familiar with all of those films. I actually took a lot of inspiration from the character Elliot in E.T. because I noticed

that both characters share the same child-like innocence and are both sweet, brave, and inquisitive. To even be in comparison with those classic films is such a great honor.

What's the E! True Hollywood Story on how you landed on the pathway to becoming such a talented actor? Is acting something you've always aspired to do?

When I was five years old, I saw Tom Cruise's Mission: Impossible. That was the movie that made me fall in love with acting. Two years later, I had just moved to Nashville from LA and was attending classes at a local dance studio. One of the dancer's parents was hosting an acting workshop and my mom suggested I give it a try. It turns out I was pretty good and the manager believed in my abilities.

That was Ashley Green of Pure Talent, who is still my manager to this day. And that's what really set my acting career off!

Can you give cinephiles and readers alike a hint or three as to what you have coming up in the near future? And what sort of roles would you fancy playing in the future?

Currently, I am very busy auditioning for a wide variety of roles in film and TV, as well as voice acting. On top of that, I am currently rehearsing for Beetlejuice The Musical, Jr. with my theatre group, Nashville Theatre School. There, I am also in a performance company that performs dances, songs, and scenes at numerous venues, such as the Tennessee Performing Arts Center (TPAC) and the Junior Theatre Festival in Atlanta.

In the future, I would love to play a role that allows me to act alongside animals, especially dogs. I would also love to play a younger version of a sports player, or act in a comedy.



Photo Credit: Conor Clayton Photography

A close-up portrait of actress Sònia Victoria Werner. She has long, dark, wavy hair and is wearing a white off-the-shoulder top. She is smiling slightly and looking towards the camera. The background is a soft, out-of-focus grey.

Sònia Victoria Werner

Photo credit: Deborah Lopez

We're very excited to have some time today with acclaimed actress as well as co-founder and CEO of Lighthouse Ladies, Sònia Victoria Werner; greetings and salutations Sònia and thanks for carving some time out of a very busy schedule to speak with us here at Vents Magazine today! Before we dive down the Q&A celluloid-lined rabbit hole, how is the latter part of 2025 finding you and yours?

Thanks so much for having me and for that wonderful introduction! 2025 has been a truly transformative whirlwind thanks to a mix of on-camera bookings, voiceover sessions, gearing up to showrun a series I created, and scaling my production company Lighthouse Ladies and our projects with the support of our incredible core team of multi-hyphenates. Lots of travel, joy, new wins, pinch-me moments... and now Winx! Things just keep coming and I couldn't be more grateful!

Major kudos and accolades on your bravura turn as a series regular in the Netflix global reboot Winx Club: The Magic Is Back which is set to captivate audiences when it premieres this October 2! Starting at the top, and for anyone not in the know, can you explain what the premise is behind this Italian animated fantasy series and how the character of Flora – who you bring to life with your amazing acting and vocal prowess – figures into the proceedings?

Thank you so much! Winx Club is such a beloved franchise (and one I've actually watched since its very inception in 2004), and this reboot honors that legacy while giving it fresh wings (pun intended). At its heart, it's

about a group of fairies (Bloom, Stella, Flora, Musa, Tecna, and Aisha) navigating friendship, identity, magic, and responsibility while protecting Alfea (their school) and the fairy realm of Magix. Flora, the fairy of nature, has always stood out to me and the fandom for her compassion and nurturing energy, and she brings that and more fierceness in the reboot too. Bringing her to life for the first time ever with an accent that reflects my very background and heritage has been a real dream come true... one little me would've never imagined.

How is Winx Club: The Magic Is Back similar to the 2004 series Winx Club? How is it different?

The beautiful thing is that the DNA is largely the same (and I say this as an OG Winx fan!) Fans can expect to see those powerful friendships, iconic transformations, gorgeous outfits and colors and so much more here, as well as a wholly intentional and diverse team of creatives and actors giving their all to this reboot. The key differences are now the animation is 3D (which I love), we have a few new characters, new villains, new battles and circumstances, maybe even a few new romances... and an awesome new female specialist too (Robin)! In the recording booth, I found the characters experiencing such gorgeous and varied highs and lows, which makes it resonate with both longtime fans and a new generation of kids discovering Winx for the first time.

Did you know as soon as the offer came in to you for Winx Club: The Magic Is Back that this was a production you wanted to be a part of?

The funniest thing is I didn't quite believe that this was the actual Winx Club and I was actually going to be portraying Flora—it all didn't feel real to me at first! It wasn't until I was in the booth recording that I was like wow... this is really happening! This marked a chance to give back to the kind of storytelling that raised me (shoutout to animated masterpieces like *The Incredibles* and *Ratatouille*, which I memorized from beginning to end thanks to Brad Bird's genius, inspiring me to pursue voiceover). Knowing how intentional the team behind this project was in the casting and direction was also truly special. I knew this was meant to be and I can't believe it's now here!

What does it mean for you as a trilingual actress as well as a first-generation Hispanic-American to contribute to the new mythos of this Winx Club reboot?

Without sounding overly cheesy here, it truly means everything to me. I grew up watching Winx Club, and now to be a part of that legacy in a new light is unreal. I grew up embodying many "firsts" in my family lineage: the first ever to be born in the United States, the eldest daughter, the first actress, the list goes on. Navigating a new country and new passions and new languages and cultures on my own (of course, with the most amazing support from my parents) came with its own unique challenges, and I remember turning to fictional characters on their own journeys to learn how to act and what to do on mine. I think about my younger self in Kindergarten, mixing Spanish and English and German and more, pronouncing vowels my own way... what would it have meant to hear that reflected back on my TV screen? Spanish was one of my first languages, and empowering Flora with that cultural nuance (like so many of the incredible Flora voice actresses have done before me) has been a real dream come true. It's really about kids hearing themselves, seeing themselves, and realizing their stories belong in the larger cultural mythos. I come from a strong lineage of powerful, self-starting women—from my abuela/iaia to my mamá—their strength and warmth are all interred within Flora now.

You work with such an outstanding ensemble of actors on Winx Club: *The Magic Is Back*, including Kate Bristol, Courtney Shaw, Zuri Washington, Jenny W. Chan, Sarah Faye Beard, Cat Protano, and Caroline Spinola, among others! What was it like exercising your own considerable acting chops alongside this group of thespians?

Fun fact: we actually didn't officially meet until after the voice cast was announced! However, each session, I was starstruck hearing their engaging voices in my headphones. They made it so easy to feel what Flora was feeling, to play off of them and laugh and cry and relish in the story from a true fan's perspective. I cannot rave enough about each and every one of them and the heart they poured into crafting these characters. We were all fans of the original series, so there was this shared sense of reverence mixed with pure joy! I also have to give a major shoutout to the team over at 3Beep where I recorded all of Flora's lines—Tom, Dominic, and the whole NYC team made my job not only so fun but also their understanding of the characters and worlds and direction reinforced just how much intentionality was being put into this series. I couldn't be more grateful to be in such good company!

Can you give our ever-inquisitive readers a hint or three as to what we can expect and look forward to with this eagerly anticipated reboot of Winx Club?

Ooh... without giving too much away, Flora has some moments this season that made me tear up in the booth! Mr. Straffi and the creative team really leaned into developing and expanding Flora this time around, and I think having that heart and soul there is something fans will also love to witness in the next 13 episodes coming out Spring 2026. The fairies also face challenges that aren't just magical battles but emotional ones surrounding their fears, their hopes, their friends, their families. We get to see some really exciting, unexpected moments from everyone in these first 13 episodes, and more to come in the Spring!

When you're not blowing us all away onscreen, you're out in the world doing amazing things as the co-founder and CEO of the award-winning Lighthouse Ladies; congrats! Can you talk about what inspired you to co-found this brilliant and much-needed endeavor?

I'm blushing! Thank you! Lighthouse Ladies was born out of a pandemic guerrilla filmmaking project where myself and three of my closest multi-hyphenated friends inhabited every role of production from writing to directing to acting to producing (and everything in between) to create our very first short film *Sandwomen* on a budget of under \$100. Instantly, we connected due to our varied yet complementary skillset and knew we had

something on our hands. As female founders, we wanted to keep that visibility at the forefront of our name (representation is a key theme here!) and we loved this image of the lighthouse being the structure that guides lost sailors back to shore, just like we seek to do when helping artists find collaborators, opportunities, or even themselves through their work. Of course, there are hundreds of production companies out there, so we really took the time to map out our game plan, mission, key differentiations, and more ahead of officially launching in 2023. We didn't want to just "find a seat at the table," we wanted to build an entirely new table. One where, in order to dismantle gatekeeping, we scale the gates and bring everyone with us. At our core, we believe that radical empathy should extend to the humans behind it, and that that empathy does not prevent our art from being the most commercially successful art it can be. If anything, that empathy propels us and our artists forward. Since founding, we've produced and/or supported 30+ projects, including Oscar-qualifying festival runs, sold-out theatrical nights, Broadway musical development, feature films and series, and community events that bring thousands of NYC creatives together. Our core team is women-led and internationally diverse and our internal artist database (which is free to join) now spans 1,500+ creatives. And hey, we're just getting started!

Looking ahead, where would you like to see Lighthouse Ladies in five years' time? Do you see opportunities to grow Lighthouse Ladies even further?

Absolutely. Right now, Lighthouse Ladies is already juggling over a dozen projects at various stages from development to post. But five years from now, I see Lighthouse Ladies as a whole creative ecosystem. That means running multiple projects simultaneously, financing our own projects and those that resonate with us, and serving as a launchpad for emerging voices who might not otherwise get the platform. We do things differently at Lighthouse Ladies. When we cast, we watch every tape and get back to everyone who auditioned with an opportunity for feedback or to remain in touch. When we produce, we do so with heart and non-negotiable mutual respect. When we develop, we flag the things we wish we would have known at the start, making information accessible to all. We've already built a free artist database to connect talent with opportunities, and I'd love to see that scale into a global network and Lighthouse Ladies Library of mentorship content, resources, connections, and so much more. I also see us leaning into international co-productions, reflecting the multicultural backgrounds of myself and our leadership and core teams. It's all about growing with intention—expanding while keeping empathy and humanity at our center.

Beyond Winx Club: *The Magic Is Back*, what else do you have coming up in the near future as far as film and television? Is it a pretty full dance card?

You know it! On television, I'm making my primetime debut on BET's *Assisted Living*, filmed at Tyler Perry Studios. On the film side, I'm in two feature sets to release this year: *The Monks of Lorisidia*, which is this delightfully absurd comedic monk period piece, and *Burn the Boats*, a project that really digs into how the media we consume shapes our identities and relationships. In the voiceover world, I've had the joy of lending my voice to national campaigns for various major brands including a Pepsi spot currently playing in Regal Cinemas nationwide, and to several upcoming video games I can't quite name yet, but fans will hear very soon. Commercially, I just wrapped an exciting shoot in Texas, and on the producing side, Lighthouse Ladies is supporting projects across genres, from comedy pilots to narrative features. I've also lived a lot of lives outside of the spotlight all of which feed into my creative work now. Some of my friends joke that I'm "Barbie" because of the many roles I've inhabited, but the truth is each role has taught me something that makes me a stronger actor, producer, and entrepreneur today. Lots more to come!

At the end of the day, what do you hope audiences walk away with after heading over to Netflix to check out Winx Club: *The Magic Is Back*?

Going in with an open mind, ready to experience new things and new characters and newness overall is the biggest tip I have for folks eager to begin watching. The original Winx Club is so iconic, and I want fans to know this reboot doesn't erase that in any sense... it's a continuation of a legacy for a new generation. There are also subtle nods and Easter eggs woven in for the original fans like myself. What I personally hope people walk away with is a sense of empowerment wrapped in magic. Flora, in particular, carries this reminder that compassion isn't weakness, it's power. If kids and adults alike can finish an episode feeling braver, kinder, happier, or simply more connected to the people around them, then we've done something meaningful. Overall, embrace the newness, embrace the love put into this reimagining, and rate it highly wherever you can so we can keep bringing the magic your way next year and beyond!

Photo Credit : JPeterJohn Minto

A full-page portrait of Ashli Augillard. She is a Black woman with dark, curly hair, looking off to the side with a slight smile. She is wearing a light blue, sleeveless, knee-length dress with a vibrant floral pattern in shades of red, orange, and yellow. She is sitting on a curved, dark wooden ledge or staircase. Her left leg is extended downwards, and her right leg is bent. She is wearing a gold hoop earring, a necklace with a small pendant, and a gold watch on her left wrist. The background is dark and out of focus.

ASHLI AUGUILLARD

We're very happy to have some time today with acclaimed actress Ashli Auguillard; greetings and salutations Ashli and thanks for taking time from a busy schedule to speak with us here at Vents Magazine! Before we dive down the Q&A celluloid-lined rabbit hole, how is the latter-half of 2025 treating you and yours?

ASHLI: Thanks for having me! I'm excited to chat with you guys! The latter half of 2025 is treating me SWELL! THE FIRST HALF was excruciatingly slow; the slowest of my career actually. The film/tv industry has been slowly coming back to life, but things started picking up for me in August, and I'm feeling blessed!

Major kudos and accolades on your bravura turn in the hit CBS television comedy series The Neighborhood! Starting at the top, and for anyone late to the party, can you explain what The Neighborhood is about and how your character of Everette figures into the proceedings?

ASHLI: The Neighborhood is about a white, mid-western family that moves into a predominantly black neighborhood, and how the families come together and create bonds that transcend their cultural differences! It's hilarious and relatable. Everette comes into The Neighborhood in Season 8, as the new "perfect" nanny for Marty and Courtney! Things seem promising, until a detail of her past comes to the surface!

How are you as a person similar to your character of Everette in The Neighborhood? How are you different?

ASHLI: I'm very similar to Everette in that I look good on paper, and we both love athleisure! She's in leggings and sneakers her entire time on the show! That's how I dress 90% of the time! I also love Dave & Buster's dates, and ironically enough, I always urge my dates to play against me in 'Connect 4 Basketball.' If you're caught up on The Neighborhood, you get the irony.

I'm different than Everette in that I'm much more resilient. Everette quit her job because of an unpleasant memory with someone who isn't causing any harm. Rather than quitting, I likely would've challenged Malcolm to a rematch! But hey, the writers clearly had other plans for Malcolm to see through in the final season. Maybe if we had another season, Everette and Malcolm could've rekindled.

Going into The Neighborhood, were you already a fan of the series, or did you have to do a crash watching party to catch yourself up-to-date?

ASHLI: I definitely knew about the series, but I actually don't watch much tv! I enjoy reading screenplays; it allows me to create whatever world I'd like and cast whoever I prefer. Maybe it's the control freak in me, but I like getting to

paint my own world with plain text. For the past few years, I've felt like TV/film is always trying to tell me how to think. So I try to watch only a little bit of TV at a time, using most of my entertainment time to write my own screenplays, or read others. However, The Neighborhood had been on my list because of the absolute legends leading the show, and it got pushed up after I received the audition! The episodes are short, so I caught up pretty quickly! Definitely a great family show, and Marty and Malcolm keep me CRYING laughing on the show! Their scenes are gold!

The Neighborhood is a multi-camera sitcom. What was that experience like as an actress? Had you ever done a multi-camera sitcom prior to The Neighborhood?

ASHLI: It was beyond fulfilling. My foundation is in the theater, and working on the show felt like live theater. It was my first multi-cam sitcom. There were 4 cameras! I loved every moment of it, and had fun navigating not only the live aspect, but also gauging when it was appropriate to improvise/add a line that felt more organic versus sticking to the script. The OG cast went off script A LOT, but I didn't want to overstep as a newcomer, so I kind of walked that fine line.

You work with such a talented all-star cast in The Neighborhood! What was it like exercising your own considerable acting chops alongside this ensemble of thespians?

ASHLI: It was exhilarating acting alongside comedy legends! I grew up watching Cedric the Entertainer and Tichina Arnold. To play alongside them was a joy, and they made me feel so welcome. I fit right on in!

Can you give our ever-inquisitive reading audience a hint or three as to what they can expect and look forward to with this new season of The Neighborhood?

ASHLI: You can expect hilarious takes on modern topics like AI and its implications to the

workplace, relatable themes on navigating adult friendships, and a whole lot of LOVE!

Outside of The Neighborhood, is there a special upcoming project you're involved in which you might like to plug to our fellow pop culture mavens?

ASHLI: I am currently producing a short film titled 'The Happiest Hour,' and we are locking down locations and preparing to lock in our shoot dates! I can't share too much, but I can say that it navigates the cultural intersectionality of navigating adult friendships. We all know it's tough to do as adults, but there's nuance in interracial friendships that aren't touched on often. We're bringing those nuances in The Happiest Hour.

Acting-wise, who are you inspired by? And, outside of acting, who do you count as influential to you and your pathway?

ASHLI: Acting-wise, I'm extremely inspired by Uzo Aduba. As a Meisner actress who craves the opportunity to play REAL characters, I marveled at Uzo's portrayal of 'Suzanne Warren' in Orange Is The New Black. It was some of the best character acting I've seen to date. Viola Davis is another legend at the top of my list to work with. Ironically enough, I auditioned to play her daughter in The Woman King, so I feel like I'm already in the orbit of working closely with her in the future! Denzel Washington and Liam Neeson are in that mix as well, and I look forward to getting to play with them!

Final – SILLY! - Question: Favorite movie?

ASHLI: My favorite movie of all time is THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA (2004)! From beginning to end, it's a masterpiece. I used to watch it every day during the summer. I drove my grandmother absolutely insane with my original choreography of 'Masquerade.' Maybe I'll let you see it sometime!





JANET-ROSE NGUYEN

We're so excited to chat with you, Janet-Rose! Thanks for joining us. How has this year been for you so far, especially leading up to the premiere of your new film?

Thank YOU for having me! I am so grateful to be here. This year has been a busy and hectic one! I wrapped my first self-funded indie feature, travelled a bit, and otherwise been busy in post-production and writing!

Congratulations on your new psychological thriller short film Do You See Her, premiering at the Blood in the Snow Film Festival. To start, can you tell us what inspired the story and what the film is about?

It was inspired by my poor eyesight lol! I used to have terrible myopia. I've had eye correction surgery since then but it was so bad that my phone would have to be held one inch away from me to be clear. I always watched films and wondered about how everyone just had good vision, what about the people with glasses during a zombie apocalypse?! I really wanted to play with vision and use a film to explore what happens when you see something terrifying ONLY when your glasses are off. After that, I wanted to make sure the characters and story were meaningful and not just a "scary" story but something with heart.

The performances in Do You See Her are so striking. How did you approach casting, and what were you looking for in your actors to bring this story to life?

Thank you! I am so proud of the performances we got! I am lucky with casting because in my previous life as an actor I know SO many talented folks and when I write my stories I can envision who will perform. Ivy and Kimberly-Ann are both my friends and I knew that they would both be able to do these roles. Then, the fact that they're both Vietnamese allowed me to put my own culture and language into the story as ewll!

The film's practical effects really stand out. Can you tell us about the creative process behind them and who you collaborated with to achieve that?

Thank you! Our SFX artist Jay Bezouska is amazing. They really can pull off anything you give them. When I wrote the script I knew the creature would be terrifying but I had no idea in what way. When Jay and I started speaking I

was trying to figure out what would be scary for Katie to see. I knew something tall, lanky, with scary teeth and something eye related. I did some initial sketches, googling, and photoshopping to try and piece it together and eventually I used Midjourney to prompt something scary - I know AI is controversial to be used in film and creative processes but we really used it in the end process and Jay took the ideas I presented and made it their own.

The tension in Do You See Her builds so subtly, creating this beautifully unsettling atmosphere. Was that pacing something you designed from the beginning, or did it evolve naturally during the edit?

Thank you, again! I knew I wanted to create something that slowly unfolded and my biggest inspiration were Parker Finn's Smile films. I loved how he created the terror in those and my challenge to myself as a genre filmmaker was to try and emulate this, and I knew that I wanted a big long shot of Katie giving her monologue. So I'd say it was intentional from the script straight through production and finessed in post.

What does it mean for you to premiere Do You See Her at the Blood in the Snow Film Festival?

A really big deal! I am so excited because this will be my first film premiere in Toronto (where I am currently based) so the cast, crew, and my friends can all come to see it. I also love the festival, having attended and admired the films in the past, so it feels like a homecoming in some ways!

After the festival, where can audiences expect to see Do You See Her next? Any upcoming screenings or plans for a wider release?

We are waiting on a few more festival notifications, so as of now I don't have any future ones but we plan to release it online in the next year!

You have such a distinct creative voice. What first drew you to filmmaking, and how did your path as a storyteller begin?

It's funny because I have been in and out of the industry with personal struggles and imposter syndrome. My first love has always been writing but with film the thing you see first is the actors. So, I used to think I wanted to be this amazing actor and I pursued that in the industry for the longest time while always writing. The first time

I tried to be a director, I faced a lot of sexism and questioned why I was even in this, so I left! Then when I returned as an actor, the dual strikes happened and the industry slowed down so I found myself with a lot of time to consider what I really wanted, and I realized that all of the screenplays I had written weren't for me to act in but to direct. I had the vision and saw the films in my head and knew what they looked and sounded like and what emotions I wanted to evoke, so why couldn't I be the one to direct them? That was a little over two years ago! I found myself a great community and threw myself into filmmaking in order to learn the craft of production. That's the long answer, the short answer is it was a long circuitous route full of self-doubt and growth but eventually I found myself here!

In your view, what makes Do You See Her stand apart from other short films on the festival circuit this year?

I think the fact that the leads are two queer Vietnamese women is a big deal! Vietnamese people and South East Asian people are not really represented in film, and in the genre space there is still a tendency to skew white and hetero behind and in front of the camera. I think our music by my amazing composer Insiya Foda stands out and the great sound design by Thom O'Neill is also exceptional! Also, that it is a horror film but grounded in Katie's mental health struggles and the heartbreak of her relationship with Mia makes it different from your typical horror fare.

And to end on a fun note — what's your favourite film about filmmaking: Living in Oblivion, Hollywood Shuffle, Barton Fink, Once Upon a Time in Hollywood, or Ed Wood?

Living in Oblivion - I am so partial to Steve Buscemi! And its satirical take for indie filmmakers is just on point.



Katelyn McCulloch



Katelyn, it's such a pleasure to have you with us today. How has 2025 been treating you so far — both personally and creatively?

It has been a rollercoaster of a year! Hot off the CSAs and straight into shooting Season 2 was a whirlwind but the excitement and joy from the entire team fueled my fire. It's also been a big year of leveling up for me and redefining for myself what it means to be a creative entrepreneur. I love to examine the systems that art exists in and find ways to reimagine how they can be more holistic, collaborative and fair. With my company Hey Old Friend I have been expanding it beyond just being a film production company and into an Entertainment lifestyle brand so it can be a home for community events like SHENANIGANS, mentorship, workshops and other forms of creative expression!

On a personal level it's also been a rollercoaster year! I think whenever you are undergoing major growth and transformation in your work/career it goes hand in hand with your personal life. For me that has looked like creating strong boundaries, developing an even deeper sense of self and not being afraid to let go of people, projects or ideas that no longer serve me. As hard as that can be in moments, I am so grateful for the sense of peace and self I'm feeling these days!

Congratulations on the upcoming second season of your CSA-nominated series Everybody's Meg, premiering November 13 on Bell Fibe TV1. For readers who may be new to the show, how would you describe Everybody's Meg and what makes it stand out in the comedy landscape?

Thank you so much!!! Everybody's Meg is a comedy for anyone who's ever felt "behind," in life.

The show serves up angsty Millennial realness and dives into that underlying anxiety that many people struggle with as they try to make it in a world that has been set up for us to fail.

I write the show with our lead Maddy Foley and whenever we dive into our scripts we always want to make the situations and dialogue as relatable as possible. We don't shy away from anything cringe and as a director I am always asking the question "how does this get funnier?". That question sparks every department, every actor and every part of post production to continue to push the boundaries of the comedy and to dig as deep as we can into every moment.

I think all of this and our collective diligence, passion and desire to reflect our own experiences on screen (and not to sugar coat them) has set our show apart in the comedy landscape.

As Everybody's Meg returns for its sophomore season, what can viewers expect this time around? How does the story and Meg's journey evolve in Season 2?

Season 2 finds Meg determined to take control of her life: she's going to therapy (despite her mom hijacking the sessions), saving for a solo trip, and swearing she won't get derailed. Enter her sister's surprise engagement — and Meg's forced role as co-maid of honor. Suddenly, her hard-won savings vanish into wedding expenses, resentment brews, and Meg faces her greatest

nemesis yet: Nancy, her sister's overachieving best friend who would do anything to trade places with her. So we have lots of new exciting things going on this season!

Not only do we watch Meg evolve this season but we also gain a deeper sense of understanding of other key characters like her sister Violet, mom Shirley and soon to be brother in law (and former ex Gordie)

One of the most relatable parts of Everybody's Meg is how it captures the idea that adulthood doesn't necessarily mean having everything figured out. Was that theme always part of the show's DNA, or did it emerge naturally as you developed the story?

It was definitely always a main theme in the show from the very beginning but it developed and grew organically with me and Maddy as writers and our own experiences. For myself- I blew up my life and moved from Toronto back home to Nova Scotia at 32. I remember feeling like if I changed my whole life now, would I be quitting or failing or giving up? But instead I found myself in a whole new chapter of messy self discovery and a real rebuilding of myself from the ground up. At times it was very difficult and lonely but making Everybody's Meg really helped me rediscover my sense of passion and purpose and I hope when people watch it they can feel a little less alone on this wild journey we call life.

You write, direct, and also act in the series, quite the creative balancing act. How do you manage those different roles on set, and what's been the most rewarding (or challenging) part of wearing so many hats?

Yes, there are many hats! I am also a producer, the Show Runner and run the day to day operations of the production company Hey Old Friend that produces the show. So it is a lot haha! BUT- I'm not alone in wearing many hats. I feel very fortunate to have a team of people where pretty much everyone is doing more than one job at any given time. It's a versatile, multi-hyphenate team of creatives who aren't afraid to meet the challenges of the film industry with hustle and heart.

While it can be challenging- what I love about it is our ability to pivot quickly when necessary. As a small but mighty show/team I have found our ability to problem solve seamlessly and everyone is always putting the show and story first which makes for a positive and productive working environment.

The show features such a talented ensemble including Maddy Foley, Martha Irving, Gil Anderson, Liam Fair, and Christian Murray. What's it like collaborating with such a strong cast, both as a director and as a fellow performer?

It is a damn dream come true! As a director I tend to lean towards actors that have a strong theatre and improv background in addition to film/tv work. I love to roll for long periods of time while we improvise and dig deeper (sorry to my sound friends holding those boom mics) and this entire cast is always so game for that approach. On top of their talent and incredible range of hilarious comedy to grounded and even more emotional scenes; this cast is so kind and generous. It is truly my absolute pleasure to work with them, laugh with them and I think you

can feel that energy from all of them on screen. And when I'm acting with them; I find it nearly impossible to not corpse because they are always surprising me with new ideas and offers I wouldn't even think of.

Maddy Foley as our lead carries this entire show effortlessly. Meg is a challenging character not just because of the amount of screen time but because of the range of emotions and situations she cycles through. Maddy has that range and versatility, but above all, I find her ability to meet every actor in the moment on and off screen to be so beautiful. She has no ego on set, she loves to play and she keeps everyone laughing no matter what the heck is going on.

Everybody's Meg received a CSA nomination, which is such an exciting milestone. What did that recognition mean to you personally and professionally?

It meant the world to me and the entire team. Personally and professionally I felt like I was really being seen as a writer and director and production company for the first time. I began my career as an actor and my pivot into being behind the camera has been developing over the last 5 years so this felt This was my first time even being eligible to submit for the CSAs so to be nominated in multiple categories really did feel like a dream come true.

Do you have a vision for how long you'd like Everybody's Meg to run? Have you mapped out a larger story arc, or do you prefer to let the series evolve organically with each season?

I think part of the magic of Everybody's Meg is that it's grown as we have — there was never a strict blueprint, just a shared instinct for where the story wanted to go. I love keeping space for surprise. And there's more Meg news on the horizon — including new places you'll be able to watch — so stay tuned!

Everybody's Meg has found a home with Bell Fibe TV1. What makes this platform the right fit for the show, and how has that partnership supported your creative vision?

It has been an absolute joy to be in the company of everyone at BellFibe TV1. They have given us so much creative freedom, support and encouragement throughout the years. When I pitched the show to them I had only short films under my belt but they believed in me, the team and that we could bring this story to life. That trust empowered me so much and truly changed my life. They always say- you just need one yes. FibeTV1 was mine and I will be forever grateful.

And just for fun — do you have a favorite movie about filmmaking itself?

(Living in Oblivion, The Player, Once Upon a Time in Hollywood, Ed Wood, Barton Fink, or Bowfinger come to mind!)

This is a tough one- first I'll say I do have a favourite book about filmmaking which is Rebel with a Crew by Robert Rodriguez but with movies I love any docs about a specific artist's journey. One of my favourites is The Zen Diaries of Garry Shandling that Judd Apatow created in honour of Garry, his mentor. I love the peak behind the curtain of an artist's process and specifically how they find and develop their comedy.



Host
of the
Month

Kristina
Denton



Host
of the
Month

Kristina
Denton

How is 2025 finding you and yours?

Thank you for having me! 2025 has been a rollercoaster. It started quite rough, as for everyone in LA, with the wildfires that rocked our city. I had just moved back after spending a year in Hawaii with my now husband, helping him finish his 24 year career in the Army. We moved back the day before the fires started and had to evacuate. It was a terrifying and heartbreaking welcome home, as you can imagine. We were more fortunate than most, but it was unreal. A few months later came a publishing deal for my memoir with Storyteller Media and MacMillan, a new rescue puppy who was found in the fires at a day old, my first stand-up comedy show and my first feature film as a writer in theaters. There is a lot to be grateful for lately.

What is Hollywood Grit all about?

At its heart, Hollywood Grit is a modern noir thriller. It follows a washed-up ex-cop (played by Max Martini) searching for his estranged daughter in the dangerous underbelly of Los Angeles. The film blends action, suspense, and a dose of humor, pulling back the curtain on a city that thrives on glamour but survives on grit. We wanted to show both sides of LA: the shine and the shadows.

How does it feel to see your characters brought to life by such an all-star cast?

I've cried so many times. You imagine these voices in your head as you write, but watching actors like Patrick Duffy, Linda Purl, Benito Martinez and Max Martini embody them was next level. They didn't just play the roles, they deepened them. Seeing Max carry the weight of the lead role with such intensity and humility gave me chills. His choices were so much fun to watch play out. It's the dream every writer secretly hopes for, to see their imagination walk, talk, and breathe on screen. With a small budget indie film, all we really have is our characters to rely on for the story. No special effects or big action scenes to keep audiences engaged. So, having this incredible cast really lean in and pour their hearts into the work, was outstanding for me.

What was your collaboration process like with Ryan Curtis?

Ryan and I have collaborated on a handful of projects in the last five years. We come at storytelling from opposite angles with a different set of strengths. He's a combat veteran and director, so he thinks in big-picture visuals, world-building, and action. I come from acting, so I always start with character, dialogue, and emotional truth. Together we fuse grit and heart. Writing Hollywood Grit was a sprint. We had puzzle pieces in place like some cast, budget, and locations before the script existed and had to build the story around them. And we only had a couple of months before we had to be in pre-production due to actor schedules. So, the first idea I had, we ran with.

Were there noir inspirations?

Yes. I know Ryan had a number of films that inspired him as far as the aesthetic and mood, and he has mentioned Billy Wilder being an inspiration. I was thinking more

in terms of the depth of the characters. I love the layers and subtly with noir and find myself creating characters that are imperfect and morally ambiguous, at war with serving themselves or the collective which feels classic noir. I think it's the most rewarding when we're watching our hero overcome both external and internal battles. I also wanted to explore the desperation in chasing your dreams or the length we go to fix our mistakes. I feel like that quest can take us to dark places, just like the quest for fame has for so many. The pursuit of fame comes with a cost and we wanted to explore that.

What role does Los Angeles play in the film?

You're right! LA isn't just the setting, it's a character. By day, it's sun-drenched dreams; by night, it's neon secrets. That duality mirrors our characters, who are all putting on a show while hiding something underneath. LA has this intoxicating energy: it promises everything, but it demands everything, too. You never know who you're going to sit next to at a bar or run next to on a treadmill. Every day there are hundreds of opportunities just waiting for you to discover them. No other city could hold this story. I've been here almost 20 years and have been the most happy and the most miserable I've ever been in my life. Same city, same me, but a completely different experience with it. The city is what you make it.

Tell us about You Don't Know Dick. What inspired it?

Thank you! You Don't Know Dick is my debut memoir about the year I worked at an erectile dysfunction clinic, a job I never expected to have, but one that cracked me wide open. On the surface, it's funny and outrageous. It's hard not to laugh at the idea that a woman was getting paid to fix broken penises for a living. But underneath, it's about grief, shame, and masculinity. My father died when I started the job and so this clinic became this unexpected distraction and eventual healing center, not only from losing him, but from never really understanding him in the first place. I was mourning the loss of my complicated father while helping hundreds of men confront their own vulnerabilities. The job changed my life and the way I saw my father and ultimately helped me make peace with him. I knew I had to tell the story in some format. The book felt like the most thorough way to get it out of me, even if a TV show remains my ultimate dream for it. Writing the book forced me to re-examine identity, mine and theirs, and to laugh through the pain. It's about dicks, yes, but really it's about male shame from a female lens, father-daughter wounds, and bridging the gap between toxic masculinity and femininity.

Any upcoming projects you can tease?

I've got a sitcom pilot being pitched that I co-created with a well-known comedian. Also, I'm hoping to get my next action-comedy feature off the ground within the year. And, if the book does well, I'll hopefully get to work on developing the show.

What are your thoughts on the shifting entertainment landscape?

I certainly hope not. It feels impossible to replace the magic of going to the movies and experiencing a story with a room full of strangers where we collectively feel and live through whatever the journey is together. Maybe that's just me being nostalgic, but it still feels magical to me. Watching the change, I think it has been an interesting challenge to try to make sense of it or keep up with it. I have two sides to my feelings about it. On the one hand, innovation and change excite me and make me feel challenged to adapt the way I tell stories. I've been adapting my storytelling for budgets and different formats for a while now, so I welcome that. On the other hand, I feel connected to the fight to keep traditional cinema alive. It's what I grew up on and it pulled me into wanting to tell stories. So, I'm torn. Overall, I know being a storyteller is all I've ever wanted to do, so I am staying flexible to keep going with the evolving landscape.

Favorite movie about the making of movies?

The TV series The Studio that came out this year is hands down my favorite. But for film: The Disaster Artist, Tropic Thunder, and The Artist. You can see where my sensibilities lie here.



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JAMES 'JB' BARNES

We're very excited to have some time today with acclaimed Blues bassist James 'JB' Barnes; greetings and salutations JB, and thanks for taking time from a busy schedule to speak with us here at Vents Magazine! Before we dive down the Q&A music-lined rabbit hole, how is the latter-half of 2025 treating you and yours?

(JB) Thank you very much for having me. I'm honored to speak with you today. As 2025 is ending, me and mine are doing very well and I am so excited with all the great things happening this year.

Major kudos and accolades on your stunner of a new album *My Mississippi Roots*, which is busy lighting up record charts and putting a smile on listeners' faces even as we speak! Starting at the top, can you talk about what inspired one of the best LP releases of '25?

(JB) Thank you! The inspiration for this record was many years in the making. Let me go back to the year 1964. This was the year my dad passed away. I was only (4) years old when he passed and I have a vague memory of him. My dad was born and raised in Port Gibson Mississippi. As the years have gone by, I have always felt an emptiness growing up without ever really getting to know him. I have 3 other siblings, whom were all born in Mississippi. I am the only one who

was not born in Mississippi. My dad and mom made the decision to leave the deep south and head north during the mid-1950's before I was born. They settled in Cleveland Ohio, and this is where I was born. I felt the need to tell my dad's story and at the same time reach back in time to his beginnings. Several of the songs on the record tell my dad, Jerry Lee Barnes Sr's story. I felt his story needed to be told and this is also my way of paying tribute to his life and legacy.

Your father and his memory and inspiration played a very big part in the new *My Mississippi Roots* album, specifically on the title track of the LP. When you think of the Blues, is your father's memory sort of entwined within that music genre?

(JB) From what I know of my dad through researching and talking with my eldest sister, my dad loved music and was exposed to gospel through his parents while attending church. The blues was also a major part of his world being from Mississippi. He listened to blues, gospel, Jazz and R&B. My father lived the blues growing up in the "Jim Crow" south and had a deep-rooted understanding of where and how blues music started. The title track *My Mississippi Roots* is my father's heart felt story which is certainly entwined within the blues.

Your producer on *My Mississippi Roots* is the rightly lauded guitarist, songwriter and long-time friend Anthony Krizan. What did Anthony bring to the new LP which is unique and exclusive to him and what was it like collaborating with him?

(JB) Anthony is my friend who I've known for many years. He is professional, very talented and has excellent ears. When I explained to him the theme for this upcoming record, he understood that the record needed to be a heartfelt tribute to my father's history and legacy. The most unique aspect of Anthony's talent is his ability to interpret the blues with fusing his rocking style guitar playing giving the songs the heavy stand-out guitar sound I was looking for on the songs. Anthony also has an excellent ability in coming up with melodies as well sometimes off the top of his head. We used several of these melodies and wrote lyrics based on them. A great example of this is the title track, "My Mississippi Roots". The song tells my father's complete story and journey from Mississippi to Cleveland Ohio. The acoustic piano player is my son, Jarred "Arktkt" Barnes. His playing help to ground the song in the blues with a very tasteful piano solo at the end of the song. I had so much fun collaborating with Anthony. We have a great collaborative connection, and every studio session was fun and full of passion and energy for the music. We experimented with several sounds within each song and once a

song was completed the satisfaction was good as we felt we accomplished what we set out to do.

We're over the moon for your rendition on the My Mississippi Roots album of the Rolling Stones classic Wild Horses; congrats! What's the secret of pulling off a successful cover version of a beloved song such as this? Is it a fine line to walk in paying respects to the original version while also attempting to make it your own?

(JB) I'm so glad you like it. On my first record released during 2023, "JB's Favorite Things" we did a cover of the Beatles song "Oh Darling". On the new record I told my producer Anthony that I wanted to do the rolling Stones classic "Wild Horses". This song to me kind of reflected on my father's love for my mother. "Wild Horses couldn't drag him away" from her. I heard a version of this song many years ago from the great singer, Otis Clay. I wanted to do my own version of the song giving it an R&B flavor. The fine line was to make the music as perfect as we could aligning it with the original version. The acoustic piano being played by my son Jarred "Arkktk" Barnes gave the song the blues feeling I was looking for. Anthony had the great and innovative thought to extend the interlude with great guitar solo over the top which made the song even more our own. The lead vocals by Steven Braxton gave the song the R&B feel I was looking for. Background vocals by Anthony myself, Steven and Oria Aspen. The vocals for this song to me was the icing on the cake. Anthony and I felt this song was a masterpiece.

In your humble opinion, what differentiates My Mississippi Roots from the Distinguished Competition on the current day music scene?

(JB) I'm working to keep up with all the great blues artists and musicians out there today and I am so inspired by everything I'm hearing. I attend many shows and listen to all the blues artists I can on a weekly and/or monthly basis. I feel that I need to have a sense of excellence in putting songs together for a record. I hear excellence from all the competition, and this makes me work hard to bring the same type of excellence to my music. My Mississippi Roots tells my family's story especially my father's story. When anyone fuses their heartfelt life experiences and story through music, it will always differentiate itself. The listener will also feel the difference and respond in a positive way.

In the wake of the October 17 release of your drop-the-mic LP My Mississippi Roots, can fans look forward to catching you on the touring/performing circuit?

(JB) Yes, I am currently performing shows locally throughout the New Jersey and Tri-state areas. I'm using my 3-piece trio, (BBD Rhythm & Blues Band) for the local shows often bringing in soloists to sit-in performing blues standards and several songs off the new record. I am also in rehearsals with my larger band (The JB Blues Band). I will be doing multiple record release shows during November and December while preparing for next year's larger clubs and upcoming festivals.

Who are some of the folks both in and out of the world of music who have informed and inspired your own unique and indelible artistic pathway?



(JB) I give God the glory first and foremost. My inspiration comes from several genres. I grew up hearing straight ahead Jazz from the likes of Miles Davis, John Coltrane and may others. I also grew up during the Mo-Town era listening to the great R&B artists such as James Brown, Smokey Robinson and may other. Rock & Roll also played a strong part in my upbringing. The roots of all these genres of music is the blues. Listening and researching the blues has given me such joy. I wanted to base my career on playing the blues while doing my part to keep the music alive.

Speaking of collaborations, you work alongside your son Jarred 'Arkktk' Barnes on My Mississippi Roots! What's it been like to witness Jarred carrying on the family tradition in such a remarkable and fine manner?

(JB) Thank you for asking this question. My mother, Jarred's Grandmother sang Gospel in the Church. My Brother, Jarred's Uncle, sang in a do-wop group during the late 60's, early 70's. Jarred to me is the most talented among the entire family. It started with him when he was a toddler. At the age of (4) he use to sit in front of the TV watching Mickey Mouse on the movie "Fantasia". He would act like he was conducting the orchestra. This is how we knew music was in him. Long story short, he began to play piano at the age of (8). During high school he played Trumpet in the school marching band and played piano in the jazz band. Jarred went on in music learning classical music and jazz music. He and I would work on music together when he was young all throughout his grade school years up to the time he went on to Berklee College of

Music graduating during 2013. When ever Jarred would come home on break, he would always find time to sit in with me and my band during local gigs we were performing. My first album "JB's Favorite Things" featured Jarred on piano as well. I challenged him again on the new record and explained that this time was very special and I needed his help to tell the story of his grandfather's story. As you hear, Jarred rose to the occasion like I knew he would. Recording, performing and working with my son Jarred is a dream come true and the most gratifying feeling I've ever had since playing the blues.

At the end of the day, what do you hope listeners walk away with after giving many-a-spin to your beautiful new album My Mississippi Roots?

(JB) I feelthere is a little something on thisrecord for everyone. From the Jazz infused "JB Shuffle" to the slow blues of "Gotta Make a Change" to the Title song "My Mississippi Roots" and the Rock classic "Wild Horses" along with the R&B classic "Sara Smile". The common thread that runs throughout this record is, the blues. I want people to walk away with a strong feeling of my family history and perhaps make the connection to their own history. But what it all comes down to is, does this music make the listener feel good, tap their foot or sing along with the songs. My sincere wish is that they do all the above. If the listener does these things, I will be very happy.



DAMIEN MCFLY

Hi Damien, welcome to VENTS! How have you been?

I've been good, thanks, very excited about what's happening.

What can you tell us about the title and meaning behind your most recent release, 'for those who care'?

After trying about a hundred different combinations of "for those who," I finally decided that care was the best word to use.

It carries many different meanings, and it's one of those English words that, in Italian (my first language), doesn't have a perfect translation.

The album is for everyone who cares — about someone, a passion, their favourite book, or even their plants.

I want these songs to reach people who take the time to appreciate things and truly care about them.

How was the recording and writing process?

The album came to life very slowly, in a completely natural way.

I love producing my own songs, so I spent most of the time doing that — even before some of the lyrics were finished.

Each period of the past three years had a different sound in my head, and it's beautiful to listen back now and relive those moments through these songs.

I recorded everything in my living room, and since I live next to a busy road, I often had to wait for the quiet hours to sing or record piano and guitars.

I wanted the sound to feel authentic and organic, and I hope people can feel that.

Where did you find the inspiration for the songs and lyrics?

Mostly from my life experiences — from past relationships and from learning through my mistakes in them.

This album is also written from the perspective of a 35-year-old guy who doesn't have a family of his own and doesn't work a 9-to-5 job.

I talk about that too, but not in a complaining way — more as an honest reflection on where I am in life.

Will you be hitting the road this year?

Yes, I have a tour planned in France, UK, Germany, Netherlands and Italy.

I'm pretty happy about going back to the UK for a proper tour after many years.

If anyone's interested you can find the dates at www.damienmcfly.com

What else is happening next in your world?

Maybe it's the fact that I've just released a new album but I really feel like writing new music right now so hopefully I'm gonna have some kind of EP made by the end of next year



GLASCATS

Hey! Welcome to VENTS! How have you been?

We've been well. We're happy with the release of our new album and already looking forward to the next one.

What can you tell us about the title and meaning behind your most recent release, 'DUST'?

DUST can have several meanings, you may find hints of something untouched or a metaphor with time. We chose this title because we find it modest, small and yet powerful.

How was the recording and writing process?

The songs were composed over the course of 2 years and

recorded during a 2 week home session. We get together to assemble different parts created individually. It's democratic, each has their say. Some songs are born through jamming.

Where did you find the inspiration for the songs and lyrics?

While traveling, by reading books (especially Stephen King), spending time in nature, listening to the heart.

Will you be hitting the road this year?

We'll be at the Supersonic in Paris on October 30th. We have a few shows going in Switzerland but no big European tours.

What else is happening next in your world?

Collaborating with a European booker is a dream. In the meantime we're writing new songs for upcoming projects.



Witchy Ways



Jane Clark

For those who haven't seen it yet, can you tell us what WITCHY WAYS is about?

Witchy Ways is about a woman who goes in search of her mother's past, only to discover herself through the power of magic.

You wrote, directed, and produced WITCHY WAYS. What were some of the biggest challenges in wearing all those hats?

I am very comfortable assuming those responsibilities. In this case I was aided by Ainara Landon who came on as a producer and is now someone I hope to never make a movie without! The challenges came with so many things that became out of our control. For instance, it was an incredibly rainy year for Los Angeles and we had to call off our first day of shooting when all the roads in Topanga cut off entering or exiting the area. That meant we lost a day of shooting from our already tight schedule. This is the truth, though. Every time we were hit with a problem, we only needed to think around the issue and come up with a solution - and invariably the solution gave us something better than we had before the problem. Trust - a continuing lesson I put into practice as consistently as I could.

Was it difficult to juggle so many creative and logistical roles, or did it feel empowering to have that level of control?

I feel that telling a story starts with the first word on paper and doesn't end until the film is locked and delivered to the distributor. So having that level of control to some degree is essential to my process. The additional role of Costumer Designer - after our original hire quit for a better paying job - that was a little more control than I wanted, but when you don't have a choice you step up in any role necessary when you are making a low budget film.

Let's talk about the cast. What was it like working with such incredible talent including Diora Baird, Marem Hassler, Guinevere Turner, and Candis Cayne?

It was like Sunday brunch. I was excited for that first mimosa (it starts with rehearsals), I loved every minute of the meal (these women are all experienced, joyful, and open to possibilities), and it only got more fun as we went along (there was a lot of laughter and some very surreal moments!) And at the end, tipsy on the adrenaline, we said goodbye until next time and headed on our way home. I'm now looking forward to an opportunity to do it all again.

When writing WITCHY WAYS, did you set out to turn the traditional supernatural/witch genre on its head by approaching it through a queer and contemporary lens?

I was always going to write a queer relationship story, and I wanted to explore the idea of a ghost and a witch. That's what I started with. Originally, I was walking down that more traditional darker witch/ghost path, but was dissatisfied after finishing an Act I of a totally different script. So I started watching every witch movie I could get my hands on, looking for inspiration. I made my way back to the 90s and rewatched "Practical Magic" and that was it. I started crafting the story, which leaned toward romance and in some ways sisterhood. Then I researched

spells for a scene and discovered this very real community of witches who live their lives to some degree, still "in the closet." That's when I realized that there was an opportunity to not only shine a light on this beautiful, spiritual world, and by doing that the parallels between the two communities found themselves.

The film explores the idea that real magic comes from authenticity and love. Can you talk about how that theme connects to your own creative journey and to the queer experience?

I think the best way to describe how magic informs my life, both personal and professional, goes back to the idea of trust. Magic happens when you trust. I always use this analogy - if I am walking down a garden path and a wall appears in front of me, I have two choices. I can insist that the path that I'm on is where I'm going and I am going to hit against that wall and try to climb that wall in an effort to stay on that path. If I take a moment and let the magic in, another way will appear. And I simply have to trust that the spirits are guiding me down another direction for a reason, and so I take that path and trust it will lead me to where I should be going.

You've mentioned parallels between the witch community and the queer community both often misunderstood yet grounded in strength, resilience, and chosen family. How did those ideas influence the story and characters in WITCHY WAYS?

I have to be honest - I write and then I realize. It's hard to explain, but unlike some writers who struggle with the process, I don't. Once I understand the heart of the story and my characters, I just write. The themes and ideas seem to get together in my brain and have a party without me, decide where they want to go and then use me to transfer that to the computer screen. It is in the details once the script is a strong first draft that I start thinking about what I wrote and how to hone, define, and grow those ideas into something that resonates.

The film blends romance, humor, and supernatural elements almost like a modern-day Practical Magic or A Discovery of Witches. How did you find the right balance between these tones?

If you go back and watch past work (even Meth Head) humor and romance have been part of all of them. I think both are integral to reveal the humanity of the character. So honestly, finding that balance was natural for me. The part that was new was the supernatural. When I got into editing, I initially leaned on the romance and humor to build the story and was hesitant with the doses of the supernatural and witchy. But as the story came together, I slowly began feeding more of the otherworldly into the edit, experimenting with how it felt to push it further. I also landed with a great VFX guy, Kareem Walkes, after my original VFX guy became unavailable. Kareem was game to try things my imagination whipped up and also showed me what was possible that I might not have thought about. So the balance of the supernatural and witchy with the more down to earth aspects grew as the edit developed.

You recently partnered with VENUS, the new LGBTQ+ community app and platform, to host

Scene & Story, a series featuring conversations with leading LGBTQ directors. How did that collaboration come about, and how does it connect to your work on WITCHY WAYS?

Shirin and Katherine approached me, and I couldn't be more delighted. It only connects to WITCHY WAYS in that I am springboarding off of my experiences with this film and all my other work, to encourage a conversation with fellow directors. I really love sharing those experiences with other women who have been down similar roads.

Who are some of the people within or outside the film industry who have inspired your creative path and storytelling voice?

Geez. I'm not sure, to be honest. There have been so many people - some random - some long time friends and family - who have encouraged me, shared their wisdom, slowed my roll when I was snowballing, pushed me when I faltered. There have been filmmakers and films that live in my brain and come out in my work. There have been naysayers who made me only work harder, try harder, believe harder in myself. I thank them as much as anyone for giving me the inspiration and knowledge I rely on today. I am really like a big sponge, soaking up everything that I can possibly absorb from every experience and human who I come in contact with. When the time is right, I wring myself out a little to create something new.

What can audiences look forward to from you next?

I just shot a sizzle reel and am headed to AFM to raise money for a film called BENEATH THE SURFACE. It's a psychological horror film I've been developing with my neighbor, Paul Fox. It's centered around Ben (who Paul is playing) who returns with his partner, Addi (Haaz Sleiman) to a family summer cabin to scatter the ashes of his father - estranged from him since his twin brother drowned when they were 12. When Addi is called home to help his mother, Ben is alone with his memories. A strange contamination takes him on an hallucinogenic journey and the cabin grows sinister as Ben's increasingly fractured reality conjures the manifestation of his guilt - his dead brother - who comes out of Ben's mind with revenge in his water-logged heart.

It's very cool, very creepy, with deeper meaning, but I'll let the film speak for itself on that score. I'm hoping to finish financing for a January shoot, so if there's anyone out there interested in investing, contact me!

And finally, a fun one: What's your favorite movie about making movies: Living in Oblivion, The Player, Barton Fink, Hollywood Shuffle, The Big Picture, Swimming with Sharks, or Ed Wood?

Oh by far and away Living in Oblivion. I've seen it at least a dozen times, most recently with Guinevere (Turner,) when I was visiting her in Syracuse this past winter. Snowy day, caught inside and it was the perfect way to share the time.

STRANGE BOUTIQUE



Hey! Welcome to VENTS! How have you been?

Monica: Just home from a great show in NYC!

Steve: We're feeling great about the feedback on the new album and the reactions at recent shows. It's humbling and rewarding!

What can you tell us about the title and meaning behind your most recent release, 'Let The Lonely Heart Sing'?

Monica: The title 'Let the Lonely Heart Sing' is about wishing to find a feeling of hopefulness and positivity when your life and world is in turmoil. The cicada featured on the album artwork is rich in symbolism, including resurrection and transformation. We think having the band itself resurrected after so many years, but with a new feeling and energy, says it all.

Steve: We'd been speaking about wanting to say and share something positive with this record. We were working on "Whistle, And I Will Come To You" and I heard Monica sing the line "let the lonely heart sing" ... it instantly resonated with me as a wish for even the loneliest to find hope and shine.

How was the recording and writing process?

Monica: We wrote long-distance, which was different from our earlier albums when we were in the same room together writing songs. For us, it was important that whatever we did retained the spirit and vibe of the early Strange Boutique

records. We used organic instrumentation for the whole thing, and Steve and Dennis also recorded with live drummers, so it was a matter of sending wav files back and forth as far as my vocals.

Steve: This album was different and it took us a while to find a process that worked. We were used to being together in a room and tossing out ideas to catch a spark and then fleshing that out. This time around, we had to find those sparks individually and then share them digitally. It was still really exciting to hear what each other would add to the demo, so I guess that's the equivalent of hearing someone play something and yelling "yes!, play that again". Once we had a couple of songs written and arranged we pulled in one of the 3 drummers we worked with and actually recorded them. Then we'd do it again!!!

Where did you find the inspiration for the songs and lyrics?

Monica: Many of the themes in my lyrics are inspired by my passion for history, mythology, and literature. Others are from personal experiences, or memories of those who have passed, maybe. "Jet Stream" is a mix of a tribute to our fallen guitarist Fred 'Freak' Smith as well as the loss of my mother. "Whistle and I will Come to You" is an M.R. James ghost story, based on something dark and very ancient unfortunately unearthed by the protagonist. "Radium Kiss" is about the

Radium Girls, who died terrible deaths licking their brushes back in the 1920's while painting Radium on the numbers of clocks. I've reimagined them as eerie, glowing sirens lurking in the ocean's depths, shining eternally.

Will you be hitting the road this year?

Monica: We plan for some lives shows next year.

Steve: Yes! We plan to do more shows in 2026.

What else is happening next in your world?

Steve: Trying to stay sane in very crazy times.



PRIMO DANGER



Hi guys, welcome to VENTS! How have you been?

Busy busy, but hanging in there!

What can you tell us about the title and meaning behind your most recent release, 'Waiting'?

It's a track I took with a different framing than I usually do... a lot of my tracks are more personal but this one I was feeling some way about gun violence in america and how preventable a lot of this shit is, but we are too divided to come up with any set of changes to help reduce it.

How was the recording and writing process?

It was a ton of fun! We worked with Greg Muzljakovich in the studio for a few days with him and really shaped this thing up with him. He helped produce and really brought it to a new light.

Where did you guys find the inspiration for the song and lyrics?

The song I had written a while back but just didn't have any lyrics to it. The instrumental is kind of a poppier tune and sounds kind of happier, but wasn't feeling any track mood accompanying lyrics and was feeling a bit pissed off when writing it. I think the juxtapose works well, and yeah the lyrics I mentioned above.

Will you be hitting the road this year?

Planning on it in 2026, keep ya eyes peeled!

What else is happening next in your world?

Wrapping up some recordings, putting out some new tunes, and then global domination



CAPTAIN BUCKLES



We're super-excited to have some time today with acclaimed A-list New Orleans-based veteran musicians and sidemen known collectively as Captain Buckles; greetings and salutations gang and thanks for carving time from a busy schedule to speak with us here at Vents Magazine! Before we dive into the Q&A music-lined rabbit hole, could you all say 'hi' and introduce yourselves to our ever-inquisitive readers?

Rob: I'm Rob Davis and I play keys and percussion in Captain Buckles.

Smitti: I'm Smitti Supab and I'm generally the quote unquote "leader" and manager, bassist and vocalist, and write songs, too. But Rob has started contributing his songs too, and Alex Mallet, our guitarist, vocalist and songwriter, has jumpstarted the current group vibe with the bulk of originals that really pop the way we

want to funk and groove. Rob sings his butt off, also. Ezell Smith, Jr., our drummer, has also started to do some backup vocals, and Phil Breen plays keys and synths.

Major kudos and accolades on the recent Captain Buckles single release of Acting Up which is lighting up record charts across the ever-loving globe even as we speak! Rob, can you talk about what inspired this gem of a ditty?

Alex (not Rob): Acting up started as a guitar warm up exercise. After playing through it a few times I started developing more of a melody to the exercise and eventually added some other sections to make it sound more like music and less like an exercise. The song took its final form when the band started prepping it to be recorded as we worked out transitions.

Ezell, Acting Up is the first single off the eagerly-anticipated debut full-length album Hurry Up which is set to drop this November 14 on cassette, digital download and streaming services! Can you give readers a hint or three as to what they can expect and look forward to with this mic-drop of an LP?

Rob (not Ezell): [Expect] an array of carefully plotted riffs and grooves, sprinkled with improvisation over the top.

Smitti: Expect a bunch of risks being taken! We're just going for it, doing what we love, without thinking about it too much or having too grand of an agenda!

Smitti, Captain Buckles produced the upcoming Hurry Up LP; congratulations! Can you talk about the pros to self-producing your own material versus outsourcing the task to a Norman Petty or a Rick Rubin type?

Smitti: It was super risky! And super great to self-produce. It was also an experiment. I really wanted everyone to feel comfortable just being themselves, without feeling any pressure to please any one person or two. The result was magic!

Rob: A lot of people come into the studio with a "bare-bones" song idea, which requires somebody to make a lot of decisions about instrumentation and form, in order to "produce" the song. In Captain Buckles, we had already been rehearsing and performing these songs for quite a while, tweaking parts over time, so that by the time we got into the studio, a large amount of the "producing" was already done. Self-producing is great because instead of having to put trust into a third party to bring the song to fruition, it forces us to put trust in ourselves.

Phil, the rightly lauded engineer Justin Tocket handled the recording of Hurry Up at the far-famed Dockside Studio in Maurice, Louisiana! What was it like collaborating with Justin on the debut album?

Rob (not Phil): Justin was great. He is a skilled engineer, but more importantly, he is accommodating, relaxed, and down to earth, which really helps things to feel comfortable and easygoing during the recording process.

Alex, we're big admirers of the ballad This Time which can be found front-and-center on the forthcoming Hurry Up LP! What's the scoop on this absolute stunner of an evergreen?

Rob (not Alex): "This Time" has such a powerful emotion to it, it's like a window into somebody's soul. I think all of the band members can feel that emotion when we play it, and it fuels us. I think we were all just excited to get this song recorded, so that other people can enjoy it as much as we do.

Smitti: My buddy Michael Darby wrote it, and once I heard an unreleased recording years ago of it, I was floored. I've been in his band for over seven years, and could hardly get him to play it because he only wanted to do it in drop-D tuning, and eventually asked him if I could cover his song with my band, and later asked him if we could record it. Since he's a really great guy and a New Orleans true rock n' roll legend, he agreed.

Rob, in the wake of the November 14 release of the debut Captain Buckles album Hurry Up, can fans look forward to catching the band on the touring/performing circuit?

Smitti (not Rob): That's a good question. Alex is expecting a child soon, and Rob has two kids of his own, and I'm really wary of burning out the band. We all have so many great gigs in New Orleans, and not enough festivals have asked us to play yet. But Wild Things Family Reunion is having us on November 22nd and we're really stoked about that! It's a really great festival put together I think largely by Marc Paradis, of Johnny Sketch and

the Dirty Notes, and the band and friends, and this is our second appearance. Our first appearance there two years ago really did wonders for our confidence and vision, and was integral in leading to us getting a Threadhead Cultural Foundation grant that helped make this album possible. As far as other gigs, we've made great impressions at The Green Parrot in Key West, and the Charleston Pour House in Charleston, so I think we'll be back there at some point in 2026 with any luck!

A question for all of you: Who are some of the folks both in and out of the world of music who have inspired and informed your own professional pathway?

Smitti: So many to list! But here goes a few: Booker T & the MGs, The Band, The Meters, The Allman Brothers, The Beatles, Chuck Berry, D'Angelo, James Brown, Carole King, Willie Nelson, Bob Dylan, Dr. John, Django Reinhardt, Fela Kuti—Lord knows the list goes on and on. Kurt Vonnegut, Victor Serge, Malcolm X...

Rob: Lao Tzu is my biggest influence. He wrote the Tao Te Ching, which teaches us that there are two sides to everything in life, and both should be appreciated. Finding balance between the two is as important in music as it is in life, particularly when it comes to balancing dynamics and tempos.

Ezell, in your humble opinion what differentiates the freshly-minted new Hurry Up LP from the Distinguished Competition on the 2025 music scene?

Rob (not Ezell): This is an album that's not afraid to be itself. We aren't trying to cut the songs down to three minutes to get radio play. Many of the songs don't even have words. But they all have enthusiasm, a solid groove, and a vision behind them, and I think we captured those things.

Smitti, at the end of the day what do you hope listeners walk away with after giving many-a-spin to one of the best albums of '25, Hurry Up?

Smitti: I hope they walk away with inspiration, encouragement, and permission to take risks and to be comfortable to be themselves, without getting bogged down by insecurities and agendas and barriers. I hope they can hear the influences of all of the great musicians, most of whom made great music before us, in our playing, because at our best, we're all just conduits of what we've heard and love to listen to. I hope they can walk away with a taste of New Orleans. And if they walk away with neither of all of these things, I'm just grateful that they gave it a listen. And I'm beyond grateful that we even made a thing at all to listen to.





ZONING OUT

Hi Lucas, welcome to VENTS! How have you been?

Hi, I'm doing good right now, just busy with university and recording currently.

What can you tell us about the title and meaning behind your most recent release, 'Loosey-Goosey'?

The song is about getting drunk at parties or social events to overcome the overwhelming feelings of social anxiety.

How was the recording and writing process?

The recording process was fairly easy as I recorded all the guitar parts myself in the studio which including all the layers, only took an hour to do. The bass was recorded by a friend who plays with me for live performances and knew what I wanted the bass to sound like as I already wrote the basslines for song but he expanded on them. The same principal applied to the drums as I had a distinct vision for the root accents the drums hit for the whole song and also how aggressive I wanted them to sound. The Piano parts were recorded by a friend from home. I instructed her on how I wanted the piano parts to be played, this was done by me playing the exact lines on the guitar and her translated them onto the piano.

Where did you find the inspiration for the song and lyrics?

I wrote the song about a year and a half ago. It came about because when I was with my old band, I noticed an old bandmate was playing the guitar in a very tight way on the fretboard as was struggling to change chord shapes. He wasn't very relaxed playing, therefore I told him to relax and I quoted Jack Black from his film "School of Rock" and said "just be loosey-goosey" and it just evolved from that. I then put the lyrics into motion with regards to social anxiety to which as a neurodivergent person, I suffer from.

Will you be hitting the road this year?

I have been doing live gigs annually and have performed at venues such as The Finsbury, Dingwalls in Camden, The Star in Shoreditch and The Gunners Pub but mostly I have been concentrating on writing, recording and promoting on social media. With regards to touring, unfortunately I will not be doing a tour anytime soon as I don't have the financial support or backing from a label as I only started this project this year. However as soon I have support, financially speaking I would love to tour as I thrive from live performances.

What else is happening next in your world?

In the next few months I will be completing my Joint Honours Degree at BIMM University studying Performance (focusing on guitar) and Music Production. In the meantime I plan to release a couple more singles before the year is finished and I intend on releasing an album to kick off the next year which would be great with some support from a label. I am also doing some collaborative work with some fellow musicians at my university.



OPEN WINDOW



Hi guys, welcome to VENTS! How have you been?

Great, Thank you for asking!

What can you tell us about the title and meaning behind your most recent release, 'Close Your Eyes'?

Lyrically - at its core - the song is about a person having to go on a long journey for a very long time, perhaps forever, but leaving someone they love behind.

How was the recording and writing process?

The writing process seemed to flow on this one. I (Daniel) have been working with James and Wayne for a number of years, and we have developed a good chemistry between us. Not every song manifests the same way, but with regards to Close Your Eyes, James presented a guitar "riff" to me, and I very quickly began scatting melodies

and words, a few of which are present in the final recording. I (Daniel) took our ideas home and woodshedded for a few days and emerged with verses and a Chorus. I presented what had to James and Wayne, and from there the guys rounded out the musical transitions and the bridge – Voila, we had a finished song!

The recording process went similarly, in that it was collaboration of ideas and musical input.

How fun was the music video to put together, and what did you really want to see from it?

It was very enjoyable. Our film crew was young, ambitious, and brought a lot of excitement and energy to the shoot. We really went into the shoot with no preconceptions. We each leaned into our performances and worked diligently to stay on schedule. From there, we entrusted the Director to create his vision for the video.

Where did you guys find the inspiration for the song and lyrics?

Musically, the inspiration came from our desire to once again make music with one another, following a several-year hiatus. Lyrically, as mentioned above, the inspiration was me (Daniel) thinking about someone whom I care very much about if/when I have to go away.

Will you be hitting the road this year?

Yes! We are currently working on our tour plan for 2026, which will commence in the U.S.

What else is happening next in your world?

We are gearing up to release our full-length album in early 2026. We will also continue to solidify upcoming tour dates.



Max Rae

We're super-excited to have some time today with acclaimed pop powerhouse Max Rae; greetings and salutations, Max, and thanks for taking time from a busy schedule to speak with us here at Vents Magazine today! Before we dive down the Q&A music-lined rabbit hole, how has the latter-part of 2025 been finding you and yours?

It's been amazing! Filled with live shows, new music releasing, and great time with friends and family! Thank you for asking!

Major kudos and accolades on the stunning new music you've been unveiling to an eager audience! Starting at the top – and just in time to get us all in the festive holiday spirit! - You just dropped the infectious gem of a ditty, Christmas Fever, on October 24; congrats! Can you talk about what inspired you to tackle this song? Have you always been a confirmed Christmas fan?

I've always loved Christmas! It's definitely my favorite time of year. I wanted to create a universal, happy, friendly Christmas song, which is so hard to write! I feel like you stepped on a Hallmark Christmas movie, said every time I hear it!

You followed Christmas Fever up on October 31 with the stunner of a single Karma; congrats again! What's the story behind one of the best single releases of '25?

Well, thank you! Karma is my most vulnerable release to date—a raw and unfiltered reflection of one of the most excruciating chapters of my life. Written from the depths

of heartbreak, the song tells the story of my father's infidelity and the unraveling of my family through divorce. With haunting honesty, it captures the pain, anger, and devastation of betrayal while channeling it into a fierce anthem of truth and resilience. This is more than just a song—it's me baring my soul, transforming personal tragedy into a universal story that listeners who have faced betrayal, loss, or broken trust will instantly connect with.

Returning to the Christmas motif, you're releasing a companion bookend single to Christmas Fever on November 21, Auld Lang Bye! When recording a song which deals with Christmas, is there a certain template which you draw inspiration from, be it Bing Crosby or Mariah Carey?

Both are huge Christmas icons! I must say it's hard to write and get the holiday spirit in the summer, especially where I live in Las Vegas, but watching classic Christmas movies and listening to Christmas songs like White Christmas definitely helps!

Who handled the producing honor on your latest tunes, and what did the in-studio collaboration between artist and producer look like while in the studio fashioning and shaping these new evergreens?

Karma, I wrote with the amazing Grammy award-winning, Keith Thomas! These fun and festive jams I wrote with the amazing producer duo Simon Jay and Luke Shrestha! Writing with them is super fun. Honestly, I wrote Auld Lang Bye lounging out by the pool, haha!

In the wake of the release of Auld Lang Bye on November 21, should fans keep eyes and ears on wide alert for even more music as we ease into 2026, perhaps in the form of an EP or LP release?

Oh, for sure! You don't want to miss this new era! Auld Lang Bye is just a peek behind the curtain to some new, raw, vulnerable, and empowering songs coming in 2026. I have two projects in the form of EPs coming early 2026!

What does your touring/performing dance card look like in the coming weeks and months?

I just finished a show here in Vegas and am very excited for new opportunities with performing! It's always been a joy and one of the best parts of my work.

You were born in the beautiful city of Albuquerque, New Mexico! How do those specific roots inform you as both an artist and as a person?

Albuquerque has deep cultural roots. Since we've been on the topic of the holidays, it's definitely part of why I love Christmas. The decorations, the food, it's such a magical time of year there!

Who are some of the people, both in and out of the world of music, who have served as inspirations for you?

In music, Michael Jackson, Whitney Houston, and Bruno Mars have been big inspirations for me. My mom is a big inspiration as well. I definitely get my voice from her!

Any final thoughts you might like to leave our ever-inquisitive reading audience with regarding your newest recordings, Christmas Fever, Karma, and Auld Lang Bye?

Thank you so much for taking the time to get to know me and my music! These songs were such a joy to create. I hope you enjoy them as much as I do!

MABERRY

Hey! Welcome to VENTS! How have you been?

Hi! Thanks so much for speaking with me, I've been exhausted but good!

What can you tell us about the title and meaning behind your most recent release, 'DUMBO!'?

It's all about reckoning with your internal doubt. The title of the album encompasses the self-deprecating lens that I wanted to take while exploring this side of me that I felt was defined by the external image of me rather than the internal. Even though it's gloomy, dark, and sad, I hope people also see the hope infused in the album.

How was the recording and writing process?

Absolutely brutal. Being an artist sometimes comes as a result of certain social and neurological pre-dispositions that I have had to deal with all my life so this album stems from the rawest side of me that has dealt with the darkest and most hopeful times of my life.

Where did you find the inspiration for the songs and lyrics?

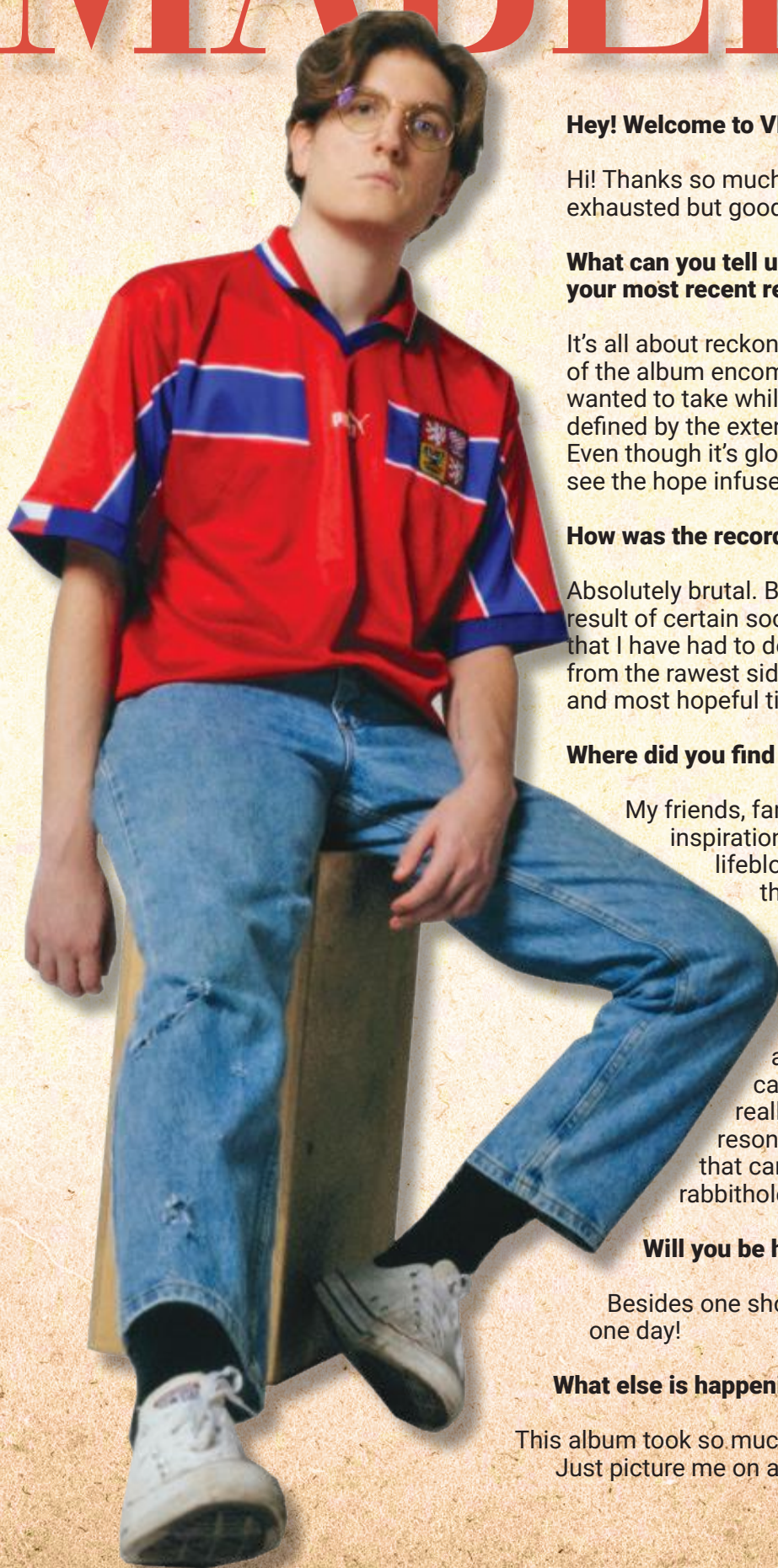
My friends, family, and other art are my primary inspirations. My friends and my family are my lifeblood. I don't know where I'd be without them or where to even begin, so I won't even try. I love them so much. In terms of other inspirations, I have so many random obsessions like programming and computer science, film/video game/tv production, soccer and so many others. They all serve as catalysts for inspiration for me. I like to really sit and think about why that moment resonated with me so much and sometimes that can lead to some sort of larger musical rabbit hole.

Will you be hitting the road this year?

Besides one showcase in NY, no plans. It is my dream to one day!

What else is happening next in your world?

This album took so much out of me that it's finally time to relax. Just picture me on a beach somewhere :)







LAKE MAR/E

Hi guys, welcome to VENTS! How have you been?

We've been good! We're itching to play some shows and rattle some roofs soon!

Kris Bashaw (bass) has been getting into cycling lately, and you might catch him cruising the streets of Smithfield, UT looking for trouble. Eric Howerton (vocals) has been putting a lot of miles on his car driving to film festivals to support the short film he co-wrote called "Go Down, Diller." Nick Sibley (drums) has been hard at work on two master's degrees, and Stephen Bialkowski never puts down the guitar, not even when he's sleeping.

What can you tell us about the title and meaning behind your most recent release?

Our newest song is "Reanimatrix." The title is a play on H.P. Lovecraft's story "Reanimator," which was also later a film series, both of them about a scientist who, unsurprisingly, brings things back from the dead. The title also plays on the idea of a matrix in the sense of a web or trap of some kind. Put them together, and you get someone who is unavoidably brought "back to life" again and again, like being rebooted into a situation or simulation against your will. It's also the Latin word for a woman who reanimates others, so we theoretically flipped the script and turned Victor into Victoria Frankenstein in this song, not that the roles in the song are that clearly defined.

Both Eric (vocals) and Kris (bass) are big fans of Mary Shelley's novel Frankenstein, and the lyrics tell the story of a wretched, undead entity who is reanimated so many times he begins to lament his own existence and the motives of his creator. One thing that always struck me (Eric) as curious is that in the many different versions, Victor Frankenstein almost never uses his powers of galvanism to save the lives of the people he loves who die along the way. In our version, the wretched creature dies and is revived and dies and is revived, so and on and so on, so many times that existence itself—even though there is some warmth to be found—becomes a question of cold, inhumane suffering. As morose as that is, hopefully the question "What am I doing here again?!" is one that most people can relate to even if the Frankenstein elements aren't what grab your attention.

How was the recording and writing process?

Recording took a bit longer than expected, but when you have four members in three different states and a limited practice schedule, getting the song into a shape where everyone is happy recording it can take a while. Fortunately, most of us have (or had, at the time) home studios, and so we afforded ourselves the luxury of not rushing it. We tweaked things, made adjustments, tried different approaches and registers to develop the song's nuances. There's definitely something to be said about recording quickly to

capture the rawness and passion of an early demo, but some songs benefit from being given space to breathe and develop in other areas. Because we weren't worrying about running up the studio bill, we were able to add a lot of thoughtful textures and backing vocals that deepen the overall experience of the song.

Where did you guys find the inspiration for the song and lyrics?

We definitely write song lyrics with a clear motivation, but we hope that doesn't prevent the audience from finding their own meaning in the song. For "Reanimatrix," we were looking to write a song that examined, leaned into, exaggerated, what have you, the sort of malignant, creeping feeling of being sucked back into another person's cycle of harm. The confusion of being in an on-again/off-again relationship was sort of the catalyst for combining the gothic elements the way we did. In at least one reading, the on-again/off-again experience is described as the creature that won't die because its creator(s) won't let it.

Will you be hitting the road this year?

We gig every winter and every summer, so we'll be playing shows in Tennessee and Alabama this December.

- Wednesday, December 17th we're at Cobra Nashville in Nashville, TN with Sweet Easy Listening (S.E.L.), Pond Digger, and Wicked Trip.

- Friday, December 19th we're at Growlers in Memphis, TN with Hooves.

- Saturday, December 20th we're at The Shed DIY in Tusculumbia, AL with Lucid.

Artist Joe Casso of Christiansburg, Virginia will be joining us on stage at these shows, and we're so stoked he'll be coming along. His merch is out of this world. He's a really cool punk rock/outsider/street artist that Eric met this summer at an art fair in Blacksburg, VA. We'll have custom-made, one-of-a-kind Joe Casso Lake Mar/e t-shirts for sale at the shows. You can find Joe's work here: <https://www.traumatismart.com/>

If you're in the area, come check us out! And if you want to schedule a mini-tour with us this summer or next winter, or if you want us to play your festival, reach out at contact@lakemare.com.

What else is happening next in your world? Tomorrow is happening next, right after these messages!

Seriously though, we're busy recording more songs, trying to work out logistics for a music video, designing flyers, eating tacos, and hopefully coming to a city near you!



Salt Collective

We're very excited to have some time today with acclaimed French songwriter and guitarist Stéphane Schück; greetings and salutations Stéphane and thanks for taking time from a busy schedule to speak with us here at Vents Magazine! Before we dive into the Q&A music-lined rabbit hole, how is the latter-part of 2025 finding you and yours?

First of all, thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to discuss music with you. I'm doing very well. Even though the end of the year is very busy work-wise because, alongside Salt collective, I'm in the process of launching a company that manufactures electric guitars, Desert Dust Guitars, with my friend and talented luthier Pascal Carreau. and my primary career as a physician involved in clinical cancer research also takes up a lot of my time.

Major kudos and accolades on your stunning international collaborative music project known far and wide as the Salt Collective! Starting at the top, and for anyone late to the party, can you explain what the Salt Collective is all about and what inspired its formation?

Thank you! The Salt Collective was originally based on my French band, formed in the 90s, called Salt. It was a power trio with Benoit Lautridou on drums, Fred Quentin on bass, and me on guitars. Then I had the extraordinary opportunity to meet Christ Stamey, who was a legend to me and a major influence on my music. From then on, we naturally agreed to be as collaborative as possible. I write the music and Chris and I improve it, then we offer it to different artists. They have complete freedom to write their vocal lines and lyrics based on the music we send them. It's a truly collaborative process, which results in some really good songs.

The Salt Collective shines a spotlight on some of the best music artists in the industry, including the likes of Andy Partridge, Aimee Mann, Matthew Caws, and Mike Mills among others! What has it been like for you to bring all this phenomenal talent together?

like a waking dream. These artists are very important to me, and collaborating with them is a real fan's dream.

I'm sure you understand! They are all so brilliant and accessible, and they collaborated with, I believe, genuine sincerity and a desire to share the music we love. Chris was the link between us all. He knows the whole world, and everyone is happy to work with him!

Congratulations on the upcoming eagerly-anticipated sophomore Salt Collective album A Brief History of Blindness which is being released on 12" LP vinyl, CD, digital download and streaming services by Propeller Sound Recordings this November 21! What's the story behind one of the very best releases of '25?

When we finished the album Life, we wanted to continue working with Chris because she is inspiring and a source of deep joy. I think we're here for the pleasure of writing together and developing the songs. So we decided to repeat the experience on the same basis of collaboration. And we found ourselves in Mitch Easter's studio with a band to record the rhythmic structures of the album's songs live in the studio. It was great.

How is A Brief History of Blindness similar to the Salt Collective's first release, Life? How is it different?

It's similar in the collaborative approach, with the idea of offering pieces that are already written, except for the singing, vocal lines, and lyrics. And it was different because for this album, as I told you, we were physically together in the same studio, whereas for Life, we recorded quite a bit remotely. And for good reason, because at the time I was hospitalized in a sterile room being treated for acute leukemia. All I had with me was a guitar (disinfected!) and a computer!

The new album was produced by Chris Stamey and mastered by Dave McNair. What was it like collaborating with these two rightly lauded industry veterans?

Working with legends like these gives you an incredible sense of serenity. Their combined experience deserves to be in a music encyclopedia. So for me it's a real joy, I listen, I absorb, and I learn!

We're big admirers of the tune Waiting for the End of Time featuring Jason Falkner and which can be found

front-and-center on the upcoming A Brief History of Blindness album; congrats! What's the scoop behind this gem of a ditty?

I'm delighted that you like it. It's a very important song for me because it's written by Schuck/Stamey/Partridge. They are two of my personal gods! And I'm a big fan of Jason Falkner. He did a fantastic job on this song. I composed it on the piano, which is very unusual for me. You can hear that at the beginning of the song. Then Chris and I quickly felt that this song was more rock than pop and that Jason could bring his intensity to it. I'm really looking forward to playing this song live, it should be pretty powerful, I think.

In the wake of the November 21 release of A Brief History of Blindness, can fans look forward to catching some iteration of Salt Collective on the performing circuit?

We're working on it because we love playing together. We're going to do everything we can to tour the US in 2026, but it's quite a challenge just to coordinate everyone's schedules! But anyway, stay tuned!

Can you give our ever-inquisitive readers a hint or three as to what you have coming up for audiophiles in 2026?

We are already working on the next album. I have written about ten new songs, and we are planning to have several studio sessions. It's always very exciting to start a new creative process because the songs sometimes take unexpected directions, which are always interesting!

At the end of the day, what do you hope listeners walk away with after giving many-a-spin to the drop-the-mic new Salt Collective album A Brief History of Blindness?

I hope they feel the energy and all the love for music that we put into it. Every measure was carefully considered and thought out, and we captured the spirit of a band playing live (which is what we did during the studio recording). I hope they also feel that indefinable chemistry that exists between the members of the collective.

House of Cards Pinker



Hi guys, welcome to VENTS! How have you been?

Scott: We've been fantastic, just finished a tour of the southeast and played at the Fest in Gainesville with so many amazing bands. It was a great experience!

Bryan: Great, I think I'm finally starting to get back to normal after our little tour. We did 8 shows in 9 days over 3,000 miles. It's been a minute since we've done something like that!

Greg: We played more in that week than in the past few years combined.

So you guys are back with your new record Now and The Future – how was the writing and recording process like?

Scott: We had so much fun working together on these songs. Some of them date back to before the pandemic when we were planning to finish a full-length, but got derailed. We

ultimately ended up releasing a new digital EP called House of Cards in 2022 and never finished up a complete album—it just got its debut as a physical product last month through our label People of Punk Rock Records in Quebec. So we just pressed restart a few years back and started the new LP, and it came together really well. There was no pressure, and the band definitely benefited from all of us being back together in Chicago (Bryan had spent some time a while back working in Australia, Greg moved to Utah for a minute, and I moved back as well!).

Bryan: It's amazing what you can accomplish when everyone lives in the same city. That hasn't been the case since the 90's, so it's been a nice change for us.

Greg: There wasn't really a plan until we had the first six songs written. Then we booked time at Bomb Shelter and it went so well that we booked more time to give us some-



thing to keep us motivated. Nothing like a deadline to light that much-needed fire.

What was it like to work with Dan Precision?

Bryan: We've been working with Mass Giorgini at Sonic Iguana Studios since the late 90's, so it was a bit of a change to record with someone new. Fortunately, we had worked with Dan on our record *Pop Culture Failure* as he was an assistant engineer on the project. He's such a great musician, so easy to work with and has really great ideas.

Scott: So we had experience recording together, but he was even better at his own studio (Bomb Shelter) and with so much new tech that has transformed the recording process over the last decade or so. It's a chill vibe at the studio, and we actually just loved the process. It's pretty cool when he's humming a possible new backup vocal

or grabbing my guitar and playing an awesome riff that complements what we wrote.

Greg: I've known who Dan was since I first heard 88 Fingers Louie back in the 90s but I never met him. That is a shame. He is the nicest guy and working with him on the new record was great. The experience as a whole was beyond what I was expecting. This is your first album in 14 years – how would you say time served in the album's favor?

Scott: I think Greg and I really have a streamlined process, and we were a bit more deliberate in terms of what we wanted to write and what we wanted to communicate with the songs. I'm not a 20-something writing songs anymore, so we have to bring a new perspective to our ideas and concepts. I hate to use the word "mature" though, so I suppose I'll just answer the next question....

Bryan: Like a fine wine and good bourbon, Horace Pinker gets better with age. We also sound better after drinking that wine and bourbon!

Greg: I don't think any of us realized how long it had been since our last full-length. We were still active, but every now and then I'd catch myself thinking, "Horace Pinker? Are we still a band?" Once we were all living in the same city, things just started to fall into place. Before we knew it, we were writing again. There was this energy—some real excitement. I felt reinvigorated.

How would you say you guys have matured musically throughout this large gap?

Bryan: I think overall our sound has matured through the history of the band. Starting with *Pop Culture Failure*, we've been building upon that sound with every record. Plus, I also think we can play our instruments better now, so that kinda helps too.

Scott: We've been active over the last decade, so it's not exactly a "gap," and we never broke up (but probably should have to create excitement and buzz!!). We've done a few Eps, including a 7" on Dead Broke Rekerds and *House of Cards*. Truthfully though, we haven't done the kinds of tours or festival shows we're planning now, and we're pretty excited to be doing this again. I think over the last few years, we've just been able to focus on how our sound can be refined and how we can speak to the social and political moment without writing being boring or didactic or being too clichéd.

What were some of the things that inspired the lyrics?

Scott: I was inspired to write about overcoming stuff as you're getting older, maybe wiser, maybe not! So there are songs that are metaphors (*Fear of Heights*) and songs

about moving beyond nostalgia to embrace the present (*Back in the Day*), if that makes sense. Yeah, and also a song about climate change that repeats the album title in the chorus.

Bryan: I thought the climate change song was about relationships and the ups and downs of married life. I still think it's about that no matter what Scott says. Also, I think that's the cool thing about our lyrics, they are open to interpretation, so people are able to relate to them in different ways.

What role does the Chicago plays in your music?

Scott: We moved to Chicago in the mid 90s when we were touring actively and had no permanent place to live. I ended up going back to school here, we had families here, we all put down roots (Greg and Don are both originally from Chicago). But we all love bands like Naked Raygun and Pegboy, and we were lucky to play some of our first Chicago shows with the Bollweevils and other great Chicago bands. Maybe my best response is that we've felt like it was home ever since we were playing places like Fireside Bowl, but I think musically we're Chicago-adjacent.

Bryan: Yeah, I don't think we've ever considered ourselves a Chicago band, nor have the people and even other bands here thought of us as a Chicago band. Don't get me wrong, I love Chicago and have lived here since the late 90's, but overall I'd say Horace Pinker is homeless.

What else is there in store in Horace Pinker future?

Bryan: Playing out as much as possible over the next year as I really want people to hear this new record and I think we play the songs pretty well live. We're also playing Brakrock Festival in Belgium next year, so really looking to get back over to Europe and play some shows!

Scott: We're going to be playing out in the spring and summer in the U.S. and Canada with a bunch of really good bands, and we're working on a split with one of them right now (two new songs!). We have big news on the European front, but we can't share yet. So please stay tuned!!

Greg: We're really excited about this new record and just trying to take advantage of every opportunity that comes our way. We've got a lot in the works for next year, and honestly, I'd be up for working on another record as much as we can. We've also got a permanent second guitar player again—which is funny, because he's actually the last "permanent" guitarist we had. It's great to have him back in the mix.

ttwig

Hey! Welcome to VENTS! How have you been?

I have been fantastic.

What can you tell us about the title and meaning behind your most recent release, 'Hang Ten Colors to Catch the Sun'?

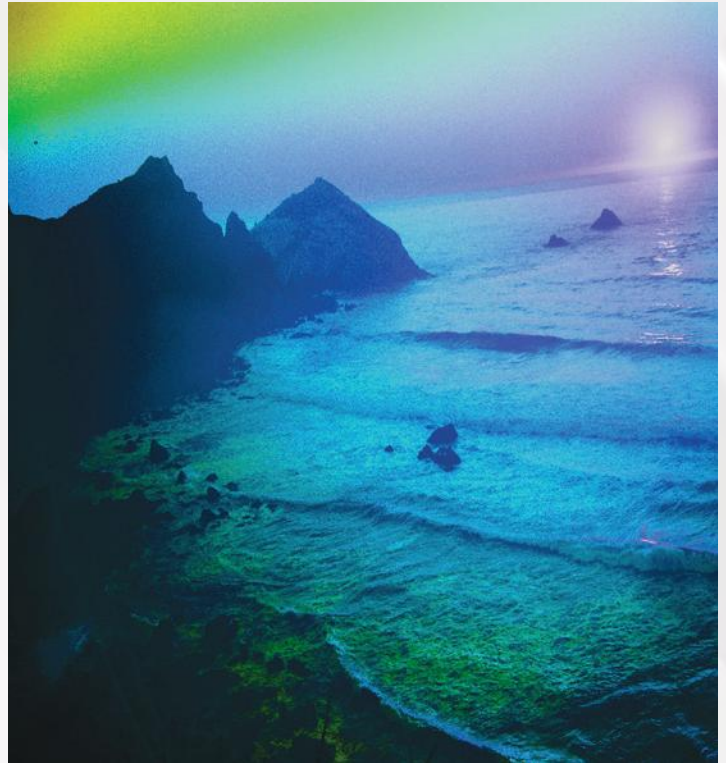
When I first moved to Los Angeles in 2019, I went out one night to a bar in Venice. It was a surf themed bar. It was a pretty quiet night if I recall correctly. I went to go for a whiz and when I entered the bathroom I noticed the walls were covered with cool surf posters. One of them read: Hang Ten Colors to Catch the Sun. I thought it was such an awesome combination of words. To this day I have not been able to track down the poster. Legend states it was actually never there...

How was the recording and writing process?

All of these songs were written and recorded at home during the pandemic. It was during the same creative surge as my first ttwig record, Mindless Meadow. I was in such an amazing flow state during that time.

Where did you find the inspiration for the songs and lyrics?

There is certainly a huge California influence embedded into this record. Concept wise, it's about the ups & downs of life. I love the phrase "Ride the Wave". As much as we think (or would like to believe) we are in control, we're not. Life is chaos. I think everything that needs to be known can be learned in nature. The ocean doesn't adhere to the will of man. It is wild. It is free. It just is. Waves come and go. Hang Ten Colors to Catch the Sun is really a musical universe built around this concept.



Will you be hitting the road this year?

I am definitely planning on playing this record live.

What else is happening next in your world?

My partner & I have been making incredibly delicious coffees at home every morning.

