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# How the Native Women’s Shelter overstepped the system to beat COVID-19



Nakuset

BY LORRAINE CARPENTER

So many people, families, businesses, organizations and institutions have gone to hell during COVID-19. Not all have come back, and while we’re still in the midst of this historic pandemic, this is a local success story that deserves to be told.

The Native Women's Shelter of Montreal offers frontline services, including a three-month stay in a private room, exclusively to distressed Aboriginal women and their children. The shelter's executive director, Nakuset (who also runs the Cabot Square day shelter Resilience Montreal), is a Cree who was adopted and raised by a Jewish family as part of the Adopt an Indian or Métis (AIM) program during the Sixties Scoop. As a victim of systemic racism, she considers herself lucky to be where she is today, and has dedicated her career to helping people in her extended community who didn't fare so well, and continue to suffer.

When the city started to shut down in mid-March, Nakuset watched as other shelter operators altered their services and, in some, cases, closed their spaces entirely. “That was not an option for us — we needed to stay open,” she said. “We didn't have many guidelines in terms of how to proceed, so we were really searching for best practices. We did a lot of research and came up with the concept of dividing staff: keep half the staff at home so that they can get paid to be healthy and then have another group of staff come in to be the core staff, so if anyone got sick we could just replace them with healthy staff. It seemed like a really good practice — until it wasn't.”

Taking inspiration from the \$2/hour bonus that supermarket chains were paying their employees as essential service workers, shelter staff members were paid an extra \$4 per hour. Those who stayed home continued to provide counselling by phone. But unfortunately the shelter's weekly requests to the CIUSS (the integrated university health and social services centre) for PPE, hand sanitizer and antiviral cleaning products were declined. Donations from the public proved to be more valuable than any government or institutional support.

Another issue that the shelter faced was COVID-19 testing for their residents in lockdown who exhibited potential symptoms.

“As Indigenous people — considering the fact that we're 18 times more likely to be racially profiled than anyone else, with this long history of abuse from the police — when we would send the women to go get tested at Place des Festivals (which was turned into a mass-testing site at height of the pandemic), there was a big line-up of police there. So the

women would get out of the taxi, see the police, turn around, get back in the taxi and be like, ‘No, I'm not going.’ Indigenous people right now are really afraid of the police.”

When shelter staff members were asked to do double duty to help out at another shelter serving the Aboriginal community, a second location of the Projet Autochtone Québec (PAQ), Nakuset was concerned.

“I was sort of like, ‘Woah! What about what’s happening with cross-contamination in Ontario, where you had staff go from senior home to senior home?’ I was spending all my time at Resilience, just keeping in touch and making sure that things were going as smooth as possible, because I was afraid that I would bring (COVID-19) into the Native Women's Shelter.”

## SHIT HITS FAN

“Suddenly one staff got sick, then another, then another, then another, until we had a total of seven staff who were sick. We brought in the second group and they got sick immediately, went home and ended up giving it to their family members. So we only had one staff that was walking around the shelter super-freaking out, thinking, ‘Am I going to be next?’ It was really unbelievable. We thought we did everything the right way.”

Nakuset once again appealed to the CIUSS for replacement staff (soldiers if need be), cleaning specialists to get COVID off surfaces, on-site testing for all the shelter’s residents and a last-resort hotel space to relocate the women to. A pair of helpful CIUSS social workers got the shelter an audience with one of their superiors, who promised to deliver all of the above — before taking it all off the table after a quick call to public health authorities.

“I said, ‘What about the hotel?’ and he said, ‘I don't think that’s the appropriate place for your ladies,’ and I said ‘Oh really?’”

One of the social workers contacted her supervisor at the CIUSS to double down on the hotel option. The unnamed four-star hotel was already affiliated with SOS Violence Conjugale, and therefore used to accommodating women in crisis. “Her supervisor said, ‘You know what? Let's do it now — let's just move the women out now.’”

That same day, all the women were transported to get tested for COVID-19 and then checked into the hotel, which was set up with three colour-coded floors so that the women could be grouped based on whether they were waiting for test results, COVID-positive or COVID-negative. The shelter closed down for two weeks.

## WHAT NOW?

“Then we all turned and looked at the shelter and said, ‘What now?’ We needed to bring the shelter up to code.”

On a conference call with the CIUSS, including her social worker helpers and the previously unhelpful superiors, Nakuset once again appealed for assistance, only to be told she'd hear back in a week. Two and a half weeks passed before anyone checked in.

“In the meantime, I got in touch with Bruno (Demers) who works for Architecture Sans Frontières (ASF) — they had

helped me turn Resilience Montreal from a dive into a spa, with 150 volunteers. He said, ‘Well, right now I'm working with other shelters, designing them in such a way where people can use the services but you can keep the spaces safe.’”

The three-floor facility was reconfigured and fitted with all the pandemic-era features that have become so familiar: plastic barriers, arrow stickers on the floor to direct foot traffic, hand sanitizer stations and more.

“(ASF) were the ones who came and did all that and created the policy that's in place now. We spoke to another consultant about best practises and we moved forward with these initiatives, because I had zero faith that the CIUSS or public health were going to help us. That call that I was supposed to have with them around May 26 only happened on June 4. We reopened the shelter on June 1.

“We didn’t have many guidelines in terms of how to proceed, so we were really searching for best practices. We came up with the concept of dividing staff, so if anyone got sick we could just replace them with healthy staff who stayed home. It seemed like a really good practice — until it wasn’t.”—Nakuset

“Basically, they were like, ‘I'm glad you reached out to Bruno and I'm glad everything is up to speed.’ Someone from public health came to the shelter, looked around and gave us the approval (to remain open) and that was it.”

Aside from adopting new ways of working, shelter staff who'd recovered from COVID-19 also had to contend with conflicting information from the CIUSS and public health about when it was safe to return to work — the former said you needed two negative tests, while the latter said that workers could simply return 14 days after symptoms had subsided.

“We were really confused,” Nakuset said. “Who do we believe? Are you trying to set us up? One of my colleagues who got a positive test went back after he was feeling better, after 14 days, and his test was still positive. He was like, ‘Well, what do I do?’ and I said, ‘I don't know, but it doesn't sound good.’ What happened is a lot of my workers didn't come back. It's almost three months later and one of them is still testing positive.”

## WHAT'S NEXT

When I spoke to Nakuset in the second week of July, she and the shelter staff were still adjusting to new protocols, which extend beyond masks, physical distancing and hand-sanitizing. Many of their counselling services were still being offered exclusively by phone; the shelter had recently begun admitting new women, who had to get tested and self-quarantine for 14 days; residents were divided on different floors based on whether they were in quarantine or tested positive or negative, much like the temporary hotel set-up was; meals in the shelter are served separately, in shifts, rather than the old buffet approach; meals are also being delivered to people in need.

“When the pandemic first started and everyone was doing the baking and cooking thing, we were like, ‘Hey, why don't you make a meal for a family that's on the verge of homelessness, or a woman who can't leave the home to go to the grocery store because she has children and she can't bring her kids and we don't want her to starve?’ We were able to go and pick up meals and drop them off, so that's been super successful. It's very different still working at the shelter. We have to think outside the box in terms of how we can provide these services.”

Thinking outside of the box is also manifesting literally, with the impending expansion of the Native Women's Shelter: a second-stage housing facility with 23 units and services to help women with children is coming soon. Nakuset has been advocating for the proper treatment of Indigenous children for years, trying to work with and educate child services and the Batshaw Youth and Family Centre — she is one of the authors of what she calls “the idiot’s guide to raising an Indigenous child” (ie. *The Cultural Manual for Foster and Adoptive Parents of Aboriginal Children*). This work is extremely personal for Nakuset, who was separated from her sister for 25 years, only to lose her to suicide in 2018. Her battle with Batshaw (where she herself was on file pre-adoption as part of the AIM program) and child services — in light of their unwillingness to adopt changes to Indigenous child welfare recommended by the 2019 Viens commission, and given the Quebec government's similar resistance to changes proposed by the federal Bill C-92 — is one that she's now shifting to a team that will work in-house at the new, second shelter location.

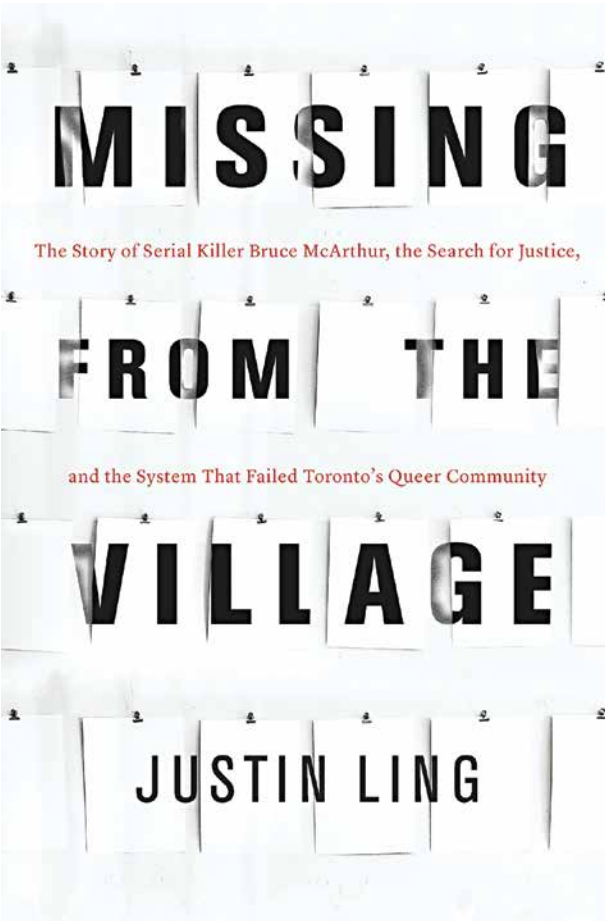
“They’re going to start breaking ground in September, and we’re having the Fondation Dr. Julien in the building so if there's a problem with a child, the women have doctors and lawyers and all these other people who surround them and help to move the system faster than we can. A lot of the times when women lose their kids, they never get them back. People can be referred from the community to be like, ‘I'm having a really hard time, I'm afraid of losing my kids,’ and they become a client and then they have an army of professionals around them.

“I'm not a doctor, I'm not a PhD, I'm not a masters — I'm just Nakuset with a BA, and a lot of people don't take that seriously because I don't have the right credentials,” she says. “I have 21 years of experience, but when you get all those doctors and other people involved, they sit up straighter in their chair when those people are saying, ‘Hey, we need to address this issue — what have you done?’”

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# Law and disorder



BY MATTHEW HAYS

In what has become one of the most astonishing crime stories in Canadian history, serial killer Bruce McArthur was arrested in 2018 and ultimately convicted of murdering eight men he met in Toronto’s gay village. The stories drew attention for their obvious extremity, but also for criticism of police negligence, which many felt allowed McArthur to continue his murder spree for years.

Journalist Justin Ling was covering the crimes, as a reporter for both *VICE* and *The Globe and Mail*. At the time, he asked the police if they thought they had a serial killer on their hands. They said no, repeatedly.

In his new book, *Missing From the Village: The Story of Serial Killer Bruce McArthur, the Search for Justice, and the System That Failed Toronto's Queer Community*, Ling explores the investigation of the crimes in exhaustive detail, recounting how Toronto queer activists pleaded with police to step up their efforts, and how police managed to overlook glaring evidence. Part detective story, part journalist’s notebook, *Missing From the Village* is a wildly engaging read, taking us through agonizing missteps and heart-wrenching losses. I spoke with Ling from Montreal, where he works as a freelance journalist.



Justin Ling

Matthew Hays: You spent a lot of time researching this story, which of course exploded into national news. What was the most shocking revelation for you?

Justin Ling: It was the number of victims. I spent years on this story thinking there were three victims. When Andrew Kinsman went missing in 2017, it was a jarring realization that there were probably many more men who disappeared in those intervening five years. That four men were able to go missing without the city realizing, or fully grasping the relevance, was disquieting, to say the least.

MH: A perception emerged among many queers that police were truly negligent in this case. What was your sense?

JL: It’s a tough question, and it’s a bit of a paradox. The Toronto Police Service, as an institution, was negligent. There’s no question. (Peel Regional Police and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police bear some responsibility in their own right.) This is an institution that continued raiding queer establishments right until the ’00s, continued arresting queer men for cruising, continued gaslighting the community into downplaying their concerns and fears. It’s an institution that failed to solve murder after murder of queer people, all the while pretending as though hiring a single LGBTQ liaison officer and attending Pride events made all of that okay.

But here’s where the paradox comes in: Bruce McArthur would have never been caught if not for the individual officers on this case, many of whom worked this investigation right from the beginning, in 2013. They found clues, worked leads and interviewed witnesses with an

enormous amount of determination and empathy. I’ve covered enough cases to tell you that it’s not hard to see when investigators are just running through the motions — the amount of really good police work that went into this case is really, really impressive.

This is a tension that comes back decades, in Toronto, Montreal and a list of other cities. Even as police forces, writ large, harass and belittle queer people, homicide detectives are often the ones most willing to put sexuality and gender aside and say, “Okay, we need to solve this, how do we do that?” Too often, their efforts are actively hobbled by their higher-ups.

MH: Did you ever consider trying to get an interview with McArthur himself?

JL: Briefly. The more I thought about it, I know the interviews the cops had with him, I just didn’t see the benefit. The man is a pathological liar. You go and sit in that room, and what are you going to get? Whatever he says could easily be a bald-faced lie. Is he going to tell you why he did it? Who gives a shit why he did it? Nothing he says is going to help prevent another case like this from happening. Too much risk and too little reward. There’s nothing I particularly wanted to ask him.

MH: Critics point out that police actually interviewed McArthur, but then let him go. However, this isn’t unusual: serial killers are crafty and part of the thrill for them is eluding police. Pickton, Dahmer, Gacy and Clifford Olson, among others, were all interviewed and let go for various reasons.

JL: There’s truth to this, but McArthur was interviewed twice in the midst of his crimes. Both times, if the systems and practices designed after Pickton and Paul Bernardo were working properly, I believe there’s a real chance police would have connected the dots and upgraded him to a suspect in these disappearances. That’s the great tragedy of this case: You can point to so many instances between 2010 and 2017 when, if one database had worked properly or if police had made one phone call, they may have arrested him before he killed again.

MH: Continued declines in ad revenue and accompanying cuts mean newsrooms can’t afford investigative journalism as much anymore, if at all. Does it concern you that there may well be other Bruce McArthurs out there, who are going undetected?

JL: Yes. But, in fairness, I’m not sure things were different when we could afford more investigative teams. This is why diversifying newsrooms is so crucial. Queer people in Toronto knew about this case for years, knew it was a serial killer, knew the Toronto Police weren’t doing enough — why didn’t that filter into our newsrooms? Where were the investigative teams? We, in the media, have devoted unbelievable time and resources into unsolved murders and disappearances against people who look like the majority: white, straight, cisgender. That is not, in and of itself, bad; but when contrasted with the dearth of coverage for missing and murdered Indigenous, trans and Black people, it feels really grotesque.

MH: At one point you disparage the «massive media industry that trades on profiling» serial killers. I refer to this as the Serial Killer Industrial Complex. Did you ever step back and worry that you were adding to the pile by writing the book?

JL: I didn’t want to do the book for that reason. I told everyone who came calling, “I’m not writing a book, I’m not

writing a book.” It was Robyn Doolittle who, while I was at the *Globe*, forced me to take her agent’s card, and then it was my agent Martha Webb who told me that I should do it. I told her the reasons I didn’t want to do it, and she said, “Well, don’t do any of those things. Do it however you want.” I think what convinced me was the argument that if we don’t do it, someone else is going to, and if you do it, chances are others won’t be able to do it. Otherwise, it’s going to be some fly-by-night, turn-out-eight-books-a-year, true-crime douchebag. It was a good sell. I can get into the record all of the things that I want to get into the book, get more into a case for police reform and society reform, than it is about a serial killer. There was already a raft of documentaries and TV shows that are coming out. A lot of people are going back to victims’ families and asking them to relive it. And for what? I’m not sure it’s going to help anyone or anybody, except the bottom line of some media organizations.

MH: There is a powerful, overwhelming sense of history repeating as I read your book. It’s infuriating that signals are missed and lives are lost. What would be one of the main things that needs to change so that we avoid this happening all over again?

JL: We, as a society, need to stop thinking that the police can fix everything. There are things the police, exclusively, should be doing — collecting evidence, conducting search warrants — but there is simply no reason why uniformed, armed police officers should be doing wellness checks, in most cases, or even doing some interviews. Surely we have seen the limitations of this model, so it’s time we try something new. One of the main reasons, I believe, that homicide cops have historically failed to solve violence against queer people is because different wings of the police were at odds with each other. On one hand, morality cops were raiding bathhouses. On the other, they were trying to solve these murders. It’s an absurd way to go about things. I think you can say that, albeit with different

circumstances, with respect to the investigations into missing and murdered Indigenous women, and regarding the staggering unsolved rate for murders of racialized people writ large. Yes, you need to figure out how to do outreach better, improve cultural sensitivities, improve recruiting from those communities — but that is fundamentally keeping the structure the same. I don’t think it’s enough.

MH: The book is so well researched, and you’re careful to talk about the history of police-queer relations in Toronto. But as I read it, I felt a blind spot: you make one reference to Joe Rose, who was murdered in Montreal in 1989, but you don’t get into what followed, which was a wave of homophobic violence and murders in the city. I covered it at the time for the Montreal *Mirror* and *Xtra*, and the parallels to what happened in the McArthur case were astonishing: police indifference and dismissals of the existence of a serial killer, gruesome murders and eventually the revelation that several of the murders were in fact connected. Why didn’t you include a bit more discussion of the eerie parallels with the Montreal situation?

JL: It’s a good point. We did a bit of that in the CBC podcast, and I was cognizant of the fact that I didn’t want to repeat too much of what we did there. I did have to make a conscious decision of what to include and what not to include. We are working on a series about the crimes, and we are going to include more about those crimes in the series. I had the feeling that the Montreal crimes were unresolved in way that if I’d included them in passing, it wouldn’t have been very satisfying in the book.

→ *Missing From the Village: The Story of Serial Killer Bruce McArthur, the Search for Justice, and the System That Failed Toronto's Queer Community* (McLelland & Stewart, 304 pages, \$32.95) will be released in September

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# Dating differently

BY LORRAINE CARPENTER

The new Montreal-based dating app LoveinSync is designed for people suffering from dating fatigue — tired of swiping, tired of catfishing and ghosting, tired of the Groundhog Day repetition of a seemingly endless series of first dates. And while the COVID-19 pandemic put a major damper on dating, online dating — the only/safest way to meet people — has never been so popular.

LoveinSync bills itself as “the first online dating community designed to connect like-minded conscious singles who are passionate about personal development.” I spoke to founders Tina Jesso and Susan Hum, longtime friends with backgrounds in financial services, about what makes LoveinSync different from the other apps.

Lorraine Carpenter: Where did this idea emerge from?

Tina Jesso: Susan and I are longtime friends, we've been friends for 14 years, and in 2017 we were looking into the possibility of starting some kind of business together. Susan had become a very successful life and love coach and I was looking at leaving my RESP company.

On Susan's birthday, we were having dinner and I was going on about my latest misadventure in online dating. I said, “Oh my God, if I was in charge of a dating website, all the stuff with ghosting and catfishing and all that, that wouldn't be acceptable. I would want to build a better platform.” And she said, “That's the idea! That's the business that we have to get started in.”

LC: How is this app different?

Susan Hum: One of the things with the love-mindset work that I do is the notion that if you failed in the last 11 apps and you're going to come to this one, what's going to change when you're carrying the common denominator? We're bringing in the awareness that you might have to switch something up in what you're doing.

LoveinSync also focuses on authenticity by making video a requirement. That's one of the big problems with online dating, when the picture doesn't match reality. Getting the picture, the video and the audio at the same time provides a sense of how the person communicates in real terms rather than just a picture that you can be crafted.

We're also bringing in a lot of honest talk with the profile writing. We want more original content when you write about yourself rather than just what you do for a living and what you want. How you enjoy life and how you live your life is what we want people to write about.

LC: Tina, you mentioned your misadventures in online dating. How and how much did you apply your personal experiences to the app?

TJ: I did meet a lot of really great people on the different dating websites, that's for sure, but finding a good person and taking it to a second or third date or maybe more, it's kind of like looking for a needle in a haystack. There are so many profiles out there and the only thing you can go by is a photo. It just never felt right somehow to constantly be swiping and making a split-second decision based on someone's appearance. I knew that there had to be a better way.



Secondly this bad behaviour in online dating would never be acceptable in everyday dealings with people. Ghosting — when people start conversations and disappear with no explanation, or you have a great date and they say, “I can't wait to speak to you again,” and then nothing — if you were with a friend or colleague at work or someone that you were making a business connection with, you would never do something like that, so why is it acceptable in online dating? It's all of those types of behaviours that we really want to change.

Online dating is hugely popular. Most people are meeting their significant other these days through online dating. Especially during COVID, how else do you meet someone or start an initial contact? We're not trying to take on the whole online dating world, we've decided to focus on and target people who are in the space of personal development and personal growth. Susan has been involved in that arena for quite some time as a coach, and one of the reasons I was successful in my financial services business before I switched out to do this is because of personal development. When people are trying to elevate themselves, learn about themselves, working on self-worth and self-love, that's a really good place to start with the programs that we're offering.

LC: So is the idea that people who are working on themselves are less likely to engage in deceptive or disrespectful online behaviour?

TJ: Nobody is perfect. We are all a work in progress but people on the path, from what we've seen, are trying to be as authentic as possible and question their place in the world and how they want to interact with people around them. At least there's that level playing field. I can tell you from personal experience that if you're trying to improve yourself and live your best life, you probably want to be with someone who is like-minded so at least there's that common value.

SH: The baseline for personal development that makes it easier to understand each other is accountability for your own actions. That's why we're able to get into their mindset. If you're just blaming the world and want to be a victim, it's not going to work. That's why personal development is an area that we want to focus on.

Another pitfall of online dating is that it encourages swiping, and we're trying to implement something that's a little bit more real and stop the bleeding of that type of superficial mindset that's been created by online dating and social media.

LC: It's an interesting time to launch a dating app. Has the pandemic changed anything about the app and its rollout?

TJ: COVID actually brought out some qualities in LoveinSync that we already had in place. We did a series of online conversations on love hacks during the time of COVID, and one thing that we were already strongly suggesting in our coaching is that people have a teleconferencing chat, a Zoom call or FaceTime or something, to make sure the pictures match who they are, get a sense of voice and body language before jumping into a date.

It's fun to do online dating and to meet different people but after a while you develop dating fatigue and you think, “Oh my God, if I have to tell my story one more time, I'm going to shoot myself.” A quick FaceTime or Zoom call to find out if this is a person that you have potential with or not can save you a bunch of time.

SH: We did make one change: We have a Love Academy to educate our community about what it might take to find love in a much easier way, and because of COVID we implemented an online dating game show called Real Raw Role Play of Love & Dating. People come on and role-play and I critique and we have judges. We have fun.

## :the 1st half



BY PAUL DESBAILLETS

Well it's been a few months.

This column will attempt to get you excited about the beautiful game while trying to navigate WTF is going on with the planet.

The culture and the sport is very much alive in the city.

FOOTY, FOOTBALL, SOCCER or FUTBAL, no matter how you say it, is a sport that is bigger than the 90+ minutes on the pitch.

In the last several months, while everybody has been locked up and trying to figure out what the next moves will be, the grand world of football (or soccer) has gone through a few ups and downs while still maintaining an excitement factor.

I didn't think I was going to miss football as much as I did over these past months but was thrilled to see it return.

In the time that we have been put into detention, football resumed with matches in empty stadiums. Rising to the top-tier of the football universe was the amazing story of Alphonso Davies winning a championship in Germany. Davies was crowned the top Canadian men's national player and named the Bundesliga Rookie of the Year for the 2019–20 season.

In France, PSG were quickly crowned French League champs — almost too quickly — but the honest truth is they were slated to take the title.

In the U.K., the English Premier League returned right at the heart of the Black Lives Matter movement and integrated that social message into its initial matches. Here's hoping that the social message continues to be pushed as a top line agenda of the league for the next 50 years and doesn't get lost in the “next” social issue!

Sadly, racism and football have always been linked but 2020 could be the time where things start to push the needle towards a more open-minded ecosystem and an environment with zero tolerance.

Liverpool became champions of England after a 30-year wait. Bravo to the Reds for doing it with class during this mess, while being helmed by a very cool, well-groomed, smiley-faced man who is considered to be one of the greatest football managers of all time: Mr. Jürgen Klopp.

Champions League is about to be played in a mini-tournament in August, which will be exciting for the football-heads out there and will keep the football addiction well satiated.

The Euros that were supposed to be played in June got cancelled and pushed over to 2021, like many other major events including the Olympics.

The MLS returned with the MLS Is Back tournament which will award the winner some money, some bragging rights and a spot in the CONCACAF Champions League after the final on Aug.11. All the teams that could participate in the tournament (that didn't drop out due to having too many players testing positive for COVID-19) moved into Disney World in sunny Orlando Florida. Mickey's backyard is a COVID-free fortress!

At Disney World, nobody is supposed to be able to go in or out of designated areas, even though the theme park is back open to paying guests. Don't tell me players are not sneaking out to take a ride on Space Mountain.

The NBA restarted in the same place on July 30. Everyone will have fun, “Living in the Bubble.”

Thierry Henry, as everybody knows, is the new coach to the Montreal Impact and so far he's not having a great time, record-wise. Let's be honest, though: this is no regular season and I for one look forward to seeing what he'll be able to do with the team next year as a proper litmus test of his coaching ability.

I will say that having the beautiful game gone for as long as we did helped me and others realize how much we love the game and that all the little things that bothered us about the game before no longer bore any weight. Bring on VAR any day of the week!

There is just still so much yet to be seen on how things roll out. Our city has only slowly started to come back to life: parks reopening, soccer camps restarting and people being able to play in groups of more than 4, 6 or 10 people at a time to enjoy what it means to play sports.

It's going to be interesting for the next little while but with a positive mindset and with the beautiful game always throwing us mouth-watering storylines, corruption scandals, mega deals, clubs being bought and sold like trading cards, games played in empty stadiums, social justice and the coming from nothing to greatness stories and so on... I for one can't wait to watch it all unfold!

“I don't believe skill was, or ever will be, the result of coaches. It is a result of a love affair between the child and the ball.” — Roy Maurice Keane

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Resto  
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BY CLAYTON SANDHU

In 2016, Marc Cohen, Sefi Amir and Ethan Wills, the owners of Lawrence and Boucherie Lawrence, opened their most popular venture to date: Larry's. Most won't need an introduction to this wildly popular day-to-night café-cum-natural wine bar — it's been lauded as one of Montreal's essential restaurants by everyone from *The Gazette* to *The New York Times*. It's a restaurant built around a concept of offering a somewhat utilitarian kind of dining experience: a long list of simple, small-plate dishes that range from breakfast classics to a simple but delicious fried porkchop.

Lawrence, Larry's sister restaurant, went through a transformation two years ago. Confronted by the realization that Larry's casual small-plates format was quickly becoming the industry trend, Cohen's meat and two veg style of cooking, while delicious, was no longer interesting to the standard Mile End clientele. Lawrence entered into a more contemporary era. The room got a spacious reno and the food, while still steeped in classic Lawrence flavours, became smaller, more finessed and refined. The restaurant broke away from the traditional three-course dinner format and dipped its toes into the world of contemporary fine-dining.

Then, of course, COVID-19 struck and restaurants, as we know them, changed. But perhaps not all for the worse. Larry's has moved its operations into the space usually occupied by Lawrence where a take-out operation has been running successfully for months. Larry's, due to its miniature size, has remained closed. However, for a limited time, Lawrence will be taking over the Larry's space as a pop-up, serving a seven-course prix-fixe dinner prepared by chef de cuisine Endi Qendro, with optional wine, cocktail or non-alcoholic pairings by sommelier Keaton Ritchie and bartender Elizabeth Yu.

"Like every other restaurant, right now, we've been thinking about how to best be able to offer what we normally offer," says Cohen — but as we know, things are far from normal. "We had the idea to start a very small Lawrence pop-up in the Larry's space. It seemed like a small enough space to be able to navigate safely and gently. It's sort of a first step on the road to getting things back to normal."

It's a concept that many have been playing with — a gradual return to traditional service and food served on proper plates. Most restaurants have opted to build temporary terraces to take advantage of the summer weather. Lawrence, in addition to the few seats they've set up outside, is moving operations indoors.

"We're going to have six tables of two. We're going to have plexiglass dividers installed. We're fortunate that the windows in the front open completely so it can be nice and



Lawrence at Larry's

breezy. You can expect to be greeted warmly by Sefi or by Keaton and we're going to try to cultivate a relaxed and comfortable restaurant experience. Sure, we're going to be wearing masks, but I think that's something that people are slowly getting used to."

While the object of the pop-up is to offer a sense of normalcy, the menu concept and restaurant format is something entirely new. "It's going to be seven courses — two menus to choose from, with a decent amount of overlap between them. One of them is going to be completely vegetarian, which we're excited about. It's not going to be super fancy, it's going to be in the Lawrence style, but smaller plates, fixed format.

"The set menu format is something I've been interested in exploring for a while. The ramifications, in terms of food cost and waste, are very attractive."

Under normal circumstances, a 12-seat, fixed menu, restaurant format would be unthinkable — you simply couldn't make enough money to survive. But COVID-19 has ushered in an unprecedented era of experimentation.

"It is definitely a good opportunity to explore because under normal circumstances there's always this feeling that if you try something new and it doesn't work out, you're going to be judged. We're in this time where everyone is doing something weird, trying new things. I think, when the dust settles, some of those things are going to work some of them aren't, but I don't think there's any shame in trying something new."

Cohen's experimentation extends outside the restaurant menu and format — there's experimentation in the payroll, too. The past few months have uncovered many glaring inequities in the restaurant industry, not the least of which was a demand for payroll and gratuity reform. Tipping, as a concept, has long been a contentious topic, particularly given the division between servers and cooks, but tipping

also contributes to an uncomfortable power dynamic between servers and clients — some in the industry are proposing a ban on tipping. This radical concept has been tested with mixed results over the past few years, but Cohen and his staff are attempting to abolish tipping by working a gratuity into the price of their fixed menu.

"It feels like that conversation is happening," Cohen says. "People are aware of it and people are interested in making things better in the world and [abolishing tipping] is a way to do it in the restaurant industry."

At face value, the Lawrence at Larry's pop-up is another bit of restaurant experimentation, nothing more than just figuring out how to keep business afloat amidst mounting uncertainty and ever-changing safety regulations. But it's really much more — it's a vision, an ephemeral mock-up of a utopic restaurant. Most cooks and chefs don't relish the stress of cooking for hundreds of people every night — if they could make a living from it, many would like to open something small and cook the food they like for a few guests. Likewise, in the front of house, it's an imagining of a relationship between servers and clients where money doesn't loom omnipresent over the interaction. Servers are able to tend to their tables in a caring and attentive manner while also being able to comfortably protect themselves from poorly behaving customers without fear of losing wages. Cohen is taking advantage of a rare opportunity.

"I think everyone is really accepting of any change and innovation right now — almost expecting innovation. We have to see that as a positive."

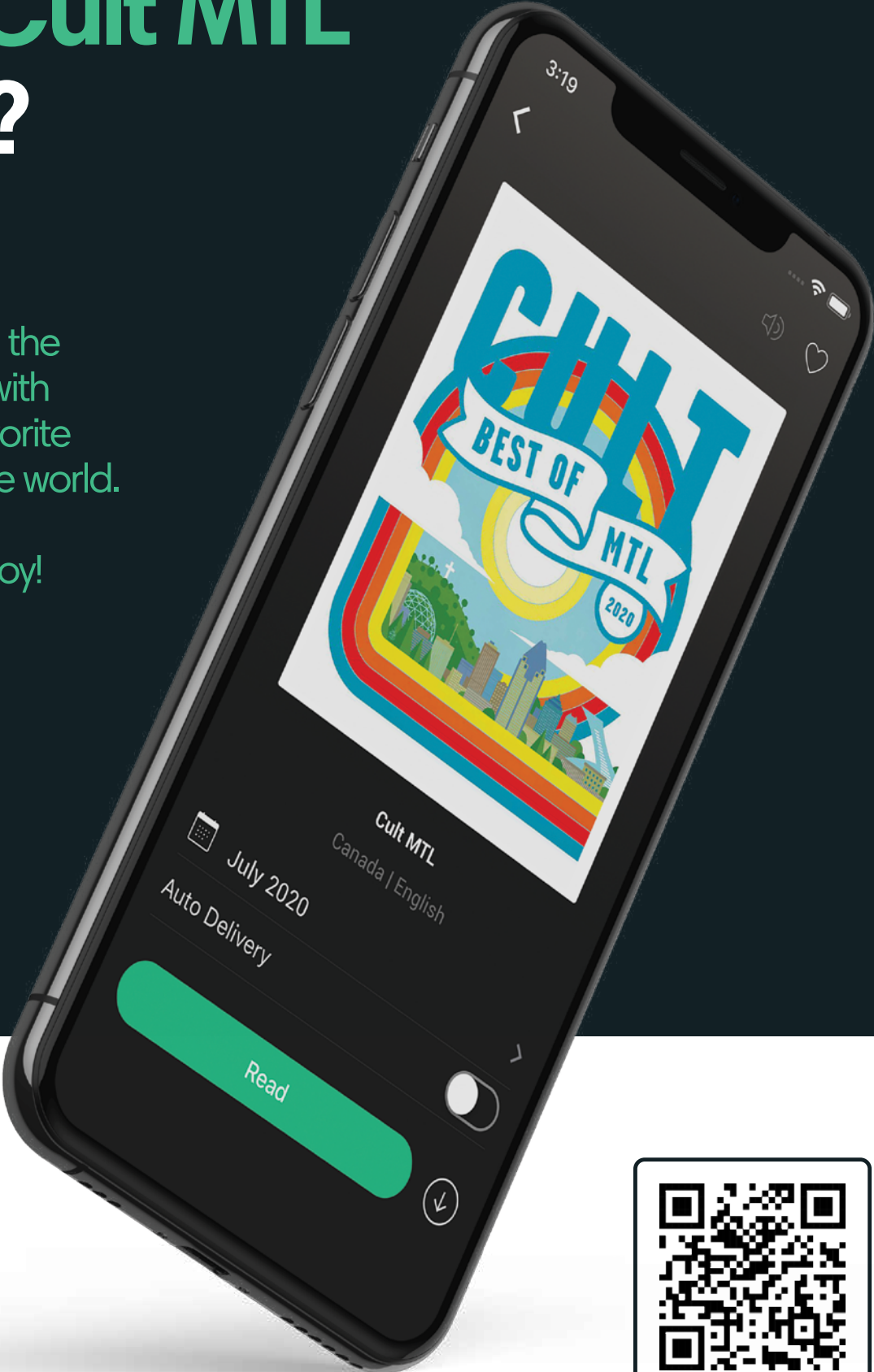
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# music

## The new world music

BY LORRAINE CARPENTER

Montreal label Cosmovision Records is releasing the second volume of their *Animals of the Earth* compilation this month (on Aug. 15), and aside from the fact that it's an impressive collection of electronic folklore tracks (with great cover art by Divan Grafico that's characteristic of Cosmovision's on-point visual signature), the release aims to shed a little light on a global challenge that has been shifted to the backburner.

“Today our planet still waits urgently for our action and with the latest events, Mother Earth itself is screaming to humanity to slow down and reconnect with her in a spiritual way,” reads the Cosmovision statement. “We invite you to come with us on this journey through the musical ecosystem of the *Animals of the Earth* to discover, respect and care for these beautiful beings that live with us.”

Ahead of the compilation release, I spoke to Felipe Nadeau — who runs the label alongside Tibo, Don Mescal and El Extravagante — about a sound that connects international communities, and navigating a global music scene from a place that hasn't paid much attention.

Lorraine Carpenter: Can you tell me about the electronic folklore movement?

Felipe Nadeau: This is a global movement, it's from everywhere: people from South Africa, from Japan, from Chile. It's a whole new wave of electronic music created by people who make music with a little bit more folklore while experimenting with high technology, and with an element of environmental engagement, consciousness about the earth. It's huge in Europe, it's huge in Latin America, but here it's kind of still developing. North America had it from before but by another name — the Burning Man crew, the ethnic-music hippies, though we don't like the term “ethnic” now, haha.

The music movement really responds to the current state of society, the big environmental problems we have, the problems with the native cultures that live in the Americas that are still invisible. With this music, people are starting to pay more attention to their events, their sound, their culture and their stories.

LC: How do you feel about the more dominant styles of electronic music here?

FN: House and techno used to be more relevant in the '90s but now it's a completely different story. Even the more techy crew, for example, like Mutek (festival acts) — there's a lot of technology going on, but where is it going? Where is the substance there? Especially now, with the world on the edge of collapse, music can be more of a meeting place. That's why I feel people are loving this music more and more every day.

Our crew is (aged) 25 to 40, and a lot of these guys were really into house and techno when they were in their 20s, when it was big and fresh. Now we want more than just the average Roland synthesizer. We want sounds from exotic places of the world, sitar, South American drums, African djembe, kora, expanding the ear a bit.

LC: When we communicated prior to this interview you stressed the fact that your label is run by and features acts



Animals of the Earth Vol. 2 cover art by Divan Grafico

from all over the world, including local and Canada-based artists who are visible minorities and immigrants. What has your experience been like as a label in the local scene?

FN: This project started as a necessity, as a minority group of South Americans, and a lot of women as well. I was born in Santiago, Chile and I arrived in Montreal in 2018 — I had lived in Toronto before — and there was no place for us, nothing. We started gathering people and connecting to a community and we became an internationally growing project. None of the big festivals have ever paid attention to us. I'm not saying we should be on the main stage of Osheaga or whatever, but Mutek for example invited Nicola Cruz, one of the biggest artists in this genre, they knew about us as the only (electronic folklore) label and collective in Montreal, and they didn't even invite us to do a small warm-up.

This is the first time I talk with any Canadian media. It's a big, big challenge. We need to put money upfront to get a bit of visibility from the Canadian media. We've been in Mexico City FM radio, in Berlin, we've had parties in Vienna.

I'm not surprised by all the problems that happen here with diversity — it's a big shame. Montreal has a lot of diversity, and Toronto as well, but it really doesn't profit from it much. It's still very one-sided, we're still fighting to be a bit more visible, and it's so hard.

In Toronto they always say, “Oh, we're so diverse here.” It's a nice discourse, but having one neighbour from India and one neighbour from Mexico doesn't mean that your society is culturally diverse. If there's no cultural interchange, it's just a demographic phenomenon.

I feel like Cosmovision Records combines the diversity of Montreal and the city's love for technology.

I feel that's something we've been doing and presenting to the crowd. If you go to a Cosmovision Records show, you can see a live act from South America and the next one is Arabic

and the other one is European and then African. It's a big melange of things.

LC: Where have you guys had events locally?

FN: We've been at les Jardineries, Jardins Gamelin, Ausgang Plaza, Cabaret Lion d'Or, Nomad Life and l'Escalier, and also festivals in Val David and Sherbrooke. I once made a party at l'Escalier and everybody was like, “What?!” But if Canada had more places like l'Escalier, the scene would be another story for sure.

In Chile, the way people do underground music is very different. I feel like the Cosmovision way of working has a lot to do with how we do underground in places like Latin America, a lot of guerrilla-style, sharing, gathering, working against the mainstream. Usually people here in North America want to be in the mainstream; we know we're not going to be in the mainstream so we work to present an alternative.

LC: Parties and shows are obviously not happening now but do you have any future plans that you can talk about?

FN: We haven't had a night at a proper club yet because everyone is into house and techno madness, but we had some offers for this year. Of course with COVID everything is on hold. During the pandemic, we kept working a lot as a label, releasing stuff online, inviting people to streaming, doing interviews. We haven't stopped at all.

We've gotten a lot of donations. Our music is free to download, that's part of our politics. You can get it on Spotify and all the main platforms, whether you live in Africa or South America or a place where you can't spend \$10 for an album. It's name your price, really, pay what you can. We've had a really, really good experience with donations, and this is super important as well: the label is actually self-sustainable. We've organized things very well so we have a big crew of people. We don't put any money into it, just time.

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# Living right

BY DARCY MACDONALD

It’s a good day for Montreal rap talent Mike Shabb.

It’s a Friday, it’s his day off from the smoke shop where he holds a day job, and his new album, *Life Is Short*, has hit streaming platforms.

“It’s a bless feeling man! I’m feeling great!” Shabb says. “I have good feedback right now. I just opened my Spotify artist app and I see 100 people listening to my tape at the moment. It’s crazy!”

Shabb is among the province’s new wave of rap artists who have actual, breathing fans, and not just friends and followers who happen to party at the same places they do.

“I think my music is different. It’s a whole new vibe that people haven’t heard before, it’s new for them,” Shabb reasons.

He’s had a deal with Bonsound hip hop imprint Make It Rain Records since he was 18, four years ago.

“They’re good people,” says Shabb. “It’s easy to work with people who understand what I’m trying to do.

“I’m always trying to be in the future with my music and think about how the music is gonna sound in two or three years. I’m always trying to stay ahead and make timeless music. I’m happy people fucks widdit.”

With four albums out in under three years, there’s no lack of progress to pay attention to. His development has been steady and convincing, with all the earmarks of an artist who’s in it for the long haul.

*Life Is Short* comes with production assists from les Anticipateurs’ Danny Ill and Dead Obies’ VNCE Carter, who also engineered the project.

A self-produced single, “Hesitate,” is a good example of the consideration Shabb puts into his sound.

“I heard the whole U.K. drill scene and that shit was bumpin’ so I was like, I’m try to make a beat like this, but different. Not the usual drill beat you’ll hear. I tried to go smooth on it and sing on it, too,” he describes.

“I heard mad people do drill beats but they always rap on it in a harsh voice. I thought, I’ll sing on it and try some shit for you. It came out how it came out — I made the whole beat in my room, freestyled on it and said, ‘This is going on the album.’ That’s it.”

Just as “Hesitate” — despite its suave leanings — captures a certain vulnerability, other album tracks combine thoughtfulness and strength without bravado or posturing, giving Shabb’s music an emotional depth that rings sincere without sounding forced.

“I had some shit on my chest that I had to get out, so it’s pretty emotional music. There’s flexing songs, too, but it’s more personal and I think people can relate to it,” says Shabb.

And as for the title of the project, Shabb kept it simple.



Mike Shabb

“Life is short! That’s a fact!” he chuckles.

“I went through some shit last year, my father died. Hard times. Since I was 17, I’ve been living on my own trying to chase this music dream. I’ve been through a whole lotta bullshit, bro.”

“I’m not even scared to talk about it,” he continues. “I have so many great memories of my dad and the only thing I can get outta all of this is positivity. I spoke about it on the album. If I’ve got fans that have (lost people), they can relate.

“Every human will go through that phase in life and all you can do is not blame yourself and try to stay positive. I know my father is watching over me every day. Sometimes when I’m making music, I get the chills like he’s there with me. It’s a great feeling. I don’t even wanna cry, it just makes me smile and makes me happy.

“And somehow, even if I went through all this mess, I’m still here and appreciating the moment,” Shabb says through an audible smile.

“Life is short, bro. Do what you gotta do.”





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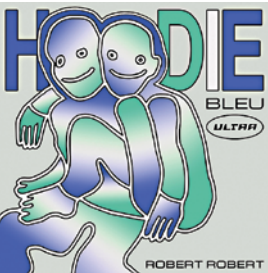


Blu & Exile, *Miles* (Dirty Science)  
Living up to a debut classic can be the bane of a hip hop artist's entire career. There's no guarantee lightning will strike twice, and fickle fans tend toward an entitlement that demands that their favourite acts do the same thing again and again, or else. Blu & Exile have returned only once since their 2007 masterwork *Below the Heavens* with an admittedly lukewarm collection of odds and ends in 2012's *Give Me My Flowers While I Can Still Smell Them*. And truthfully, *BTH* was an act of hip hop excellence so pristine that in some ways, it has no business being matched. All that said, *Miles* (named for jazzman Davis, and ostensibly for the road the pair has travelled, together and apart) gets pretty close to where it all began and brings it to the now. Exile is a nearly untouchable producer with an ear for old school, jazz era nuance, and Blu is a once-in-a-generation lyricist. Hearing the duo do it again in their 30s is a gift. 8.5/10 Trial Track: "True & Livin'" (Darcy MacDonald)



Juice WRLD, *Legends Never Die* (Interscope)  
The late Juice WRLD's spotlight in the music scene may have been shortlived, but his influence was nearly instantaneous, largely due to the success of his breakout hit "Lucid Dreams." In his first posthumous album following his tragic death by overdose in 2019, Juice WRLD returns with a body of work that lives up to his legacy. The album is eerily predictive, with nearly every song featuring lyrics that discuss pills, overdose, the constant

need to stay high and inevitable death. Although Juice WRLD never tried to hide his pill addiction from the public, several lyrics are deeply troubling in hindsight, due to them actually becoming a reality. While *Legends Never Die* could have benefitted from some cuts to the 21-song track list, the four snippet/interlude songs throughout make it more digestible to listen to in parts. Yet, due to Juice WRLD's reputation for being an incredibly talented freestyler and hard worker, there is surely no shortage of unreleased tracks that will find their way to the surface in the coming years. Legends truly never die, and will continue to live on forever through their music. 8/10 Trial Track: "Conversations" (Jacob Carey)



Robert Robert, *Hoodie bleu ultra* (Nowadays Records)  
Despite being titled *Hoodie bleu ultra*, the third full-length offering by Montreal's Robert Robert presents a warm and dancey soundscape. It is no secret that our city thrives with its electronic music scene. Robert Robert is a testament to the scene's frequent strive for originality, challenging himself to venture into new soundscapes he has never quite tackled before to blissful results. Count the Lia-assisted "Speak" for my vote as a late-entry contender for song of the summer. 8/10 Trial Track: "Speak" (feat. Lia) (Mr. Wavvy)

Long Beach Dub Allstars, *Long Beach Dub Allstars* (Regime Music Group)  
The once-upon-a-time Sublime spinoff group are back at it in the studio after almost two decades. This regrouping is entirely composed of non-Sublime personnel that keeps intact the voices and players that made their sound different, even as they were held to the inevitable standard that fans of the original California trio were hungry for when LBDA



first came on the scene in the late '90s. That means the fat and filler of the bullshit "Sublime With Rome" projects don't make the cut here, making way for authentic, easy-going roots reggae and non-offensive ska riffing from a pool of talent neither stuck in the past nor desperately clinging to branding standards that would leave them competing with a pale imitation of themselves. While nothing here will reinvent your relationship to upstroke rhythms, the core creativity of the Goodman/Happoldt/Ortiz line-up (with contributions from sadly departed brothers and LBDA OGs Ikey and Aaron Owens) is bright enough to bring the band to the promised land its best intentions suggested in the last millennium. The album is fun, thoughtful and will hopefully give the group space to breathe outside its own legacy when touring can begin. 7/10 Trial Track: "Dream" (Darcy MacDonald)



Hit-Boy & Dom Kennedy, *Also Known as Courtesy of Half-A-Mil* (Independent)  
Super producer Hit-Boy steps up to the mic once again for a second installment of his Courtesy of Half-A-Mil project alongside fellow Los Angeleno Dom Kennedy. The two's easy breezy flows are a fitting complement to the bouncy West Coast beats heard across the album. While Kennedy is known as a hometown hero, something akin to the late Nipsey Hussle, Hit-Boy's vocals sound akin to what Hannibal Buress may sound like if he swapped jokes for bars. There's nothing particularly high stakes here but the duo provide another light listen to let you live out your drop-top convertible dreams. 7/10 Trial Track: "Lou Rawls" (Mr. Wavvy)

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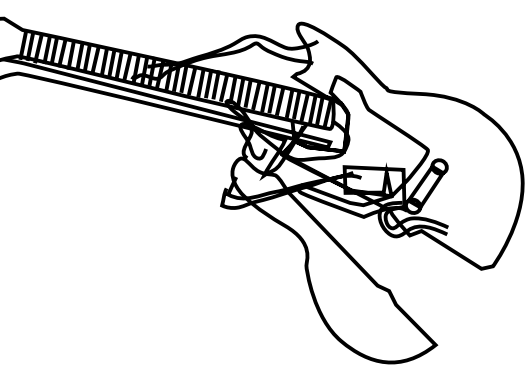
BY JOHNSON CUMMINS

Last month we had a peek at two absolute killer slabs of early 1980s power pop from Toronto's the Mods and Edmonton's Modern Minds after super-rad Toronto label Ugly Pop reissued 1980 recordings by both bands 40 years later.

This month, another classic Canadian punk rock release gets the reissue treatment from the fine people at Los Angeles's Porterhouse Records. The Young Canadians' second EP *Hawaii* gets a second chance at bat. Although widely regarded as a touchstone in the highly influential first wave of the Vancouver punk scene, the original copy of the *Hawaii* EP almost never winds up in the used record bins. Porterhouse is finally resurrecting this rare punk rock artifact but will continue to keep *Hawaii* on the DL with only 250 copies being pressed up. It goes without saying that this reissued slab o' wax will be selling out lickety split but Porterhouse and *Cult MTL* will be giving away a rare copy this month, so keep reading, street urchins, and you may get to grip a copy of your very own.

Although the early Toronto punk scene was indeed slinging out some serious punk rawk nuggets like Viletones' "Screaming Fist," Teenage Head's "Picture My Face," Diodes' "Tired of Waking Up Tired" and Demics "New York City," to name a few, Vancouver was also churning out the hits at the end of the '70s. Look no further than the Modernettes' ultra-catchy "Barbra," Subhumans' troglodyte stomp of "Fuck You," DOA's piss and vinegar drenched "Disco Sucks," Pointed Sticks' hooky as heck "Out of Luck" but as good as all of those blasters are, I would rate the Young Canadian's *Hawaii* — or better yet, their absolute killer *No Escape* — as the crown on the Vancouver rubble heap.

While DOA and Subhumans swung with nickels in their mitts and helped pave the way for hardcore, and Pointed Sticks and Modernettes flirted with pop that set its sights on the radio dial, the Young Canadians managed to lead the pack while not sounding like any of their 604-ers slinging their goods at East Van punk rawk hotspot the Smilin' Buddha. Headed up by contrarian and miscreant Art Bergman, the Young Canadians quickly took over the Vancouver punk scene as they were already playing long before the Ramones' debut record changed the landscape. Bassist Jim Prescott and drummer Barry Taylor were a lethal rhythm section that could go toe to toe with just about anybody in the punk rock scene from both coasts, with Bergman proving his songwriting prowess right out of the gate.



The *Hawaii* EP would be their second release coming in right after the almost as good 7" *Automan* EP and just before the more commercially oriented *This Is Your Life* EP. It was this middle ground though that the Young Canadians were still huffing the punk rock fumes while utilizing dynamics and emotional maturity and retaining the pile-driving BPMs that we all love.

They only left a total of 12 officially released songs in their wake, but the Young Canadians never released a dud, with the 1980 *Hawaii* EP being their most definite high watermark.

Contest time: Name the dearly departed drummer of the Pointed Sticks (send it to the email address below). The winner gets a very rare vinyl copy of the Young Canadians' *Hawaii* EP!!!

Current Obsession: Yoko Ono, Fly  
jonathan.cummings@gmail.com

BY ALEX ROSE

One thing is certain: COVID-19 has radically changed everyone's approach to film distribution and its possibilities.

Early on in the pandemic, we saw sizable theatrical releases bypass theatres and get sold directly to streaming services. This particular practice seems to have slowed down as studios speculate on a potential return and/or sit on properties with the hopes that they'll be purchased by networks at increasingly competitive rates. Whatever happens, it seems that everyone has deemed Christopher Nolan's *Tenet* the film that will officially test the waters when it comes to bringing blockbusters back. Now ostensibly set for Aug. 26, Nolan's newest *might* very well be discussed in next month's installment of this very column. Who knows anymore?

*Unhinged*, an automotive thriller starring Russell Crowe, was also supposed to come out in theatres months ago but keeps being delayed as the pandemic continues to cripple theatres in the United States. It's out on Aug. 14, the same day as *Greenland*, a disaster film that reteams Gerard Butler with *Angel Has Fallen* helmer Ric Roman Waugh, in which a huge comet hurtles towards Earth and Butler is the only one who can stop it — *Geostorm*-style.

Long deemed unfilmable, Jerzy Kosinski's Holocaust novel *The Painted Bird* finally comes to the screen (Aug. 14 at Parc) care of Czech director Václav Marhoul. Reactions have been all over the map, with pretty much everyone agreeing that it is about as heavy as films get — not exactly a pandemic feel-good effort, but an interesting watch nonetheless. Harvey Keitel, Udo Kier and Stellan Skarsgård co-star. Keitel also stars in Marco Pontecorvo's *Fatima* (Aug. 14), a Portugal-set story of faith in which a young girl and her two cousins become the talk of the town after witnessing an apparition of the Virgin Mary.

Claes Bang (*The Square*) and Elizabeth Debicki (*Tenet*, ostensibly, if it ever comes out) star in *The Burnt Orange Heresy* (Aug. 7), an Italian-set art-world neo-noir that also co-stars Donald Sutherland and Mick Jagger (!). Dev Patel stars in Armando Iannucci's *The Personal Life of David Copperfield*, an adaptation of the Dickens novel that was described as surprisingly straightforward considering Iannucci's penchant for the caustic and biting (*In the Loop*, *The Death of Stalin*). Benedict Cumberbatch stars as real-life spy Greville Wynne in *The Courier*, a Cold War-set thriller that also stars Rachel Brosnahan (*The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*).

Locally, August sees the release of Jean-Carl Boucher's *Flashwood*, which was originally scheduled to open earlier this year but was delayed for reasons we all know.

*Flashwood* stars Pierre-Luc Funk, Simon Pigeon and many others and centres on a group of friends over the years. The film was shot over seven years, meaning that the characters age more or less in real time, *Boyhood*-style. Aug. 14 sees the release of *Mon cirque à moi*, starring Jasmine Lemée as a young girl who has spent most of her life on the road with her father (Patrick Huard), a rodeo clown who has no desire to settle down anywhere or do anything — a belief that isn't necessarily shared by his daughter.

The big Netflix release this month is *Project Power*, a superhero drama from directors Ariel Schulman and Henry Joost (*Catfish*, *Nerve*, *Viral*). Jamie Foxx stars alongside Dominique Fishback and Joseph Gordon-Levitt as a man who attempts to rescue his daughter after she falls in with the wrong crowd — who are taking a drug that gives its taker superhuman abilities for five minutes. The rest of the Netflix original slate this month is the usual mix of things for teens and the evergreen dance film.

Amazon Prime Video similarly promises yet another star-crossed-teens-doomed-romance with *Chemical Hearts*, about two teens who fall in love while editing the student newspaper. The more interesting release this month is the British teen horror/comedy *Get Duked!* Already garnering comparisons to *Attack the Block*, *Get Duked!* is the story of four teens who find themselves hunted through the Scottish Highlands by a mysterious hunter played by Eddie Izzard.





# The art of change

BY LORRAINE CARPENTER

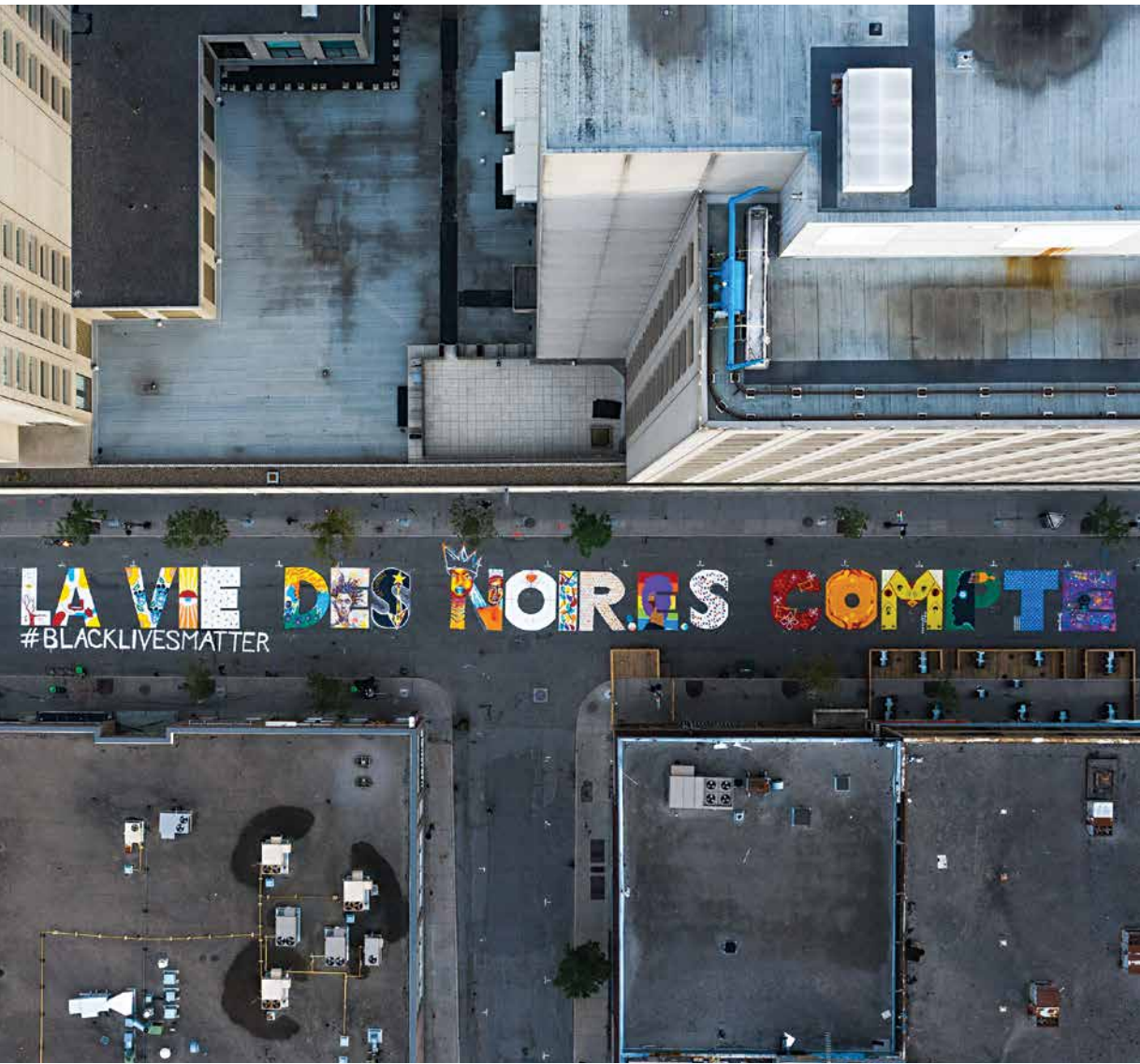
When a Black Lives Matter street mural (La vie des noir.e.s compte) was painted on Ste-Catherine E. in mid-July, a lot of people heard about the local organization behind it — Never Was Average — for the first time. I am one of those people. Co-founded as a retail boutique in 2013 by Montreal-born entrepreneurs Hanna Che and Harry Julmice, the NWA mandate was soon reimagined and the duo shifted their energy towards other creative outlets and socio-political causes.

“We came to the realization that our community needed some representation,” Julmice said. “What we wanted to do is to build a platform, an organization that would help empower the community and strive for social change. Since we’ve always been into creativity, we thought that art would be a great way to create these different projects, to raise awareness and get the public involved and develop a relationship with the community. What we mostly do is design and curate conversations, art exhibitions and other events. We try to produce as much content as possible to uplift our community.”

Along with offering personal development workshops for youth, showcasing LGBTQ2 artists of colour with the Amour Is Love series and hosting a range of art and community events, Never Was Average curated a huge interactive space for the Museum of Fine Arts’ Picasso exhibition in 2018, and has been co-hosting a series of conversations with the MMFA (which will continue on Sept. 12). But their most high-profile project to date has been the Black Lives Matter street mural, which was the brainchild of Carla Beauvais, executive director of the Black excellence foundation and awards event Fondation/Gala Dynastie.

“We’d been working with Carla for about six months, and following the murder of George Floyd in Minnesota, after seeing all the different cities and the states doing street murals, it was important to Carla to make sure that Montreal was part of the conversation as well. She basically approached us because we’re part of the art world and we have strong ties with local artists within the community, so it only made sense that she involved us. We were responsible for curating and producing the whole project.”

The artists who participated in the mural are Marc-Alain Félix, Lana Denina, TEEN ADULT, Niti Marcelle Mueth, Michaëlle Sergile & Yarijey design, D. Mathieu Cassendo, Kando, MALICIOUZ, SIMO, AXL, G L O W Z I, MĪNS (Made in Shaina), Eelise Ndri, Anastasia Erickson / aeri, Franco E., Awa Banmana and Marie-Denise Douyon.



“The project wasn’t initiated by the city,” says Julmice, clarifying a misconception around the origin of the project that arose due to the city of Montreal’s endorsement of the street mural — Mayor Valérie Plante was photographed visiting the site and posing with some of the artists. “Of course you need a permit and for that you have to go through the city. The city approved the project and they wanted to be involved so they decided to finance part of the project.”

As for the artistic direction, he explains that Never Was Average was pretty hands-off, giving the artists carte blanche for their respective sections (letters) of the mural.

“We gave the artists some guidelines. Niti Marcelle Mueth came up with a design, the layout, the canvas and then it was up to each artist to come in and do their thing and share their message and come up with their own artwork. Some of them had an idea before (they arrived), but once you get on the site that’s when you really know what you want to do. For most of them, it was really on the spot.”

When asked about the issues at the core of the Black Lives Matter movement — particularly at the local level, and in light of the report on systemic racism in Montreal that was released in mid-June — Julmice says that addressing these political and societal issues and achieving equality is at the core of what Never Was Average is about. There’s a lot of work to be done, not just as a community, but as a society.

“First of all, we should really address the issue firsthand,” he says. “It’s a systemic issue. We need to revisit some of the practices that are toxic, from the bottom all the way to the top. It’s not just in one particular space or area, it’s in every area in our society, whether it’s housing, education, especially the workplace. We need to make sure that everybody has the same opportunity and everybody’s playing on an even field. It’s been four or five years since (Never Was Average has) been actively having this conversation, but this has been an ongoing issue since the beginning of an age. This is a time when people really need to understand that it needs

to stop today, and actions need to be taken today.”

Having worked in various artistic milieus in the city, Julmice has experienced his share of racism in Montreal’s art scene.

“Of course, every black person has experienced a situation where they were taken advantage of. We get our ideas and our work stolen all the time. It’s gotten to a point where we need to make sure that we sign NDA’s and protect ourselves legally. It’s not an easy space to navigate. There’s a lot of cultural appropriation that’s happening every single day. We don’t get the credits that we deserve, we don’t get paid for the work that we actually put in. I get requests all the time asking me to do this, do that, without even offering compensation and I know for a fact I’m not the only one dealing with this.”

Prior to the mural project, Never Was Average participated in some of the Black Lives Matter marches and rallies that happened in Montreal, a (distanced) meeting point for the Black and Indigenous community and their allies after months of lockdown. But as an organization, they had remained as active as possible throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Like every company, every organization, we took a huge hit,” Julmice says. “About 80 per cent of what we do, we do it in person, so since we weren’t able to be together physically, thanks to the internet we transitioned everything virtually. We’re still hosting conversations on a biweekly basis, we’re still in touch with our community on the day to day to support them through this hardship. We thought that it was really important to continue doing the work and providing spaces for people, especially at a time when we weren’t allowed to go outside and see family members and friends. The only way to get a human connection was through a Zoom call, so it was important to provide that for our community.

“Everything that we do, we always make sure to do it on a positive note,” he adds. “That’s our approach to everything.”

# You can’t postpone Pride

BY LORRAINE CARPENTER

Like all of this city’s summer festivals, Fierté Montreal Pride has had to reimagine itself this year.

As announced back in May, a series of online conferences and festive activities will take place between Aug. 10 and 16.

“The Pride movement was born out of adversity and has since overcome major historical challenges; its spirit cannot be postponed nor cancelled. The communities of sexual and gender diversity — especially those whose rights and freedoms are not fully recognized and whose visibility is often limited to the festival’s duration — can not only celebrate social advances that concern them but also use this moment as an opportunity to advocate on behalf of their rights while they gather together in a different way, this year,” said Fierté Montréal Pride founding president Éric Pineault in a statement.

This year’s daily festival themes and ambassadors are as follows:

Aug. 10: Family constellations with Annie Pullen Sansfaçon, Ph.D, “dedicated to diversity within families”

Aug. 11: FemmXs with Elle Barbara, “a day allowing all people of female diversity to invest the public space, to make their demands heard and of course, to celebrate!”

Aug. 12: The Bear communities with Dominique Lavergne, “an opportunity to learn more about the practices and philosophy surrounding them in order to deconstruct the prejudices” around the leather and fetish community

Aug. 13: QTBIPOC with Ngabo

Aug. 14: Drag communities with Miss Butterfly

Aug. 15: Spotlight on different realities with Rosie Bourgeoisie and Pierre-Olivier Beaulac Bouchard

Aug. 16: Pride festivities day with DJ Sandy Duperval, this year’s festival spokesperson.

→ For more details about Fierté Montreal Pride 2020, visit [fiertermtl.com](http://fiertermtl.com)



Miss Butterfly



Sandy Duperval



:play recent

# Drop that phone



BY RYAN DIDUCK

Duma, “Lionsblood,” *Duma* (Nyege Nyege Tapes)

In June, an article in the *Journal of Biological Regulators & Homeostatic Agents* entitled “5G Technology and Induction of Coronavirus in Skin Cells” caused major controversy by suggesting that high-frequency electromagnetic (EM) radiation from new 5G networks could potentially breed COVID-19 through the epidermis. The article circulated through conspiracy theory websites and social media accounts, with many readers holding it up as definitive evidence that COVID-19 is a hoax and other more or less tenuous conclusions.

One of the scientific studies cited in this incendiary article is a 2020 paper published in the journal *Toxicology Letters*, called “Adverse Health Effects of 5G Mobile Networking Technology Under Real-Life Conditions.” I noticed that the article’s second author was Dr. Paul Héroux, an Associate Professor in the Department of Epidemiology, Biostatistics, and Occupational Health at McGill. So, I reached out and spoke with Dr. Héroux by telephone on July 28 to ask his opinion of the article and the scandal surrounding its publication. What he said was at once reassuring and nonetheless shocking.

Abdullah Miniawy & HVAD, “The Dirty Canes Lake,” *did you mean: irish* (irsh)

First of all, I wanted to know if it was really possible, as the *Journal of Biological Regulators & Homeostatic Agents* article suggested, that our coiled DNA could act like “antennae,” receiving EM radiation and producing Coronaviruses in otherwise healthy bodies. Dr. Héroux immediately banished the notion. However, the news about the levels of EM radiation to which we are already exposed should have been cause for concern — and 5G is just going to make matters worse.

EM radiation, according to Héroux, is a good engineering idea in theory. But since the 1930s, it has also become a very profitable idea, too. This has led to the growth of the telecommunications industry beyond its usefulness and left it blind to the “very suspicious” impacts of its effects on environmental health. During the Cold War, it was considered unpatriotic in the U.S. to claim that radar, for example, may be detrimental to humans or animals. And while these kinds of devices were strictly for military applications, their footprint wasn’t that big. Now that every civilian has an EM-emitting and receiving device in their pockets, though, the footprint is far more significant and potentially threatening.

Héroux contends that policy in Canada and the U.S. is controlled by industry, a situation that he called “very immoral.” Telecommunications companies recruit scientists who are willing to downplay the potential adverse effects — as well as to divert attention away from the real risks — to produce what he called “Mickey Mouse science.” He told me that the Bioelectromagnetic Society (BEMS) which, according to their website was “established in 1978 as an independent organization of biological and physical scientists, physicians and engineers interested in the interactions of electromagnetic fields with biological systems,” had in fact been infiltrated by industry actors. Héroux called the science conducted under its



Inga Silverstova from Pixels

aegis “easy to manipulate” — more of a “fashion show” than an independent body of research.

Drew McDowall ft. Kali Malone, “Agalma V,” *Agalma* (Dais Records)

Section 704 of the U.S. Telecommunications Act, for instance, prevents the discussion of potential health hazards due to the installation of mobile phone towers. In Canada, the establishment of safe limits of human exposure to radiofrequency EM radiation is determined by a policy called Safety Code 6. Yet, the Canadian government collects around \$1-billion annually on the rental and sale of the wireless spectrum to the telecoms industry. Why rock the boat?

I asked Dr. Héroux what could and should be done — what can the average person do? — and he emphatically said that we need to change now, that the rising levels of EM radiation are unacceptable for humans and animals, with potentially life-altering unforeseen consequences. Globally, it is the World Health Organization that sets the tone for health and safety. If the U.S. follows through on its threats to defund the WHO, this will leave Bill Gates (whose fortune, the world’s second largest private fortune, depends upon selling more and more wireless and digital devices) as its biggest contributor. This constitutes a gross conflict of interest. The FCC in the U.S. claims no expertise in health, and the FDA’s mandate is to assess the safety of food and drugs, not EM radiation, leaving the industry literally to its own devices to directly control the policies around its products and services.

Aasthma feat. Dale Cornish, “Go Bark,” *V/A Vol. 1* (Herrensauna)

There are alternatives. Optical Fibre, for instance, can

provide data transfer rates that match or exceed 5G. And we can use wireless technology only when necessary in order to limit its detrimental effects upon ourselves and our environment.

Instantaneous global communication has become not only expected but, in many ways, necessary, as we have seen with the unprecedented flow of information around this “data-driven” pandemic. Ultimately, Héroux believes that governments are unwilling or unable to change on their own. There is too much money to be made, politicians don’t have the time or expertise to parse the scientific literature or to assess its robustness, and many of them are on the take from lobbyists and industry actors. It will have to quickly become a matter for the courts to decide. Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. in the U.S. is currently suing the FCC over its wireless health guidelines, contending that the agency knew and didn’t act upon credible information that wireless technology — and now 5G — is leading to a growing epidemic of illnesses.

Eli Winter, “Maroon,” *Maroon* (American Dreams Records)

But it is everyone’s responsibility, too. Which begs the question: How much communications technology do we really need in our lives? Do we require a device in every room, emitting and receiving harmful radiation into our bodies and into our communities? Or could just one do the trick? Do we really need to be connected 24/7/365, or would taking a few days off to bask in an environment not blanketed with EM frequencies do us good from time to time? How many Netflix series do we really need to binge-watch. How fast of a network is fast enough? Perhaps we’d be wise to park that self-driving car, drop that iPhone 11 Pro and dream a little dream instead.

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*Yasmeen Haddad Loves Joanasi Maqaïttik* by Carolyn Marie Souaid
- AUG 19, WEDNESDAY | 7 PM **GRAPHIC NOVEL**  
*The Sky is Blue with a Single Cloud* by Kuniko Tsurita
- AUG 26, WEDNESDAY | 7 PM **NEW READS**  
*Little Eyes* by Samanta Schweblin
- AUG 28, FRIDAY | 6 PM **TEEN READS**  
*Wilder Girls* by Rory Power
- AUG 30, SUNDAY | 6 PM **D+Q COOKS**  
*Mandy’s Gourmet Salads* by Mandy Wolfe et al.
- SEPT 8, TUESDAY | 7 PM **TRUE READS**  
*They Said This Would Be Fun* by Eternity Martis
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