



DECEMBER 2020 • Vol. 9 No. 4 • CULTMTL.COM

FREE

* Laurence-Anne * 2020 * Empress Theatre * Ruby Waters * Ian Stone * Panettone

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Kelly Rowland

PLASTIC HEARTS

*Le nouvel album
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Kamouraska-born, Montreal-based singer-songwriter Laurence-Anne spoke to us about craving live music and preparing to release a record that was written the week before COVID.

Photo by Xavier Cyr / Juste du Feu

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Cult MTL is published by Cult MTL Media Inc. and printed by Imprimerie Mirabel. Entire contents are © Cult MTL Media Inc.

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Annus horribilis

BY TOULA DRIMONIS

How does one even come close to recapping such a hellish and unprecedented annus horribilis? 2019 was the year that saw 500,000 Montrealers hit the streets, shoulder to shoulder, to raise awareness about climate change. 2020 would be the year we barely saw each other.

Looking back on how the year started, it's almost quaint to see how unaware we were of what was to come. I can now officially confirm that I much prefer reading about history than being a part of it.

Early troubles

What dominated international headlines in January of 2020 were the massive Australian wildfires that would kill people and animals, displace thousands and destroy over 15 million acres of land. It was a harbinger of what climate change will do if not taken seriously.

February saw the Wet'suwet'en crisis unfold across Canada. As rail blockades multiplied against the expansion of the Coastal Gas Link pipeline, national columnists and politicians — from François Legault to Andrew Scheer — discussed the “lawlessness” of the civil disobedience and urged police to “lay down the law.” Reconciliation, once again, proved to be nothing more than words.

February was also the month that saw Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein get his comeuppance. More than 100 women had to come forward before justice could finally tip in survivors' favour. A few months later, the Quebec music industry would be rocked by its own #MeToo allegations, reminding us that privilege has a way of protecting people for a long time, but karma catches up with us all.

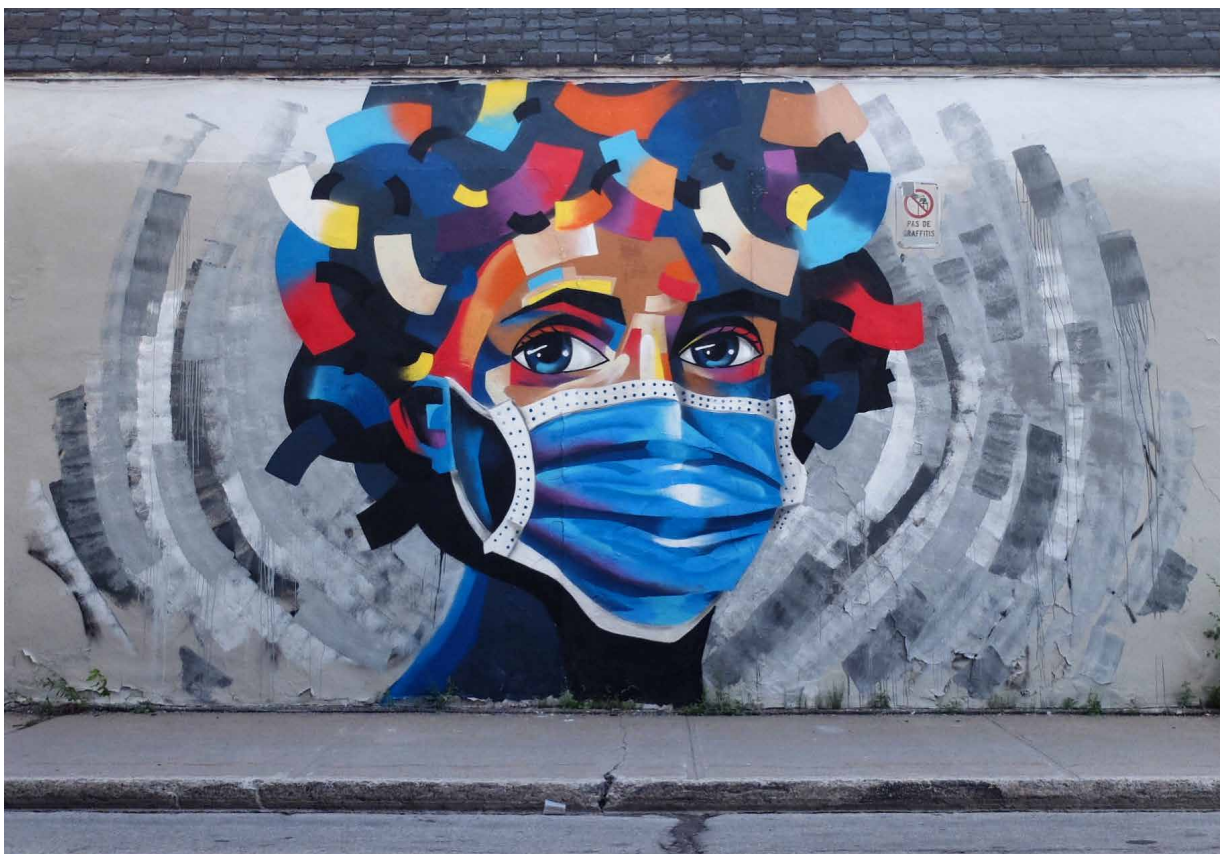
Pandemic March

February would be the last “normal” month we would experience. By early March, what started off as distant stories of a virus spreading in Asia would catapult us all into the unknown. Within weeks, COVID-19 would evolve into a full-on global pandemic, the likes of which none of us had seen in our lifetime.

“Social distancing” would become the buzzword for 2020. Zoom calls, proper mask etiquette, CERB and “flattening the curve” became part of our vernacular and our daily lives, as social media replaced our daily commutes and 5à7s, and some of us wouldn't see our loved ones for months.

Toilet paper wars

Images of people fighting for toilet paper and bottles of hand sanitizer started making the news. Rapidly updated and often-conflicting government information started making the rounds and sharing online space with conspiracy theorists and anti-maskers.



Cindy Lopez

Then, the stories from hospitals and CHSLDs started making headlines. Our sense of security and order crashed like a badly built Jenga tower. One volunteer nurse blew the whistle, journalists started probing, family members started talking and everything came tumbling down.

Our underfunded healthcare system

Years and years of neglect and refusing to prioritize eldercare came back to haunt us. Story after story of seniors dying in eldercare facilities made frontpage headlines. So many stories... Each story representing a life and the family that loved them and lost them. Each story representative of our collective failure as a society and successive governments' inability to prioritize healthcare.

Thousands of frontline workers exhausted both physically and mentally. While writing this year-end column, Quebec has registered a grim milestone: more than 7,000 COVID-related deaths, far more than any other Canadian province. Globally, close to 1.5 million people have died from coronavirus. The world is collectively in mourning, whether we realize it or not. And that number is only expected to go up before mass vaccinations roll out.

Guardian angels and sacrificed frontline workers

By May, the stories making headlines were frontline healthcare workers and “guardian angels” being left to their own devices and sacrificed by chronic underfunding. Many of these orderlies working the frontlines, risking (and sometimes losing) their lives were asylum seekers. Many Quebecers demanded the government — in a show of solidarity and appreciation — fast-track their applications. The Legault government would initially reject and then reluctantly (and disappointingly) agree on limited fast-tracking for healthcare workers only.

BLM and denial of systemic racism

By June, Quebec's Black Lives Matter movement was gaining momentum. Spurred on by George Floyd's death in the U.S., and continued instances of police brutality right here at home, BIPOC communities increased pressure for much-needed change. Joyce Echaquan's tragic death in September rocked Quebec and laid bare the systemic discrimination suffered daily by Indigenous communities. Still... Premier Legault (and by extension his government) continued to deny systemic racism exists, making Quebec seemingly the only place in the world untouched by it.

Summer break

The hot summer months gave us all a bit of breathing room. Able to escape our homes and come together in public parks and terraces, Montreal felt alive and almost “normal” for a minute. Unable to travel abroad, Quebecers flocked to rural towns and national parks, many of them discovering, for the very first time, the beauty in our own backyards. Summer bliss didn't last long. By the end of August, Sir John A. Macdonald's head was bouncing off the pavement at Place du Canada and COVID cases started to climb up again. Healthcare workers warned everyone a second wave was coming.

It did.

While writing this, Montreal's restaurants, theatres, bars, cafés, museums, live-music venues and all the things that make this city what it is are shut down and gasping for air. I worry about whether we have what it takes — financially, emotionally, physically — to get through the next six-month hurdle before vaccines offer us some hope for normalcy. I worry about how long it will take for Montreal to bounce back and I worry about our morale and our sense of solidarity.

The final stretch

2020 has been the year where our collective weaknesses and our failings as a society were laid bare for all to see. But I also saw some of our finest moments. People found incredibly creative and generous ways to support each other and push through. It's the good I choose to focus on.

The 7,000 Quebecers who responded to the premier's call for retired healthcare professionals willing to help. The people who reached out to thousands of housebound seniors. The people who volunteered their time in food banks and shelters. The people on the frontlines: the orderlies, nurses, doctors, teachers, maintenance workers, grocery store cashiers, warehouse and delivery folks, risking their lives daily, who have made it possible for the rest of us to stay home and stay safe.

The people who wore their masks religiously and did everything to keep the numbers low to protect the most vulnerable among us. The people (politicians included) who have been working tirelessly and resiliently around the clock, trying to devise plans and figure out ways to keep us going and keep the city functioning, while dealing with a pandemic they never signed up for.

I see you. And I thank you. You are what makes this city shine. Stay safe. Hang in there. A new year is coming. I hope it's a supremely boring one. We could use one of those.



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Empress's new clothes



1940s

BY TAYLOR C. NOAKES

It's one of those vexing, persistent, only-in-Montreal problems — like how to greet American tourists without offending separatists, or how to remove snow without contracting organized crime. We claim we're historic. We claim we support the arts. We claim to enjoy a night on the town. Yet somehow, for nearly 30 years, a one-of-a-kind theatre has occupied primo real-estate in a pseudo-trendy part of town with inadequate nightlife, and no one has been able to revive the Empress.

A quick search reveals a seemingly endless stream of stories dating back to the late-1990s about how NDG's Empress Theatre will “finally” find a new vocation. It will be revived, restored, rehabilitated, renovated and/or repurposed, bringing “life back to NDG.” Several articles of the type were written this year alone.

And year after year, nothing happens. Non-profits, charities, cultural organizations, local government — seemingly

everyone has taken a turn trying to make something of this building. Sometimes there was more than one group working on a solution, but not working together. Studies were commissioned, architects came up with renderings and illustrations, surveys were completed, the public was consulted.

And zilch. The Empress has stood empty for about a third of its life. The building has been described as derelict and in danger of falling down for over 20 years (spoiler alert: it hasn't happened yet).

In fact, questions about the structural integrity of the building date back to 1999 when the city first purchased the building with a plan to renovate it. The nature of this concern was based more on politics than engineering, however, with a cabal of West End city councillors (including Michael Applebaum, Jeremy Searle and Marvin Rotrand) leading the laissez-faire charge that the city shouldn't be involved in the theatre business.

Applebaum, for what it's worth, had a change of heart about a decade later when he was CDN-NDG's borough mayor. In 2008, he was pointing to the city's \$1.6-million contribution to a \$6.5-million project that involved the city, the borough, Black Theatre Workshop, McGill University, the provincial government's culture ministry and Peter McAuslan, among others. This project — the Empress Cultural Centre — received money to repair the building's roof, which apparently still leaks. Somehow millions of public dollars have been spent over the years to maintain an abandoned building in a state of disrepair.

When just about the entire planet was glued to their screens waiting for results to come in from this year's American presidential election, the borough of Côte-des-Neiges / Notre-Dame-de-Grâce held the first in yet another round of public consultations on the future of the old Empress Theatre.

Though participants had plenty of ideas about what could be done on the site of the antique movie palace, what wasn't clear was whether any effort was being made to preserve the nearly hundred-year-old theatre. Answers to the question ranged from “we'll see” to “we're not sure” to “let's see what people say,” but for the most part elected officials seemed resigned to the idea that the building is a total loss and not worth preserving.

Qualified though these individuals may be in running the borough's affairs, none are preservationists, historians, architects or engineers.

City councillor Peter McQueen, who was needlessly evasive when questioned about the Empress and its future, indicated that the building had lost whatever was worth preserving when it was converted into the twin-screen Cinema V in the 1970s.

Héritage Montréal, by contrast, indicated that there were not only preservable fragments of the building's historic interior, but a façade worth preserving as well. Moreover, preservation is not limited to form, but extended to function as well, and in this respect the Empress is still what it's always been: a neighbourhood theatre. Héritage Montréal's experts were invited to tour the Empress but



1980s



2010s

also encouraged to confirm the borough's position that the building wasn't salvageable. This they declined, indicating they'd need to conduct a thorough examination before rendering judgment. They weren't invited back.

City councillor Christian Arseneault said that borough mayor Sue Montgomery "tried to fast-track a demolition in order to show that *something* (original emphasis) was being done, but was unsuccessful" and that "the inaction of administrations past has effectively ruled out preservation funding." Arseneault continued stating "...we conducted a structural audit of the building last year and, frankly, it's a miracle the place hasn't collapsed yet. It's not just the façade that is falling apart; the building itself is unsound."

This assessment wasn't entirely confirmed by borough planning consultant Nicolas Lavoie, who contradicted Arseneault's assertion that the borough had sought to demolish the building but agreed that the building was in poor shape. Whatever shape it's in, the borough gave the SHDM (the city's public housing authority) a quarter of a million dollars to conduct an engineering and architectural study. This is apparently a different study from the "structural audit" Arseneault referred to, which isn't a public document. According to Lavoie, the studies aren't public because it's a "delicate situation" and the borough wants to avoid any "misinterpretations."

Indeed, it is peculiar that a building of such evident importance to the people of NDG would be left in such an apparently precarious physical state while the report detailing the precariousness would be withheld from the public eye. Keep in mind, just four years ago the Empress Theatre Foundation was moving ahead on a project to rehabilitate the building as a multi-screen cinema. Did the old girl suddenly decide to fall apart after all these years?

Curiously, in the entire time the city or the borough has owned the building outright, no one has ever applied to either the federal government's Historic Sites and Monuments Board or the Quebec heritage ministry for an official recognition of the building's historic status. Nicolas Lavoie reiterated several times that everyone at the borough considers the Empress a heritage site, but admitted no one had ever tried to make it official.

Such a designation would permit the borough to apply for federal and/or provincial government funding to execute necessary repairs, and in some cases even more substantial renovations. It might also limit what could be done with the building — i.e. historic site status would mean it would have to function as a theatre, one the reasons the status likely wasn't pursued 20 years ago. It wouldn't be a tough argument

to make: the Empress is nearly 100 years old and remains, dilapidated though it may be, the unique extant example of Egyptian Revival theatre architecture in Canada.]

And just for good measure, yes, Oscar Peterson apparently practised on the Empress's organ during off hours when he was a teenager.

The biggest problem facing the Empress — and the primary reason why the borough seems insistent on wiping the slate clean and starting fresh — is also what hampered restoration and revival efforts of the past.

Everyone wants this building to be something it isn't, and for it to make up for an ever-increasing deficit of public community space.

So rather than restoring a theatre to function as a theatre, public consultations consistently reveal that the public wants multi-functional rooms, dance studios, performance space, a cabaret, a cafe and a full-service rooftop restaurant. They'd also like the project to be finished yesterday, don't want to pay higher taxes, need extra parking on weekends and would prefer the whole renovation process be carbon neutral.

It goes without saying, the greenest building is almost always the one that's already built.

Given the myriad non-theatre related functions the public would like to see at the site, the form of the building is now considered "too constraining", according to Lavoie, who also reiterated the prominent belief, drawn from public consultations, that streaming services and the internet have made cinemas obsolete.

There's a great irony here, because people were saying the exact same thing about the VCR in the mid-late 1980s, right around the time Famous Players bought the Empress and converted it from a repertory theatre back into a first-run cinema.

It's the difference between drinking at home and drinking at a bar.

Sure, the former is usually cheaper and likely safer, too. It's also boring. There are plenty of people who have jumped the gun already and pronounced bars, cafés and restaurants 'obsolete' because of the pandemic. Trust me when I say once it becomes safe to go out again, Montrealers will be going out with a vengeance. A theatre — be it a space for cinema, comedy, music, slam poetry or amateur beatboxing competitions — will likely attract a crowd, and those people will probably want food and drink both before and after a show.

When people talk of reviving the Empress, it's not just that they wish to see the lights on in a charming old building, it's that they want the opportunity to go have a night out on the town in their own backyard.

Perhaps public consultations in NDG reveal a bit too much about the people who live there: the Deeg got old. A lifelong resident who split recently for the greener pastures of the Mile End-adjacent Outremont lamented the loss of his old neighbourhood: "NDG ages you." It's not that the Empress is a loss, but maybe that NDG is too old and too stuffy to have a good time. Being "Westmount-adjacent" was bound to bite the borough in the ass eventually, and here it is. If the Empress were anywhere else, it would be a performance venue, and doubtless a successful one as well.

The Montgomery administration's aim to build social housing on part or all of the site — in addition to community space, commercial space and whatever other proposals come forward in public consultation — is admirable but not what the borough needs. NDG is almost exclusively residential, and extant housing could be purchased by the city and subsidized for those who need it most, integrating social housing into the urban fabric rather than isolating it on an island in the most prominent location in the whole neighbourhood. As it stands, the mayor is setting the stage for a potentially ugly confrontation between the borough and local Not-In-My-Backyard types. Besides, there are other locations — former churches, empty lots etc — that could just as easily be used for public housing. Political expediency — in this case the fact that Mayor Montgomery is on the outs with the rest of Projet Montréal — seems to be dictating the fate of the Empress. It would seem what local small businesses need may have taken a backseat to showing everyone who's in charge.

Subsidized housing and ill-defined commitments to 'community space' isn't going to get people out onto Sherbrooke Street West, and it's indirect small-business stimulus that's going to need to be prioritized in the post-pandemic recovery. Montreal neighbourhoods are distinguished by their cachet, but for NDG like too much of the West End, there's no "there" there.

It would be a sad fate — though entirely characteristic of Montreal — for the Empress to be razed in the name of political expediency, only to be left an empty lot for several more years before eventually being turned into condos, supported by a new borough mayor hell-bent on "finally" rejuvenating NDG.

:the 1st half



BY PAUL DESBAILLETS

Lionel Messi & Cristiano Ronaldo pass away.

This generation will feel like they've been punched in the gut when they read those news headlines, the same way my generation (and those older than me) has been reacting to the passing of one of the greatest and most intriguing figures in the world of football, at the age of 60.

Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola said Diego Maradona "made world football better."

"There was a banner in Argentina, one year ago," he said, "that I read that said: 'No matter what you have done with your life, Diego, it matters what you do for our lives.'"

Everything we know about football was embodied in the soul of DM10. All the ups and downs of life, the highs and lows, all of it was compacted together in that 1.65-metre frame from Lanús, in the Buenos Aires province of Argentina.

There is probably nobody on the planet that has not heard of Diego Maradona in some capacity. Outside of football he battled with drugs and alcohol and those battles contributed to his passing at a relatively young age.

He changed football for Argentina, he changed football for Italy, he changed football in England forever! On the pitch, he was one of the greatest footballers of all time, with fluid moves and an aggressive playing style that nobody, I mean nobody, could stop!

The hand-of-God goal in the late '80s is one of the most famous goals of all time and will never be forgotten by any football-loving Brit or Three Lions supporter. He played for seven clubs, managed eight clubs while representing the baby blue and white jersey of his county.

There is just too much to write about when talking about this legend, so I will leave you with this fun fact that connects him to the red maple leaf: Diego Maradona played football in Toronto!

On Sept. 2, 1996, DM played a one-off match at Scarborough's Birchmount Stadium. He was a guest player for the Toronto Italia, the semi-professional Canadian National Soccer League (CNSL) team that his brother Lalo played for at that time. The game attracted 6,000 rabid fans, in a stadium that had a capacity of 2,000.

On the topic of Canada and footie, all three Canadian MLS clubs are not in the running for the MLS Cup. Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver are out and the players have all packed up and will be watching from the sidelines of this exceptionally odd 2020 MLS season. The final will be played on Dec. 12 (in which stadium remained unclear at press time).

A bright spot for Montreal's club is they still have some very important football to play in December. They are still in the CONCACAF Champions League. Montreal plays the second leg of the home and away against the Honduran team Olimpia in the quarter finals. (The IMFC lost the first game 2-1.)

For film buffs: To get up to speed on Maradona, I recommend the 2019 film Diego Maradona by Oscar-winning documentary filmmaker Asif Kapadia. Otherwise, there is more than enough content out on the world wide web to satisfy your curiosity.

This is my last article of 2020 and I am very much looking forward to continuing this adventure with you throughout the brighter and safer new year that's just around the corner.

If you have any comments, positive or negative, or want to see anything different in this column in future, please let us know.

Happy Holidays. Let's have the best 2021 possible.

"There is still much to be said, but for now, may God give strength to his family members. One day, I hope, we will play football together in heaven."

—PELE

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:rant line™

THIS WEEK: Big pharma, pig dicks, the cult of crazies!

PLUS: Boys lining up for shoes are advised to go home to their mothers!!

“edited” by AL SOUTH

M Hey, calling to say I've been following all this VACCINE news and it seems to me that all I've heard so far is that some need to be held at SUB-ARCTIC temperatures, which I'm sure will work really well in Asia and Africa, and the rest seem to have been rushed through without the usual safety protocols. All pretty scary in my opinion. The one thing I do know for sure is that BIG PHARMA will find a way to screw us all through this process while making billions of dollars off the whole thing. [BLEEP!]

M Yes! Canada just announced their plan to eliminate GREENHOUSE GAS emissions by 2050! I find this so inspiring I swear to God I'm going to quit smoking on my 50th birthday! [BLEEP!]

M Hello, I just wanted to publicly pat myself on the back. The news was once again predicting a SIGNIFICANT SNOWFALL and all the media was talking about 15 to 20 centimetres of snow, and I said it will be two centimetres to be followed by some rain. And guess who was right? And you wonder why people don't believe in CLIMATE CHANGE. [BLEEP]

F Hello, I just wanted to comment on something I find, I don't know, very strange. I just saw a video of people, it looked like dozens of people, in the middle of a pandemic, lining up for SHOES in front of a store downtown for the Black Friday sale. I say they were people, but it wasn't all people, it was all men, I didn't see any women. Actually I guess it would be more accurate to call them all BOYS. Hello boys, can I tell you something you need to hear? You don't need a pair of new Adidas or Air Max or whatever it is that you're re craving so bad that you need to line up in the middle of the night in the middle of a pandemic! My God! It used to be men making fun of women for their shoes! Boys, go home to your mothers and get some hot soup. [BLEEP!]

M FREE KYLE. [BLEEP!]

M You know, looking at the shit going down in the U.S., the CULT OF CRAZIES, I don't think there is any hope. Well maybe one — a brutal TUTSI-HUTU style civil war. I am sorry to say that. [BLEEP!]

M Hi Rant Line™, just a heads up PSA. If you want to see something sad but funny, and TRUE, check out BYE BYE PIG DICK on Michael Rapaport's Instagram. Now that's truth to power. [BLEEP!]

M All I wanted to say, really, is fuck all those dried-up fucking old-purse cunts that are so fucking arrogant when you ask them if you can purchase a CIGARETTE. Help a brother out, you know? Don't be a snotty bitch about it, saying, “Oh it's my last one,” when you clearly have a full pack. Like this is

just fucking ridiculous. And how can Trudeau and Legault fucking dare to STEAL Christmas? How fucking dare they?! Like it's not enough to drive us to the point of insanity with all the fucking lockdown shit, they want to steal Christmas, too? Yeah things are not going to look so good for them in the long run, I can tell you that much. [BLEEP!]

F Okay, listen please, would somebody please write a new Christmas song that actually gets played on the radio and becomes popular? It's bad enough that the Christmas music starts playing in November, right after Halloween, but it is always the same old songs. Even the newer ones, I mean the so-called newer ones, are from like 25 years ago! There should be a law — yes I am talking to you, 92.9 — that if you are a radio station and you are going to start hyping Christmas music in November, you have to play at least one new song every hour. Because there are new songs being written and made, they are just not being played! It's almost like they have to incubate for 25 or 50 years before they get played. Anyway, I'm sick of it, I need to go somewhere where this doesn't happen. It can't be like this all over the world — can it? [BLEEP!]

M Hello, cyclist here. Just wanted to give a shout-out to the city for standing up to the weirdos and BULLIES and morons who endlessly complained about the REV on St-Denis and the streets around it, and going ahead and building it and turning it into what is becoming a fantastic cycling system. Getting right up there with Amsterdam. It's fast, it's smooth, it is a very nice ride. The fools sitting in their cars — now in one lane traffic, going even slower than ever — I guess most of them will never use it. But that is their loss, and our gain. Great job Montreal. Something to be very proud of. [BLEEP!]

F Hey, I just wanted to say that I just came back from walking on St-Denis street where the new bike path is and, guess what, there are PEDESTRIAN crosswalks everywhere! So I decided to cross the street and, guess what, a car actually stopped to let me cross the street! So, guess what, I went across to the other side and BOUGHT something at Zone! You know, the same Zone that was going to sue the city because of the bike path. Merry Christmas Zone! Merry Christmas everybody! [BLEEP!]

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BY CLAYTON SANDHU

Panettone is the Mount Everest of baking.

Yes, the mysterious Italian fruitcake packaged in flashy and sometimes gaudy hat boxes is widely considered to be among the most challenging items to bake. In many ways, this seasonal dessert is not worth the herculean effort required to make one and yet, if you have ever eaten a perfect slice of panettone, you know there is almost nothing else like it. Much like climbing the actual Mount Everest, there's almost no point — why bother scaling the world's highest peak? Nobody would think less of you for having only summited K2. Many exceptional bakers will never attempt the panettone, but for some, it's a point of pride. To scale the highest peak or to bake the hardest cake is to declare oneself an expert — an echelon above.

To fully understand panettone, you need to understand its history. It's a showstopper — a 15th-century baking flex. Panettone was originally created to be a physical embodiment of wealth and status. The cake itself is predicated on being made with the most expensive ingredients possible and requiring an otherworldly level of know-how to bake. In the 15th century, the cake was made entirely with wheat flour, a rarity as most of the era's flour was derived from rye and spelt. The candied fruits — a defining characteristic of the panettone — had to be transported from hundreds of miles away, even purportedly from outside the borders of modern-day Italy.

The ancestral home of panettone is Milan and a significant portion of the world's panettone production still takes place there, with cakes being packaged in their ornate boxes and shipped around the world to fill artisanal Italian grocers and big-box stores alike. The majority of panettoni, however, are not produced in Italy at all, but rather in Brazil and Peru. In the late 1800s, the government of Brazil began an intensive agricultural colonization campaign that allotted

land to Europeans willing to immigrate to Brazil and farm. Over a span of 20 years, more than 100,000 Italians would emigrate to Brazil — today the Italian population of Brazil is over 30 million. These immigrants brought with them cultural traditions and history, including panettone, which over the course of 150 years, give or take, has become a deeply ingrained part of South American culture. In Brazil and Peru, panettone is enjoyed year-round, and between both countries, more than 200,000 tons of panettone are produced for distribution to over 50 countries each year.

Inexpensive and mass-produced as they may be, they are still authentically Italian and follow the classic Milanese recipe. In fact, the first man to mass-produce panettone was a Milanese baker by the name of Angelo Motta. In the 1930s, Motta added a 100-foot conveyor belt to his bakery expressly for the purpose of mass manufacturing his iconic panettone. Today, Motta is still a household name. Recently, in the way that Roman pizza, obscure amari and *Zeppole* have again come to the fore, panettone, too, is having its revival. Young bakers, often wishing to test their mettle, are attempting to revive the artisanal craft of panettone-making.

In Montreal, one baker leading the movement is Jeffrey Finkelstein of Hof Kelsten, who's entering his seventh year of panettone production. While he might not be a purist when it comes to panettone, he is without question an obsessive. Finkelstein uses non-traditional French candied fruit and artisanal chocolate but he firmly believes that the key to making good panettone is to study under a master — as he did over a decade ago. His mentor, Oriol Balaguer, is considered one of Spain's best bakers and won the country's illustrious award for the best artisanal panettone in 2017. Before dismissing this award for being of Spanish and not Italian provenance, it's important to mention that Spain, similarly to South America, also has a long-standing love affair with the Milanese fruitcake. Over many years, Finkelstein learned how the dough should look, feel and most importantly smell during the various stages of the process.

To this day, Finkelstein still troubleshoots dough issues with his mentor, despite being considered one of Montreal's authorities on the subject. For his panettone, balance is key. All factors must be meticulously considered: the amount of fat (butter) weighed against the acidity (both lactic and acetic occurring during the fermentation process) and the sweetness of the candied fruit. But most important of all, and this is true for all panettone, is the structure of the crumb.

Therein lies the real difference-maker when it comes to panettone — some will argue it's about the purity (or creativity) of the fillings and flavours. Purists will turn up their noses at a cake filled with chocolate or custard, or a cake made anywhere outside of Italy. Others crave the perfumed aroma of the modestly-priced Italian imports that get a spritz of preservation agent before the long flight overseas. Others still will debate levels of sweetness, acidity and moisture. But at the end of the day, it's the way the cake is held together that speaks volumes of its maker. The crumb of a truly great panettone easily pulls apart in delicate strands that are impossibly light. This is in part due to a consistently irregular crumb (it's a complicated cake and I know that sounds vague, but bear with me). The crumb is irregular in that there are air pockets throughout the cake that extend from its centre and continue, bubble by bubble, to the very limit of the crust. Contrary to the big sexy air-pockets one looks for in sourdough, you want delicate and small bubbles evenly dispersed throughout the cake. When the right crumb consistency is achieved, the cake takes on a cotton candy-like texture that melts in your mouth as you eat it. It's an incredible sensation.

So without unceremoniously cutting into cakes at the store, how can you know which panettoni are of quality and which are simply sweet cakes in a flashy box? The short answer is research, combined with a bit of trial and error. However, to make choosing a panettone a bit easier, I've acquired three panettoni, each representing a particular style and price point. I'll go ahead and get this out of the way now — there

is no cheap panettone on this list. Building on the Everest metaphor, if a naturally leavened classic panettone is Everest, an \$8 panettone collecting dust on the grocery store shelf is an Everest fridge magnet. Regardless of how it's manufactured, the cake remains incredibly difficult to make and so you have to ask yourself where is my money going? Like all Italian cooking, value is derived from knowledge (and tradition) and quality of ingredients. After all my research I am of the opinion that a panettone should cost at least \$20, at a bare minimum.

FIASCONARO PANETTONE PANDORATO

This is a best-of-both-worlds kind of panettone. By that I mean it combines the characteristics of panettone and pandoro (the other, star-shaped Italian Christmas cake). Fiasconaro is a Sicilian bakery but has long since established itself as an affordable luxury panettone maker. Perhaps best known for their flamboyant partnership with Dolce & Gabbana, the one I tasted comes from their classic product line. This panettone is naturally leavened but any sense of fermentation is obstructed by the overwhelming smell of confectioners sugar. On the palate, there is a faint sense of acidity, but it's really all about the sweetness. Because this is a pandoro-panettone, hybrid there is an absence of fruit, which is a pro if you don't like candied fruit, but definitely a con if you're looking for a real sense of balance. The crumb of the cake is very light and airy, which is enjoyable, but it gets a bit stodgy as you chew it — it lacks that melt in your mouth quality. Overall, it's a good, sweet cake but it lacks the grandeur of a great panettone and is probably best enjoyed dunked in coffee. (*Milano's, \$22*)

BORSARI PANETTONE CLASSICO

This is 2020's panettone of the year according to the *Federazione Internazionale Pasticceria Gelateria Cicolateria* — Italy's authority on the subject. This is a truly delicious panettone, but as sacrilegious as this may sound, the FIPGC's stamp of approval is really just an indication



Matthew Perrin (matthewperrinphotos.com)

that it checks all the traditional boxes. Borsari's version is plump and squat and deliberately less adorned than Hof's or Fiasconaro's — it looks a bit like a super-sized hot cross bun. Cutting into it, one can't help but notice that it has a beautiful, lush, golden-yellow crumb, a product of the famously pigmented yolks of (high quality) Italian eggs. The fruit is in much larger pieces, fitting with the rustic appearance of the whole cake. Giant, moist sultanas are interwoven with candied squares of lemon, orange and *cedro* (a pithy citrus fruit similar to lemon). The crumb is spectacular with a tight matrix of small bubbles that extend to the limits of the crust. The crumb pulls away in amazingly tender ribbons and the flavour is rich and eggy like a well-made brioche. Overall, I think you'd be hard-pressed to find a classic panettone better than Borsari's. The crumb is soft and moist (the perfect retort to those who think panettoni are dry and tasteless) and the flavour is deep and rich. This is a great traditional panettone and for less than \$40, it's maybe one of the best deals out there despite being a bit in-the-box. (*Milano's, \$37.50*)

HOF KELSTEN

Cutting into the cake, you notice immediately that the structure of the crumb is perfect. From the outermost edge of the crust to the centre of the bread, there are millions of tiny bubbles and a notable absence of density. The cake is visibly airy. The top of the panettone has a sweet and crunchy "craquelin" which helps offset the cake's defining characteristic — its acidity. Hof's panettone is naturally leavened and retains much of the lactic acid produced during the dough's fermentation. Personally, I rather enjoy the tanginess that combines nicely with the high-acidity chocolate, perfumed candied fruit and high-fat crumb. It's a beautiful example of balance. The cake pulls apart elegantly revealing those beautiful vertical threads of crumb — it's a marvel to see how intricate the crumb structure is. This panettone is noticeably taller, about an inch and a half taller than the Fiasconaro, and it smells like fresh bread. The cloyingly sweet smell of confectioners sugar is completely absent from Hof's panettone. Both the fruit (which is in very small pieces) and chocolate hold their own and offer delicious variety to each bite. Overall, every element of this cake is of the highest quality — it's an absolute delight to eat and well worth the \$50 price tag. (*Hof Kelsten bakery, \$36 to \$50*)

The big takeaways I've gleaned from researching and eating various panettoni are relatively obvious. The first is you get what you pay for — shelling out \$50 for a heroic feat of baking (whether an Italian import or a local production) shouldn't be a big leap — and paying less than \$20 is almost sure to guarantee you mediocrity. The other takeaway: an Italian product isn't necessarily better. Panettone is made all over the world, but the recipes remain very similar. Like wine, it's best to know the producer — when you buy a panettone, you're paying for the expertise and principles of the person who made it.

For what it's worth, I like Hof's panettone the best. I like the crumb, I like the crispy craquelin and I love that tangy taste, but I certainly wouldn't kick the Borsari out of bed — which is likely where I'll be polishing off my remaining kilo of panettone.

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Be there for yourself the way you're there for others



You are always there when your loved ones are going through difficult times. But don't forget about yourself—solutions exist to help you feel better.

The current situation may cause you distress. Experiencing various levels of anxiety in some spheres of life is normal. When this happens, you may find it more challenging to deal with your thoughts, emotions, behaviour and relationships with others. Most people succeed in adapting, but listening to your needs is vital. **Don't hesitate to do whatever is necessary to help yourself.**

Take care of yourself

- Rely on your personal strengths and have confidence in your abilities.
- Remind yourself of the winning strategies you used in the past to overcome difficulties. There is no one-size-fits-all solution! Each and every one of us must take steps to foster our own well-being.
- Enjoy life's little pleasures, such as listening to music, taking a warm bath, reading, exercising, etc.
- If you live close to nature, make the most of it. Breathe deeply and slowly as you walk.
- Learn to delegate, and allow others to help you.
- Ask for help when you feel overwhelmed. **It is not a sign of weakness, but rather a sign of strength when you are strong enough to do what is necessary to help yourself.**
- Lend a hand in your community in a way that respects your personal limits and public health directives. By helping others, you can improve their wellness and your own as well.
- Think about what has meaning and value for you. Reflect on the important things in your life that you can hold onto in hard times.
- Reduce the stressors in your life.
- While it is important to stay informed, limit the amount of time spent reading about COVID-19. Information overload can increase stress and anxiety, and even cause depression.



The *Getting Better My Way* digital tool

Getting Better My Way is a digital self-management tool for emotional health. If you are experiencing stress, anxiety or distress, this tool can help improve your well-being by identifying practical things you can do to feel better. Learn more at [Québec.ca/Gettingbetter](https://Quebec.ca/Gettingbetter)



Give voice to your feelings

- Keep in mind that having a range of emotions is normal. Feelings play an important role in life, and it is essential to experience them without passing judgment.
- Use words to express what you are going through. Do you feel alone? Are you worried?
- Allow yourself to share your feelings with a trusted friend or family member. It might also be helpful to write down how you're feeling or call a helpline. Find what works for you!
- Those closest to you may not necessarily be able to "read" you. Express your feelings.
- Leave space in your life for your feelings and those of your loved ones.



Make judicious use of social media

- Use critical thinking before sharing something on social media. Ill-advised information can have harmful effects and be detrimental to everyone's efforts in these times.
- Use social media to share positive actions.
- Watch videos that make you smile.



Choose healthy living habits

- Try to keep to a routine for eating, resting, sleeping and other daily activities.
- Take time to eat well.
- Go to bed at an hour that lets you get enough sleep.
- Be physically active on a regular basis, while complying with public health directives.
- Reduce your consumption of stimulants like coffee, tea, soft drinks, energy beverages, chocolate, etc.
- Drink lots of water.
- Lower your alcohol, drug and tobacco consumption, or simply say no to them entirely. The same goes for gambling.

Help and resources

We are all going through unprecedented times that can intensify our emotional reactions. For example, you might feel greater fatigue or have fears that you can't shake, or even have trouble just dealing with the day-to-day. Focus on these signs of a problem and, as soon as you can, contact resources that can help you to better manage your feelings and develop new coping strategies.

- **Info-Social 811**
Info-Social 811 is a free and confidential telephone consultation service available 24/7
- **Regroupement des services d'intervention de crise du Québec**
Provides 24/7 referral services for people in distress (French): centredecrise.ca/listecentres
- **Suicide prevention crisis helpline**
Crisis helpline that provides suicide prevention services 24/7:
1 866 APPELLE (277-3553)

For a host of other helpful resources, visit Quebec.ca/gettingbetter

[Québec.ca/Gettingbetter](http://Quebec.ca/Gettingbetter)

 Info-Social 811

Québec 



True blue

BY LORRAINE CARPENTER

Like so many musicians and composers without shows and promotion filling up their time, Laurence-Anne spent much of 2020 in creative mode. Now she has an album to show for it, being released by Bonsound in April 2021.

You'd think that this record, the second LP by the Kamouraska-born, Montreal-based indie pop singer-songwriter, would be inspired by the darkness, isolation, anxiety and fatigue brought about by the pandemic, but that's far from true. And for listeners looking for an escape from reality, that's probably for the best.

"I wrote all the songs in a house I rented in a small town in Gaspésie," Laurence-Anne explains. "The funny thing is that it was all written in the week before the crisis. Listening to the lyrics afterwards, some of the songs could be interpreted as being about that, the emotions of a song like 'Tempête,' but it was not meant to be.

"A lot of my songs talk about personal experiences, mostly about relationships — love songs," she adds. "A lot of the songs start with 'tu,' so it's usually a message. I sometimes have difficulty expressing myself to other people, so this is a way to speak to someone indirectly."

The buzz around this 26-year-old artist has been growing since the release of her debut LP *Première Apparition* in 2018. It reached international levels after her show at the M for Montreal festival in 2019, which was followed by a wave of meetings with prominent labels. She and her band played M again last month, and despite the distanced streaming nature of the event, she says that the positive feedback from industry delegates who watched her set this year had the same impact on her as last year's aftermath. The head of CBS in L.A., for example, says that Laurence-Anne's *Accident* EP, released in August, is on his Top 10 list of the best releases of 2020.

As for whether the *Accident* EP's tropical vibes and post-punk accents are indicative of what the as-yet-untitled next album will sound like, Laurence-Anne says that the origins of the songs are pretty specific.

"I thought the EP would be like a path leading to the next album," she says. "At first I actually thought these three songs would be part of the next album but we recorded them in January and then the pandemic happened and all cultural activity was delayed. It became clear that these songs would be a whole, just the three of them. And it made sense because the songs literally fit one into the other. It felt like it was complete. The album is going in another direction."

Our first real preview of what Laurence-Anne has in store for us in 2021 is "Indigo," a single to be released in January. (She also revealed that the album will be trilingual, with songs in both of Canada's official languages as well as Spanish, which she learned over a year spent in Mexico when she was 17.) While no one knows what next year holds for live music, she would love to be able to play this new material with her band in front of an audience sometime in the next 365 days. She's been performing music since she was seven years old, and from school talent shows to sweaty intimate gigs at places like Quai des Brumes, she's loved every minute of being on stage — or in front of one for that matter.

"Last year, in 2019, I saw 200 shows! I was going to concerts three or four nights a week, and also a lot of festivals. It's almost as if I knew I wouldn't see any for a long time, so I went to as many as I could. It's something that I really miss."



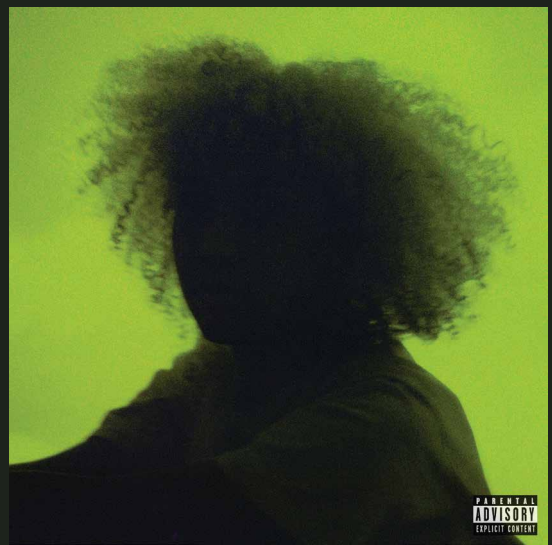
Laurence-Anne



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Rolling stone

BY JACOB CAREY

In the eyes of the industry, Ruby Waters is a fresh new talent with a lot of potential and promise that will propel her to stardom. Her track record in such a short time speaks for itself: popularizing a tune on Reddit before its streaming release, hundreds of thousands of views on YouTube and being the opening act for City and Colour on their 2019 international tour. But for Waters, there is nothing new about her career in music.

“I started performing when I was really quite young,” says Waters. “I can remember being as young as four, being with my mom doing music stuff. I started busking and performing in bars when I was 12, 13. When I was 14, a couple of people would ask me, ‘You want a drink?’ I was like ‘Fuck ya.’”

Waters isn’t one to shy away from acknowledging the role that cigarettes and alcohol can play as coping mechanisms for mental health issues. The artist’s debut EP, *Almost Naked*, introduces her at her most raw and vulnerable. While many of the tunes are rooted in tales of heartbreak, they carry an air of optimism and rejuvenation. Listeners are rooting for Ruby — her carefree attitude is contagious.

Water’s most recent release, *If It Comes Down to It*, feels a lot like a continuation from where its predecessor left off. Rolling out an EP amid a pandemic and provincial restrictions is certainly not ideal, and the incapacity to play live shows and meet new faces is unsettling.

“Different places, different people, different feelings, different sounds of music that we’ve been making,” says Waters. “Lots has changed, but we’re still out here keeping it real.”

Waters celebrated the release of her project with immediate family from the comfort of her country house near Orangeville, Ontario. Over the last few months, she has bounced back-and-forth from country to city on various couches, meeting up with her management team and hitting the studio to record new tunes.

“I’m contemplating where I want to settle next,” says Waters. “It’s so nice in the country, and in the city there’s so much opportunity, but then with all this COVID stuff, it’s like — damn, I can be anywhere. I guess as far as creativity goes, it’s nice to be able to breathe out here. I like it.”

Waters is no stranger to the country, having been born just outside of Shelburne, Ontario. Her father is Slovakian, and her mother, a musical inspiration to Waters in her own right, is from Northern Quebec and of Métis descent.

The singer-songwriter cites her Métis roots as inspiration for some of the songs that she writes. Waters enjoys using her music to tell stories from the perspectives of those who have it worse than most.

“I’d love to be able to learn how to speak out for any



Ruby Waters

community that feels like they don’t have enough word in the world.”

Waters, having visited multiple Indigenous reserves, spoke about the hardships faced by the Métis community that largely stems from the communal trauma of residential schools.

“It’s about the opportunity. Accessibility to, like, clean water, good schooling and fun activities so that people aren’t so depressed and don’t rely so much on other ways of escaping mentally.”

Waters has donated to the Native Women’s Resource

Centre in Toronto and hopes to further give back to Indigenous communities through merchandise sales. She says that she would like to see more money donated to arts programs in these schools to inspire the children in the communities.

As for her future moves, Waters isn’t exactly sure what’s in store for her next project. She happily strolls along with no concrete plans, but her laissez-faire outlook is comforting.

“Making it to the point I have is a dream come true and it’s been a crazy ride. I always say if I were to die tomorrow, I’d be happy with the accomplishments I’ve made.»

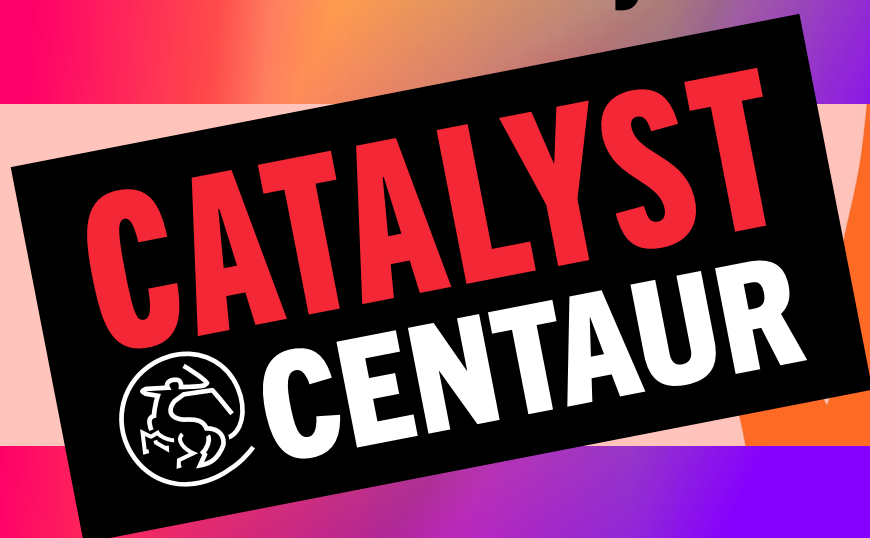
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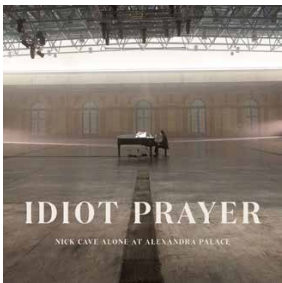
Album reviews

Presented by **SUNRISE**
RECORDS



The Du-Rites, *A Funky Bad Time* (Old Maid Entertainment) Dirty soul-funk duo the Du-Rites couldn't be more divergent in terms of their musical backgrounds. In one corner we have Jay Mumford, aka J-Zone, a legendary producer/MC and New York character who gave up the rap game in a blaze of less-than-glory, literally forced to burn his back catalogue in the back

alley of Fat Beats when the label went broke. Joining him is Argentina-born Pablo Martin, a punk with a penchant for old-school TV jingles. Together as the Du-Rites, they specialize in the type of now-obscure 70s AM radio funk that future rappers' grandparents grinded to at the afterparty. Downright fat and fly, this album would make one helluva slab for the vinyl lover on your holiday list. 8.5/10 Trial Track: "Done N'Dusted" (Darcy MacDonald)



Nick Cave, *Idiot Prayer: Alone at Alexandra Palace* (Bad Seed Ltd.) Pared-down "acoustic" records by iconoclastic musicians can sometimes, in a post-American Recordings world, be seen as a bit of a bid for the mainstream — or at the very least, as a bid for the ear of a new audience. Nick Cave's work in recent years has already grown starker and further removed

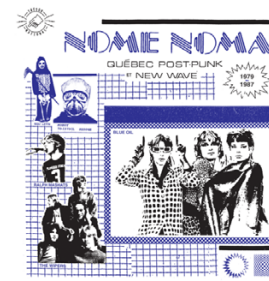
from the tenets of alternative rock, so *Idiot Prayer: Alone at*

Alexandra Palace feels like a logical next step rather than a stylistic stunt. *Idiot Prayer* finds Cave alone at an acoustic piano, delivering impassioned but extremely pared-down versions of songs usually augmented by the Bad Seeds. Don't go expecting a crossover hit, though — these are still dark and gloomy songs, and Cave's apocalyptic crooning, while a little less aggressive, has lost none of its power. At nearly 84 minutes, it's quite an exhausting listen, and it's still shorter than the filmed version! 8/10 Trial Track: "Higgs Boson Blues" (Alex Rose)



Eli Sostre, *Emori* (SUAN) *Emori* ("succumb" in Latin) is most enjoyed when listeners succumb to Eli Sostre's entrancing beats and melodic hooks, allowing the rap artist's third studio album to take you on a ride in which Sostre is in the driver's seat. The Marcy Projects, Brooklyn native kicks things off with a quick and captivating intro, "New Opps," that sets a

precedent for the hip hop/R&B tunes that follow. Returning with frequent collaborator SORIANO, Sostre's sound and vocals feel like a Bryson Tiller and 6lack fusion. Riding the beat with catchy choruses, the instrumental breaks add a nice element of downtime while maintaining the album's mellow and at times melancholic mood. When it comes to lyricism, Sostre has songs that will appease those of any relationship status, seemingly confused as to which category he falls into himself. Sostre demonstrates his versatility in an enjoyable album that is largely overlooked by the mainstream music industry. 8/10 Trial Track: "Fish" (Jacob Carey)



Various, *Nome Noma: Quebec Post-punk et New Wave 1979-1987* (Trésor National) Archival compilations can be kind of treacherous. Once the true nuggets have been unearthed, some labels confuse "unknown greats" with "things that simply existed once upon a time." The good news is that local label Trésor National has decided to compile tracks from the

local new wave scene, one that was rather fruitful and remains pretty obscure to this day thanks in part to a dearth of properly distributed records. Though a few of the artists featured here had proper albums (Kaméléon, Leyden Zar), the focus is mainly on rare or unreleased cuts from a variety of little-known outfits. Like the new wave moniker itself, the compilation spans an extensive array of genres, from the spiky post-punk of the Wipers (featuring soon-to-be-BB Patrick Bourgeois) to hooky, synth robot pop and angular drum-machine anthems. *Nome Noma* showcases an era of Montreal music that existed in clubs more than on record. 8/10 Trial Track: Vex "DNA" (Alex Rose)

Aesop Rock, *Spirit World Field Guide* (Rhymesayers) Four years gone from his last solo outing, the Impossible Kid, the indie hip hop stalwart returns with his typical panache for bringing both quality and quantity of words, beats and concepts to rap's rescue. If any single rapper can be appreciated for constantly switching the code to his signature style in rejuvenating fashion, it's the NYC-to-L.A. transplant, now in his third decade of blending oddball notions into crisp, calculated cuts. Like the spirit world Aes Rizzle endeavours here to map, don't mistake his friendly ghost-flow for a deficit of menace. If ever a year required a Def-Jukian reminder that it's a cold world out there, Rock got back right on time. 7.5/10 Trial Track "Gauze" (Darcy MacDonald)

:hammer of the mods

BY JOHNSON CUMMINS

This month's column takes a look at two completely amazing books that are waiting for you on bookstore shelves, or just a click away at your favourite virtual booksellers. Both tomes harken back to the subterranean regional scenes of yesteryear but couldn't be further removed from each other.

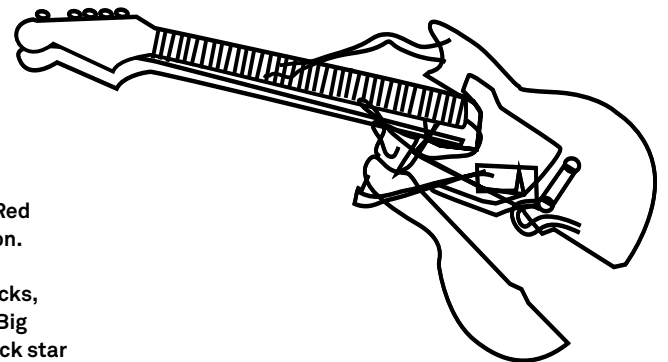
First up is the incredible hardcover coffee table read *Texas Is the Reason: The Mavericks of Lone Star Punk* (Bazillion Points) featuring the fly on the wall photography of Pat Blashill and essays from director Richard Linklater, Jesus Lizard/Scratch Acid's David Yow and other Texan punks. In the early days of hardcore, in '81 and '82, Texas was already as weird as it gets with Butthole Surfers putting a bit of acid into the punch bowl while the Dicks fucked up the homophobic Texas program that was firmly in place in the years of Ronnie Raygun. Photos of one of hardcore's greatest frontmen, Dicks' Gary Floyd, is worth the price of admission alone while previously unseen photos of the best

Texas band of all time (sorry 13th Floor Elevators, Red Krayola) the Big Boys is nothing short of a revelation.

As incredible as Texas punk bands like MDC, the Dicks, the Offenders, Really Red and Buttholes were, the Big Boys remained the linchpins. Instead of copping rock star poses, this motley crew of XXL skaters existed to foster and grow a punk scene that was totally inclusive. Photos of the late great Big Boy Biscuit stomping the pines while Misfit Glenn Danzig looks on slack jawed is one of the great lost hardcore photos. This is not just about the music here either, like any scene worth its salt; Blashill's roaming lens perfectly captures the punk house parties and the sense of community that still lies in the heart of any underground scene today.

The second book here, *Peter and the Wolves* by Adele Bertei (Smog Veil), is less weighty in size but no less stunning. This slim 90-page book looks at the proto-punk years of the almighty Cleveland but more specifically provides an insider look at the downfall of Cleveland scenester, musician (Pere Ubu/Rocket From the Tombs) and *Creem* magazine writer Peter Laughner. This looming Clevo figure is seen through the eyes of a young Bertei as she recounts moments from the mid-'70s with laser focus over four decades later.

The author struggles with loves and losses and excess while at the feet of Laughner, who teeters on the precipice of darkness. Although her muse is most certainly Laughner, this book is really about Bertei, who dives into the world of drugs, art, music and guns before gathering her well-honed



tools and striking out on her own. Laughner's downward spiral into the pull of nihilism is tragic indeed, but Bertei's untethered, heartfelt and deeply revealing writing is the real reason you will finish this book in one sitting. The usual proto-punk suspects from the burgeoning Cleveland scene, like the Electric Eels and Pere Ubu, all get namechecked as well as the early CBGB's/Chelsea Hotel movers making cameo appearances, but it's Bertei's untangling from Laughner's dark web and the mark that left on her that makes this much more than a raucous rock 'n' roll ride. If you read this one hard enough, you can almost hear the glass break as Laughner takes his final swing on the chandelier.

Publisher and record label Smog Veil has graciously agreed to send out a copy of *Peter and the Wolves* to the first person who emails me with the correct answer to this skill-testing question: What legendary Texas psych band wrote the song «Hurricane Fighter Plane»?

Current Obsession: *The Open Mind*, self titled
jonathan.cummings@gmail.com

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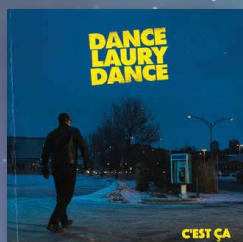
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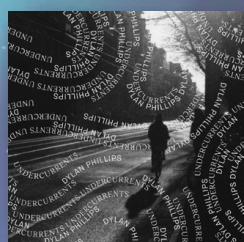
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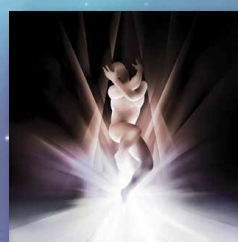
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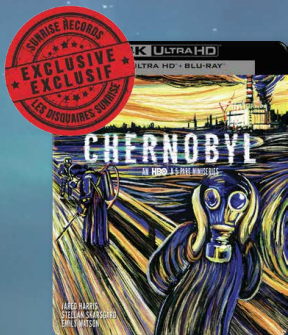
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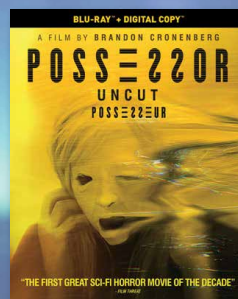
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film

On Screen



Sound of Metal



Ma Rainey's Black Bottom



The Prom



I'm Your Woman

BY ALEX ROSE

As the pandemic continues to keep movie theatres closed and release schedules confusing, it's becoming increasingly difficult to predict what might and might not come out. Some films are released elsewhere in Canada but held for release in Quebec, while others are held for months only to have their VOD release announced mere days prior. This On Screen column has therefore become more theoretical than practical, but there are still some sure bets.

One of those has to be David Fincher's *Mank*, which drops on Netflix on Dec. 4. Gary Oldman stars as Herman J. Mankiewicz, the screenwriter of *Citizen Kane*. *Mank* chronicles the making of that film and the tensions that arose between Mankiewicz and the film's director, Orson Welles. Highly anticipated as a potential awards-season frontrunner, the film was written by Fincher's late father Jack. Ryan Murphy continues his intensely productive collaboration with Netflix with *The Prom* (Dec. 11), a

musical starring Meryl Streep, James Corden and Nicole Kidman. As usual with Murphy, the film is rife with themes of queerness and show business.

Jillian Bell and Isla Fisher star in *Godmothered* (Dec. 4 on Disney Plus), a comedy from *Bridget Jones's Diary* director Sharon Maguire. Bell plays a Fairy-Godmother-in-training who is assigned to help a widowed TV reporter who has stopped believing in the concept of happily ever after. *The House of Mouse* also features the family football drama *Safety* on Dec. 11 as well as *Mulan*, which was available for an extra \$30 earlier this year but will now be free for all Disney Plus subscribers. On Christmas Day, you can stream *Soul*, the latest Pixar production in which Jamie Foxx voices a high school music teacher with a passion for jazz. Speaking of films that came out earlier this year, the Andy Samberg-led comedy *Palm Springs* went months without a Canadian streaming release — it'll be available on Amazon Prime as of Dec. 18.

It's been four years since we've seen George Clooney on screen. He directs and stars in *The Midnight Sky* (Dec. 25 on Netflix), an apocalyptic sci-fi film in which he plays a scientist posted in the Arctic who has to stop a crew of astronauts from coming back to a decimated Earth. Sounds uplifting, to say the least. *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*'s Rachel Brosnahan stars in the crime thriller *I'm Your Woman* (Dec. 11 on Amazon Prime Video) from director Julia Hart (*Fast Color*). Brosnahan

plays a woman forced to go on the run after her husband betrays a business partner in the 1970s-set film that is getting almost exclusively great early reviews.

The late Chadwick Boseman's last film is *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* (Dec. 18 on Netflix), an adaptation of the play by August Wilson from director George C. Wolfe (*Lackawanna Blues*, *Nights in Rodanthe*). Viola Davis stars as the titular Ma Rainey, a blues musician recording an album with an ambitious trumpeter played by Boseman. Tom Hanks stars in *News of the World*, a gritty Civil War Western from director Paul Greengrass that was originally set to premiere in theatres on Christmas Day and is now coming to Netflix on that same day. Riz Ahmed stars as a metal drummer who suddenly loses his hearing in *Sound of Metal*, Darius Marder's acclaimed feature directorial debut. It premieres on Amazon Prime on Dec. 4.

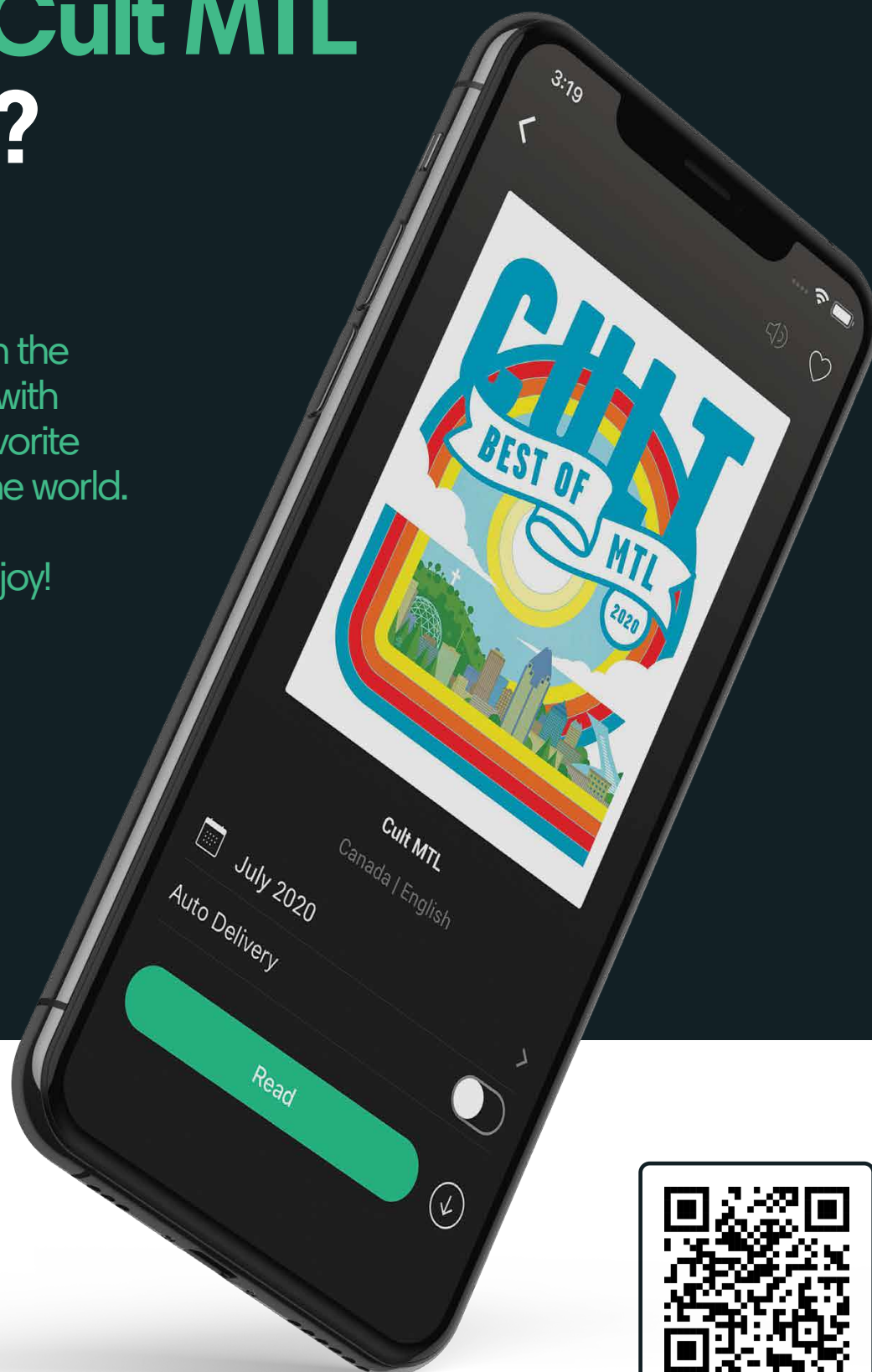
HBO Max content doesn't systematically show up on Crave — *Wonder Woman 1984*, for example, will remain a USA exclusive when it hits the service. *Let Them All Talk*, the newest Steven Soderbergh / Meryl Streep collab (after the coolly received *The Laundromat*) will however hit Crave on Dec. 10. Mads Mikkelsen stars in Thomas Vinterberg's *Another Round*, an acclaimed festival favourite about four middle-aged friends who experiment with constant drinking as therapy. It's available on VOD as of Dec. 18.



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Out to lunch



BY STEPHAN BOISSONNEAULT

As you walk towards BBAM! Gallery, an oil painting depicting a half nude man taking a selfie in a shiny, gold, balloon star hangs in the window. The painting is called “Gold Star Gay” — a gay person who has never had intercourse with the opposite sex, according to the Urban Dictionary.

Inside, past the Québécois new wave vinyl, a few more oil paintings greet you at the entrance to the second room — one shows a husky, bald, bearded man wearing a half-shoulder leather harness, smoking the nub of a cigar as he takes a selfie.

Each painting depicts an individual gay/queer man and is part of a new exhibition from Ian Stone entitled *You're Gayer Than a Picnic Basket*.

“I wanted to make art about what it's like to be a gay man today, the dating scene — which is mostly lots of selfies, sending themselves bits and pieces of their bodies — and also masculinity and how there's a lot of toxic masculinity that you have to try to either belong to or avoid online,” says Stone as we sit in the middle of the exhibit.

The exhibit is small but striking, filled with paintings of men taking half-clothed or fully nude selfies. Some of the men seem empowered while others hide their face. Some wear sparkling and flamboyant clothing while donning thick beards.

“I'm trying to paint men who are typically very masculine with

their beards, but who aren't afraid of accessorizing to have a bit more femininity to them,” Stone says. “I'm drawn to the fearlessness of these guys ... I mean I've had beer bottles thrown at me in public, been called ‘faggot’ so many times. There's something I find special about these guys who are just unapologetically themselves and I think that's beautiful.”

Stone, an artist from Laval, began exploring homosexuality in his art around three years ago and has been gathering selfies to paint from Instagram and gay dating and hook-up apps. Stone of course asks prospective subjects if he can paint them, and almost everyone says yes.

“It takes about 100 to 150 pictures for me to find one I want to paint,” Stone says. “Very rarely will someone say no. People are vain. They're impressed, for one, because of the technique, but they want to be immortalized in a sense, on canvas. I think it goes with the whole Instagram culture of wanting to be seen.”

Each portrait is a snapshot into a different person's life and Stone, a master of still life, captures that snapshot beautifully. These canvases evoke a sense of vulnerability and trust in the viewer — and in Stone, as he has only met a few of his subjects because of pandemic restrictions. Some of the subjects took their photos in the bathroom, some in their bedrooms, some in their living rooms. Others found random objects to pose with.

“There's that guy,” Stone says as he points to a black and white portrait of a bald man standing in his tub, wearing only his underwear and gripping a plant, roots dripping dirt. “I can't even imagine that. Like why would you uproot a plant, go in your bathroom to take a picture of yourself in your underwear to send to some other guy? I just can't comprehend it. But that's why they make interesting paintings.”

The name of the exhibit follows another one of Stone's past showings, *You're Gayer Than a Rainbow*.

“These are just phrases that people have constructed over, like, I don't know how long ... I'd say decades,” he says. “There's a whole list of them that I found online, like a big Urban Dictionary just to show how gay someone is.”

Still, the idea of “gay” is a subjective one.

“Does it mean that they're effeminate or fruity? I like to play with that,” Stone says. “Especially by having something so conventional looking like a painting. I love that when you read the title, you're like, ‘Oh, that's not what I was expecting.’”

Hence the title *You're Gayer Than a Picnic Basket* and the accompanying painting, a still life picnic basket with a loaf of French bread sticking out ever so slightly.

Stone plans to continue his exploration of homosexuality through art, but going forward, wishes to focus more on objects rather than people.

“It goes back to this idea of what gay is and what gay means. People imbue these objects with like, ‘Oh, I can't be seen in public with this. It's too gay,’” Stone says. “So I've been asking ‘What's the gayest object you own?’ Everyone's idea of what gay is is different, so the objects are changing, depending on the person. One guy looked around his house and said a leather teddy bear.”

→ Ian Stone's *You're Gayer Than a Picnic Basket* is on at BBAM! Gallery (808 Atwater) through Dec. 31.

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Out of the past



Lutto Lento

BY RYAN DIDUCK

Joni Void + N NAO, “Je Vois / Non-Dit,” Corona Borealis Longplay Singles series (Constellation Records)

He sat in the morning sun, watching tiny fibers spin and hover in thin air in the long sunbeams that spanned the kitchen. The miniscule bits of matter weighed almost nothing at all; they were barely existent. We breathe these bits in and out by the thousands every day without noticing. They react almost with a sort of intelligence, like miniature insects or microscopic strands of string. These bits were wonderful, each one reflecting a little piece of the universe. These bits either were or are about to become us.

Pierce with Arrow, “In the Depths of His Eyes,” *Shatter* (Dais Records)

Everybody had a hard year. Nobody had a good time. Nobody had a wet dream. And we only saw the sunshine on our government-mandated walks, should they happen to have fortunately fallen on sunny days.

He watched his friends make incremental inroads and get eclipsed by the world. This happened to him, too. Just making a thing is not the same thing as making a good thing. Mostly, he watched people get varying levels of drunk. And he also got varying levels of drunk. Sometimes he was drunker than they were, and sometimes they were drunker than he was.

Dream, April 1, 2020

I am in a living room sitting on an old brown leather couch. There is a girl there with me. She is restless, like a little kid. She says, “These restrictions are too

strict.” I agree with her. She says she wants to watch a movie. I say that I’m annoyed by all the trucks passing by. Then we are in a car on the street outside my house. There are trucks everywhere and greyish army-like vehicles driving around. I say to her, “Something bad has happened.”

Lutto Lento (with Katarzyna Karpowicz), “Horned Heart,” *LEGENDO* (Haunter Records)

“Get an education because they can’t take that away,” my dear old grandfather — who escaped the Ukrainian famine genocide and was quite preoccupied with not having things taken away from him — used to tell me. But they can devalue it to the point where it’s worthless. And then they can take away the world you might have enjoyed it in. They can remove the dock from the canal where you liked to soak up the sunshine in the summertime. Then they can take away the canal and the sunshine and summertime, too. Then they’ll take the wintertime and the snow that you loved to catch on your tongue, and watch sparkle out the window on lonesome nights as it gently draped hazy orange-lit streets. They’ll take that. They’ll take away the blue in the sky. They’ll take away the fluff in the clouds. They’ll take the warmth of the wind and blow it you know where. But you’ll be glad you got an education. Because that they can’t take away.

ACT!, Section 1 (1-20), “Grey Matter AR” Snapchat Compositions [100] (Halocline Trance)

To think that we once escaped through the past, or toward the future, through lines of flight drawn between different and complementary points of entry — there is always a space between. Unraveling that mystery is no longer possible in a world where science is paramount, where spatiotemporal reality itself is held over society’s collective head like an anvil: either comply or the entire world will be destroyed. You didn’t create these conditions, but you’re sure going to feel their consequences. No Future? It’s worse than that. Today there’s no “No Future.”

Ana Roxanne, “A Study in Vastness,” *Because of a Flower* (Kranky Records)

It’s the sound that keeps him sane out here. The non-organized nature of it. Bells. Chimes. Birds. Dogs. Waves. You can hear the wind out here. And you get the feeling that everything else can hear it, too. The blood in his body feels okay when he’s here. When everything is still and quiet. Too many noises today. He only wants to hear the wind. The wind is the only real power. It is the primary thing that moves everything else or keeps it away. The wind shapes the landscape. Bless the wind that shakes the tree that blows the seed that feeds the birds that tweet so sweet. I better start going back, he thought. But God how he wished there was a home for him out here.

When he got tired, he looked at television. All the programs had become so dialogue-driven. But the dialogue was absurdly generic. It seemed like any character could have delivered the lines. Everyone and everything was interchangeable. Nothing seemed much different from the next thing. He lurched forward with the remote control, shadow-boxing a blunt fist toward the TV set. The television was a large box, finished in deep brown mahogany, that made an irreparable square depression in the carpet. Unnameable crumbs collected at its base in a kind of carpet gutter. He noticed the square depression whenever he moved it to vacuum up the crumbs. The remote had buttons that clicked as they were pushed. He clicked. The channels flicked obediently. His eyelids were heavy. There was something so distant about remote control. In fact, distance was its essence.

He slept and dreamt that he would unexpectedly find something that he was really good at, like singing or painting. Like there was a hidden genius inside him just waiting to be discovered. If he could only write the next great American novel, he thought. But he was Canadian, and nobody read novels anymore.

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