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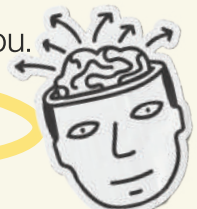
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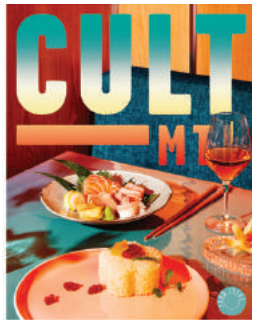
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“Going out to eat is one of the greatest pleasures of living in Montreal. People from around the world come to eat here and they come because we do restaurants right. Our restaurants are cultural institutions, they are a reflection of our unique way of life and they are the places where conviviality and joy reside.”

Photo Virginie Gosselin & Rachel Lecompte

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The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (MMFA) extends its thanks to the Ministère de la Culture et des Communications, the Conseil des arts de Montréal and the Canada Council for the Arts for their ongoing support. | An exhibition organized by the MMFA, Nicolas Party, *Portrait with Mushrooms*, 2019. Private collection. © Nicolas Party. Photo Adam Reich

# city

## Tram time



BY TAYLOR C. NOAKES

I was reading Daniel Sanger's *Saving the City* the other day (it's an oral history on the rise of *Projet Montréal* and a decent overview of the last 20 some-odd years of municipal politics that manages to be highly readable) and it occurred to me that we never got around to building any trams in this city. This despite the fact that *Projet Montréal* was literally founded as a \*ahem\* vehicle to develop them, chiefly to get Montreal off of cars.

That was nearly 20 years ago, and *Projet* has now won two mandates to govern. So what are they waiting for? The need to reduce reliance on cars — and, more importantly, to reclaim much of the land that has been lost over the last half century to the exclusive use of automobiles — is more important now than it has ever been.

Building a tramway network in our city shouldn't just be prioritized because of the climate catastrophe, but also because the pandemic has provided us with a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. There are far fewer cars on our streets right now, and fewer people commuting into the city each day. This will likely continue to be the case for as long as the pandemic continues, which, thanks to the complete and total incompetence of the political class, may be another few years.

Recent news is that island of Montreal lost nearly 50,000 people between July 1, 2020 and July 1, 2021, which is apparently the biggest population loss since the Institut de la statistique du Québec began keeping track 20 years ago. It's likely this trend will continue for the duration of the pandemic — meaning it will continue for the foreseeable future — and this population loss is coupled with already existing suburbanization trends, along with generally fewer people coming into the city for work, to shop, to go out etc.

This means fewer people in the city, fewer cars on the roads, fewer people using the city's existing public transit services and all of that means now would be the most ideal time

to start ripping up the roads for an aggressive tramways development project.

### WHAT ARE TRAMS, AND WHY SHOULD WE HAVE THEM?

Trams are a kind of light-rail mass transit system that are widely used throughout the world and were once common even in small North American cities, though many of those systems were phased out in the 1950s and 1960s. If you've ever had the misfortune of being forced to visit Toronto (a pointless city on the banks of Lake Ontario in a neighbouring province), one of its few redeeming qualities is its under-developed tram network, which they illogically call a "streetcar" (I suppose because "road train" wasn't available). Toronto's streetcar is woefully outdated though, largely because it is forced to share the road with other vehicular traffic, which on Toronto's congested streets often makes the streetcar less desirable or efficient than walking.

Montreal had a similar streetcar system for about a century, up until 1959, when it was phased out in favour of buses (so yes, despite what you may have heard, they do in fact work in winter). At the time, buses looked like a much better option, chiefly because they weren't limited by the extent of the tramway rail network. Moreover, by the beginning of the 1960s, Montreal was already beginning a prolonged phase of suburbanization, and most of the new suburbs weren't connected to the city by the tram network. The new thinking of the 1960s was that Montreal's mass transit would be best served by a subway system in the urban core of the city, where each station could become a terminus for a number of bus lines which in turn would connect to the outer reaches of the city proper (and everyone living in the suburbs would drive their own car on the brand new highways the province was building at the time). Trust me, it all made a lot of sense 60 years ago.

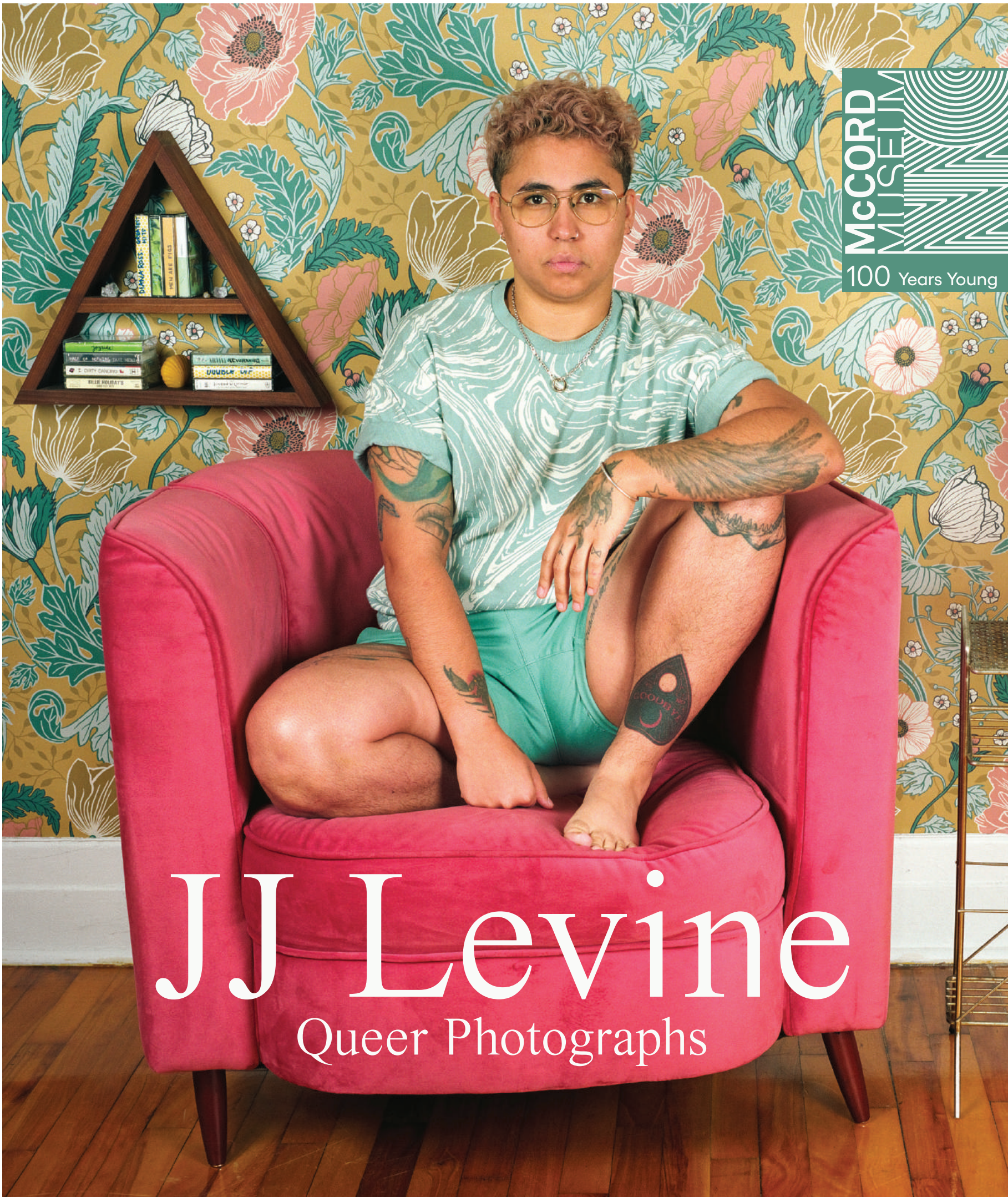
The main advantage of trams today is that, unlike buses or cars, they use electricity, which in Montreal's case would come from renewable and sustainable hydropower. Moreover, trams today are designed to operate on a dedicated right of way, so they're not actually sharing the road with buses, cars and trucks. Most cities that use trams also have priority signalling, meaning trams cross through intersections alone, without ever interfering with the normal flow of vehicular traffic. In addition, a tram in Montreal would fill the gap between bus and metro service: higher speed and greater passenger volume than a bus,

yet far less expensive than building more metro or REM.

Moreover, because a tram is less capital intensive than other major transit projects, and would be built on streets already owned by the city of Montreal, a new tram might be possible to realize entirely on our own — i.e. without financial support from Quebec City or Ottawa. Trams running in parallel with the metro could help alleviate congestion (something which will likely get worse once the REM is completed, or if the lines are extended). More importantly, running trams on major commercial arteries—like Ste-Catherine Street, Parc Avenue or St-Laurent Boulevard — would likely make these streets more attractive shopping destinations. It's already a well-established fact that pedestrians tend to buy more and visit stores more often than motorists—trams on these thoroughfares would have the effect of turning them into massive pedestrian malls. As more housing units are built in the city centre, the city will have to provide new transit accommodations for these new residents anyways, and more buses on already congested streets won't cut it.

### PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

I realize that it may seem odd to make such a proposal while the STM is running a \$43-million pandemic-related deficit, but I can't imagine another time when we'll have as few cars on our roads, and as few people in the city centre, as we do now. Eventually the pandemic will end, and people will come back to the city. Moreover, climate change is going to put additional pressure on the city to increase its population and population density, and it wouldn't surprise me if older office towers are transformed — like every empty lot, gas station and otherwise under-utilized property in the city — into new housing. All that made Montreal a desirable place to live in 2019 will in all likelihood still be the case a few years from now, but we need the city government to be proactive rather than reactionary. If the pandemic has taught us any one lesson in particular, it's that we really need to start thinking ahead and planning for the future. The experts, like *Projet Montréal* founder Richard Bergeron 20 years ago, have long anticipated what cities will need to do in order to survive and thrive through the era of climate change, and getting the majority of the population off cars is generally agreed to be step one. Tramways are, at least according to transit experts, a fundamental building block for the creation of the new green metropolis of the future. What better place than here? What better time than now?



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# :MTL courtside



BY MR. WAVVY

## WIGGINS' MEANINGFUL MOMENT

Let it sink in: Andrew Wiggins is an NBA All-Star. The Toronto-born forward shocked the basketball world last week when he was announced as a Western Conference starter. Many were quick to compare stats, with Wiggins' numbers marginally lower than "inconsistent" point guard Russell Westbrook.

Like it or not, Wiggins has earned his spot. If we are being perfectly honest, he would have been next up as a replacement player for last year's game, had another athlete gotten sick or injured. Yes, perhaps a starting role is a bit of a reach but Wiggins has played an important part in helping the Warriors regain their swagger, following both the departure of Kevin Durant and two years of injuries for Klay Thompson.

As a #1 overall draft pick (and only the second Canadian to achieve this feat), it was without question that Andrew Wiggins would soon have his moment to shine. After a wasteful tenure in Minnesota and an adjustment period in the Golden State, that time has finally come.

## WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT THE KINGS

It has been 15 years since the Sacramento Kings made the playoffs. The team, which was led by the player formerly known as Ron Artest, managed to snag the 8th seed in the Western Conference, where they were promptly taken out in the first round by the San Antonio Spurs.

If the Kings, who are currently ranked 13th in the West, miss the playoffs this year, the team will beat out the Los Angeles Clippers for the longest playoff drought in NBA history.

With only 18 wins, their postseason hopes are dismal, yet not impossible. The team has a tremendous talent pool who are ultimately incapable of winning games. Both Harrison Barnes and Tristan Thompson have both won NBA championships, yet are far-removed from any true position of leadership.

This could be the team to explore a veteran shooter of All-Star capacity. Names like Ben Simmons and Russell Westbrook have been tossed around in trade talks. The latter would surely provide some guidance for the incomplete team, also providing them with a much-needed offensive aggression.

## DUARTE DOES IT ALL

Selected as the 13th pick in the 2021 NBA draft, Montreal-born Chris Duarte has been an absolute steal for the Indiana Pacers. With a 13.2 points per game average, Duarte has locked in a spot on the 2022 Rising Stars roster among other young talents.

It has been reported that the Pacers are looking to make some major roster adjustments, with both Myles Turner and Domantas Sabonis rumoured to be traded. These moves would commence a rebuilding phase for the young Indiana team.

It goes without question that Duarte will be one of the players that the team will look to build around. At 24 years old, the shooting guard offers more experience than the average rookie. His two successful years at Oregon earned him the 2021 Jerry West Award. LeBron James has called Duarte a talent "beyond his years" With all the praise and a good head on his shoulders, it seems near-impossible for him not to make this year's All-Rookie Team and be a crucial key to the Pacers' future.

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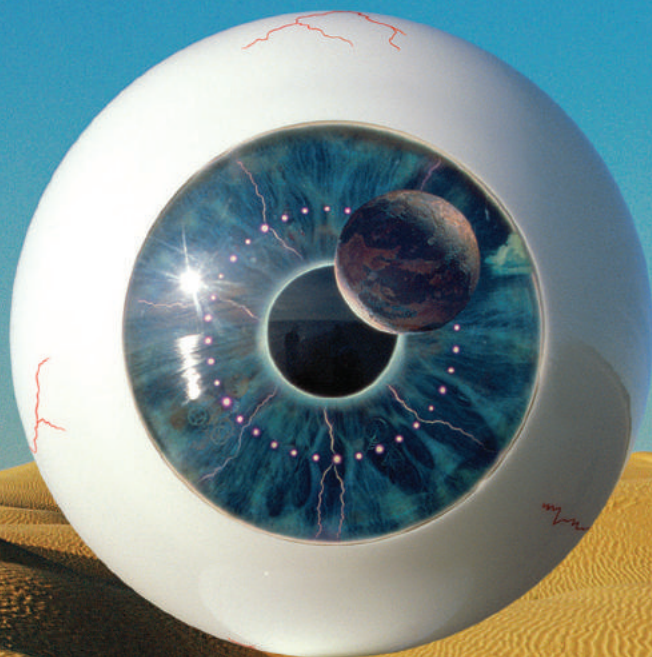


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# : best buds



BY DAVE MACINTYRE

For any stoner, it seems like a rite of passage to watch a Cheech & Chong film. This month, that's exactly what I've done for the first time ever, with their 1978 feature film debut *Up in Smoke*. Not only is this because Tommy Chong hails from my hometown of Calgary, but also because they're probably the most loveable 420-friendly duo in pop culture history (with all apologies to Harold and Kumar).

My dried flowers of choice to accompany my stoned viewing of a seminal stoner film? An indica — more specifically, Sour Kush from Vert, a Mirabel-based subdivision of Canopy Growth. The Vert brand is sold exclusively within Quebec, and since one of my goals for this column is to promote Quebec cannabis companies, I'll be giving one of their four

SQDC-sold strains the old college try.

Despite my love for weed and regularly consuming it, I was a newbie to the hazy, smoked-out world of these two comedy legends, so it was high time (wink wink) that I had my first Cheech & Chong viewing. Here's how that went.

INDICA: VERT SOUR KUSH

First, the weed. Two things can immediately be said about this strain as soon as you open its container: its buds are quite dry and brittle, and they don't smell particularly potent, though their aroma is noticeably spicy. Once you do inhale it, you'll likely notice that it primarily gives you a head high. It's also pretty fast-acting: after only smoking about two-thirds of a joint, I am LIFTED. Even if the scent doesn't hit you right off the bat, it delivers the goods as far as actually getting you nice and toasty.

It definitely makes you a bit hungry and couch-locked, as many strains tend to—but fuck it, it's winter. I'm more likely to stay nestled in my home and binge *Yellowjackets* all day than step outside in what feels like -25 weather for any reason whatsoever. In any case, this Sour Kush is an enjoyable head high... even though it made me a bit angrier than normal upon discovering that no less than FIVE people

I know are supporting that stupid anti-lockdown/white supremacist trucker convoy in Ottawa. Barf.

As for the film? It's basically the textbook definition of a "turn your mind off" movie. Your brain feels literally and figuratively fried while watching it. Our two protagonists embark on cannabis-fuelled adventures in various parts of California, and even the Mexican border, where they go to procure — you guessed it — more weed.

Cheech Marin and Tommy Chong both say "man" a LOT in this movie. Like, literally at the end of every sentence. Oh, and Tommy Chong's accent is so 'Berta it hurts. Long story short, this movie is about drugs, including the cat and mouse chase between Cheech & Chong and a gross-looking, weed-hating, moustachioed narc — even if such a subplot doesn't hold up in a world where weed is legalized in Canada and in many American states.

Though *Up in Smoke* lacks an engaging plot, is extremely of its time and its jokes sometimes need more punch, it's nonetheless a pretty enjoyable stoner flick. Cheech & Chong's characters, Pedro and Man, make an extremely likeable team; the movie boasts a killer soundtrack (War's "Low Rider" in the opening credits is a great touch); and the house party scene's aesthetic is indisputably cool. The movie's battle of the bands sequence is also a fascinating look at that era's burgeoning punk movement. Best of all, the Sour Kush improved the viewing experience, as is always the objective. While you watch this movie, take a toke and let all your cares go up in smoke.

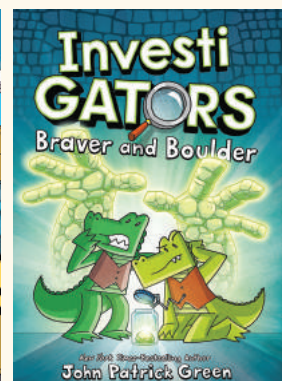
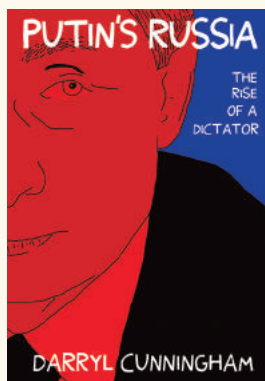
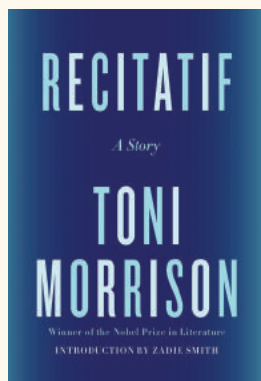
The weed: 8.5/10

The movie: 6.5/10

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# food

## Epitomizing the era

BY CLAY SANDHU

Back in November of 2020, I wrote about a pop-up running out of Pastaga's sister cavieste/snack bar Cul Sec. You might have heard of it — it was called J'ai Feng.

Back then, the pitch was all about how this beloved Chinese–Franco–Canadian chef named Anita Feng, who had run a wildly popular dumpling shop called Trilogie, was back. Feng had been on a cooking hiatus and, after a trip to China fell through, decided to start an ephemeral takeout counter serving regional, homestyle Chinese food. Since then, her story has become intertwined, in such a fascinating way, with so many of the most prevalent narratives of the pandemic and has proven to be one of the most optimistic stories of the COVID era.

When I first ate at J'ai Feng, I knew the food was going to be good — I'd had Anita's food in the past and it is without exception satisfying and delicious. What I didn't anticipate was how smart of a concept it would be, how well it would be able to thrive through wave after wave of pandemic restrictions, and what its impact would be on the identity of Chinese food in Montreal.

Anita is the epitome of warmth. She has this wide radiant smile and type of genuine unreserved laugh that's not only completely disarming but makes you feel like old friends catching up after a long while. In many ways, she's the perfect ambassador for talking about Chinese cooking. There's not a glimpse of posturing or pedantics when she talks; instead, she sounds knowledgeable and welcoming. She's not standing on a soapbox shouting about Chinese food, she's cooking it without compromise and apology. She lets the food make the point for her.

I, like many, got interested in Anita's story over the past two years. She's this figure that's at the intersection of a few major arcs of the pandemic, in terms of food and culture. The most obvious storyline is that of the pandemic pivot. Anita was on her way to China for a prolonged stay when the pandemic hit. Now, let's lay the cards on the table — her pivot came with a lot less overhead than most established restaurants and had the benefit of being thought up during the first wave and not before. It made the barrier to entry a lot lower and the risk a lot lower, too. She wasn't paying an exorbitant rent or figuring out how to keep her restaurant staff employed. She found an inexpensive spot and worked, for the most part, on her own.

"I'm pretty much by myself, with a little bit of help from my sister — so I don't have that problem of being short-staffed like a lot of other people do. I feel so bad for them though. But so far it works and I don't have that stress."

But it's not just that she shoulders most of the labour burden. Her expenses are lower, too. "The food cost is really low. You have these base ingredients: soya sauce, sesame oil, black vinegar — all this basic stuff. But you can create a lot of different flavours just using these ingredients." It's because of extremely low overhead that J'ai Feng was perfectly adapted to work in a pandemic-restricted restaurant scene.

For a month, she cooked a weekly, fixed menu of Chinese



Matthew Perrin

comfort food — incorporating dishes seldom seen on restaurant menus: it made for an enticing offering that appealed directly to a shift in consumer desire. Throughout the pandemic, what I observed was that what people seemed to want most, in terms of food, was to be provided with some version of a surrogate restaurant experience while also wanting comfort food. "Of course, Chinese food is kind of, how do I say this? It's easier to fit into a takeout frame," Anita acknowledges, but it's clear she's just being humble.

Making food that replicates the excitement of dining out while ticking the box of comfort food is a tricky balancing act to pull off for most restaurants, especially when you're trying to keep your head above water, retain employees, oversee ever-evolving safety protocols and manage your own sanity. Anita successfully started a business during a restaurant lockdown that created genuine buzz and brought scores of new people into a conversation about Chinese food. And that was always her goal. You see, Anita didn't set out to start a business, per se. "My goal since day one has been to talk about Chinese food." And it's worked — I regularly speak about her *aubergines l'eau à la bouche*.

The pop-up ended in late December 2020 but J'ai Feng reopened in 2021 as an épicerie, selling specialty Chinese ingredients, prepared meals and a few take-out dishes. Perhaps more importantly, however, is that the conversation she started is still ongoing. Which leads into the second major arc of the pandemic: a significant increase in anti-Asian racism.

Chinese culture throughout the past two years has been under attack and, in Montreal, our city's Chinatown, the

oldest in the country and historic centre of Chinese culture and community in Quebec, was at risk of disappearing. Feng was part of a movement of young East and South Asian activists working to dispel preconceptions and start new dialogues about what it means to be Asian in today's society. Sticky Rice Magazine brought a diverse range of Asian voices into a mainstream space, and cooks like the Ku brothers (and Webster Galman) at Dobe and Andy, Psthyme's (and upcoming An Choi's) Michelle Vo, Touk's Chantry Yen, Thammada and Pichai's Chita Phommavongxay, and Tota Oung of Les Street Monkeys (among many others) firmly established Asian cuisine as an indispensable part of Montreal's typically eurocentric restaurant scene.

For her part, Anita became a spokesperson for Chinese food in Quebec media, "Because of the opportunities I had over the year: being on *5 chefs [dans ma cuisine]*, a Radio-Canada show, on Curieux Bégin [*Télé-Québec*] — people come here and they want to buy Chinese ingredients." While a sort-of pan-Asian way of cooking had been ubiquitous in Montreal for decades, thanks to cooks like Anita the general consumer is starting to get an understanding of regionality and the Chinese pantry.

"They have a lot of questions. 'Which soya sauce is good?' 'Which *doubanjiang* should I get?' I see [*l'épicerie*] more as a showcase of Chinese cuisine than coming to eat what I do." Recently, Chinatown was officially designated a heritage district by Nathalie Roy, Quebec's Minister of Culture. This news comes with an array of much needed protections for a district that has been reduced to a fraction of its original size over the century since its founding. Much of the credit for the change in status has been attributed to resident

reactions to property acquisitions in the neighbourhood by noted renovictors Shiller Lavy. Though this is unquestionably a major factor, it was restaurant owners and advocates of Chinese culture in Quebec who had cast a light on the significance of the district and the need for protections in recent months and years. "I feel very fortunate to be able to cook Chinese food — people just jump into my venture," says Anita. It's a sentiment that represents an exciting shift in the perception of Chinese cooking in Montreal.

The last arc is one that I'm still wrapping my head around. In many ways, it's the result of the other two arcs when combined. I've maintained, over the last two years, that the pandemic has levelled the playing field for the restaurant scene. By removing the dining room and service aspects from restaurants, the comparison is being made based almost exclusively on the food. That gives cooks a unique opportunity to be considered in the same conversations as their peers regardless of status. That's a long-winded way of saying, the great Indian take-out spot gets to be compared against an industry behemoth like Joe Beef on the merits of its take-out and not all the expensive and intangible aspects of physical restaurants. I think it's by virtue of this new reality that a concept like J'ai Feng can take such a prominent role in the COVID-era restaurant scene.

"It was always my plan to open something but I never thought that I would open an épicerie," reflects Anita. Her dream was to open a restaurant that explores the technical and refined aspects of one of the world's oldest cuisines. Instead, she opened a shop that gives her time to educate her clientele, "Maybe that's why it's so different from a lot of other people. I don't mind not cooking," she laughs. Of course, her dream is to eventually open the restaurant she always envisioned, but for now, "J'ai Feng gives me time. It doesn't matter what model I use. For me, it's just a tool to talk about Chinese food."



Matthew Perrin

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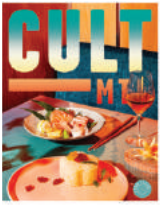
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CONSEIL DES ARTS DE MONTRÉAL

Montréal

Photo: Serge Barbeau

Québec



# Restaurant Guide



Antoine Charlebois

Le Super Qualite

BY CLAYTON SANDHU

Putting together a food issue has not been easy this year and it's no mystery why. Things have been particularly bad for restaurants for quite some time. This issue corresponds with a breaking point for those in the restaurant biz that have managed to endure 13 months of closures over roughly two years, but it also corresponds with a light at the end of the tunnel.

Jan. 31 marked the official reopening of indoor dining (albeit with a hefty slew of restrictions) and is part of a gradual reopening of the city and a hopeful return to a version of normalcy. To me, it feels like we're finally coming up for air after a long time underwater and I aim to breathe as much damn air as I can.

If you're vaccinated (including a booster) and you're not immunocompromised, I urge you to go out to eat. Yes, it's important to go out because restaurants need your support and this is a chance to start a rebuilding process after a period of great loss, but that's not why I'm urging you to go out. I urge you because going out to eat is one of the greatest pleasures of living in Montreal. People from around the world come to eat here and they come because we do restaurants right. Our restaurants are cultural institutions, they are a

reflection of our unique way of life and they are the places where conviviality and joy reside.

This year, our guide isn't about what restaurants are the "best" or "hottest." This is a guide to the spots we love and places that make the kind of food we want to eat. We hope that it introduces you to a new spot or serves as a reminder to make a reservation at a restaurant you've been meaning to check out. Above all, we hope it inspires you to go out to eat at the places *you* love the most.

And remember, restaurants are open but they are still hurting. Most are still short-staffed and the staff they've retained have been through a lot. Kindness and patience will go a long way. Take a deep breath, have a sip of wine and enjoy the fact that you're out for dinner in one of the best restaurant cities in the world.

## LITTLE ITALY

### J'ai Feng

The feel-good story of the COVID era in Montreal has been the J'ai Feng project from the jubilant personality and phenomenal cook Anita Feng. Feng's goal was to introduce an increasingly open-minded clientele to a seldom-seen style of Chinese home cooking. What started as a casual pop-up out of Cul Sec has blossomed into a proper *épicerie* where quality Chinese ingredients and Feng's food are at the fore. Don't miss the rotating take-out specials. (Clay Sandhu) (43 Beaubien E.)

### Mon Lapin

Marc Olivier Frappier and Vanya Filipovic's Little Italy eatery has been one of the most celebrated restaurants in town since opening back in 2018. After taking time during the first wave to expand the restaurant into the neighbouring vacant storefront, Mon Lapin became more accessible than ever before. The food here is a poetic mixture of French and Italian cooking penned in Frappier's unmistakable and ingenious style. As the undisputed Queen of natural wine, Filipovic's list is expertly curated and chock-full of classics and quaffable curiosities. (CS) (150 St-Zotique E.)

### Pizza Bouquet

Montreal's finest slice. While that might be a hotly debated topic ever since New York-style pizza joints flooded the fast-casual scene in the past few years, Pizza Bouquet is regarded as the perennial gold standard. 16" pizzas are sold by the pie or by the slice and feature flavours like the basic margarita and more unusual offerings like the upside-down (cheese first, sauce last) or the NDQ, which counts sweet potato and kalamata olives among its toppings. Previously take-out only, the Bouquet team has recently launched a delivery service via Checkplz. (CS) (45 Beaubien E.)

### Alati Caserta

While this isn't a restaurant at all, it is an iconic food destination in Little Italy. This cake and pastry shop has been making traditional Italian sweets and treats in its Dante location for over 50 years. A perennial contender for the best cannoli in Montreal, Alati Caserta's cakes and pastries are unpretentious, delicious and redolent of celebratory nostalgia. One of the greats. (CS) (277 Dante)

## PLATEAU / ROSEMONT

### Pasthyme / An Choi Plaza

This is the unexpected story of Michelle Vo, a West Island dentistry administrator turned ambassador for Vietnamese home cooking, turned first-time restaurateur — all in the middle of the pandemic, no less. Her potent (read tongue-singeing, sweat-inducing) chili oil became a cult product of the first wave and was the point of introduction for many, myself included, to her weekly noodle specials that ran as a ghost kitchen out of La Bêtise in Rosemont. Rarely seen dishes like *Bún mắm* (a type of Vietnamese gumbo made with fermented fish) and *Bo Kho* (a homely braised beef



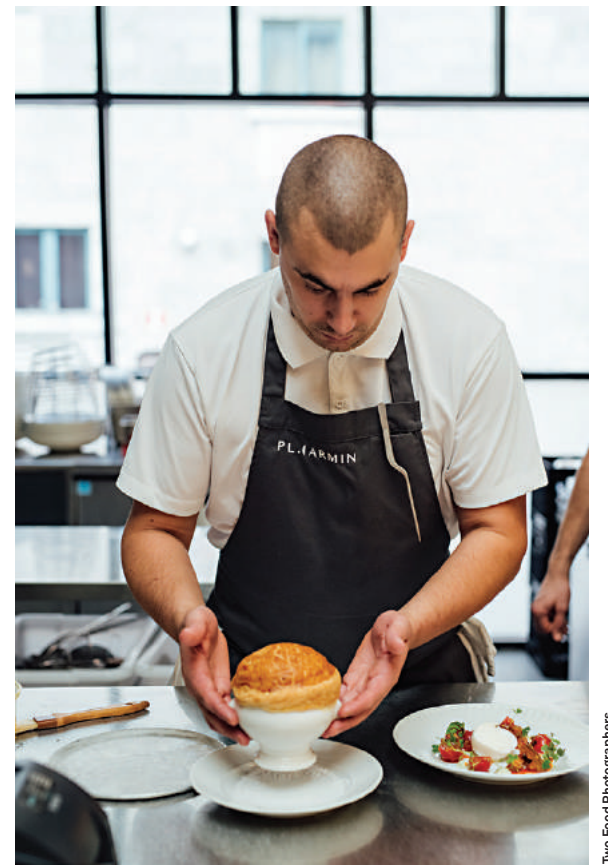
Pasthyme



Marchigiani



Place Carmin



Two Food Photographers

stew) are regular fixtures. Stay tuned for Vo's upcoming brick and mortar restaurant An Choi Plaza, which is slated to open sometime in 2022. For now, her weekly offering can be ordered in advance at [anchoiplaza.com](http://anchoiplaza.com). (CS) (6553 St-Hubert)

### Le Super Qualité

An Indian snack bar courtesy of Guillaume Lozeau, Étienne Clément and Jennifer Zachanawich. The tongue-in-cheek name (a jab at the often bombastic marketing style pervasive in India) is all about Indian street food. While there's no shortage of great North Indian restaurants (and a slowly developing South Indian scene, too) only a tiny fraction of the subcontinent's culinary offerings are available in town. Le Super Qualité makes some of the most popular dishes in India accessible to Montrealers. Perhaps best known for their tiffin specials (a stacking set of metal dishware akin to a lunch box), you really can't go wrong with anything on the menu. An excellent choice for vegetarians and one of the best cups of chai in town. (CS) (1211 Bélanger)

### Pichai

After much speculation and a lot of waiting, Pumpui principals Jesse Massumi and Jesse Mulder were able to open their long-awaited second restaurant, Pumpui, in 2021. Adding two new partners (including a third Jesse, Jesse Grasso) Pichai is all about communal eating, regional dishes and expanding the scope of Thai cooking in Montreal. Its colourful dining room is joyful and festive and the food is utterly delicious. There aren't many old standbys on the menu, but don't fret — you're in for one of the best meals in the country. (CS) (5985 St-Hubert)

### Barranco

The food (by former Tiradito executive chef Daniel Silva), murals (by tattoo artist Gabriel Urban) and music at

this Peruvian fusion restaurant are meant to evoke the lively, colourful seaside establishments of the Lima neighbourhood that the restaurant borrowed its name from. Founded by three Peruvian Montrealers, Barranco specializes in mahi-mahi ceviche and chicharrón tacos and sandwiches, with loads of burgers and sides of the fried or featherweight variety. And they've just added a very promising arroz con mariscos (seafood rice) to their menu. The exotic cocktails and non-alcoholic drinks are also fantastic. Drinkers would be advised to try the Mariachi en Lima, while the chicha morada is a good bet for your kids or AA/dry February buds. (LC) (4552 St-Denis)

## MILE END / PARC EX

### Drogheria Fine

A near-literal hole in the wall on Fairmount, Drogheria (Italian for pharmacy) is a purveyor of imported olive oil and of homemade Calabrian-style tomato sauce. The shop, on the same stretch of street as Fairmount Bagel and Kem CoBa, is best known, however, for its steaming takeout boxes of gnocchi bathed in red sauce. Fluffy and perfectly simple gnocchi are poached in the house sauce and dusted with a sprinkle of parmesan and handed out the front window to be enjoyed on the benches out front. At \$5 a pop, you'd be hard-pressed to find a better pasta special anywhere. (CS) (68 Fairmount W.)

### Buffet Maharani

Amid the old-standbys and fledgling new kids on the block (or five blocks on Jean-Talon, between Champagneur and Acadie), Buffet Maharani is one of the more unsung Indian restaurants in Parc Ex, but one that's consistently high quality. Serving all-you-can eat from the kitchen (not openly displayed under heat lamps), Maharani offers a

different spread of dishes every day of the week. Expect exceptional takes on staples like butter chicken and palak paneer and a stellar fish curry and vindaloos that will make you sweat. Maharani also delivers à la carte, but if you're in the mood to feast on Indian cuisine, dining in is the way to go. (Lorraine Carpenter) (808 Jean-Talon W.)

### Segreta

Since the summer of 2021, Segreta has been serving Roman-style pizza by the slice in Parc Ex, practically a stone's throw from Mile End. While relatively heavy on crust, their al taglio pizza dough is rendered light, soft and airy after fermenting for 72 to 96 hours. Get a variety pack of slices and you'll walk away with a signature long rectangular box of goodness, with rosso and bianca sauces and topping options like rosemary potatoes, Italian smoked bacon and leccino olives. You can also pick up some nice Italian products from their grocery shelves. (LC) (413 Beaumont)

## OLD MONTREAL / CHINATOWN

### Mélisse

An escape to the Mediterranean. Chef Tom Allain (formerly of Nora Gray) took over this Old Port restaurant just before the pandemic. Under his management, the food is as bright and fresh as their sun-kissed terrace at the corner of William and Queen. Expect simple dishes like a halibut crudo with Fresno chillies and labneh, silky and vibrant spaghetti vongole, and clever refreshing desserts — buckwheat financier with berries and cream, anyone? (CS) (719 William)



# CowBOY JUNKIES



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J'ai Feng

### Place Carmin

A polished and refined neo-steakhouse from the Bouillon Bilk team. Inside a beautifully bricked heritage building deep in the Old-Port, Place Carmin is a French Brasserie with an altogether contemporary feel. The dark masculine and leather-clad dining rooms of Brasseries past are ditched to make room for Carrara marble, white oak, and cognac coloured upholstery. Classics like the shrimp cocktail are done justice (and subtly elevated) and the steaks are cooked to perfection. A refreshing take on a quintessential restaurant concept. (CS)

(740 William)

### Fleurs et Cadeaux

This Chinatown eatery, which gets its name from the former gift shop that used to occupy the address, calls itself a snack bar and café with Japanese inspiration. Falling somewhere in between an izakaya and jazz bar Fleurs et Cadeaux manages to encapsulate the feeling of stumbling into a hidden gem while wandering the streets of Shinjuku. Expect dishes like an opulent Chirashi bowl and simple dishes like a Japanese curry made with Quebec mushrooms. While the food is excellent it's the vibe that steals the show, thanks in no small part to an amazing nightly soundtrack and weekly guest DJ sets on weekends. (CS)

(1002 St-Urbain)

## LACHINE / LASALLE / VILLE ST-PIERRE

### Nonnina

For obvious reasons, sandwiches – nay, sangwiches – have become a big deal in recent times. No one's passing by Mozza or Clarke Café and resisting one of their football-sized grab-and-go creations. Perfectly portable and satisfying. In an outpost 'round Lachine Market, Nonnina is a café-bistro dropping cheese and meat filled beauts on par with the big city boys. Their Italian meat sandwich doesn't hold back, spicy or otherwise, and has the multi-cold cut layering people crave. Their porchetta sandwiches with rapini at the end of the week are worth hitting up Lachine waterfront for. Perhaps a best-kept secret for those deeper in town, for those a little more west, it's an essential hangout. Has outdoor seating in the summer, and a terrific dessert lineup, including donuts and lobster tails. (Erik Leijon)

(1895 Piché, Lachine)

### Falafel St-Jacques

The best falafel in Montreal since 2016. Run by an Israeli-Palestinian duo (Israeli owner Ronan Baruch and Palestinian manager Saleh Seh) the Ville St-Pierre lunch counter has developed a loyal following thanks to its signature take on the Middle Eastern staple. Though falafel is the main draw, the fully vegetarian menu also features a plant-based shish taouk and shawarma. (A recently established second location on Chabanel is now serving the north-central side of the city.)

(345 St-Jacques, Ville St-Pierre)

### Marchigiani

A beloved Italian deli in LaSalle. Having closed in 2020 due to a fire, residents of LaSalle (and all over the island, really) were elated to hear the shop was back up and running and ready to sling their infamous porchettas and deli sandwiches. Technically a butcher shop, Marchigiani's sausages are legendary, however, it's the sandwiches that draw the crowds. The porchetta is undoubtedly the fan favourite but the chicken cutlet is drool-worthy and the sausage sandwich is, as you'd expect, incredible.

(7790 Juliette)

## ÎLE-PERROT, PIERREFONDS

### Smoke Meat Pete

Schwartz's or the Main? Maybe Lester's? Snowdon Deli? Nah — the reigning smoked meat champ is Smoke Meat Pete out on Île-Perrot. The eponymous Pete is Pete Varvaro jr. the son of Peter Varvaro Sr. — the Pete responsible for St. Laurent's Main Deli. After working alongside his father for 20 years, Pete Jr. started his own shop on the outskirts of the city and over the last 20 years has made a name for himself as one of the best smoke meat makers in all of Quebec.

(283 1re Ave., l'Île-Perrot)

### Tacos Don Rigo

You think you know tacos on the island of Montreal? Guess again, unless you've had the pleasure of sitting on one of Don Rigo's saddle seats, or outside in the parking lot. Don't let the kitsch, children's birthday party décor or Pierrefonds address fool you, they're serious about their tacos, tortas and burritos, with suburban bang for your buck. They're not precious about serving sizes, with heaping plates that could've come from a generous grandmother or street vendor. It's the lack of pretension that really stands out – the tacos may not talk, but they speak for themselves. The birria

tacos are a gift, but burrito-starved city slickers are advised to mosey on over here. Even on weekdays the lineups can stretch outside, and West Islanders don't wait for much, so you know it's good. (EL)

(4740 St-Jean, Pierrefonds)

## CÔTE-DES-NEIGES / NDG / CÔTE-ST-PAUL

### G Sacchetti Pizza al Taglio & Boulangerie Italienne

Unless there's been a rapid recent expansion I don't know about, pizza perfectionist Giuseppe Sacchetti and his oven next to the superhospital remain a pretty barebones operation, and that's what makes it great. G specializes in handmade square and round Roman-style pizzas with big crusts (if you're buying in circular form) with a personal touch that's satisfyingly bready but not to excess. The King Julien with béchamel sauce and homemade sausage may be off the beaten path pizza-wise, but it wears the crown for a reason. In recent days, he's been touting an eggplant parmigiana pizza that might blow his previous creations out of the water. A friendly neighbourhood pizza man, even though he's technically the new kid on the block. (EL)

(5463 St-Jacques)

### East Africa

NDG doesn't suffer fools gladly, and while I'm not calling them fools in the slightest, the opening of visually striking burger joint Crusty (with a tenuous connection to an Occupation Double couple) was met with a certain amount of skepticism. Could it have also been because that particular corner of the neighbourhood already holds the most underrated restos west of Decarie? Perhaps none more so than Crusty's neighbour: family-run Ethiopian spot East Africa, the one place my friends and I talk about going when legally allowed to do so. Why? Ginormous stews doused in turmeric and berbere spices that tickle the senses, eaten without utensils and with a seemingly never-ending supply of injera bread. Closest thing to a regal feast in NDG. (EL)

(5893 Sherbrooke W.)

### Dreamy

The south side of the Lachine Canal in the Sud-Ouest doesn't get the same accolades as the north, although that's starting to change. On most weekends, cars and bikes line up around Pitt, where Messorem launches limited edition slushie sour craft beers and community co-roasting space Canadian Roasting Society plays host to part-time café Dreamy. The coffee is understandably amazing (with plenty of specialty beans to go), but so too is Dreamy's signature dish, the buttery, American-style biscuit, served with or without cream and jam. Don't miss out on the cardamom biscuit either, which is more of a roll and has an irresistibly buttery crunch. They had a baker switch at one point and didn't skip a beat. (EL)

(3780 St-Patrick)

### Hoai Huong

An under-the-radar Vietnamese spot in Côte-des-Neiges. A favourite among the area's many residents, Hoai Huong specializes in Vietnamese comfort classics and good old-fashioned home cooking. While there's PhD on the menu, you'll notice families sitting around large platters of grilled meats piled high with rice, herbs and rice paper wrappers. Do as they do and don't be afraid to ask for guidance! (CS)

(5485 Victoria)



Pasthyme Mélisse



Pichai

# music

## From the underground up



Racine

BY RYAN DIDUCK

New Release Day during the physical music industry's heyday used to be a big deal. Record store managers would receive lists of forthcoming albums weeks, sometimes months in advance. Label reps would jockey for positioning of their CDs in stores. They'd upsell. Everything was the next big thing. Until one day, nothing was. Unless it was gigantic, everything else got small. In today's virtual rush of data, small things are easy to miss.

Still, small things planted in the right soil sprout roots and grow into something unexpected and unique. And New Release Day still is a momentous time for every artist, so I'm pleased to be speaking with Montreal experimental electronic musician Julien Racine on the auspicious occasion of his album's launch. Titled *Amitiés*, it's the bold first recording released in 2022 from the au courant Switzerland-based Danse Noire imprint.

Astute dance music authority *Resident Advisor* featured Danse Noire as Label of the Month in November 2021. One of the dangers of being labeled Label of the Month is that, by next month, you're last month's label. But partners Raphael Rodriguez, Niels Wehrspann, Samuel Antoine and Aïsha Devi continue to curate a Swiss pocket knife full of arcane sonic weaponry. That's largely because of their keen collective radar for artists, like Racine, forging radical aesthetic trajectories.

"This record has been pretty weird," confesses Racine, slipping over Facetime between French and English. "It was miles away from what it is right now. At first, I did stuff that was more delicate and ambient, but it didn't feel quite right at the beginning. A lot of introspection. It kind of took a life and a form that wasn't expected, and that's when things got exciting for me."

There's a genuine sense of excitement about this album, too. "It makes sense still releasing on a label," says Racine. "The reach you can have if the label is doing its job really well. It's been amazing. The first album, I was amazed how much reach I had so quickly."

2020's *Quelque Chose Tombe* attracted significant critical attention. Writing for *A Closer Listen*, Richard Allen called it "a mirror of modern anxiety, laying forth fear and anguish in equal measure." William Paulhus at *Panm360* described "a disconcerting calm, joyfully forging long digital sculptures illustrating the disarray of modern times."

*Amitiés*, Racine's sophomore release for Danse Noire, reflects a more mature, confident musicianship. With Rashad Becker as mastering engineer, its sound is precise, croquant. *Amitiés* reveals a game-like structure, one piece jump-cutting to the next level, jarring, a pristine field recording of crows, cacophonous explosions subsiding suddenly to cool moments of melodic repose, then back again. It's postmodern times.

Though introspection was a necessary imposition, relationships most inspired Racine. "It's always coming back to this friendship thing, quite frankly."

The recording was conceived and produced in isolation under the first lockdown. But, of course, *Amitiés* means friendships. When no one could socialize, Racine relied upon virtual calls with his labelmates, as well as close compatriot Justin Leduc-Frenette (aka Keru Not Ever) with whom Racine formerly formed the local outfit Corporation. Leduc-Frenette also authored the text on *Amitiés*'s cover art.

"A lot of my inspiration comes from conversations," Racine explains. "To build a more profound way of thinking, of artmaking, music making, philosophy — stuff like that really inspires me. This

album in particular was all about this inspiration because I was missing this part. The first few months, I saw no one at all. I was just isolated in my place trying to make this album because I always do music. That was a bit hard because I was missing this proximity with friends and all those conversations. But after a couple of months, we got used to communicating on Skype and Facetime. I don't think it's lost

for good, we've just shifted how we deal with friendship in a different way. The tracks were written fast, but what was really long was the back-and-forth with people I trusted, and knew that I could get this record to another direction if continued to make sense out of it."

This new direction has its roots in Racine's diverse musical influences. His father was an electronic musician in the 1990s, and Racine is part of a generation that trained classically and practised on the world's most popular 1980s synthesizer. He divulges: "One of my all-time favourite synths is the Yamaha DX-7, and my dad had one. I started playing piano, but we didn't have a piano, so I did the lessons on the DX-7."

That groundbreaking electronic instrument's various iconic patches and sounds meant that Racine could explore timbres well beyond one instrument, one genre: "I've just always had this fascination for all different types of music: classical, jazz, prog rock, of course, because we are from Quebec. All my parents' CD cases are broken because of me."

Genre, however, is difficult to pin down in Racine's style. It pulls from all of the above, processes and spits them back out as textural sound design of the highest order. It's pure laine electronic roots music in the tradition of Kara-Lis Coverdale or Roger Tellier-Craig, something that some future Eric Fillion-type might place in our national canon.

Despite having the backing of Danse Noire, as well as international gigs lined up in February through London, Athens, Berlin and Prague, Racine still finds the Montreal scene somewhat of a foreign country. "It's really a lot harder getting booked in my own city than in Europe or any other part of the world. Here, for some reason, it feels impenetrable."

It's a curious Canadian condition. Venerable local musicians like Tim Hecker or Marie Davidson for instance, have always had to prove their worth elsewhere before being accepted here at home. "That's the norm in Montreal at least. The scene here is really tough. But it's great. Every show I've done here has been so fun, so I can't wait to play here again, that's for sure."

Much of today's electronic underground is steeped in overt politicization, and Racine is embedded in an international community that, for better or worse, has made it its mission to oppose and resist oppression, often perilously, and to build and maintain the virtual and infrastructural networks necessary to sustain itself. And yet, Racine's message isn't visibly political.

"In the world in general, there's a lot of injustice. But for me, I can't come up with ideas if I have a closed concept," Racine says. "I don't want to be political in my work, it's more about feeling. It's about emotions and spontaneity. Sometimes a mistake is not a mistake. It's about trying to create something that's living. It's not political, it's just a way of being, trying to express myself in music. I love having conversations about politics, but not in my art."

Instead, Racine tends to focus in both art and life on subtle emotions, nuance, rather than blunt force — and ultimately, upon creating something approximating a good friendship, something enduring.

Gone are the halcyon days of CDs stacked to the rafters, high-octane, fast-talking label reps, the next big thing on a weekly basis. Press releases arrive in a gentle whisper. Yet with each new release, major or minor, whether or not we take notice, we must acknowledge it as something special and revere it. That's another kind of politics entirely.

It takes tremendous courage to make anything at all and put it out into the world. There's a real risk here in Montreal that our best and brightest artists will feel a sense of erasure, especially now, and instead make their mark elsewhere. Let's hope that Racine isn't among them, that his music isn't rediscovered at a later date only to be rightly placed where it's always belonged.

"Of course, like any other artist I know, I have a fear of being erased," Racine admits. "That's a fear, but I don't think I'm driven by it. My friends and I are not always on the same page. But we are able to communicate and get along because we are friends, after all. My biggest hope is to deal with other people like they were your friends. Care about people."

# Numbers game

BY STEPHAN BOISSONENAUULT

During the start of the pandemic, as many musicians were forced to isolate, cut their losses and put their careers on hold, Brad Barr (of the folk-delta blues band the Barr Brothers) found himself in a position many craved: he had a project. Not just any project, but a commissioned project for New York's off-Broadway All For One Theater.

The theater's founder, Michael Wolk, was a fan of Barr's first solo instrumental album from 2008, *The Fall Apartment*, and wanted a similar body of work he could use on and off stage. At first, Barr treated the project pretty casually, as any other hired gig, and sent a few musical examples to Wolk. Soon he discovered this was going to be unlike any other commission he had ever worked on.

"So I send him some music and ask, 'Is this what you're thinking'? I guess I was looking for some sort of approval and path to take it," says Barr as he makes an espresso in his Montreal home. "And he tells me, 'Let me be clear, there is no approval. This is for you to explore and for you to feel free.'"

The response kind of stopped Barr in his tracks and puzzled him.

"I realized this guy was a real fan and just wanted to inspire me to write new music. He also told me I would retain all the rights to the music, so I decided to make an album," Barr says.

This commission eventually turned into Barr's second solo instrumental album, *The Winter Mission*, a truly personal and insular journey for him over the course of two years. He started from scratch, shut out a lot of musical inspirations he used in the past, and knew from jump street that he wanted no overdubbing and the album to feel like one player, playing in a single room.

"For literally thousands of years, that's how we experienced music," he says. "It was one person with an instrument in a room. I started to think that it's really important to acknowledge that. That kind of lost art, and I think it's important for musicians to get to know themselves that way, too."

For the actual composing and *The Winter Mission* playing sessions, Barr took a more omniscient, bird-in-the-sky approach.



Brad Barr

Brightie Henry

"I wanted to answer the question 'What do I want to hear myself play?' If I was watching myself in concert, what should it sound like?" he says.

The result is a hypnotic, raw and unpredictable sonic journey, separate from anything Barr has ever done. There's moments of stillness, and an unprocessed intimacy in the strumming and melodies from his guitar. There are also moments of stark alien distortion, mixed in with soft tremolo-y guitar. And throughout all of it, an underlying theme is present. The number 216. Many of the songs on *The Winter Mission*, "Untouchable Number," "Cleveland, Ohio," "Ancient Calendars," "Magic Square," "Prayer Beads," are all references to the numerical, cultural and mystical significance of 216. But the song that speaks of Barr's origins with 216 is the second track on *The Winter Mission*,

"Your Dad's Awake."

"So it was me and seven friends of mine just really beaming on acid in my friend's basement. So we're having an acid trip and someone says 'Your dad's awake. It's 2:16 and you dad's awake,'" Barr says.

Little did he know that 216 would follow him and seep into other parts of his life.

"It's sort of been a part of a shared mythology with a certain group of friends of mine when we were teenagers and just sort of carried through my life," Barr says. "When I went to look for something personal to unify the music, that number sort of had this mystical property to it and seemed like a way to tie it all together."

# Cyberpunk desert



BY STEPHAN BOISSONNEAULT

Since their debut in 2011, the local dark electronic bass/dubstep music trio Black Tiger Sex Machine (commonly referred to as BTSM) has been obsessed with a coherent aesthetic in their music, art and live experience. With their latest album, *Once Upon a Time in Cyberworld*, they are expanding it even further.

This obsession with making sure all aspects of the show and music flow has been a successful one for members Marc-André Chagnon, Julien Maranda and Patrick Barry. BTSM has sold out the iconic Red Rocks Amphitheater back in October 2021, has toured over 200 venues in South Korea and headlined and played some of the biggest world festivals including Tomorrowlands, Lollapalooza and EDC Las Vegas.

From the illuminated tiger helmets they wear live to the overarching narrative they have been working on for just shy of a decade, science fiction has always been the glue that holds their creations together. But in order to understand the narrative impetus for *Once Upon a Time in Cyberworld*, we need to dive a bit into the BTSM universe.

Every album since *Welcome to Our Church* has taken place in a dystopian, post-apocalyptic world, ripe with chaos and technological advancements. This is the literal movie backdrop experience that plays behind the members of BTSM live.

Until the 2020 *Futuristic Thriller* release, there was no real protagonist for fans to follow in the BTSM universe. This is why BTSM created Naomi, a girl trapped in 2058, where a mad scientist, Kannibalen, (named after the real-life BTSM label) is creating AI zombies.

“The world really just goes apeshit and nothing is controlled anymore. The AI zombies are just on the loose trying to kill humans — it’s just a free for all,” says Maranda.

Luckily Naomi is what is called a “connected fighter,” and can control a giant BTSM mech to fight off the AI zombies and Dr. Kannibalen. However, near the end of the movie experience, she begins to lose the battle. This brings us to Chapter Two and the world of *Once Upon a Time in Cyberworld*.

“Think of this one as a cyberpunk spaghetti western,” says Maranda. “The songs from beginning to end, the titles, the lyrics, all of it comes down to this kind of dystopian future; this broken world, but there’s this sense of utopia. There’s

this sense that maybe something better is coming.”

Musically, *Once Upon a Time in Cyberworld*, features the most vocal guest spots on a BTSM album, and for good reason. When BTSM was creating it, the trio knew they wanted the album to stand on its own, outside of the tour. Touring obviously wasn’t looking that bright with the ongoing pandemic.

“We wanted lots of vocalists we have worked with in the past to help tell the story,” says Maranda. “And now that we’re going back on tour in the U.S. ... Canada is still very uncertain. We decided to really put efforts into creating this blending of Chapter Two through the live video experience. I’m directing the next video and I think it’s going to have an interesting effect on people.”

The live show is extremely important to the very essence of what BTSM is and it’s safe to say Maranda and his bandmates thrive off the energy.

“We do lots of live remixing and the sampling can really change every night, but it’s insane sometimes because the structure of the song itself controls the visuals and the lights,” Maranda says. “You basically have to be a director, musician and fan at the same time.”



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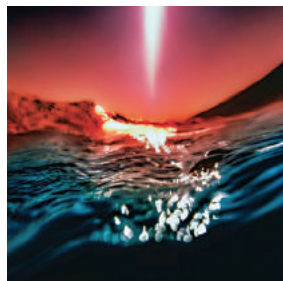


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Les Louanges, *Crash* (Bonsound)  
Anointed arbiter of 20-something Quebec mid-fi coolness after *La nuit est une panthère*, Lévis's Vincent Roberge hones in on what he does best for a follow-up that dials back the youthful exuberance and focuses inward towards safer, smooth studio songcraft. Through no fault of his own, there's been a tidal wave of vaguely yacht-y, jazzy sonic dilettantes bubbling to the surface in this province, but those beachcombers lack the pure writing chops and long-form vision demonstrated here. Hard to imagine a suite of "Qu'est-ce que tu m'fais" to "Chérie" — full of finesse, knowing references, irresistible lite funk and earned dabbles — coming from another idiosyncratic auteur. 8.5/10 Trial Track: "Chérie" (Erik Leijon)



Bonobo, *Fragments* (Ninja Tune)  
Leave something unbroken too long, and it will eventually need fixing. British producer Simon Green, best known as Bonobo, has returned with his seventh studio album, *Fragments*, released exactly five years and a day after its predecessor, *Migration*.

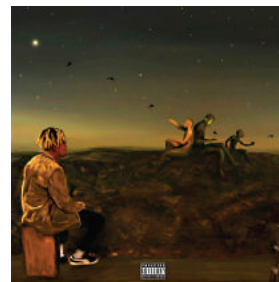
Green's trademark emphasis on lushness, texture and stirring instrumentals — with ambient, deep house and various international genres as guideposts — are on full display once again, even if the results aren't always as compelling as he's capable of. That's not to say *Fragments* doesn't have its shining moments, however: the Jordan Rakei-featuring "Shadows" is one of Green's best vocally-driven tracks to date, and "Otomo" marries Bulgarian choir chants with one of Bonobo's most percussive, hard-hitting beats ever. But on the whole, the album feels a touch too safe musically, particularly after such a long gap between albums. While *Fragments* is another solid addition to his kaleidoscopic musical canon, Green will need to emerge from his comfort zone and take his sound in bolder, riskier directions next time. 7/10 Trial Track: "Shadows (feat. Jordan Rakei)" (Dave MacIntyre)



never strays far from anxiety, addiction and death. That's what gifted lyricist and prolific freestyler Juice WRLD,

JUICE WRLD,  
*Fighting Demons* (Interscope)  
This second posthumous collection (and fourth studio album) from the departed rapper arrives with more purpose and cohesion than its 2020 predecessor *Legends Never Die*. It's no cosmic coincidence that the subject matter here

who died needlessly in December of 2019 of a ghastly (and very public) overdose, was really good at. There's no joy in listening to him predict his fate, again. But as legacy releases go, *Fighting Demons* is produced and arranged with careful attention to honouring its author's spirit. His integrity, character and talent are showcased to align this effort more closely with his debut and sophomore, finding a sonic consistency that *Legends* failed to privilege. There are more legitimately worthy moments than not to reflect on here, dark though they may be. 6.5/10 Trial Track: "Doom" (Darcy MacDonald)



a few glimmering moments, namely "Today" with Gunna and "Sinister" with Lil Wayne, *From a Birds Eye View* feels more like a lecture than it does a breezy listen. From a lyrical standpoint, Cordae is an incredibly gifted wordsmith. However, it is hard not to feel like his messaging is more forced and harrowing this time. 6/10 Trial Track: "Today" (feat. Gunna) (Mr. Wavvy)

Cordae, *From a Birds Eye View* (Atlantic)

Every artist fears the sophomore slump. *The Lost Boy*, Cordae's 2019 breakout, established him as the mightiest of his YBN crew, a rapper who could be as playful as he was meaningful. On his second go-around, the joy seems lost. Aside from

## :hammer of the mods

BY JOHNSON CUMMINS

It's finally here! *Fleurs du Mal*, the unsung opus by one of punk rock's most dangerous bands, the Viletones, finally gets its well deserved place, forever burned into virgin vinyl for the first time.

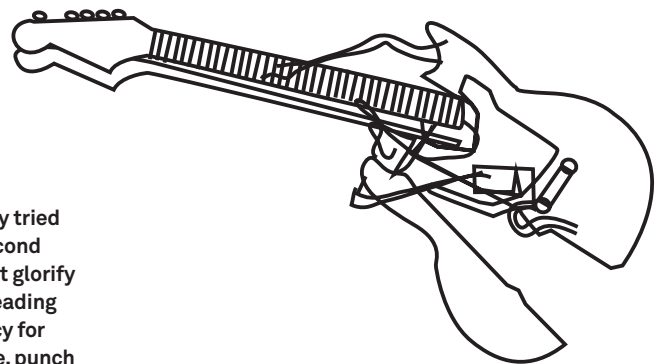
Oddly enough, it's a yank label, Artifix Records down Californi—a way, that finally got the rights to press up this Canadian punk classic. True that da 'tones did leave two completely snotty, young and loud seven-inches in their wake, but it's this live to two-track recording that really showed all the teeth-gnashing white heat that these Toronto punks could generate. All 17 songs are first-take stormers with warts and all, but the record hits like a fistful of nickels.

In our Lord's punk year of the spring of nineteen seventy fucking seven, these acne-ridden and bottle-slashing warriors entered a mild-mannered studio in Toronto and scorched the earth with absolutely killer punker lashings including the ultimate punk rock song of all time "Screamin' Fist," which rightfully starts off this set. With a pummelling bass that dares to overshadow "Ace

of Spades," things just ratchet up from there. Like any tried and true punk killer, the song barely makes it to a second chord as poster pin-up punker Steven Leckie (will not glorify his "punk" moniker at the time here) screams as if heading up a gang fight. If you have even a slight passing fancy for dangerous and raw rock 'n' roll, you need to get online, punch in "Screaming Fist" and hold on for dear life.

To say that this collection of 17 blasters is about as good as punk rock ever got would be completely accurate BUT before I give Leckie and company the royal reach-around here, this ain't all peaches and cream. First of all, this barnstormer collection was previously released on CD in 1994 under the title *Taste of Honey*, which, quite frankly, is sonically superior to its recent vinyl counterpart. Mastered by none other than Chris Spedding and released with first-wave punk reissue label Other People's Music, the highs are a little bit more crisp, the lows dig a little deeper and the general punch just inflicts more damage.

Also, you can still find copies of *Taste of Honey* on Discogs for about the same amount of scratch as *Fleurs du Mal*. Don't get me wrong as I am definitely a vinyl guy and think CDs are reserved for shut-ins that use Canadian flags for drapes and milk crates for drawers, but after A/B-ing between the two, I'll be reaching for the CD from now on. With a bit of digging, I did find out that *Fleurs du Mal* was mastered from a safety copy while *Taste of Honey* sounds like it was directly from the master tape.



Now that I've pissed on this punker parade, I will admit I am still stoked to have this nugget on vinyl, along with amazing packaging with an insert that easily overshadows the graphically thrown together '94 CD. Obviously overseen by Leckie, it features about 30 pictures of the lead singer in punk poses while only about three pics of members and chief songwriters Freddy Pompeii, Chris Haight while drummer Motor X is almost blotted from the Viletones legacy. What is really going to make this sell like hot cakes to the unsuspecting punker, though, is the front cover featuring a picture of Leckie swinging a chain in the middle of the dancefloor while unsuspecting gawkers clambered to get out of the man's way. Totally punk, Duder.

CURRENT OBSESSION: The Viletones, *Fleurs du mal*  
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# film

## Short and sweet



Les Grandes Claques



Frimas

BY JUSTINE SMITH

Momentum only seems to be building for Quebec short cinema. Following in the footsteps of films like *Marguerite* (2017) and *Fauve* (2018) (among others), in recent years the Best Live-Action Short category at the Oscars routinely features homegrown talent. With the official Oscar announcement less than a week away, two Quebec shorts are shortlisted among 15 total contenders; *Les Grandes Claques* and *Frimas*. Two radically different films, both are vying for a spot at the Oscars.

“Short films are far more than just prep for a feature,” Annie St. Pierre explains. “It’s its own format, really modern, where people have an opportunity to be really creative.” With her film, *Les grandes claques*, St. Pierre brings us back to Christmas Eve, 1983. A young girl with divorced parents feels torn between childish impulses and a need to protect her parents’ feelings. “All artists, I think, have these little moments or ideas that obsess them. For me, it’s these moments of transition,” St. Pierre says.

Annie St. Pierre has been working for years in the Quebec cinema as a producer for Denis Côté, and as a director and occasionally an actress. “I’m not a real actress. I only do it for Matthew Rankin,” she laughs. “We’re like spiritual siblings. If he asks me to do it, I will, and I will be completely devoted to his vision.” Even her limited experience, though, informed her work. “It really emphasized to me how vulnerable you need to be to act.” In directing the children, in particular, she emphasized authenticity over memorization. “It’s important,” she says,

“when working or writing for children to treat them as they are, not how you imagine them to be.”

Impacted by the pandemic, the natural life of a film like *Les grandes claques* has been disrupted, but that hasn’t dulled its shine. “Even with the pressures of the pandemic,” St. Pierre explained, “all the festivals, distributors and artists working in short film stepped up.” On the eve of the first anniversary of her short film’s premiere at Sundance, St. Pierre seemed optimistic. Among other things, she credits her distributor, which she believes gives the film the structure “to be discovered across the world.” Her movie has been screened at over 70 festivals.

A champion of local cinema, St. Pierre emphasizes the importance of local distributors and cheerleaders that have helped Quebec cinema shine internationally. “I never expected to be in this position,” St. Pierre says about her potential Oscar run, “but there are so many people who’ve already laid the groundwork to make it happen.” Along with distributors, she also mentions Danny Lennon and his festival *Prends ça court!* who travelled the world to really carve out a space for Quebec film. Other filmmakers paved the way as well. “While you’re making your film, you have so much control, but when it’s finished, you lose control over how it’s received. I am extremely lucky to be in this position.”

\*\*\*

“If I’m going to spend years writing, developing, financing and shooting a movie, I need to have some kind of emotional connection to it,” says Marianne Farley. No stranger to the Oscars, her previous short *Marguerite* screened in competition years ago. With *Frimas*, she portrays a not-so-distant future where abortion is illegal, and a woman takes a harrowing ride in the back of a meat truck to have the procedure done.

“It’s crazy to me that we’re in 2022 and still talking about this,” says Farley. She started writing the film in 2018. There were already rumours that south of the border, *Roe v. Wade* might be overturned. Due to the delays from the pandemic, the film was only released last year. The release coincided with some of the new, restrictive Texas Abortion Law and Mississippi’s attempt to reverse *Roe v. Wade*. “A lot of women think their rights are never going to be taken away from them, but the reality is totally different,” she says. Setting the film in a familiar future as part of driving the point home that this doesn’t exist in some distant reality — it’s happening right now.

“I like my stories local,” Farley says. It was important for Farley that the film be recognizable as Quebec. The film opens with a shot of the Canadian Malting Plant along the Lachine Canal and the unmistakable pink house that adorns it. While Farley is quick to emphasize that we aren’t in the same situation as the States in Canada, that doesn’t mean it can’t change. It also doesn’t mean, she clarifies, that many Canadians don’t struggle to have access to abortion, particularly when they’re from rural communities and due to the strain of the pandemic. “I wanted to make a film that was kind of set in the future, but I didn’t want people to go, ‘Maybe that’s down the line,’” she says. “I wanted people to really feel that this could happen tomorrow.”

When Farley went to the Oscars for her short film *Marguerite*, it helped put things in perspective. “I realized how extremely fortunate we are in Quebec. We have support,” she says. The funding for short films comes with its own set of rules, time constraints and expectations but it beats finding private funding. Farley tries not to look at any predictions. “I don’t know what the outcome is going to be, and to be honest, I watched all 15 films, and they’re incredibly different. I can only believe in the story that I’m telling, and hope that other people will feel moved by it.”

# On Screen



*The Worst Person in the World*



*Jackass Forever*



*Uncharted*



*National Champions*

BY JUSTINE SMITH

The movies are back (again), and with winter still blustering, it's a perfect time to make your way to the cinema to catch up on great early-year schlock and Oscar season leftovers.

Let's get the most essential February release out of the way: the much-delayed *Jackass Forever* will be back just in time for Quebec cinemas reopening on Feb. 7. A decade after their last film, the boys are back in another boundary-pushing entry in the popular franchise. With most of the guys pushing their 50s, this may be the last time we see Steve-O and Johnny Knoxville jumping into large bodies of water in a grocery cart. Don't miss out!

With the Super Bowl bringing another NFL season to an end, maybe you're hungry for some football. Coming to VOD Feb. 8, *National Champions*, starring JK Simmons and Stephan James is about a player's strike that happens hours before the big game. Ignited by the star quarterback, the players are fighting for fair compensation, equality and respect for putting their bodies on the line to enrich the school.

Video games rarely translate well to the big screen, but who knows, maybe this will be the exception. The much-

anticipated *Uncharted* (Feb. 18) film, based on the popular video-game series, also hits the big screens this winter. With Tom Holland as Nathan Drake and Mark Wahlberg as Sully, the film takes them on an adventure searching for "the greatest treasure never found."

Kenneth Branagh returns as Hercule Poirot in his latest Agatha Christie adaptation, *Death on the Nile* (Feb. 11). This murder mystery features an all-star cast including Gal Gadot, Armie Hammer, Russell Brand and Annette Bening.

Are you looking for something a little less mainstream? Catch up with some hopefuls for the international Oscar category with *The Worst Person in the World* (Feb. 11) and *Compartment No. 6* (Feb. 18). *The Worst Person in the World* is a vibrant portrait of a generation, a tragi-comedy about a young woman's trials and tribulations over four years. *Compartment No. 6* follows a young Finnish woman on an unpleasant train ride from Moscow to the Arctic port of Murmansk. Both films are easily among the year's best and well worth seeing on the big screen.

While not Spain's official selection for the Oscars, Pedro Almodóvar is also back on the big screen with his latest, *Parallel Mothers* (Feb. 11), starring longtime collaborator Penélope Cruz. The Spanish filmmaker, well known for his portraits of independent women and complex family

dynamics, returns with the story of two unmarried women who have become pregnant by accident and meet as they are about to give birth in the same hospital.

With the Oscars on the way (the nominations will be announced on Feb. 8), you will have an opportunity to watch all the Oscar-nominated short films at Cinéma du Parc starting Feb. 25. Two Quebec films are currently in contention: *Frimas* and *Les Grandes Claques*, in the best live-action short category.

Love awards season, but you've exhausted all the Oscar hopefuls? *Lost Illusions* (Feb. 25), based on a novel by Honoré de Balzac, will be available across Quebec at the end of the month. With 10 nominees at the Césars (France's Oscar), it's a contender in many categories, including a best supporting actor nomination for Xavier Dolan. Dolan's nomination and the multiple nominations for *Aline* (the unofficial Celine Dion biopic) spell out a big year for Quebec at the French awards show.

Cinephiles should also keep eyes and ears open for films initially slated or had limited releases in December before Omicron shut down theatres. *Licorice Pizza*, *Nightmare Alley*, *Red Rocket*, *Drive My Car* and *Spiderman: No Way Home* (among others) will likely be seeing a second chance at life on the big screen.

# arts

## Of art and sexy things



BY SAVANNAH STEWART

Flesh and ideas — that's what the magazine *Rat Chat* is delivering to readers.

The budding publication blending art, culture and sexuality through thoughtful articles and striking photography had a first issue released in October, and it's just getting started.

"This idea of sex and sexuality will wind its way through all future issues," says Nora Rosenthal, editor-in-chief of *Rat Chat* (and former *Cult MTL* arts editor). "It's like a dinner party where nothing is off the table. But it's also very important to me that it not exclusively be a smut publication."

Rather, *Rat Chat* is committed to exploring societal and artistic realities through their intersection with sex. Like the theme of the first issue: family.

Rosenthal, who recently moved back to Ontario after living in Montreal for years, says her interest in sexuality as it relates to family life came from her and her husband's experience moving in with another couple for a polyamorous relationship.

"It got me thinking, what does it mean to be thinking about these ideas but within an entirely new family structure?"

She acknowledges that some might find it strange to explore this theme in a publication featuring sexual imagery.

"I think that is still a giant taboo in the idea that you can be a parent and have a sex life and that those two cells can exist within the same person," she says. "I see no reason why they shouldn't be in the same publication."

An example she points to is how characters in a novel can have family lives and sex lives that are chronicled in the same story.

"The characters can have multiple different lives. They have family lives on one page and they have sex lives on another page and this is not seen as being somehow appalling, it's part of the narrative of one person's life."

Photographer Ariana Molly from Montreal has photographs featured in the magazine's first issue, including the cover shot, which her mother posed for.

"It was my first magazine cover ever and on top of that, I got to photograph my mom," says Molly. "It was very special and I think it's something that I will definitely cherish for a long time to come."

*Rat Chat*'s cover shows Molly's mother posing with her partner, her best friend who she fell in love with during the pandemic.

"It was definitely the pandemic love story that I think all the queer kids need to hear," she laughs.

Other Montreal-based contributors in the first issue include Marcela Huerta, Hamza Abouelouafaa, Bea Scharf-Pierzchala and Caroline Desilets

As a portrait photographer, Molly often photographs sex workers. Some of that work is also in the magazine. Molly had felt some hesitation at the thought of sharing images of a sex worker to be published, but the subject of the photos accepted to have the photos included.

"I am really grateful to the individual who gave me permission to publish those images in the first place. I feel like it's a gift to me," she explains. "I don't think any of my clients should ever feel obligated to give me the right to print their image, especially when it comes to erotic content."

Because of the stigma that persists surrounding creators of sexual content, Rosenthal was expecting writers and photographers to express hesitance about having their work in a magazine with explicit content.

"But I didn't anticipate that people who make explicit content would also be nervous about putting their work in something that's not exclusively devoted to explicit content, that they also really needed to feel safe in this intercultural mashup," says Rosenthal.

She had numerous conversations with contributors to discuss the content and ensure everyone was comfortable.

"I think as soon as you get into individual culture, into photography, people get very worried about how their piece will be perceived visually and somatically next to somebody else's image."

The magazine is available for sale in nine countries, and can also be bought online through its website. In Montreal, it can be found at Café Odessa. It will also soon be sold online through the PHI Centre.

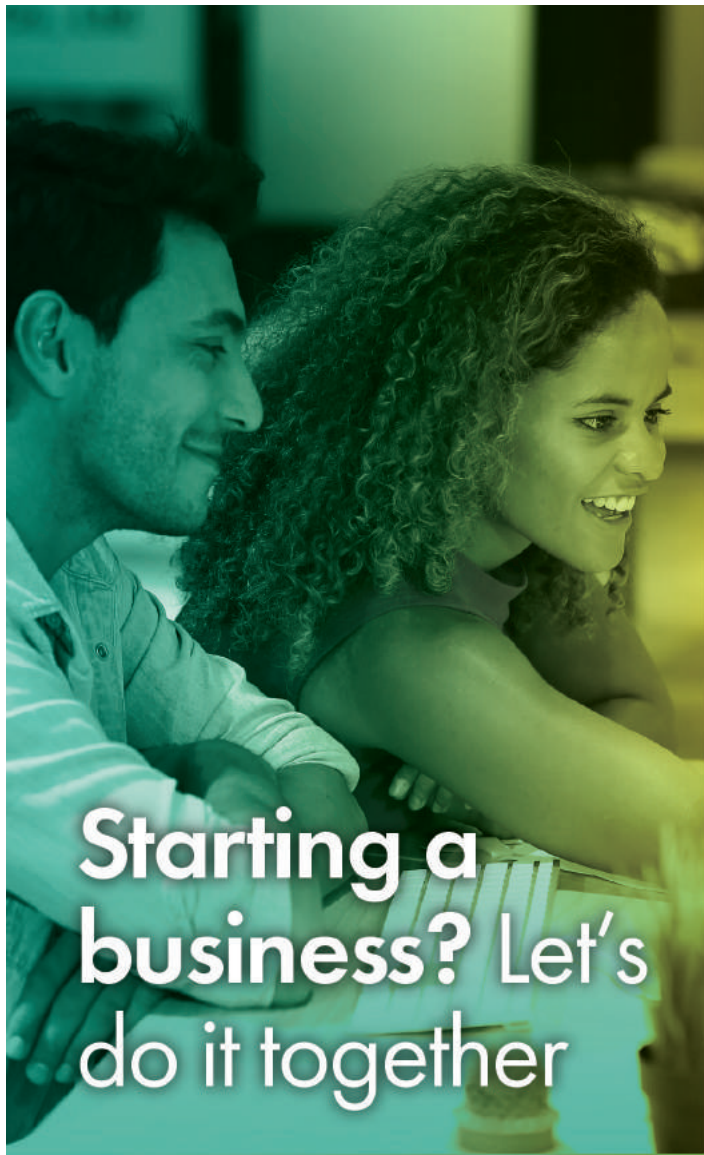
"Nothing feels better than seeing a piece of work exist outside of the social media bubble or the digital space," says Molly of the magazine's print-only distribution. "It's definitely become harder and harder to see your work actually produced in a way that it's intended for in a sense and so that was significant for me."

The theme and timeline of the second issue have yet to be determined, but Rosenthal is very eager to hear from new sources and contributors.

"I'm really looking forward to getting other voices to be a part of this issue," she says. "I'm willing to talk to anybody, to hear from anybody."

For anything new and thrilling to be coming out in these trying times is a huge positive for Molly.

"It's a welcome relief, to have something that is exciting happen. I'm definitely grateful for that."



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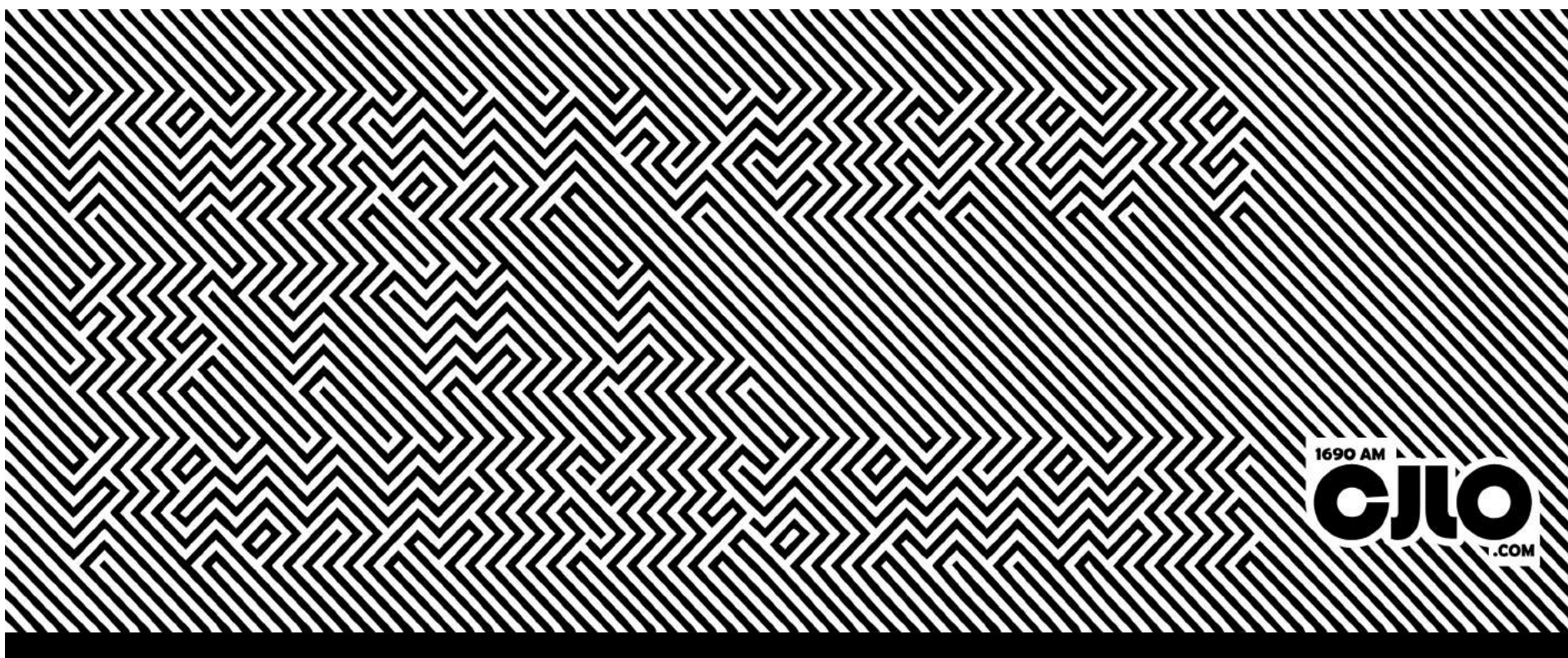
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## On pause



Lawrence Fafard

Kee Avil

BY RYAN DIDUCK

Tim Hecker, "Starting Over Again," *The North Water* (Original Score) (Lakeshore Records)

There's a poignant scene in Werner Herzog's 2007 documentary, *Encounters at the End of the World*. A group of Antarctic researchers trains to navigate the inevitable whiteout conditions of a winter blizzard. Their instructor mocks up a crude simulation: white five-gallon buckets are placed upon their heads to mimic full-frontal snowsqualls. A knotted rope tethers the party together.

The exercise is simply meant for the group to move a distance of about 50 metres. But just as the gang embarks, its leader veers off course, pulling the entire crew along. Within a few steps, they're already heading in the opposite direction, blind and blinder. This is called "cascading failure" — an early mistake becomes embedded into standard practice and exponentially misguides momentum thereafter. Is this what's been happening since March 15, 2020? They've asked us to listen to science, to follow logic. Have we been following faulty logic from the get-go?

Kee Avil, "saf," *Crease* (Constellation Records)

Governments tell us we've been "fighting a war." Let's carry this stupid military metaphor further. If you're fighting a war and run out of troops, what do you do? Recruit more troops. If a war breaks out and you didn't have a big enough army, it's due to poor planning, not an overwhelming war. All wars are overwhelming.

What you don't do in battle is constantly try to evade the enemy. At some point, you've got to turn and fight. If propping up a fragile healthcare system is the only reason left for government restrictions, then another solution is to fortify the healthcare system rather than destroy the entire society that built it and every other thing.

Should we, as Ezekiel J. Emanuel once argued, encourage premature deaths? It makes sense if the rationale is to prevent hospitals from being overrun, instead of ensuring every 87-year-old makes it to 88. What's the endgame? To never exceed X deaths in Y time? If that's the case, this is a pandemic of accounting, and "flattening the curve" means spreading out the statistics to make whoever holds power appear competent.

Racine, "Grosso," *Amitiés* (Danse Noire)

Having Tom Hanks as an early COVID sufferer should have been a PR coup. Everyone should have fallen in line. America's Dad fell ill... Forrest Gump! Paul Edgecomb! Woody! This was serious, guys!

But Hanks wasn't really that sick — in the media, he was quoted as feeling "wiped" — and he went on to host SNL at Home a few weeks later. Instead of succumbing to AIDS, he landed it in the Hudson, if you will.

Implicitly, Hanks gave us the secret key to this virus: get infected, get sick, quarantine, recover, and move on with life. Hanks didn't die. Hanks didn't get Long COVID. He didn't even get a Brain Cloud — sorry, I mean Brain Fog. If the pandemic began at 8, Hanksy was in hair and makeup for *My Gift: A Christmas Special From Carrie Underwood*, by noon.

This oversight might have cost Control its cakewalk consolidation: had Tom Hanks died, I guarantee the entire world would be vaxxed. David Icke would be vaxxed. I go so far as to blame everything that happened subsequent to July 2020 — anti-vaxxers, conspiracists, supply-chain issues, whatever this Kardashian-Davidson thing is — on Tom Hanks continuing to live. I guess sometimes the past just catches up with you, whether you want it to or not.

Tony Price, "Learning From Las Vegas," *Mark VI* (Telephone Explosion Records)

I recently got a travel writing job that involves targeting demographics of which I'm not a part — lots of pieces aimed at boomers in RVs and millennials with mad money.

I was telling a young friend that I felt like Rodney Dangerfield, writing for millennials. She didn't know who Rodney Dangerfield was, so I said instead that I felt like Steve Buscemi — "How do you do, fellow kids?" (Even my references for being outdated are outdated!)

The real gift of that job, though, is communicating with people who are very different. Because life is about having to relate to people who aren't you, and still trying to make the planet a better place. This world's going to need empathy and plenty of it.

Actors Artificial, "Immaterial Transience Looming in Material Debris," *Untimeliness & Default Settings* (Superpang)

I've been thinking of all the wonderful things that would never have been had they happened during the COVID era. That romantic scene in *When Harry Met Sally*, for example — the one where Billy Crystal goes over to Meg Ryan's apartment to console her while she's sick. She's tossing used Kleenexes all over her bedroom. That would surely be cut as a public hazard today. But it would be Rom-Com history's loss.

Another thing that wouldn't exist is Montreal. Founding Mother Jeanne Mance in 1657 made her second voyage back from France amidst the Bubonic Plague. I mean, the Plague! Only four women survived. But did they stop the journey? No they didn't. They forged on and built this beautiful city, however fractured, however fucked. I love this place. And now, I fear we're robbing the future of something just as sacred.

*The views and opinions expressed in this column are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of Cult MTL.*

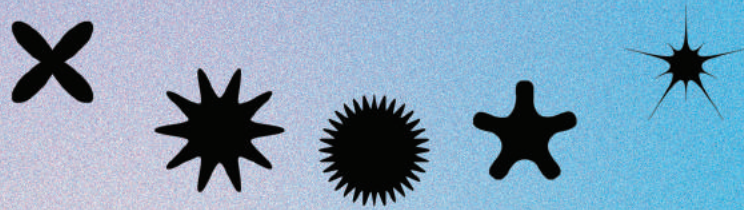
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