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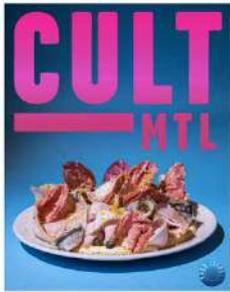
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Bar St. Denis is one of 25 restaurants featured in this year's Restaurant Guide, the centrepiece of our annual Food Issue.

Cover photo (of roast pork with white anchovies) by Matthieu Goyer

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# : best buds



BY DAVE MACINTYRE

Hello my fellow potheads, and welcome to the first Best Buds of 2023!

Before we begin, though, I have to share some unfortunate news to readers that I may not be publishing this column quite as often going forward. This is because I've decided to start taking more tolerance breaks from weed. It's not a New Year's resolution, just something I've been debating doing for a while now.

Don't get me wrong: I still love smoking it, and I still want to keep this column going, both to help readers separate the high-quality SQDC offerings from the mediocre ones, and to promote Quebec growers in a province where it's harder to secure a permit than it is elsewhere. I smoke every day as it is, and I just don't want my habit getting to levels that are too unhealthy. Smoking weed can be kind of a double-edged sword as far as mental health goes, and right now it's starting to affect it for the worse, so I need to control it a bit more.

My plan is to do Best Buds bimonthly rather than every month, so my next column might not come until the April issue. In the meantime, though, I've decided to smoke one sativa and one indica for this month's

column, after what feels like years of mostly just reviewing hybrids.

I smoked both while watching parts of *Marley* on Netflix, because what better reason does one have to smoke weed than to do it while watching a documentary about the life of someone who championed it tirelessly? I didn't get through the whole thing (it's two and a half hours long!), so I won't provide a full review or a rating for the film, but I'll talk about how much the strains heightened my viewing experience. So let's get together, feel alright and dive into these reviews!

## CRUZY MEDELLIN SATIVA

This earthy and fruity-smelling sativa definitely smells nice, and luckily it hits nicely once you inhale it — like caramel in plant form, almost (though it doesn't actually taste or smell like it). I'm not sure where the connection to Medellin, Colombia comes in with the name, but this is some really nice stuff regardless. Grown in Puslinch, ON (wherever the hell that is), it's a fairly uplifting high that matches especially well with music.

In my case, I smoke it as I'm bumping the new SG Lewis album — which I've also reviewed for *Cult MTL* this month — that had just dropped at midnight while I was taking notes for this. Smooth, bassy, funk-driven dance music makes for a nice pairing with this strain. The high itself isn't as enduring as I would've liked, as you can sometimes feel yourself

coming down ever so gradually after you smoke it. But it's pretty powerful whilst at its peak, and definitely suits the *Marley* documentary — more on that below.

## FLEURONS MENU CANTINE INDICA

Just like the doctor ordered, this Vaudreuil-Dorion-grown strain is an indica that'll keep you pretty couch-locked for a pretty long time. It'll make your legs feel heavier at times, and it'll probably make your eyes feel a bit tingly like it did mine. And if you're not careful, expect yourself to fall down quite the YouTube and/or Netflix rabbit hole! The buds are dry, but the head high you get is worth the lack of moisture. Even if going overboard on it can really make you cough up a lung, I found this indica to be quite enjoyable. It's also a more enduring high than the Medellin sativa is, and decent for bedtime purposes, too — it won't knock you out, but will make you feel more at peace.

It also makes for an enjoyable watch of the first hour or so of the Bob Marley doc while I'm taking a bath. The film has some pretty cool archival footage, even if the b-roll tends to drag on too long at times. Many talking heads, including members of the Wailers, are seen talking about Bob and the potential he had from a young age. For example, we hear snippets of songs he made when he was just 16. We also find out he used to live and work in... Wilmington, Delaware?? Yeah, bet you didn't know that either. I'll still have to finish the movie, but it looks like an excellent window into the life and legacy of reggae's biggest global icon — and as you can imagine, it goes very well with some nice, long tokes.

The sativa: 8/10  
The indica: 8.5/10

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# food

## Fine dining is dead — long live fine dining



Guy Lavigneur

BY CLAYTON SANDHU

Fine dining is dead — or at least that's the general conclusion being drawn from the relatively recent news that René Redzepi and his world-renowned restaurant Noma will be closing for good at the end of next year.

Let me just get this out of the way early: The point of this article isn't to dissect the value of Noma or Redzepi or the Michelin Guide. To me, it's always been clear that ethically running restaurants at the scale of places like Noma is next to impossible. What's fascinating, however, is that the forces that have been bubbling away beneath the surface for years are now affecting even the most revered and seemingly iron-clad restaurants of the world. Noma's end isn't the cause of the decline of fine dining — it's a symptom. More than that, it presents an interesting opportunity for reflection, allowing us to ask ourselves what fine dining should be moving forward and if there is a place for it in the future of restaurants in our city.

There's a second thing that needs making clear, something that was pointed out with the sort of matter-of-factness Jason Morris, the executive chef of Marcus at the Four Seasons, is known for: "There are no restaurants like Noma in Montreal." And I get his point. If we look at Noma as the definition of fine dining, then we can't lose what we never had, but Noma is just one interpretation of the format. While we may not have a restaurant that resembles Noma, I wouldn't be alone in my belief that fine dining — or at least, the Montreal version of fine dining — is alive and well in this city.

### THE INSTITUTION

Having not been present for the golden era of traditional fine dining in Montreal, I thought it would be best to consult the woman who spent the bulk of her career critiquing the very best restaurants in the city: cookbook author and former restaurant critic for *The Gazette*, Lesley Chesterman.

"Fine dining, when I started restaurant reviewing in 1998, was still these restaurants called *nappes blanches*. Back then, you could almost (separate) the casual restaurants from the formal restaurants by the tablecloths." That's sort of the caricature of a fine dining restaurant — a beautiful, if a bit ostentatious, room with white tablecloths where tuxedoed waiters cook filet mignon, make caesar salads tableside and pour bottles of aged St. Emilion to jacketed guests. "At the time, this is what fine-dining was really all about — it had to be a certain level of service. It's really true that all these waiters used to wear tuxedos."

As Chesterman points out, "When we talk about fine dining, the food is only one part of the equation. A big part of the fine dining equation is service. That's why, if you look at Michelin-starred restaurants — they really need to have great service. The meals that are worth hundreds and hundreds of dollars are the ones like at Bocuse, you're standing in the place where (Paul Bocuse) changed the world — it's about so much more than just the food. In fact, you could even argue that in a place like Bocuse, the food comes way after the service and the setting."

In many ways, traditional fine dining, which focuses on place and experience above all, is the opposite of a place like Noma, which is completely chef-centric. It's true that the service at Noma is famously exceptional but the restaurant's reputation is inextricably linked to one chef and his elaborate creations that have been painstakingly executed by a team of unpaid interns.

### CASUAL FINE-DINING

What Noma and traditional fine dining restaurants have in common, however, is that they are expensive, require an inordinate amount of staff and aim to produce a dining experience that is equal parts gastronomic and experiential. In my time as a cook and as a food writer, I've found that the places that consistently garner the lion's share of praise in Montreal don't really fall into those categories. Enter casual fine dining — the "jumbo shrimp" of restaurant classifications. While the terminology might be a bit clunky, I do think it's hard to put a precise label on a restaurant like Joe Beef or Liverpool House — especially in their heyday. When you remove the ostentation of the dining room and replace it with the décor of a Normandy fisherman turned poet, the result is a masterful blending of high and low.

The chef de cuisine of Liverpool House during this period was Ariel Schor, who now co-owns Restaurant Beba with his brother Pablo. During the 2010s, the cooking at Liverpool and Joe Beef was at an insanely high level. Anthony Bourdain had put the group on the map and Momofuku's David Chang had claimed Joe Beef as his favourite restaurant in the world despite his friend René Redzepi's restaurant Noma ranking #1. As Ari sees it, "I don't think there was ever really a massive foothold — not in my time anyway — of the really high end, tasting-menu-only kind of restaurants. There was a more relaxed atmosphere to dining as a whole. I personally haven't been to many of the tasting menu restaurants here — I haven't been to Toqué. It's not my way to eat. I think that resonates with a lot of people, both young and old."

Thanks to chefs like Ari, Montreal was redefining fine dining. They were proving that it didn't have to be stuffy, fussy, precious or reserved. It could be festive, romantic and larger than life, provided that it was executed with a level of precision and intentionality that kept the food in

league with the very best restaurants anywhere. Quality products and quality sourcing, in Schor's view, is essential, "(Contemporary fine dining) is so ego-driven. It's like, 'look at what I can do' instead of 'look at this fine product.'"

Beba, Schor's current restaurant, is all about the product. A neighbourhood restaurant in the heart of Verdun, Beba might not scream fine dining, but the quality of cooking, attention to detail and quality of ingredients are second to none. "There's no time like the present to break the mould. What's wrong with going to a neighbourhood you've never been to where the space is not big and it feels a little homey but you're getting fish that was flown in from Japan, or caviar or truffles? Fine dining, for me, can be wherever as long as the ingredients are of great quality."

### THE INNER WORKINGS

If we understand that fine dining isn't just one thing and that it is, above all, the result of a philosophical desire to elevate the dining experience beyond simple nourishment, then you begin to understand that the concept is malleable. Morris sees it this way: "Everyone has this idea that fine dining needs to have 40 staff members and half of them need to be unpaid. It's completely false. There are labour models that work. I'm in a completely unionized environment right now."

As the executive chef of a five-star hotel, Morris is responsible for serving breakfast, lunch and dinner to hundreds of guests seven days a week. It's not Noma, but the restaurant bears the name of celebrity chef Marcus Samuelsson, which means it carries a certain expectation. For his part, Morris oversees a team of 45 cooks who help make cooking at scale and maintaining the restaurant's standards possible. From Morris's perspective, the key to fine dining is rooted in team synergy.

"One of my most important metrics is to have a team that is over the top enthusiastic about improving every single day, about being clean and resourceful. Having a team that shares those values allows them to grow in unison — that's the magic and that's what I saw firsthand at Fantôme [*his first restaurant*]. There was this intangible feeling that I had about the team — it's the shared standard that allows them to constantly inch that standard higher and higher, and that, to me, is how you define fine dining."

To me, the picture Morris is beginning to paint feels like a natural blend of all the perspectives thus far: fine dining isn't just about the food but it's absolutely still about food — it's capturing a moment in time when a team is working together with intentionality to achieve something unique. The magic of fine dining is that it can be anywhere, it doesn't obey strict conventions nor is it defined by any one type of cuisine — it's about catching lightning in a bottle. Noma managed to do exactly that, but it took a model that relied on exploitation to achieve it.

Chesterman, in reference to Redzepi's claim that fair compensation was what did Noma in, acknowledges that the problem of paying equitable wages isn't unique to the great brigade kitchens of the world. "There are still some similarities with the reasons Redzepi (cites) for closing Noma that can relate to restaurants here. When he talks about giving fair salaries, that's a situation that's certainly a problem here."

My view is that as prices at restaurants continue to rise and that cooks continue to demand fair compensation for their work, the future of fine dining is likely going to experience a shift toward much smaller operations. But don't take that to mean reduced quality. As Morris points out, "There are restaurants in Japan and around the world that have two, three Michelin stars and have three people in the kitchen — and they're all getting paid." Fine dining, as I see it, is death-proof because as long as there are people with deep pockets and cooks with vision and creativity, there will be fine cuisine. How we define that, however, will remain in constant evolution.

So to say fine dining is dead is to miss the point of fine dining entirely — it's already died 1,000 deaths and come back 1,000 times more. I say good riddance to the brigades of the overworked and underpaid — I wasn't all that interested in what they were making anyway.

The chefs of today are experiencing a rare moment of change where they can collectively decide to reshape the industry. It's a responsibility that Morris is acutely aware of. "It's up to us and industry professionals to be creative in how we manage our teams, create our schedules and look at our business model. There is room for creativity in every aspect of our job — not just in the menu."

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# Lipstick on a pig

BY CLAYTON SANDHU

It's been over a decade since I last had a meal at Au Pied de Cochon. Since (the restaurant opened in 2001, Martin Picard's tribute to the culinary history and identity of Quebec has been considered a hallmark of Montreal's contemporary dining scene. Whether you are a fan or not, the imprint and legacy this restaurant has left on food in this province and, to some degree, the world, is undeniable.

When I was a young cook — somewhere around 2011 — Au Pied de Cochon (PDC) was aspirational to me. My reverence for it was so great that I remember feeling star-struck the first time I walked by the storefront on Duluth. My first time eating there was sensationally good — I had the infamous foie gras poutine which (alongside Joe Beef's foie gras Double-Down) counted among the most iconoclastic marriages of high and low that I had seen, and symbolized that era of food in Montreal. I also ate the duck-in-a-can and wrapped up my meal by gleefully devouring the maple cotton candy. The meal was unabashedly indulgent, rustic and decidedly of *here*, but most of all — it was delicious.

A year or so later, I came back with a friend whose goal it was to tackle the “PDC-cut” pork chop: a nearly three-inch thick slab of pork that needed a 45-minute cook time. Having learned my lesson the time before, I opted for something a hair more delicate — poached skate with hollandaise and black truffle. The chop was just as advertised, but cooked with great skill. My fish, it should go without saying, was rich but finessed, each element being thoughtful and balanced. To this day, it is the benchmark by which I compare all skate dishes. Two for two.

More than 10 years later, the restaurant scene has evolved considerably. Local products, seasonal cooking and respect for terroir are the norm. The indulgent, meat-driven fare on which PDC built its reputation has been eclipsed by vegetable-forward dining served in sensible portions. In the restaurant world of 2023, I wanted to know — what is Au Pied de Cochon now, and is it still relevant? One thing remains entirely consistent: it's busy. The restaurant that rose to international stardom, thanks to Anthony Bourdain, entrenched PDC as a destination for visiting food aficionados — but is it still any good? Joining me for this meal is one of my oldest friends, a cook who has worked in fine restaurants throughout the city and who, like me, counts Au Pied de Cochon as a major influence in their culinary career.

From the exterior, it was just as I remembered it. Walking in, however, changes were immediately apparent. Directly opposite the front door is a wall of potted plants displayed as though one was entering the garden section of Home Depot. It's not ugly, or distasteful — it just begs the question, “Why? What does this have to do with anything and why is it the first thing I see when I walk in?” You know you've arrived at the right place, however, by the giftshop-level of PDC merch and products on display as you wait. I find nothing wrong with restaurants (especially those who have built a reputation) creating alternative revenue streams but I didn't appreciate being sold my souvenir before I'd even sat down.

The very first misstep of the evening came when we opted to start with a pint of PDC's Pale Ale while perusing the extensive (I'd venture easily 500 references) wine list. Something fresh to whet the whistle while we select the right bottle to go with what promised to be an indulgent meal. We were mistakenly brought two pints of cider — no big deal, these things happen. We mentioned it to our server, who apologized and promptly returned with two pints of white beer. “They switched out the wrong keg and this is all I have.” Sensing her growing anxiety, we thanked her for her efforts, sent back the beers and ordered a bottle of sparkling rosé. Almost laughably, the wine was brought out at room temperature and stuck in a bucket



Clay Sandhu

of ice for 20 minutes to come to temperature. Again, these are the types of hiccups one would expect to see in the first few months of a brand new restaurant, but the fact that we waited, all said and done, nearly 40 minutes before a drink we ordered was finally in our glasses is borderline shameful. The wine itself, from Montreal-to-Burgundy transplant Patrick Piuze, is a vibrant display of crisp red berries, invigorating bubbles and that characteristic touch of saline minerality for which his wines are known (available at your local SAQ, too!). A fine pairing, we thought, for a meal beginning with salt-cod fritters, a blue cheese salad and PDC's famous foie gras nigiri.

First to arrive were the fritters. Five golden-brown nuggets were stacked in an appetizing pile and served alongside a lemony mayonnaise. Well-crisped and well-seasoned, the fritters were reasonably tasty. I'd reckon they'd go well with a beer. My dining companion and I both agreed, however, that the batter was overly worked, which led to a starchy and sometimes pasty texture while also breaking the fish down so much that it was texturally indistinguishable. What you want is an airy fritter in which chunks of flaky cod are suspended. A good effort for your local pub but not at all what I'd expect from one of Canada's most celebrated restaurants.

The blue cheese salad was really quite delicious although it's hard to give the kitchen all the credit when the majority of the heavy lifting was done by generous chunks of Blue D'Elizabeth, an award-winning blue cheese from Fromagerie du Presbytère. Unsurprisingly, it went well with the bitter endive and sweet slices of apple, but it's an obvious dish with no real distinguishing factor and the dressing was under seasoned and tasted mostly of canola oil.

The foie gras nigiri is a dish that doesn't immediately sound appealing. Sushi rice is cooked and seasoned with mirin, rice vinegar and maple syrup — nothing objectively wrong with that. The rice is then topped with a sauce made of peanut butter mixed with maple-seasoned vinegar and soy on top of which a steamed piece of foie gras is placed. The nigiri comes served in a Chinese soup spoon and is dressed à la minute with a sauce made of pork stock, maple syrup and maple vinegar. It is a dish that is emblematic of Picard and flies in the face of convention. Though he is not the first or only one to pair foie gras and peanut butter, this example is one of the most controversial. In years past, I have heard the dish was revelatory. My dining companion insisted that we order it, describing his first experience with the dish as somewhat transformative

This particular order, however, was not. My experience with the foie gras nigiri can be described as one-note and flabby. The preparation of the foie gras was fine, if a bit underwhelming, but the sushi rice lacked structure and seasoning, and the peanut butter only added fat where acid was needed. Ultimately it tasted like I feared it would — fatty and muted. I see the potential of the dish but it requires precision to make something transformative out of a concept such as this, and in this instance, the cook was not up to the task.

For the main event, we decided to play to the kitchen's

strengths: a choucroute garni for two. Braised cabbage studded with all manner of pork and sausage is exactly the kind of dish you'd expect a restaurant like Au Pied de Cochon to do to perfection. The meats in question included boudin, a type of beer sausage, veal liver crêpes and a maple-glazed pork shank.

The board was characteristically abundant with a generous pile of sauerkraut topped with a plump link of boudin, a “German” style sausage (it was unclear what type it was but I'd venture a *bierwurst*) and an enormous, glistening, caramel-brown pork shank. The three “artful” dots of Dijon on the side of the plate felt like a very amateurish garnish that failed to make the plating nicer and was far too little mustard to accompany a dish of this size. My advice: serve the choucroute in a tureen with a small pot of mustard on the side.

Two porous-looking crêpes were leaned against the pile of cabbage and looked a bit sad, to be honest. While tasty, the liver crêpes disintegrated at the mere suggestion of being touched. The bierwurst was flavourful but was too firm and dry, like it should have been saucisson but wasn't. The worst part of the dish was the shank, which had been so deeply glazed that the skin had become a sort of sticky and impenetrable rubber. Once you got to the meat, it fell neatly off the bone and shredded tenderly, but having been excessively reheated, the meat was completely dried out. The cabbage and boudin, for their part, were quite good.

Unable and unwilling to finish the choucroute, we moved on to dessert, which may have been the saving grace of the entire meal. What could be more emblematic of Au Pied de Cochon than the simplest of Québécois pleasures, the Pouding Chômeur? PDC's version of the iconic dessert is as pared down as you could possibly make it: a small soup bowl filled with a puddle of silky maple cream that enveloped a simple cake whose protruding peak was crisped to add textural contrast. It was an excellent rendition.

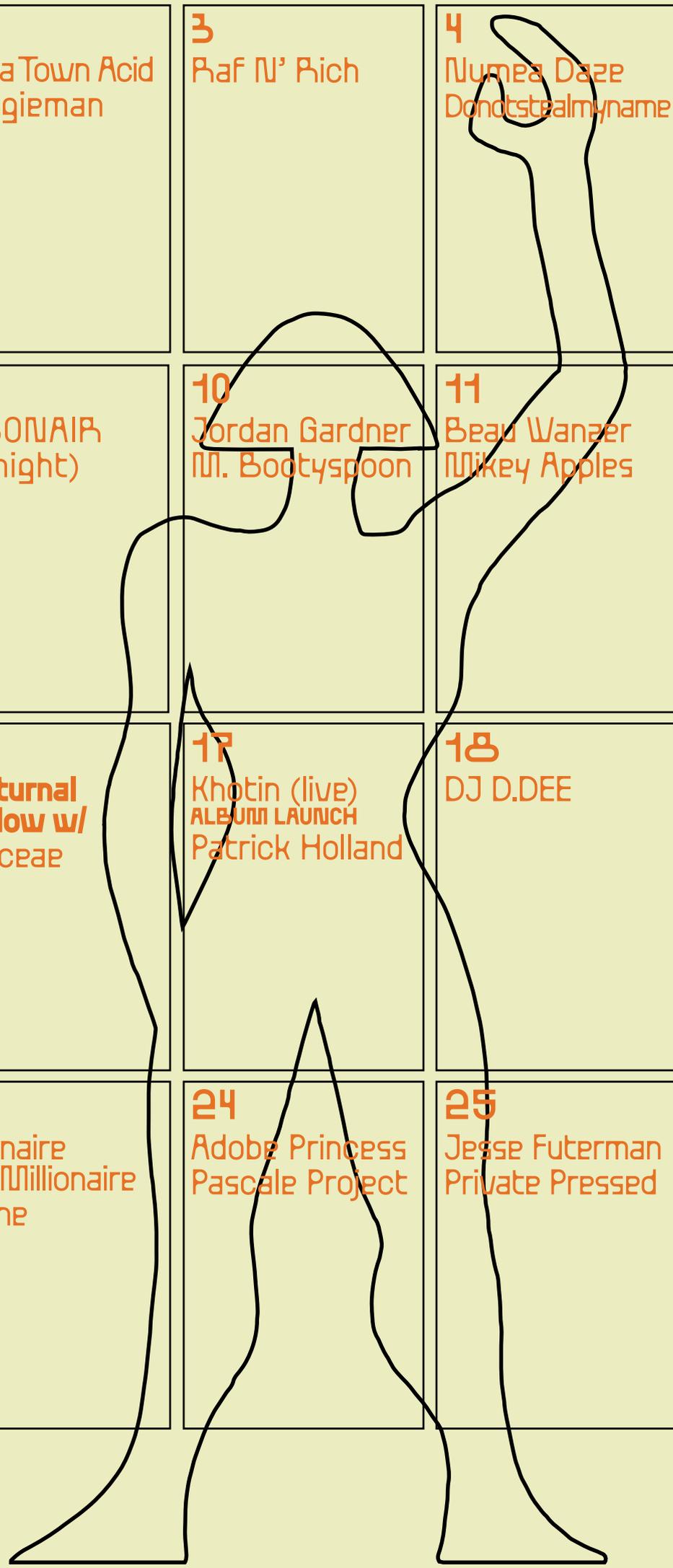
As my dining companion and I sunk back into our chairs to discuss the meal, we thought we'd digest with a bit of Calvados. Looking at the menu, we agreed the three-year Roger Groult would do just fine. As fate would have it, however, they were fresh out — a perfect bookend to an evening of disappointment.

It's not generally in my nature to write negative reviews. I came to this restaurant with the intention of doling out praise to a place that once meant so much to me. Sadly, the Au Pied de Cochon of my memories and the one in which I ate last month are not the same restaurants. Their menus may look similar and they might share the same address but what I experienced was a mediocre imitation of one of the greatest restaurants to ever do it. Back in 2001, Picard was making an important point about how we interpreted food, Québécois culture and the limits of fine dining. Today, in a restaurant industry moulded, in part, under his vision and tutelage, maybe that statement has lost some poignancy. Maybe, 22 years later, it just goes without saying. To answer my initial question, “What is Au Pied de Cochon today?” To me, it's just a name, it's a box to tick off on a list, a souvenir shop with a menu and more than anything — it's a bit of a letdown.

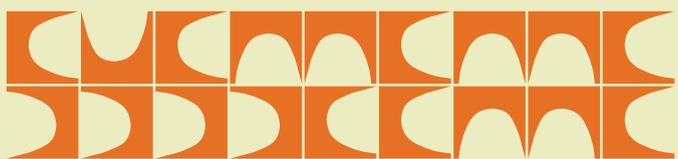
# Février

# 2023

	<b>1</b> Jane Penny	<b>2</b> Korea Town Acid Boogieman	<b>3</b> Raf N' Rich	<b>4</b> Numea Daze Donotstealmyname
<b>7</b> Far In w/ Zach Frampton & Sam Aether	<b>8</b> Also Cool & Le Sleepover present: SWEETHEARTS (market & dance party)	<b>9</b> DEBONAIR (all night)	<b>10</b> Jordan Gardner M. Bootyspoon	<b>11</b> Beau Wanzel Mikey Apples
<b>14</b> 17H-23H Snippin Wick: Faux Sommets invites I i l a (live)  23H-2H Karaoke with Aly & Pascale	<b>15</b> n10.as  presents: Tender Grooves w/ Silktits  18H-21H Mending Night	<b>16</b> Nocturnal Shadow w/ Iridaceae IRL	<b>17</b> Khotin (live) ALBUM LAUNCH Patrick Holland	<b>18</b> DJ D.DEE
	<b>22</b> n10.as  presents: Apprezzamento Della Musica	<b>23</b> Visionaire Not Millionaire Adlene	<b>24</b> Adobe Princess Pascale Project	<b>25</b> Jesse Futerman Private Pressed

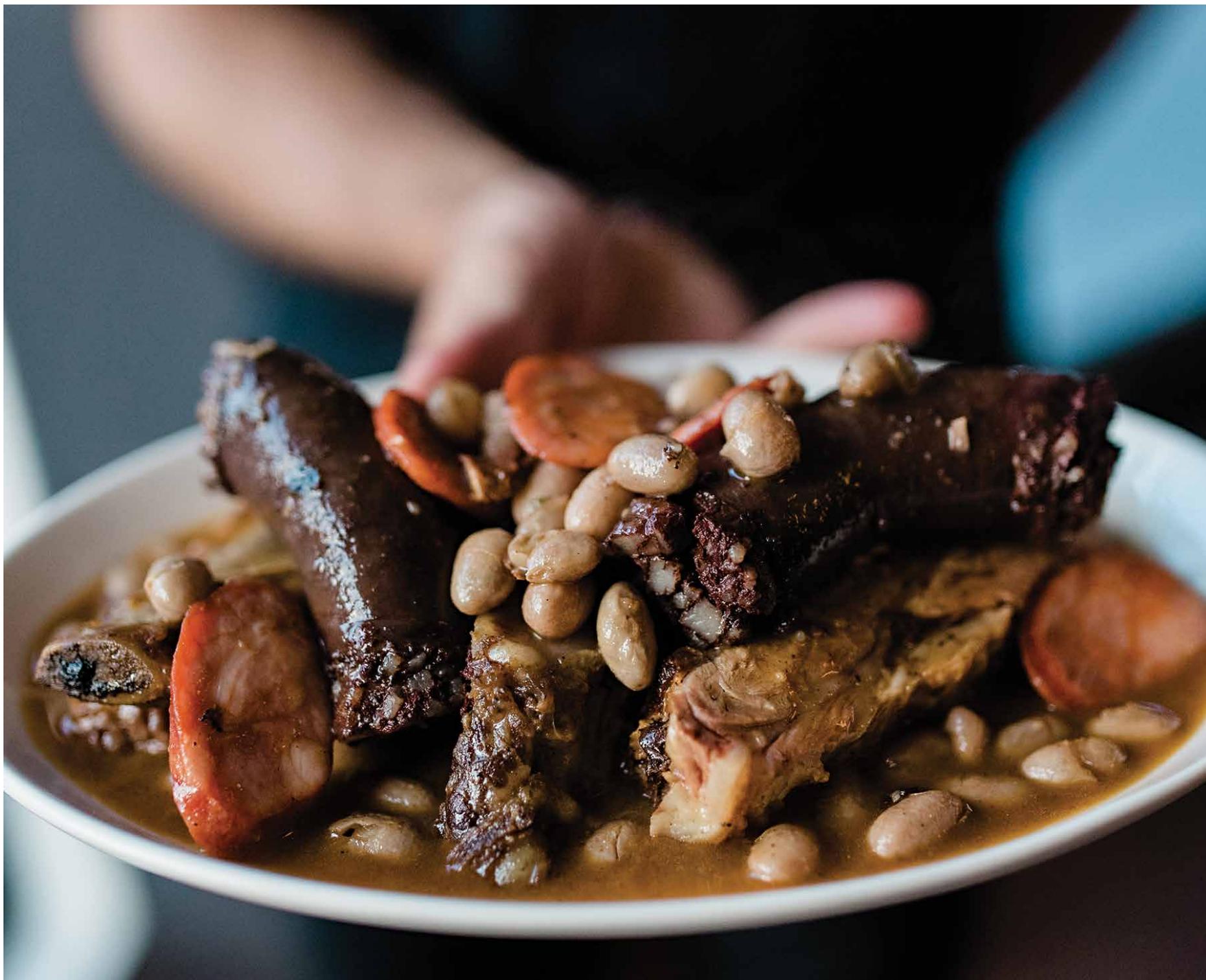


7119 rue Saint-Hubert





# Restaurant Guide



Matthew Perrin

Beba

BY CLAYTON SANDHU

The restaurant industry — in Montreal certainly, but also in many places the world over — feels like it's at the threshold of a great change. Recently, it's as though I can see the evolutions happening in real-time. Shifts that used to occur over a generation feel like they're happening every other day. Everything from how we think about food to what falls in and out of

trend to the very structure of restaurants themselves is in flux.

As our team started compiling this year's guide, it seemed like, more than ever before, the understanding of what makes a great restaurant was rooted in personal beliefs. I found myself much less interested in the grandiose and the elaborate. I looked for consistency, specialization and, above all, delicious food cooked by people who care.

Guides are always imbued with subjectivity and this one is no exception, but it is my belief that each one of the restaurants on this list is worthy of its spot and, in the right place at

the right time, are all capable of delivering a delicious and memorable meal. With all that said, this guide is about the love of good restaurants and good food. It's a celebration of the people who day-in and day-out labour behind hot stoves, hunch over in cramped wine cellars and work exhausting hours to serve us lovely things to eat and drink.

So without further ado, here's our 2023 restaurant guide. Santé!



Keung Kee

Michelle Vo



Vin Papillon

Matthew Perrin

## VERDUN / CÔTE-ST-PAUL

### Beba

Now well into its third year, Beba, owned by brothers Ari and Pablo Schor, has already cemented itself as one of the city's best and most revered restaurants. The kitchen, headed up by Dixon Cone and sous-chef Luc Rogers, is responsible for some of the most thoughtful and precise cooking taking place on or off the island. Expect exceptional fish from Japan, premium caviar, boiled meats and plump empanadas. Billed as Argentinian with flecks of Spanish and Italian, the food is singular, entirely unpretentious (though often luxurious) and absolutely delicious. (Clayton Sandhu) (3900 Éthel)

### Bossa

Hoagies, subs, grinders — whatever you call them, Bossa's reign supreme. The menu at this Italian sandwich counter (with locations in Verdun and Rosemont) is divided up into hot and cold sections and features some deli classics in both categories. The meatball and chicken parm sandwiches will do any red-sauce sandwich fan proud, but if you really want to get a taste of what they can do, opt for the fully loaded "Philly Hoagie," which features layers of salami, capicola, mortadella and prosciutto with provolone, pickled eggplant and a sensationally good house vinaigrette. (CS) (4354 Wellington, 3136 Masson)

### Seasoned Dreams

Jerk chicken is the cornerstone dish at this Caribbean restaurant, which has locations on St-Laurent Blvd. and in sleepy Côte-St-Paul, and it's available by the bucket, in burgers, in wraps, on a salad, on poutine and even on top of poutine on top of mac and cheese, in a dish rightly called the Cardiac Arrest — which is incredible. The Caribbean mac and cheese alone is worth a trip to (or an order from) the "island-inspired eatery" that's become a Montreal staple. (Lorraine Carpenter) (5509 Laurendeau, 3910 St-Laurent)

## NDG / SAINT-HENRI / LITTLE BURGUNDY

### Gia

The newest member of the Nora Gray/Elena group. Gia's unlikely location, in a squat cement building behind a Home Depot, might not seem like an obvious place to open a restaurant, but it's living proof that if you do things well, people will come. Open for lunch and dinner, the restaurant's casual and convivial vibe is rooted in the Abruzzese tradition of grilling arrosticini (small skewers of meat cooked over charcoal) and drinking copious amounts of wine. The tour-de-force kitchen features Elena mainstay Janice Tiefenbach along with Willow Cardinal (formerly of Vin Papillon) and celebrated pastry chef Michelle Marek. Pop in for a full meal or pull up to "Wine Island" for a few bites and a glass or two of vino. (CS) (1025 Lenoir)

### Le Vin Papillon

As the Joe Beef Group's third child, le Vin Papillon doesn't always get the same international reputé — all the better, if you ask me. While throngs of tourists flock to Joe Beef, chef Alan Stewart and co. treat locals and savvy visitors alike to a menu of some of the most clever and most delicious small plates in town. Stewart's food often begins with classic French fare that's treated with a levity and playfulness that makes them entirely unique while still being grounded in very solid bourgeois-style cooking. The room is absolutely lovely but Vin Pap, as it's known around town, is best enjoyed during the warmer months seated at a table in its lush back garden. (CS) (2519 Notre-Dame W.)

### Entre-Deux

The name Entre-Deux is a reference to the liminal space between lunch and dinner. This neighbourhood joint on Sherbrooke West is headed-up by Marc Flynn, Félix Poirier and Alex Quintin. A coffee shop and breakfast counter by day, Entre-Deux's menu is a bit more robust and refined come dinner time. The food is simple yet inventive, which goes perfectly well with their evolving cellar of energetic natural wines. (CS) (5930 Sherbrooke W.)

## PLATEAU / LITTLE ITALY

### Maison Publique

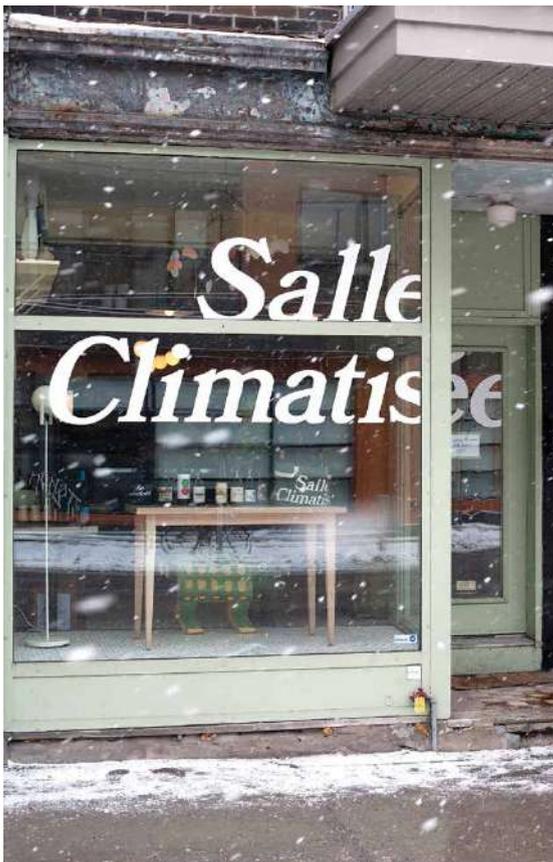
Since opening in 2012, Derek Damann's petite restaurant on the corner of Marquette and Gilford has become a verifiable institution in the Plateau and in Montreal in general. Known for its eclectic, vintage sports memorabilia and cottage-kitsch decor, its decidedly casual aesthetic has always been an unlikely backdrop for some of the city's best cooking. You might call the menu market fare with an Italian accent but really it's just simple, smart cooking with high-quality ingredients. Sicilian squid with fregola and almonds followed by Bakewell tart for dessert — don't mind if I do. (CS) (4720 Marquette)

### Salle Climatisée

A neo-French bistro may seem like an unlikely candidate for the city's coolest restaurant but Salle Climatisée has the title firmly on lock. Behind the Parisian-green facade at the corner of St-Laurent and Beaubien is a neighbourhood restaurant that just happens to be serving some of the most dialled-in French food in the city. While at face value, poached trout with beets or leeks vinaigrette with sunflower might not jump off the page, the level of cooking done by chef and co-owner Harrison Shewchuk and co. will have you picking your jaw up off the floor. Combine that with co-owner Brendan Lavery's stellar wine list and affable service and you've got yourself a certified hit. (CS) (6448 St-Laurent)

### Pumpui

While its sister restaurant Pichai might get most of the spotlight these days, Pumpui remains one of the best casual Thai spots in the city. Billed as a curry house, the rotating selections of curries are complex, rich and laden with Thai vegetables (Thai eggplant, bamboo shoots, long beans) and perfectly cooked proteins. Don't miss the incredible (but intensely spicy) Pad Kaprao: stir-fried pork and chillies with a fried egg. If there's a special on, and there usually is — get it. You won't be disappointed. (CS) (83 St-Zotique E.)



Salle Climatisée



Bossia

## MILE END / OUTREMONT

### Boucherie Provisions

This butcher shop and lunch/brunch spot by day is also a wine bar by night, but it's probably best known for its sandwiches — brisket, Cubano, halloumi, turkey and burgers — not to mention its show-stopping, heart-stopping Purple Rain ice cream, made with cream cheese and blueberries. Formerly located a few blocks west and known as Provisions 1268, this spot has diversified and evolved into a shop/bar with broad appeal beyond its previous incarnation as a prix fixe dinner destination. (LC)

(1142 Van Horne)

### Leméac

The other French bistro. While l'Express may garner the lion's share of attention, Leméac certainly holds its own (and in a few categories, far exceeds its St-Denis counterpart). The room is sophisticated and a touch moody but never sacrifices a sliver of the utilitarian charm that makes for a great bistro. The boudin is a cult classic and the onglet keeps pace with the best in the city, but the Pain Perdu, cut nearly three inches thick, sauced with maple syrup and topped with dulce de leche ice cream — that, you can hang your hat on. Open for breakfast, lunch and dinner. (CS)

(1045 Laurier W.)

### Tsukuyomi Ramen

While it's not exactly difficult to find ramen in Montreal anymore, simplicity and authenticity aren't necessarily easy elements to come by when grabbing a hot, steaming bowl of Japanese noodle soup. Tsukuyomi Ramen provides all of that at its Mile End and Concordia-adjacent locations, which are radically different in terms of design — the former a utilitarian, mostly counter-seating space you could imagine being occupied by salarymen in Tokyo, the latter featuring funky webs of colourful wall decor in a spacious room. Grab a classic tonkotsu ramen and a Sapporo or bit of sake to wash it down. (LC)

(5207 St-Laurent, 1242 Bishop)

## VILLERAY / PARC EX / SAINT-MICHEL

### Bar St. Denis

Au Pied de Cochon alumni Emily Homsy and David Gauthier's homage to bar food elevates the category to another level. The cooking is eclectic and occasionally iconoclastic but it's invariably delicious. On any given day the menu might include pillowy flatbread brushed with ramp butter, bucatini piled high with delicate sea urchin, a fattouche salad inspired beef tartare, or a chicharron dressed with Matane shrimp and a *sauce à l'oignon*. The fact that the cocktails are great, that the wine list is solid, and the room is beautifully designed is just icing on the cake. (CS)

(6966 St-Denis)

### Classic India

An under-the-radar hit hiding in plain sight. A true hole-in-the-wall and legendary take-out counter, Classic India is exactly as advertised. Expect to find all of the quintessential North Indian staples done with aplomb. What sets Classic India apart, however, are their incredible biryanis. Beautifully perfumed with cardamom and saffron and studded with hearty chunks of chicken or lamb, they are rich while still being delicate, spiced without unbearable heat, and very, very complex. (CS)

(6914 Querbes)

### Ho Guom

An understated gem on Jean-Talon. Specialists in Northern Vietnamese cuisine, Ho Guom serves regional classics that you're unlikely to find in many other places in the city. You can't go wrong with a bowl of their crimson red Bun Bo Hue but dive a bit deeper into the menu to discover the incredible blood sausage with shrimp paste, a citrusy crab patty and whelk soup and the incredible raw beef salad. Ho Guom is a BYOW joint so, you know — bring a bottle. (CS)

(2605 Jean-Talon E.)

### Paloma

Classic Niçoise fare by a father-daughter duo. Armand and Rosalie Forcherio, each having made names for themselves in restaurants abroad and here in Montreal, run this elegant yet understated eatery named after a family-favourite beach located in the Saint-Jean-Cap-Ferrat. Bits of land and sea are cooked in elegant simplicity — leeks with caviar, seared char with buttermilk and dill, a hunk of braised pork

shoulder with a calvados sauce. The selection of offal here deserves a special mention, as it's treated with particular skill, as does Rosalie's thoughtfully balanced wine list. (CS)

(8521 St-Laurent)

### Panama

This institution on the Jean-Talon strip in Parc Ex (with satellite locations in Laval and DDO) brands itself a rotisserie first and foremost, with grilled chicken and lamb being the centrepieces of a vast menu of Greek staples. Personally, I've always been a fan of their seafood: sea bass and grilled salmon, and calamari, octopus and shrimp offered by the plate or by the platter. Their lunch table d'hotes also offer interesting and affordable alternatives, especially if you're a Parc Ex-er feeling temporarily burnt on thalis. (LC)

(789 Jean-Talon W., 1150 du Curé-Labelle, 11604 de Salaberry)

## DOWNTOWN

### Café Holt

Café Holt, on the second floor of the Holt Renfrew Ogilvy department store, opened just after the 2020 lockdown to offer delicious, French-accented lunches and brunches (including a formidable burger), and remains a go-to. With beautiful art deco design and an inspired cocktail menu, this is an easy choice for a classic downtown lunch — especially since Dominion Square Tavern is no more. If you remember the old Café Holt up the street (not that you should), this one is at least 10 times more appealing in every way. (LC)

(1307 Ste-Catherine W.)

### Beaver Hall

Jérôme Ferrer's old haunt on McGill Street, Beaver Hall, has reopened within the confines of his deluxe establishment Europea, and oh my goodness: The combination of traditional brasserie française and French steakhouse fare with a touch of fine-dining finesse and flair for the dramatic is a delight for the senses. Lodged in what used to serve as Europea's cocktail lounge, the wood-panelled Beaver Hall is open for lunch and dinner, with dishes by chef de cuisine Remy Perez available in table d'hôte format (for \$60/\$75 respectively), with a series of charmingly gimmicky amuse-bouches. (LC)

(1065 de la Montagne)

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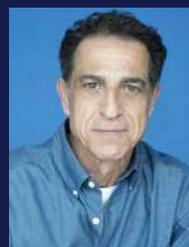
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Pumpui

### Osmo x Marusan

Tucked away inside the architecturally fascinating grotto known as the Notman House, Café Osmo has fused with fast-casual Japanese joint Marusan to serve exquisite Japanese curries, sandos and coffee in the McGill Ghetto. Set to a backdrop of funk and soul courtesy of cult record shop la Rama, Osmo x Marusan draws a mix of McGill students and the fashionable downtown crowd to mingle over a lunch of pitch-perfect Japanese comfort classics. (CS)

(51 Sherbrooke W.)

### Keung Kee

This second-storey Chinatown restaurant is a mainstay for lovers of Cantonese-style seafood. Think steamed clams in black bean sauce, scallops served in their shells with glass noodles and fried garlic, grouper steamed whole and served with soy and ginger. While seafood is the main draw, they do great noodle dishes, Cantonese fried rice, BBQ duck and pork knuckle soup. The staff is surly but always accommodating. (CS)

(70 de la Gauchetière W.)

### West Island Noodles

Pointe-Claire might not be the first place you think of when looking for a bowl of hand-pulled noodle soup — but it should be. Specializing in Lanzhou-style noodles, the unambiguously named West Island Noodles dishes out steaming bowls of chilli-oil flecked, coriander studded, braised beef shank soup. There's no question that brothy noodles are the draw here but don't miss out on the excellent (read: potent) Dan Dan noodles. (CS)

(995 Saint-Jean, Pointe-Claire)

## OLD MONTREAL / CHINATOWN

### Monarque

From the white tablecloth dining room at the back to the large brasserie area in the middle to the bar, facing an immense wall of the finest liquors known to humanity, Monarque is the kind of place that became legendary the minute it opened in 2018. The block-long Old Montreal restaurant is helmed by Executive Chef Jérémie Bastien and co-owned by his father Richard Bastien, the man behind Leméac. Monarque's menu offers a slightly modernized, Montréalais take on that classic brand of French cuisine, and while the atmosphere can be boisterous, the service is always friendly and personalized. (LC)

(406 St-Jacques)

## LAVAL / WEST ISLAND / SOUTH SHORE

### Tripolis

After closing their beloved Parc-Ex location (which had changed hands from the original owners back in 2010) this Greek-grill institution popped back up inside a nondescript strip mall in Laval. A meal at Tripolis is built around what comes off the grill. Sure, you can't miss with the salty loukaniko or souvlaki, but you made the trip to the north shore for a heaping plate of blushing lamb chops. (CS)

(5034 Samson, Laval)

### Patate Malette

Poutine sauced straight from the kettle. Making the trip out to Beauharnois for a c<sup>à</sup>sse-croûte might seem wild but this family-run snack bar has been serving excellent hot dogs, burgers and poutines for over 65 years. In terms of the menu, the regular suspects are sure to hit the spot but it's the poutine, which features hand-cut fries and squeaky curds bathed in a dark brown gravy administered directly from a stainless steel kettle, that has kept the crowds coming back decade after decade. Open seasonally, April through October. (CS)

(41 St-Laurent, Beauharnois)



Clay Sandhu

Paloma



Café Holt

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# music

## She's a waterfall



BY DAVE MACINTYRE

Nature and dreams both feel like go-to sources of inspiration for any artist, and that's certainly the case for Naomie de Lorimier.

Best known by her stage name N NAO (pronounced like "and now"), this chanteuse/multi-instrumentalist excels in making ethereal, delicate soundscapes defined by dreamlike pads and synths, lush echoing vocals, acoustic guitars, synthetic beats and a heavy use of loops — each in varying doses from track to track.

Chatting with *Cult MTL* via videoconference as she gears up to release her sophomore LP, *L'eau et les rêves*, on March 24, N NAO's quietly bewitching dream-pop/folk hybrid comes together across 12 tracks on an album she considers the most important project of her life to date. It's also an album several years in the making.

"I started writing these songs five years ago. The process was kind of slow," she says. "I can't wait to release them. I already have new music to release, so I have to clean that up to have another (project) going."

All of this comes in spite of the album being the follow-up to her 2021 debut, *À jamais pour toujours* — an album she feels she's lived two lifetimes since releasing. "I feel like I'm more calm now," she adds. "When you start to write songs, the stories are from your childhood to adulthood. I feel like now, I'm really reset. That's a good feeling."

N NAO — not to be confused with the British songstress NAO — was raised by artist parents in the Plateau/Mile End during the '90s "when it was cheap." She considers herself fortunate to have grown up around art and music, having also studied classical music at a school in Parc Lafontaine.

"I was lucky to experience art at a young age," she continues. "I'm a hypersensitive human being, and I think it helped me cope with life to be surrounded by people like me."

Outside of music, N NAO is also a florist, and used to work at Jean-Talon Market. This is where she met Laurence Veri, a ceramist who did the artwork for *L'eau et les rêves*. Aside from gaining a new creative collaborator, working as a florist taught N NAO "a lot about visual textures and colours," and how to work with form.

This helped her develop her skills before studying fine arts at Concordia for three years, where she's been taking classes in intermedia, sculpture, ceramics and performance. She's taken a year-long break from her studies, however, to finish the visuals for her album.

Being someone who finds sanctuary in nature (which also helped her enjoy working as a florist), N NAO has

endeavoured to spend plenty of time in the countryside during the pandemic, something she feels "disillusioned" with at this point.

More specifically, she's been to musical partner Charles Marsolais-Ricard's parents' cottage in Saint-Jean-de-Matha, an hour and 20 minutes northeast of Montreal. The album was made both in her home studio and in Montreal's les Studios Greenroom, but pre-production was spent at the cottage. Being surrounded by waterfalls and other gorgeous scenery — with some great hiking spots, to boot — has been a good way to centre herself during a truly chaotic time.

"In nature, you don't feel the same way during the pandemic as in the city," she says. "I went to a cottage in the forest most of the time. I had bad days and good days — it's a bit lonesome, but I'm used to it with music and creative lifestyles."

The influence of nature doesn't just seep into her work musically, either: N NAO's also doing image compilations for a multimedia study about freshwater. Documentary research about freshwater also influences the music video for "La plus belle chose," the album's eighth track.

"I think it's a nice wrap-up to all the themes in the album," she says about the multimedia study and image compilations. "I bring my cameras when I'm travelling in Quebec. Because I'm a swimmer and a skater, I'm really drawn to water all the time."

"When I started to film, I didn't really know what (the project) was about. Then when I re-watched all the footage two years later — it's on a tape, so I didn't really re-watch it — I found that all the documentary was about water because that was the most beautiful thing I had to shoot, and I was always surrounded by water. I can talk about that for a long time! (laughs)"

The press release for *L'eau et les rêves* says it draws inspiration from "encounters, magic, nature and intimacy," something she attributes to her work and life experiences being intertwined. "These themes are things I experience every day," she adds.

"For me, bathing is a ritual. It's really based on my daily routines. As a florist, a filmmaker, a musician and a performer, I do these rituals often. Being a good musician is being a good person, because we work with people. It's really important to be better with all that stuff."

When asked which tracks on the album hold the most sentimental value for her, she says it depends on the day, and that they're "all based on my dreams and sensations super deep inside" of her. But she does point to "Tout va bien" as a song she holds dear.

"It's kind of a spiritual journey to sing it," she adds, later saying the drum sounds were inspired by Phil Collins' "In the Air

Tonight" — adding to the general '80s-like feel of the track.

"When we recorded it in the studio, it was really special. When you share a song with people in the studio, it's a bit of a relief in a way — you're not alone with that on your shoulders."

N NAO joined the Mothland family in November, and they'll be releasing *L'eau et les rêves*. Her experience so far with Mothland has been very positive, and she says she feels like she can be herself with them.

"I know that my art seems a bit soft, but I feel like I'm a punk inside," she adds. "I really can be myself with them. That's an awesome thing that I don't really experience all the time with pros in the music industry... It's good to have real friends that you can trust."

Having previously worked with Laurence-Anne and Joni Void, she's also opened for big-ticket Montréalais(e) artists like Patrick Watson and Ariane Moffatt. On top of that, she's performed alongside Safia Nolin, Marie-Pierre Arthur, Jonathan Personne and Klô Pelgag, among others.

"In all my relationships with musicians, I'm super glad that, for example, these artists invited me, because it's a mark of respect from them," she says. "I think I learned to become more confident, and that we all kind of experience the same thing as musicians. So it helped me to understand I'm not alone. It's nice to have inspiration and people to look up to when you do that, because it can be a bit discouraging."

January 31 will see N NAO release the music video for her single "Tout va bien" and the self-directed clip gives off strong '90s VHS tape vibes while staying true to the heavy influence of nature and water on her art. The clip zeroes in on scenes of a waterfall, before later showing a beach and the sky, before fading to static, and then back again. But the video also goes back to where it started, albeit showing the waterfall flowing in reverse and going upwards; a decision she says she made to mirror the song's lyrics.

"I really enjoy distorting images," says N NAO, who shot and edited the entire video herself. "I like how magnetic tape can do that. When I'm using cameras, I often break them because I'm too intense with rewinding."

"In nature, there are a lot of weather and temperature differences. That's why I'm using it, because of the fragility and edginess of the medium. Also, it reminds me of childhood, so maybe it's a nostalgic, subconscious thing. When I'm making art, I kind of want to become a child again."

N NAO's music has garnered critical plaudits from some major French-language publications. Perhaps most notably, France's *Les Inrockuptibles* stated in a review of her performance at M for Montreal in November that her music "walks a path cleared by Jenny Hval, while also bridging the gap between Bon Iver, Portishead and *Drukqs* by Aphex Twin." That's high praise to say the least, and something that leaves N NAO "really touched" when her art is compared to artists she and her collaborators love (Hval in particular is a favourite of hers).

"I like the fact that they're performance artists, but also writers. I'm super happy that influence is getting through," she says. "Aphex Twin is really interesting. I listen to him, but also I want to do [that style] in the future. We talked about doing drum & bass, and more electro beats."

"In the live set (they reviewed), I think there was... not foreshadowing, but a vision of the future that was in the set that the (reviewer) touched on in that article. Also, my mother used to listen to Massive Attack when I was young, in the late '90s and 2000s, so that's also in my DNA, maybe."

So far, N NAO's plans for the rest of this year involve releasing the album, finishing the music videos, and possibly playing shows in Toronto and elsewhere in Quebec. Once this album's out, she'll want to start working on her next one, as well as release a standalone single in between. As far as what *L'eau et les rêves* says about where she's at as an artist and human being, it's helped her learn how to become a better bandleader, and allow those she's collaborating with to directly influence her music.

"I want to work with artists for their personalities," she adds. "I want to let them be themselves in my music. It's really helped me to be confident in what they're doing with the piece, and not want to control so much. I'm controlling all the visuals, but for the collaborative aspect, I wanted to let them be more free."

"As a human being, (I've learned) to open up to people, and not be so scared of that. It can be vertiginous, but it makes for good music and good relationships. So, open up to people!"

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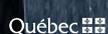
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# Enchanted forest



BY STEPHAN BOISSONNEAULT

Like many of us during the pandemic lockdowns and curfews, Rachel Leblanc (aka Vanille) was trapped in her “microscopic apartment,” and found her mind was starting to crumble. She needed to get away from the stress of the city and the suffocating noise. She needed a way to think about other spaces.

“Spaces where there are no humans, no industrial interference. Places like the woods,” Leblanc says, sitting on the couch of the co-working label space of Bonbonbon and Mothland, dubbed “Coollywood.”

To cope, Leblanc started listening to a bunch of late ‘60s folk music from England, stuff like Shirley Collins and Bridget St John, and more singer-songwriter English folk like Vashti Bunyan. She started picking up on the themes of timelessness and nature percolating throughout the music of that era. Nature was already a huge part of her life. Growing up in Laval, she would often retreat into the woods to be alone with her thoughts.

During the pandemic, Leblanc began writing her own mystical ballads, taking inspiration from her visits to

Quebec’s Laurentide woodlands and finding medieval paintings over the Internet. She also discovered she was captivated by illuminated manuscripts from the middle ages, and especially the classic “big letter” or ink-drawn creatures that start off a sacred text or other important books.

“There are sometimes animals and stuff, but in the letter, so I began to draw from those images and it helped me to create new sounds,” she says.

All of this led Leblanc to create her sophomore LP, *La clairière*, a mostly-acoustic album that was recorded at Wild Studio — a luxurious remote cabin studio in the woods near Saint-Zénon, right on the shore of Lac Bernard.

*La clairière* still follows Vanille’s established style of music, but is much more intimate than her debut album, *Soleil ‘96* — which was more inspired by the ‘60s rock of a band like the Zombies. Some songs, like the opener “Hop-hop” and “Le bois,” offer new instrumentation, like the harpsichord or flute ensembles, giving a more bardic, poet-singer edge to the music.

“It was the perfect time and place to record that album,” Leblanc says. “It was Autumn 2021 and we went for 10 days to the cabin, and the first snowfall happened, so it was very magical.”

The lyrics to album closer “Quand la neige tombe” were

actually written as Leblanc watched that first snowfall out of the huge glass panel windows outside of Wild Studio.

Leblanc knew from the very beginning that this was going to be a very personal album. She was essentially creating a musical forest she could escape to when city life was, again, becoming too much. She had a vision and no one was going to stop her from seeing it come to fruition.

“I wanted to be there for every step of the album and have complete control so I produced it myself,” Leblanc says. “For the first album, I was a lot more shy in the music industry and I kept silent. So for this one, I’m a lot more proud of it.”

*La clairière* is a completely new sound for Vanille, but she’s already thinking about and composing for another new vibe for the next record. Old and new fans of her music should know that she doesn’t want to be pigeon-holed into one kind of genre.

For the next project, she wants to go for a more joyous “sunshine pop,” feel with big harmonies and references to the 1968 album *Roger Nichols & The Small Circle of Friends* — an album that had a frontman who wrote songs for Frank Sinatra, the Carpenters and the Monkees.

We can only wait in anticipation for that one. Until then, get lost in her imaginary medieval forest.

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# :hammer of the mods

BY JOHNSON CUMMINS

Now that February has us within its firm, cold grip, there are a couple of festivals happening this month to help turn up the heat. Much like January, this month is hardly bursting at the seams with gigs but if you have a penchant for post punk and full-frontal punk fucking rock, you will have more than enough to tide you over for the next little while.

First up is the Taverne Tour, which has shown exponential growth in the remarkably short time they've been producing the fest. The folks behind Mothland, originally conceived the fest to put down stakes exclusively near the corner of St-Denis and Mont-Royal so everything is in stumbling distance. But their expanded curation over the past few editions (pandemic years aside) has included St-Laurent Blvd. venues Casa del Popolo, la Sala Rossa and the Diving Bell, along with la Tulipe further east.

If you'd like to make up your own itinerary, Taverne Tour will be happening from Feb. 9th through the

11th, and you can hit up their website to see the complete lineup and venues that are participating. Here's some of my big picks, but don't be afraid to just take a chance on a band you haven't heard yet.

THURSDAY, FEB. 9

Of Montreal is an easy choice here. They'll be laying it down at la Tulipe with Crasher. These legends of chopped and fucked up pop continue to thrill and surprise, proving that the nineties V-neck sweater club Elephant 6 still can't be fucked with. 4530 Papineau, 8 p.m., \$34.99

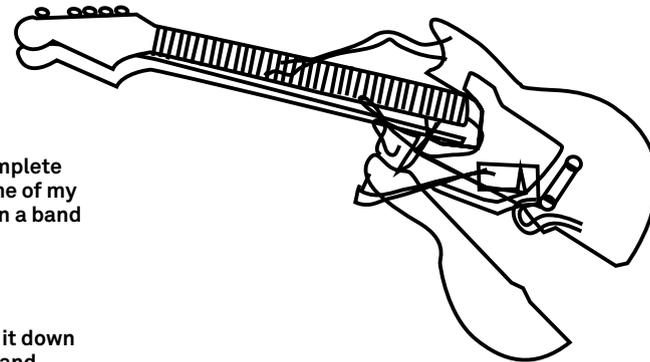
As cool as Of Montreal playing in one of the best venues in the city is, though, I will have to give the nod to local Kraut rockers and motorik messiahs Yoo Doo Right, who better bring their A game as the middle slot is taken up by one of my fave dronesters, thisquietarmy, who will join forces with total sweetheart Away from Voivod. Making this gig at le Ministère mandatory to show up at door time is Gloin. 4521 St-Laurent, 9 p.m., \$19.16

FRIDAY, FEB. 10

The easy big giggers here — the King Khan and BBQ Show with Miranda and the Beat at le Ministère and Choses Sauvage at l'Esco — are both sold out, so better peep the Taverne Tour site and get ready to Uber it up.

SATURDAY, FEB. 11

Last winter, the indie rock community was shaken up by the sudden passing of Sadies guitarist Dallas Good, so to hear that remaining members and brothers in arms are continuing to hold the torch as being one of the best live Canadian



bands to ever stomp the pines is nothing short of amazing. If you want to really see a band playing for keeps with true spirit and plenty of heart, make it down to Sala and thank whatever you pray to that they are still here. 4848 St-Laurent, 9 p.m., \$26.22

Finally, if you want two nights of straight-up punk fucking rock, you can head down to the Montreal Madhouse fest, which is holding Foufounes captive for the weekend of Feb. 17th and 18th. There are a ton of bands, but make sure you see the night Faze (known to close personal friends as "that trombone band") is headlining as they are probably one of the best bands happening in the city, punk or otherwise. Think Beantown's Hoax in their mid-tempo / downstrokes prime with treated vocals that sound more like Hawkwind and Lee Scratch Perry duking it out in a blender than your typical stubbed-toe angst. Just undeniably fucking great.

Current Obsession: Nadja, *Luminous Rot*  
jonathan.cummings@gmail.com

## Album reviews



Fucked Up, *One Day* (Matador)  
Written and recorded in three eight-hour sessions by guitarist Mike Haliachuk in late 2019 and completed remotely during the peak of COVID lockdowns (with the rest of the band committing to spend no more than 24 hours apiece on their contributions), *One Day* came by its title

honestly. The backstory is interesting, but what of the result? Alongside being one of Canada's finest bands, their 2011 opus *David Comes to Life* holds its own among the very best popular music recordings of the 21st century so far. Several projects later, the Toronto hardcore legends have yet to strike back with the same level of intensity. And by no means are they obliged to. But all that said, *One Day* comes closer than ever, and finds immediate impact on its own two legs. Fucked Up does anthems expertly and these 11 tight, catchy, urgent pieces clock in at a lean 40 minutes. Covering familiar territory and putting some new spin on their beloved spirit, the album's brevity relative to Fucked Up's catalogue makes it easy to get drawn into instant replayability, which in turn adds to its immediate relatability. In chaotic hours, *One Day* brings a welcome wind to the weary inhale-exhale cycle of the times. 9/10 Trial Track: "One Day" (Darcy MacDonald)



Mac DeMarco, *Five Easy Hot Dogs* (Mac's Record Label)  
After 2019's hugely underwhelming *Here Comes the Cowboy*, Mac DeMarco clearly had to go back to the drawing board. With that, the former Montrealer has delivered a short-and-sweet 30-minute album full of feathery, unfinished-sounding

instrumentals named after cities he recorded them in during a road trip (including two named after his hometown of Edmonton, and three after his former city of Vancouver), with the simplistic, jangly guitars, old-sounding synths and relaxing, hypnotic instrumentation he's built his brand with. That's not to say it's a bad album: the tracks, while minimalistic-sounding, act as promising skeletons of songs he could've fleshed out more. As is, the tracks sound almost like background music — the makings of solid tunes, no doubt, but ones that could've been even better with further development.

Cuts like "Portland," "Edmonton," "Gualala 2," "Chicago" and closer "Rockaway" are all great instrumentals with the quintessential Mac DeMarco sound still very much intact. If he'd written lyrics and added vocals to each of these instrumental numbers, the album would've been far easier to embrace. Perhaps *Five Easy Hot Dogs* is simply him whetting fans' appetites before releasing a proper studio album, but developing these songs further and writing lyrics over them could've resulted in a truly captivating body of work. As pleasant and chilled-out as the songs are, Mac still ends up leaving one to wonder what could've been. 7/10 Trial Track: "Edmonton" (Dave MacIntyre)



SG Lewis, *AudioLust & HigherLove* (PMR / EMI)  
Giving your album a title eerily similar to Justin Timberlake's *FutureSex/LoveSounds* is a pretty ballsy move — but SG Lewis's sophomore album *AudioLust & HigherLove* matches the scale of such ambition. Boasting more tracks,

greater sonic experimentation and fewer features than his excellent 2021 debut full-length *Times*, album number two sees Lewis reaching new heights both as a producer and as the star of his own show.

Lewis's knack for writing catchy electro-pop-funk earworms has only sharpened in the two years since his debut. As with *Times*, Lewis released a few too many songs ahead of album release day, but they're all bops: "Infatuation" is a funky, silky-smooth tone-setter for the rest of the LP; "Lifetime" is a timeless-sounding jam that sounds just at home as a newly married couple's first dance song as it does in the club; "Vibe Like This" is a shimmering, summer-ready track making excellent use of featured artists Lucky Daye and Ty Dolla \$ign; and "Something About Your Love" wears its clear influence from Daft Punk's *Discovery* proudly.

Many newer tracks also seem to draw from other artists, namely "Oh Laura" (which sounds strangely like Toro y Moi's *Boo Boo*); "Another Life" (resembling deadmau5 and Kaskadee's "I Remember"); and the Majid Jordan-esque "Holding On." Each of those songs provide a unique dimension to the LP nonetheless, even while others like "Epiphany" drag on too long and "Different Light" sounds unfinished and too short. Duration-related gripes aside, *AudioLust & HigherLove* is a triumph of a 21st-century disco record — sounding bigger, more self-assured, and more timeless-sounding than its predecessor. 9/10 Trial Track: "Lifetime" (Dave MacIntyre)



Young Fathers, *Heavy Heavy* (Ninja Tune)

If it feels like it's been a while since we've heard from these Scottish style pushers, it's because it's been five years and a whole pandemic since their last full-length. They're still 1,000 times cooler than much else going on out there these days. Their third LP for Ninja

Tune is easily their most confident, direct and accessible. But don't let that fool you. Young Fathers have already blown up, and as far as hip pockets of Europe are concerned, they've gone pop, too, notably with their contributions to the *Trainspotting 2* soundtrack. *Heavy Heavy*, despite its name, is a joyous affair. Between all the rich, catchy hooks, beautiful vocal harmonies and bass galore, it's easy to overlook the complexity beneath the surface. If the Bomb Squad and the Beach Boys took a Caribbean cruise, it might just go a little something like this. 8.5/10 Trial Track: "Geronimo" (Darcy MacDonald)



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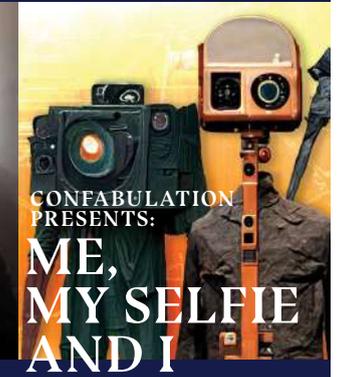
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Feb 10



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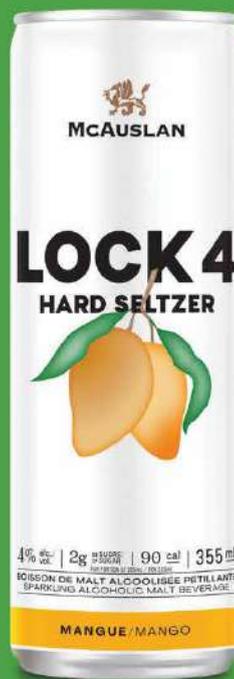
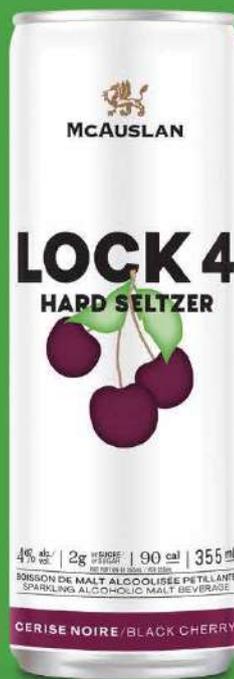
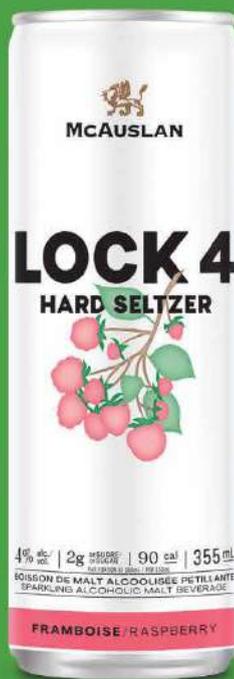
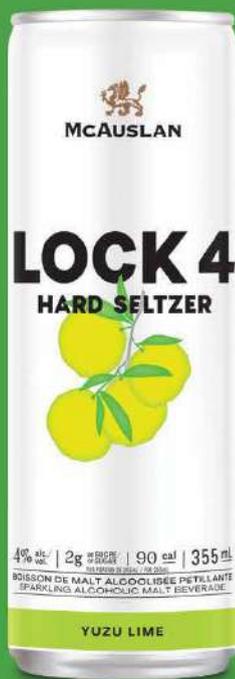


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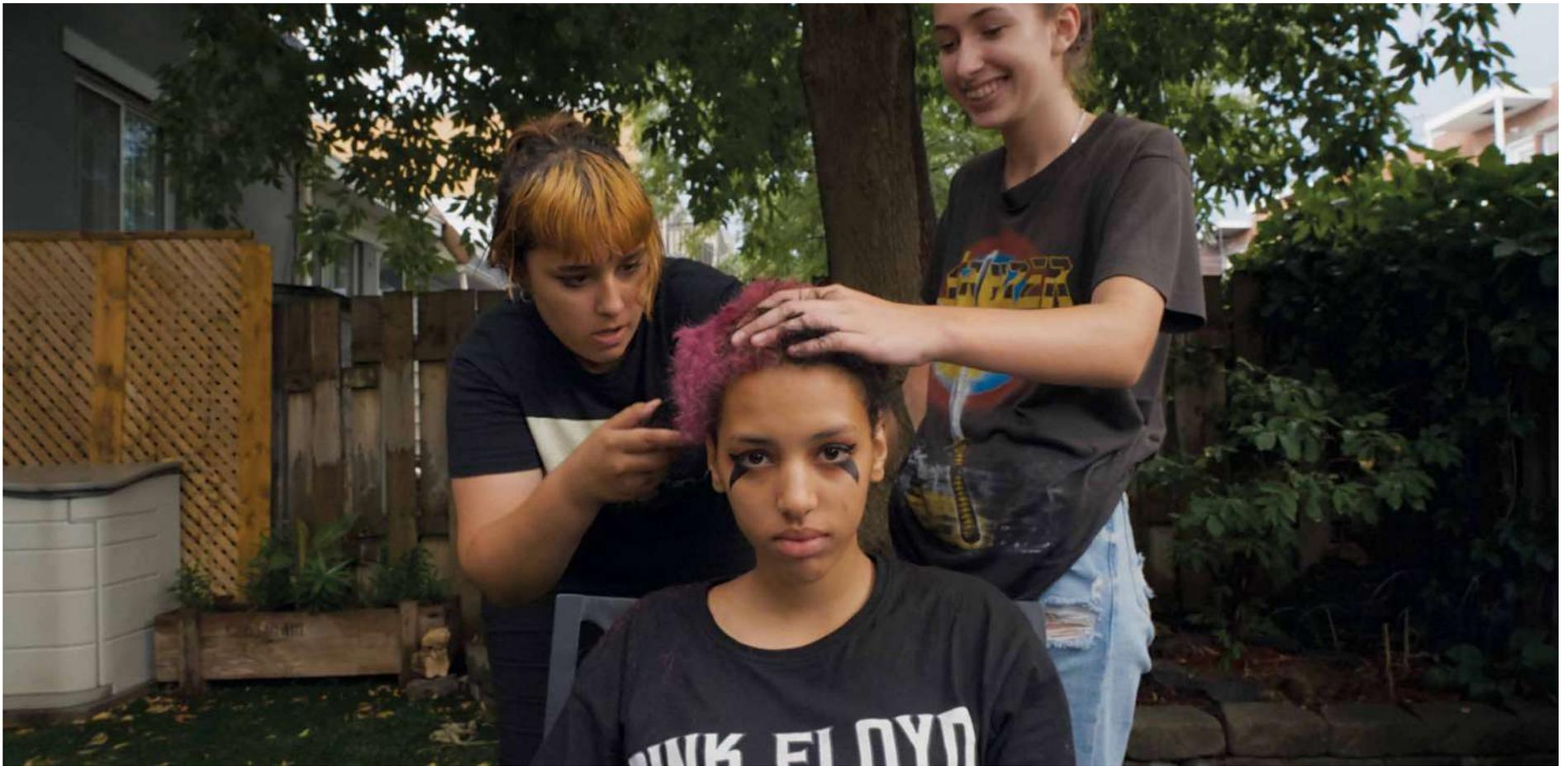
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# film

## Going live



BY JUSTINE SMITH

What's it like to experience social media as a teenage girl? A cacophony of images; friendly, inviting, hostile and terrifying. In Fanie Pelletier's documentary *Bloom*, the camera follows three groups of friends as they navigate the hyperconnected world of our modern age. With a phone almost always in hand, they're vigilant about their image, their bodies constantly measured against the world. Yet, this connectivity brings other things as well: empathy, openness and comfort.

Part traditional documentary and part "found footage," director Fanie Pelletier became obsessed with live videos, particularly ones featuring teenage girls. "Why is it so fascinating? It's like having access to some privileged space, even if it's not that privileged at all," she says. "Sometimes only five people are listening, other times thousands, but there's something intimate about a live video."

By drawing on live content on various socials, including Instagram, TikTok and the now defunct Periscope, Pelletier would watch as girls would be built up and destroyed. "You see bullying and hostility, but you also see very depressed girls being built up, like a kind of therapy. (Their lives) became a kind of laboratory for the documentary. A microcosm of life."

The documentary takes place over several years, including the pandemic, which pushed the online space more to the forefront. As subjects, the young girls are open, clever and

self-aware. "I was surprised how little work I had to do to make them comfortable in front of the camera," explains Pelletier. "They'd tell me it's because I made them feel so comfortable, but if you've made other documentaries, you know that's not enough. They're so used to being surrounded by cameras and filming themselves, though, that they'd forget it completely."

Finding the subjects was a challenge in itself. Pelletier and her producer began by canvassing high schools, and not a single person responded, not even to ask a question. In the spirit of the project, Pelletier then decided to put out a call on Instagram, and suddenly, they got a huge response. "We were specifically looking for groups of friends, but some would write me saying they're friends with so and so, but we'd quickly realize they were only 'Instagram Friends,' and never met in real life." From there, they did extensive interviews. Pelletier wanted to make sure that the different groups had different points of view, or else what's the point of having so many characters?

While the film could easily have descended into an after-school special about the dangers of social media, *Bloom* takes a more holistic approach. The reality is that much of our lives take place in the digital realm. Some of it is bad, even scary. "The negative side is that at that age, we're all a little confused, we have trouble defining ourselves, and I feel that it's even worse now." But based on what Pelletier saw, there's a lot of good, too. "It's beautiful, and it's great that there's so much freedom in terms of who they can be," explains Pelletier.

Making the film as ethical as possible was also crucial to Pelletier. She ensured all her subjects were happy with how they were portrayed. It was also important that all the girls she recorded from "the live" platforms gave their permission to have their image in the film. "I underestimated how

difficult it would be," she says. "Even if it's a second, that you see a fraction of a second of her face, it was essential to me. Even if one of the girls spoke Russian, we needed a Russian translator to speak with her." The process took months, and they even hired someone to assist in the gruelling work.

Pelletier, in particular, remembers her conversations with a livestreamer from Cambodia. "At first, she asked if I could pay for her video. I wish I could, but not even the subjects are paid. It's a documentary. We don't have money," says Pelletier. "She then asked, 'Why would I want to be in your movie? What do I get out of it?' Eventually, she asks me why I make films in general, especially if I don't make any money. I didn't know what to say."

Why do we make films? "To be part of an artistic process, I suppose," says Pelletier. But she's aware that it's deeper than that. Pelletier identifies as a shy person in real life; she doesn't think she'd ever agree to be in a documentary, but she can see how the only real advantage of being in a film like hers is "to be seen." In 2023 though, your average teen using social media has a better chance of finding an audience there than in a movie.

"Some girls didn't want to be in the film because, they'd explain, they treat TikTok as their diary," says Pelletier. "I thought that was funny because more people are watching their videos than will ever watch my film." On the other hand, though, Pelletier understands what they mean. On TikTok, the girls have control. It's as if it becomes too real when put into a cinema. "There's an abstraction," but she understands that being in a movie is somehow more important, more permanent. Of the thousands of people who watch your video on TikTok, only a handful will pay attention. In a movie, people *really* pay attention differently."

→ *Bloom* opens in theatres on Friday, Feb. 3

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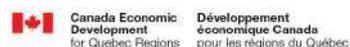


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# On Screen



Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania



Cocaine Bear



80 for Brady



One Fine Morning

BY JUSTINE SMITH

February can be depressing, but for film fans, the warm, cozy cinema remains a refuge against the darkness of the endless winter night. Among the most exciting experiences of the month, we have *Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania* (Feb. 17) at the forefront. In this one, Ant-Man and the Wasp explore the Quantum realm and go on an adventure they never thought was possible.

With no obvious contender for Valentine's Day rom-com to check out, your best (some might argue better) option is *Magic Mike's Last Dance* (Feb. 10). Our boy, Magic Mike, has to retake the stage after a bad deal left him broke and bartending in Florida. Channing Tatum returns in front of the camera, and Steven Soderbergh returns as director.

For some spooky vibes, M. Night Shyamalan's *Knock at the Cabin* (Feb. 3) brings some *Twilight Zone* vibes to the big screen. Dave Bautista stars in this apocalyptic fantasy about a family held to ransom in a cabin in the woods and forced to make a terrible choice, or else the world ends.

If you're more of a blood and guts genre fan, *Cocaine Bear*

(Feb. 24) should be the R-rated horror comedy of your dreams. The title is self-explanatory: a 500-pound gets into some cocaine and goes on a murderous rampage. The film is directed by Elizabeth Banks and stars Ray Liotta, Keri Russell, Margo Martindale and Matthew Rhys. It's Liotta's last big screen role.

For some family-friendly adventures, the biggest band in the world puts together their first-ever concert film in *BTS: Yet to Come in Cinemas* (Feb 1). That same week, you can also check out the latest entry in the Asterix & Obelix franchise, *Asterix & Obelix: The Middle Kingdom* (Feb. 1).

For some more light content, *80 for Brady* (Feb. 3) unites some of the greatest actors of all time. Jane Fonda, Rita Morena, Sally Field and Lily Tomlin play a group of friends on a quest to fulfill their lifelong dream of going to the Super Bowl and meeting their hero, Tom Brady. As absurd as the premise is, the cast is undeniably good, and this might be more fun than it looks.

*Close* (Feb. 3) won the Grand Prix at Cannes last year. It's about the intense friendship between two 13-year-old boys, Leo and Remi, that gets suddenly disrupted. *One Fine Morning* (Feb. 10) also premiered at Cannes last year. In the latest film by Mia Hansen-Løve, Léa Seydoux stars as a young woman living with her eight-year-old

daughter and also caring for her father who's suffering from a neurodegenerative disease. She runs into an unavailable friend with whom she embarks on an affair.

For some more "prestige" dramas, you can choose between *Alice Darling* (Feb. 3) and *Emily* (Feb. 24). *Alice Darling* is a psychological thriller about a young woman (Anna Kendrick) trapped in an abusive relationship who becomes the unwitting participant in an intervention staged by her two closest friends. The amazing Kaniehtiio Horn co-stars. Meanwhile, *Emily* brings to the screen the life of Emily Brontë, author of *Wuthering Heights*, in a semi-autobiographical fiction that imagines what inspired Brontë's work before her early death at just 30 years old.

There are lots of Québécois and Canadian options as well: *Jouvencelles* (Feb. 3) is a documentary about young girls navigating online spaces; *Rodéo* (Feb. 3) is about a young woman with a passion for riding who embeds herself in the underground world of dirt biking; *The Myth of the Black Woman* (Feb. 10) is a documentary that investigates and deconstructs stereotypes linked to the image of the black woman; and *To Kill a Tiger* (Feb. 10) is a harrowing documentary about an Indian farmer named Ranjit who takes on the fight of his life when he demands justice for his 13-year-old daughter, the victim of a brutal gang rape.

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## It's Black History Month in Montreal



Nadia Rousseau



Tristan D. Lalla

Dominique Pierre DeRenoncourt

Dominique Pierre DeRenoncourt

BY SAVANNAH STEWART

February brings Black History Month, and with it, a massive schedule of events, panels and workshops happening in Montreal and across Quebec.

With the theme “Out of the darkness, into the light,” the festival’s organizers are reminding us of how Black history has for so long been kept in the dark, but also how the shadow of the pandemic loomed over us since the last completely in-person Black History Month back in 2020.

“We’re looking ahead with serenity, but also with a lot of joy, because we think that being together is part of Black History Month,” says Nadia Rousseau, coordinator of this year’s festival. “We’re really happy that we’re going to have an edition that is in person.”

Spokesperson Tristan D. Lalla highlights how the constraints imposed by COVID took a toll on us all, so it’s a special opportunity to be able to come together again this year. “The social aspect is such a huge part of how we fellowship and how we get together — it’s highly welcome.”

“Let’s get on with life. Let’s go back into the world,” he continues. “There’s a sense of rejuvenation that’s imbued into 2023 already.”

Montrealers can look forward to dozens of low-cost, accessible events taking place all over the city, spilling over into March and culminating with the *Dynastie* awards ceremonies honouring Black excellence in the media and arts, March 30 and April 1.

Programming highlights include the premiere of *Le mythe de la femme noire*, a documentary by Ayana O’Shun, with

English subtitles (screening at Cinéma Beaubien on Feb. 10). The film blends interviews and archival footage to deconstruct stereotypes and how they continue to be experienced by Afro-descendent women today.

“It’s really a movie that is totally Montreal because the people that are interviewed are French speakers, English speakers,” Rousseau explains. “It’s like a jambalaya, a nice representation of how Black women in Montreal or around Quebec feel about their situation.”

*Afrodisiaque* is a one-woman play written and acted by Maryline Chery and directed by Lydie Dubuisson. Through monologue, song, rap and protest, the play explores how society perceives Black women’s hair texture, literally giving a voice to the young main character’s hair. The play will be performed twice, on Feb. 8 at Maison de la culture Claude-Léveillée and on Feb. 17 at Maison culturelle et communautaire de Montréal-Nord.

Staying true to the theme, Rousseau highlighted a conference by Martiniquaise historian Monique Milia Marie-Luce that will present the little-known story of Guadeloupean women who passed through Ellis Island to be hired as servants in Quebec over a century ago. The conference “Out of the Darkness Into the Light: The Untold Story of Guadeloupean Domesticity in Quebec” will be a bilingual presentation on Feb. 23 at the Écomusée du fier monde.

One event Rousseau particularly wanted to highlight was the yearly blood drive for sickle cell disease, an inherited disorder affecting the red blood cells that disproportionately affects Black communities. As a result of the pandemic, Héma-Québec has imposed a by-appointment event instead of the walk-in event that was organized as part of Black History Month in previous years.

“I would have liked it to be walk-in like it used to be,” Rousseau comments, as she’s worried the different set-up

will have an impact on the event’s performance. “We’re still having the impacts of COVID that are a daily thing that we are living through, so I feel a bit sad.”

The Round Table on Black History Month also chooses 12 laureates that are honoured, one for every month during the next year, beginning with this month’s laureate: Carla Beauvais, a columnist, social entrepreneur and cofounder of Fondation Dynastie.

“Black history has been in the dark for a long time, and in February the media shines a spotlight on Black History Month, but all year the Round Table schedules events uplifting the Black communities,” says Rousseau. Outside of February, there is a particular focus on community-based events, to continue the important work of uplifting.

“It’s rejuvenating because the message is so clear for me; people are so involved,” says Rousseau about planning this year’s festival. “We’re looking forward to opening for the public all we have to showcase.”

Lalla echoes that excitement for what Black History Month will bring for Montrealers and Quebecers, and the call to prioritize community-building in February and all year round.

“We got to remember Carter Woodson and those who started the education about why it was so important to highlight the efforts and accomplishments of Black women and men so that it’s not forgotten,” he says.

“It’s about passing the torch and making sure we’re not just doing lip service for a month so that we can pat ourselves on the back, but that we’re actually feeding the community so that everybody can thrive.”

→ For more information about this year’s Black History Month programming, please visit [moishistoiredesnoirs.com](http://moishistoiredesnoirs.com).

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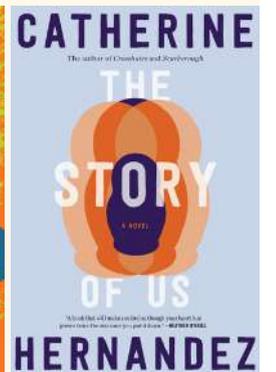
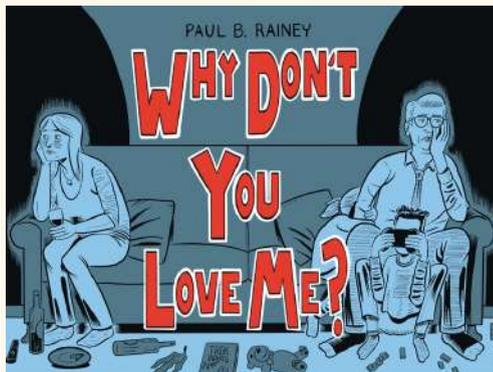
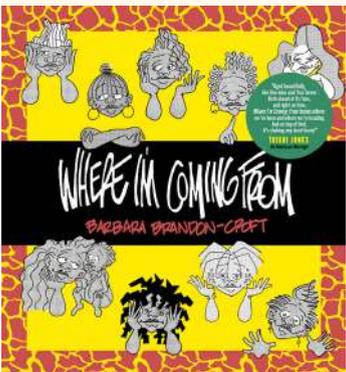
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## NEW AND EXCITING THIS MONTH



### UPCOMING EVENTS & BOOK CLUBS

TUE, FEB 7 | 7 PM STRANGE FUTURES | *Scattered All Over the Earth*

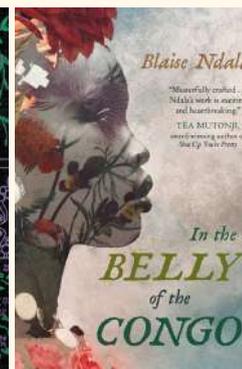
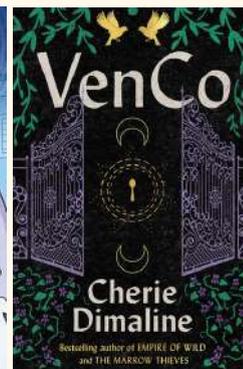
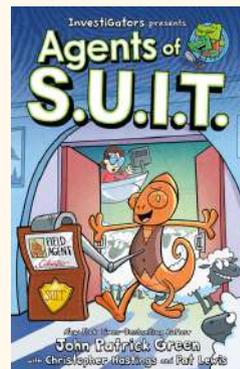
THUR, FEB 9 | 7 PM BOOK LAUNCH | *Men I Trust*

WED, FEB 15 | 7 PM GAY READS | *The Lost Century*

WED, FEB 22 | 7 PM INDIGENOUS LIT | *Making Love with the Land*

THUR, FEB 23 | 7 PM GRAPHIC NOVEL | *Wash Day Diaries*

THUR, MAR 9 | 7 PM LATINX | *When You Look Up*



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# : game jam



BY NATALIA YANCHAK

*SEASON: A letter to the future*, follows a young woman from a remote village who, for the first time, explores the world beyond her town's stone walls by bike. Her task is to collect, photograph and document memories before a cataclysmic event wipes her world away.

It's a single player, narrative adventure and exploration game with a paint-by-numbers senior Millennial

aesthetic. Part apocalyptic fantasy, part Instagram travel blog, this game visually exists in a liminal space between dawn and dusk, during a perpetual magic hour. The world is esoteric and mysterious, a version of Earth where dreams and memories are powerful, life affecting constructs.

*SEASON* takes point-and-click to the next level with its analogue elements. In your satchel you carry a camera (that you learn to frame and focus) and audio cassette recorder (improve your mic technique!) that are used to document your journey. Everything is a memory, every moment might be important — it really depends on if you decide to speedrun *SEASON* (not recommended) or linger in it. Think of this game as a scrapbooking RP — because your progression is based on your journaling, and bike riding, abilities.

It's February in Montreal: the dead of winter, we're packed in by piles of snow that seems to never stop falling. So taking a nice warm verdant Mediterranean-inspired virtual bike ride sounds *real nice*. And that first in-game bike ride in *SEASON* is truly fantastic. I could almost feel the wind in my hair.

This traversal gameplay is enhanced on PS5, taking full advantage of the DualSense controller features to mimic the sensations of bike riding. Pedalling uses the adaptive triggers with varying resistance depending on the speed and the incline of the road — one of the more ingenious uses of the PlayStation controllers since catching Sam Porter Bridges' balance in *Death Stranding*. Players on PS5 will also feel the texture of the ground change as they cycle over different terrain via haptic feedback.

I played on Steam with a controller and had to push forward on the left controller stick to pedal. And while the bike riding experience (jumping on, pushing off, gaining momentum, slowing down and parking your bike) was extremely satisfying, the PS5 experience would push it over the top.

Founded in 2015 in Montreal, Scavengers is an independent video game studio that is now run by CEO Amélie Lamarche. A bumpy period in 2021 saw a change in leadership and studio direction -- all amidst the development of *SEASON*, a title very different from Scavengers' first game *Darwin Project* (a battle royale MMO).

Making *SEASON: A Letter to the Future* has been cathartic, according to the title's writer and creative director Kevin Sullivan. "It has absorbed our worries about the state of the planet, our joy at living on it, things we've seen, people we've loved and lost, all tied together into something, hopefully, beautiful and strange."

If anything the release of *SEASON* is a testament to Scavengers studio as a team. Making games is a delicate and slow craft — it takes patience and iteration — themes that are reflected in *SEASON*'s gameplay, the story and the overall work itself.

→ *SEASON: a letter to the future* was released Jan. 31, 2023 to PC, Playstation 4 and Playstation 5 by Scavengers Studio.



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