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Following the success of his series *Ramy* and *Mo*, and an important role in the upcoming Yorgos Lantimos film *Poor Things*, Ramy Youssef is taking some time to return to standup at this year's Just for Laughs festival.

Cover photo by Josh Aikin

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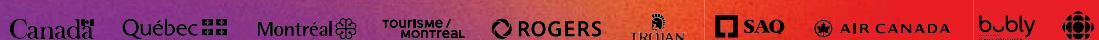
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: best buds



BY DAVE MACINTYRE

If you take much stock in what Reddit has to say, the weed I'm about to review is absolute dogshit. DLYS Appalaches is grown around Sutton, in the Eastern Townships, and in those parts you'd expect a pretty high-quality product. Instead, you've got people calling it "le pire pot à la SQDC, point finale."

Oof! I suppose this represents a good opportunity to see for myself if this is actually as poor as the Reddit potheads seem to think. Only one way to find out, I guess! Let's dive in.

DLYS Appalaches Granddaddy Punch (Hybrid)

Though this batch isn't QUITE as bad as certain Redditors are saying, there definitely is a little too much stem with each of the buds I see in my container.

For strictly aesthetic reasons at least, it's not one of the better SQDC strains you'll find. There's no question about its potency, as the batch I picked up clocks in at 25.3% (with 2.2% terpenes in the mix, too). It's a high I mostly seem to feel around my eyes and face, so you'll be disappointed if you're expecting any sort of body high with this one.

The buds are easily the most frustrating part of this strain. For one, they're definitely showing more stem than they should, and it feels a bit like I'm not getting my money's worth for a mere \$25. When you try to grind the buds you do get, they're very sticky and almost rubbery, so it's hard to break them down to smaller pieces. They aren't super moist, but they also aren't brittle enough to break down with your fingers, or even with an actual grinder (or at least, MY actual grinder). Also, any scent or fragrance when you smell them feels nigh-unnoticeable. This strain also goes down a bit too harshly when you smoke it from a pipe.

Sometimes, this strain keeps your brain wired and active in a way that makes you think you're smoking a sativa. It can definitely cause your thoughts to race though, and not always in a good kind of way. At its worst, it does tend to get you a little too self-analytical.

That's what it did for me, and it's probably a sign I should stop smoking it whenever that happens.

Overall, it can be a double-edged sword: sometimes I'm super active, while other times I feel quite sleepy.

At the peak of its powers, though, this'll get you straight fucked. For example, me listening to Sampha's comeback single "Spirit 2.0" after smoking this feels like a trip of epic proportions at times (also, holy shit, that's Yaeji singing in Korean at the very end!). It also makes me feel more immersed and involved in Grian Chatten's album — which I reviewed in this issue — while listening to it again a couple times.

For all of its moments where it actually packs a "punch" (sorry, I know, low-hanging fruit), there were at least a couple instances where the high died off sooner than I would've liked it to. (Side note: I wrote this column while the smog outside rendered Montreal's air quality the third-worst in the world — trailing only Jakarta and Lahore as I wrote this.)

Overall, the SQDC Redditors are being a bit dramatic, despite their valid criticisms. This weed has its moments, but also leaves a fair bit to be desired. It's not the worst government-approved weed you can smoke, but definitely among the weaker ones I've tried for this column.

Rating: 6/10

PHOTO BY MARIUS VAN DYK

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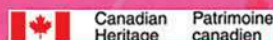
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food

Lawrence 3.0



Rachel Cheng

By Clay Sandhu

Over the last 12 years, Lawrence has been different restaurants.

In the beginning, it followed a traditional three-course format with a menu heavily influenced by London institution St. John, serving sizeable, decadent portions that frequently featured offal. In 2018, Lawrence got a massive facelift, and along with a new design came hand-thrown ceramic dishes, bound menus and wine lists, and smaller, more composed dishes — the small plates era. Now in its third distinctive iteration, Lawrence is something new altogether. Having switched locations with its sister restaurant Larrys, Lawrence is a much different restaurant than it was in 2011 — and since the recent departure of longtime chef-de-cuisine Endi Qendro, chef-owner Marc Cohen now runs the kitchen solo.

I arrived to eat on a Friday afternoon for the third daytime service since adding lunches three weeks prior. Lunch is by far my favourite meal and Lawrence in its heyday served one of the very best in town. Lunch at Lawrence is different than it used to be, however. The iconic burger and cheese sandwich are no longer on the menu (though you can get them at Larrys next door). Instead, you're presented with an option of two fixed menus: three courses or four. Since I had come to research, it seemed only common sense to take the four-course menu.

The wine list, curated by Keaton Ritchie, features more than 200 references, but there is also a robust selection of craft beers, ciders and a small cocktail menu. While a wine list this large might seem intimidating, it's divided by colour and subsequently subdivided into categories of flavour profiles, making it easy to navigate. For my part, I selected a bottle of Vouvray from Michel Autran. It's a wine that can comfortably accompany fatty fish, poultry, blanched veg and even red meat — provided that it's got some spice to it. It's an excellent wine and one that can go the distance.

The first course was a revisited take on a Cohen classic: Dripping toast with bone marrow and peas. Served in a small bowl, a crustless square of sourdough, spread with beef drippings (delicious rendered beef fat), is crisped up and topped with sweet green peas, a round of beautifully roasted marrow and a dollop of horseradish cream. An alluring little pile, the lot is set in a hearty broth. It's absolutely delicious. The crispness of the bread stays entirely intact while somehow also absorbing the broth surrounding it. The peas burst on the palate with the sweetness of spring and balance the richness of marrow helping to join the dish together. I love this kind of cooking. It's deceptively simple and yet very hard to do well. Combining different textures and temperatures requires great timing. Done wrong and the peas overcook or the bread will sit in the broth too long and become soggy. It's also a dish reminiscent of the old Lawrence — just slightly more refined.

Next up: pasta. Specifically, a double-ravioli of chicken hearts and livers. A single portion includes three ravioli, each containing two fillings. The liver, in the form of a light-pink mousse, is vibrant in flavour and deliciously smooth, whereas the hearts, which have been ground and browned, are unctuous and deep. Served in a sultry sauce (likely a bit of reduced stock mounted with a generous helping of butter) and garnished with plump morels, it's an instant classic. This dish defines Cohen's cooking in so many ways. Nobody else is making pasta like this. It's entirely untraditional and somewhat esoteric — I mean a little packet of hearts and liver doesn't scream home run — but it's balanced, it's perfectly cooked and it's a dish that feels whole.

The third course: lamb with dandelion greens and anchovy. I feel the need to insert a small disclaimer. I worked as a cook at Lawrence for a year back in 2015 and as the sous chef at Larrys for a few years after that. This is a version of a dish I used to make back then — only now, it's even better than I remember. Braised lamb breast (belly) gets roasted for crispness and is then served in a chilli-flecked lamb broth and topped with gently wilted dandelion greens and a

spoonful of anchoïade. Cohen has always been particularly adept at combining bits of land and sea but this dish is one of the best examples. The lamb is meltingly tender yet the roasted exterior provides a textural contrast that is as delightful as it is essential. The dandelion greens work a bit like chard or rapini — offering a touch of bitterness that works exceptionally well with the vibrant anchoïade (a provençal condiment that's essentially anchovy aioli), which brings depth to the dish while counterbalancing the spice and also adding acidity. Another hit.

The final course, of course, is dessert. I've always loved dessert at Lawrence — it's one of the few restaurants I can think of that employs an entirely separate pastry department. Always indulgent but never overly complicated, a Lawrence dessert never tries too hard to reinvent the wheel (a fatal flaw so many restaurants are guilty of). Here, you get a slice of a beautiful tart, a pot de crème or an excellent piece of cake. In this instance, dessert was a frozen lemon custard topped with the season's first strawberries and a spoonful of gin. The custard is texturally perfect and the strawberries are both tart and sweet. A few leaves of lemon balm and prickly ash pepper add a savoury touch and the gin gives the dish a bit of backbone. It's refreshing, light, and a perfect complement to a near-flawless meal.

Lawrence, for nearly as long as it's been open, has been a major influence in my life. Much of my opinions on food were formed during the time I worked there and the way I cook remains deeply influenced by Cohen's style of food. Today, I see Lawrence and Cohen in a new light. There's a confidence and maturity to the food that feels different. In the early days, it felt like a young chef cooking someone else's food — Fergus Henderson's food. Lawrence of 2023? It's all Cohen. After 12 years, his voice and style have been concretized and the result is a restaurant that feels new while simultaneously commanding the respect and embodying the polished professionalism of a fully-fledged institution — and in my opinion, it's the best the restaurant has ever been.

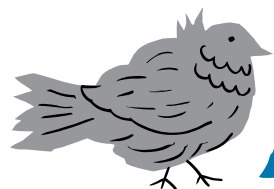
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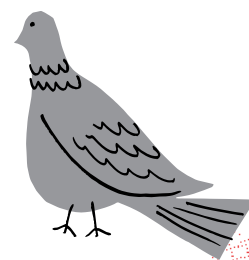


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music

Support system

By Darcy MacDonald

In the sweltering noon-hour heat on the first official day of summer, Félix Petit seems to be chilling right at home in the comfort of Rosemont-la-Petite-Patrie's hybrid café/record store, 180g.

As coffee orders are placed, one of the shop's co-owners lifts the flaps on a square cardboard package and shows us the goods. The box contains a stack of vinyl copies of Petit's first official label release as FELP: a solo EP, aptly titled *HELP*.

With 10 tracks and 3 interlude segues clocking in at just under 27 minutes, *HELP* arrives right on time. Which, considering how busy its creator keeps himself with an already-flourishing (albeit more behind-the-scenes) music career, is saying a lot.

Petit is a go-to studio producer for some of Quebec's most bankable young talents. Les Louanges, Hubert Lenoir and Laurence-Anne are just a few of the artists Petit regularly works with. All three show up to *HELP*. So do Greg Beaudin, Klô Pelgag, HAWA B and even more, still.

Because when talents like les Louanges and Lenoir need somebody — not just anybody — to bring their visions to life, they get by with a little help from Petit. So when, early in the pandemic, he began composing his own solo project, they showed up for him in kind.

"Very early in the process, I called the guests," Petit explains.

"For example, Hubert joined very early in the process. We did it all in one session, all the vocal recordings. And for three years, I kept those demo recordings on the tracks. And at the end, during the mix, he sent the new vocal recording."

During that period, artists wanted to record their own albums, and Petit had no shortage of production work. *HELP*, he explained, was a slow burn, but one he managed to take on with intention when small opportunities to advance presented themselves.

"It was very efficient. I'd have like two days to do a song. So if someone was open to doing something, I'd tell them I wanted them on a song and ask if they were available."

"Then Bonsound gave me a deadline, so I managed my time over one month to close the deal."

And with that, as Petit and friends mixed and mastered their way through many late nights, *HELP* finally arrived.

And the result, despite its brief run time, is a sprawling exercise in controlled chaos. *HELP* is a woozy, trippy, highly nuanced affair, unstuck in time and unencumbered by pretense or pomp, and structured such that listeners might find any number of moments in the groove to lend their attention.

"I wanted the pacing and the project to be short because I know, based on my experience, I like half an hour of music!" Petit laughs.

"If something begins and ends in half an hour, I'm very happy



Louis Robitaille

with that. I wanted *HELP* to be, like, flash-music."

Music, Petit offered, is the only art form that can bend time. That can be a blessing or a curse, to his mind.

"Sometimes one minute of music can feel like two hours of jail," he says. "You have to skip it. I'm okay with skipping. I've skipped a lot of songs in my life."

FELP makes sample music with a composer's ear for structure, a musician's ear for style, a beatmaker's taste for experimental time signatures and sample layering, and a studio professional's intuition for seeing a creative idea through to the finish line with its artistic vision intact.

This is how Petit approaches production for every project he collaborates on.

"I'm here for the artist. When I'm doing an album, I try to really accompany them, to take their ideas, get those ideas clear, and not be putting myself in there. And I live for that. Production is all-encompassing.

"Whatever it is that permits a record to be produced, if you know how to do it, you've gotta do it. Recording, composing, arranging, beat-making, whatever. A producer takes the idea and makes a record with it. And I like that because it's concrete."

Petit moved to Montreal at the age of 18 from his small hometown of Besançon, France, to study saxophone at Université de Montreal.

There, he met like-minded musicians with whom he plays to this day. In earlier incarnations of FELP (and its sister band, Chienvoler), Petit and his jam partners would mount near-three-hour live shows for like-minded music nerds.

"Nobody could guess which song was from which band that was playing. It was weird P-Funk vibes!"

And with a little more help from his friends (including keyboardist Jérôme Beaulieu, drummer William Côté, bassist Jérémie Roy, vocalist Em Pompa and all of the guests on *HELP*), FELP performs the first-ever and possibly only live presentation of the entire project at the Montreal Jazz Fest on July 7.

"I wanted to take my chance to put something out there that might enlarge the spectrum of what we can hear. Sometimes, music starts to go in the same direction," offered Petit.

"With *HELP*, I wanted to showcase how things can be done a little differently."

→ FELP performs on the Jazz Fest's Club TD Montreal stage on Friday, July 7, 11 p.m., free

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Growing up again

BY DAVE MACINTYRE

Great personal strife often leads to great art. Across five songs on his newest EP, Alex Nicol turns grief and major life changes into a small but truly captivating body of work.

The EP, *Been a Long Year Vol. 1*, dropped on June 30. Prior to the release, the Montreal-based singer-songwriter was “really calm and really excited at the same time” to unleash these songs onto listeners, especially as they took quite some time to marinate — almost nine months — with much of it being recorded during the pandemic.

A follow-up to his 2020 debut album, *All for Nada* (his first solo record after being in the band Hoan), Nicol feels like this EP is a big leap toward fully expressing himself artistically, compared with his album’s more “heady” and “intellectual” nature, where he didn’t feel like those depths were being reached.

“My universe is far larger,” he says, speaking to Cult MTL while staying at his mother’s house in Ottawa (and having just returned from doing a press run in Europe). “It’s grander, it’s deeper, it’s naughtier. It’s a lot more emotional. I think that comes out of what I’ve lived through.”

Born in Hamilton and raised in Toronto and Ottawa, he moved to Montreal at the age of 18 to pursue his ambitions as a singer-songwriter. “I wanted to be involved in an artistic community, and I found one in Montreal, so I stayed,” he says. “The music community in Montreal is vast — there’s just fantastic people everywhere.”

While it may have been a long time in the works, *Been a Long Year Vol. 1* doesn’t feel stale or played-out to Nicol. “They’re so ‘of the now’ for me,” he says. “As much as they’ve been around for a while, they’re still fresh to me. I hear them and I think, ‘Oh yeah, this is my new identity. This is my new sound.’”

Produced in part at the Gamma Recording Studio at LaTraque in Rosemont/Petite-Patrie, Nicol recorded these five songs alongside several musicians, including Chocolat’s Guillaume Éthier (who played drums on the EP) as well as bassist Maxime Castellon and guitarist Simon Trottier (who plays electric and lap steel). If you ask Nicol, it was producer/mixer Emmanuel “Manu” Éthier — who’s worked previously with Coeur de pirate, Pierre Lapointe, Choses Sauvages and other big-name acts in Quebec — who really brought the songs together after they were demoed in Nicol’s Parc Ex basement.

But not before a sudden domestic accident when Manu went over to Nicol’s place to meet him for the first time.

“We sat down, and my cat had just peed on my couch the morning Manu came over,” he says. “I’d never met Manu, so I was like, ‘Oh my God, this is terrible.’ I didn’t know what he was going to think, but it wasn’t a good time to have a cat pee on the couch. But he came in and sat beside it, and we really hit it off. He was very, very chill.”

Nicol talked about what he wanted to do with the songs, while Éthier recommended where to record them, and who to lay those tracks down with. After meeting with the musicians he played on the EP with, they set some dates and practised before sitting down at Gamma to record for five days.

This also all happened at a challenging time for Nicol. Two days before recording, he was laid off from his job, as the



Hamza Abouelouafia

department he worked in had suddenly been shuttered. He couldn’t get time off work to record prior to his job loss, so he decided to “commit 110%” to his music. Between mixed feelings of relief in the present and uncertainty about the future, there was upheaval elsewhere in Nicol’s life, when a friend of his committed suicide.

“It was really a strange period,” he continues. “That’s the milieu in which the songs were written and recorded. The only thing keeping me sane was the recording of the music, and the commitment to the art. Looking back on it, it’s clear that I was receiving some signals from the universe that this is what I’m supposed to be doing, and I’ve got to take this really seriously.”

“I poured my heart and soul into it. It captures this transformative period in my life where my old self, which was very stuck to social expectations of myself — have a full-time job, be a certain way in the world, tamper your artistic temperament. That was my old self. This all kind of came together, and within a couple of weeks, I was jobless. I had recorded music that I thought was the best, but I didn’t have any money left. I was like, ‘What the fuck is going to happen?’”

Nicol admits he used to feel like he couldn’t tell people he was a musician, instead saying he was a copywriter (his old job) or a cook. Deciding to fully lean into his role as a musician and embrace it was a huge moment for him, one that made him cry and become “very emotional” afterwards. In other words, this personal breakthrough is part of why it’s been such a long year for him.

“These songs are always going to bring me there, to this period of intense interpersonal evolution,” he says. “In part forced, and in part out of my own volition.”

Learning to accept his feelings as being valid and authentic is documented within the songs on *Been a Long Year Vol. 1*. The pandemic has also caused a sense of hyper-stability inside Nicol, leading him to avoid tackling certain long-suppressed emotions for a great amount of time. After

making the EP’s title track (“Been a Long Year”), the writing process became a “flashpoint” for him.

“It all happened very quickly,” he continues. “I didn’t change one word. It captured it. From that point onward, I was like, ‘Okay, I can go there.’ And it feels good. It was mostly that song that crystallized it, because it was so simple. The sense of hyper-stability lasted so long. It wasn’t just COVID, but COVID augmented it. All that meant is I just retrenched further and further and further.”

“Then other sad things happened: deaths, job losses. In a way, it’s tough for me, because I’m not a sad person. I just got smacked around by the world for a long time. And I let the world smack me around, in some ways. Now that I’m living with grief, too, and living with the version of myself that I was before, that’s life, baby.”

As far as what he’s learned about himself during the pandemic, whether as a musician or on a human level, he credits a newfound appreciation and respect for Montreal’s music community, and those involved in it. (Having guests like Dirty Projectors’ Angel Deradoorian on vocals and Pietro Amato on French horn on this EP made Nicol feel like “the luckiest person on Earth.”) On a more personal level, he feels like he’s “broken through a lot of walls I set for myself,” and embraces vulnerability, freely expressing his emotions more than ever.

“I have more emotional intelligence now than I did before,” he continues. “I just think I don’t have any fear anymore. I have so much less fear of getting it wrong, whether I’m worthy of things, whether what I’m trying to say is what people want to hear.”

“I have this whole suite of themes about myself now that I never had before. I have a relationship with my anxiety, my body image, my sense of inadequacy and a lot of tangled-up thoughts that I used to have. I’m trying to make public this interpersonal transformation I’ve undergone.”



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Album reviews



Killer Mike, *Michael* (VLNS/Loma Vista)
Calling Killer Mike one of most prolific figures in modern hip hop is a short sell. The Atlanta rapper's slow-burn pop culture ascent first caught fire when he shared a 2003 Grammy with Outkast. For a fulltime activist, businessman and one half of music megaforce

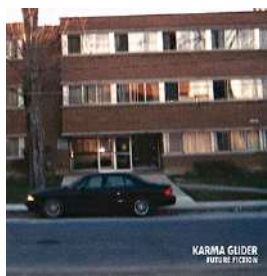
Run The Jewels, that *Michael* arrives only 11 years after its predecessor, *R.A.P. Music*, is a small miracle, and divinely inspired at that. The MC stretches his autobiography over gorgeous blues and gospel-steeped arrangements guided by the prestigious production talent of No I.D., which places *Michael* among the chosen. Marquee guests like André 3000 and CeeLo help create space for Killer Mike to find real identification with listeners. A damn-near perfect project and a golden anniversary gift to hip hop. 9/10 Trial Track: "Two Days" ft. Ty Dolla \$ign (Darcy MacDonald)



Grian Chatten, *Chaos for the Fly* (Partisan)
If Grian Chatten's goal was to make an album unquestionably and inherently distinct from his day job fronting Fontaines D.C., he's passed that test with flying colours. His debut solo LP, *Chaos for the Fly*, does away with the crunching post-punk that put the Irish singer on

the map, instead making a folkier and almost crooner-like body of work. Swapping electric guitars for acoustic ones

(and plenty of strings, horns, harmonicas, mandolins and pianos), Chatten combines old-school folk melodies with more introspective, vulnerable and subdued lyrics than we're used to hearing. He also channels Leonard Cohen (especially on "The Score"), Nick Cave, Nick Drake, Morrissey and Elliott Smith to varying degrees. Trip-hop influences can be heard in the sparse, downtrodden closer "Season for Pain," while the violin-driven "Fairlies," waltz-tempo acoustic number "Salt Throwers Off a Truck" and the strangely psychedelic "Bob's Casino" are also highlights. Overall, *Chaos for the Fly* proves with plenty of gusto that Chatten can be a truly transfixing one-man show. 9/10 Trial Track: "Fairlies" (Dave MacIntyre)



Karma Glider, *Future Fiction* (Mothland)
Future Fiction, the debut EP by Karma Glider, sounds like it should be the soundtrack to an indie skateboarding video game where you grind on planetary rails and bomb down into celestial half pipes. The vocals, by former Heat frontman Susil Sharma, are

hazy and pushed a bit back in the mix, purposefully, for the listener to get lost in the rhythmic, punky shoegaze. The dance between the bass riffs and fuzzy guitar are also fun as hell. *Future Fiction* is a bit Dead Boys, but if they were opening for someone like Echo & the Bunnymen or the Psychedelic Furs. Another win for Montreal's Mothland scene. 9/10 "Burning Up" (Stephan Boissoneault)

Sigur Rós, *ÁTTA* (Von Dur/BMG)

If any band can make truly sweeping, gorgeous and grandiose music like it's nothing at all, it's Sigur Rós. The Icelandic band's first album since 2013's *Kveikur* — and first since the return of keyboardist Kjartan Sveinsson — is an hour-



long odyssey backed by a full orchestra, and showcasing many of the band's long-established musical strengths. Their eighth studio album (the title *ÁTTA* means "eight" in their native tongue) also eschews drums almost entirely, save for a pounding bass drum almost like a heartbeat on "Klettur." Frontman Jónsi has said the

band's intention was for the songs to sound "sparse, floaty and beautiful," and they've definitely understood that assignment. Though that strategy means *ÁTTA* is somewhat lacking in range, and it's not particularly different from what we've heard from them before, it still feels damn good to hear Sigur Rós make proper albums again. 8/10 Trial Track: "Blóðberg" (Dave MacIntyre)



Various, *Sounds From Mothland, Vol. II* (Mothland)

Mothland, your favourite local alternative label, has dropped Volume II of their *Sounds From Mothland* series — a treasure chest of b-sides and other rarities in the label's expanding universe. There are so many gems on this 14-song puzzle. Starting us off is the

experimental gothic track "Deep (Demo Version)" by Petra Glynt, who also made the the trippy album cover. Next is the evil yet glamorous "Entertainment" by dark-synthwave post-punk stooges CDSM. "Kafka (Mixtape Version)" may be Sunglaciers' most straightforward punk song, and it's glorious. "No They Wouldn't" — by Mothland newcomer We Owe — is pure sonic madness reminiscent of collaborations between Robert Fripp and Brian Eno. Closing the album is the blissful "Volcan d'amour" by N NAO. 8/10 Trial Track: "Kafka (Mixtape Version) by Sunglaciers" (Stephan Boissoneault)

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:hammer of the mods

BY JOHNSON CUMMINS

About a decade ago, I found myself at one of my most hated places in the world: an outdoor music festival.

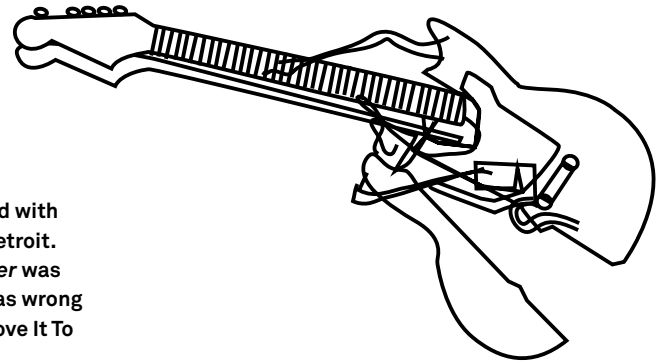
The reason I was there was to see former members of Black Flag (rounded out by Descendents shredder Stephen Egerton) absolutely pummel under the name Flag. I am not too ashamed to admit I was a complete fanboy as Black Flag rank as religion to me. After following them around and peppering them with a litany of questions, bass player Chuck Dukowski and myself went to see one of the fest's headliners, Alice Cooper. I admitted to my bass-playing hero that I wasn't into his "Hey Stoopid" years etc. After letting me vent for a bit, Dukowski just pointed at Alice Cooper and screamed over the din, "Before punk, the Stooges, MC5 and Alice Cooper were the only thing happening." Waitaminnit. "Before punk"? At that point I had never talked to anybody who was there "before punk." He insisted that Black Flag would've sounded very different if not for Alice Cooper and as soon as he said it, I instantly saw the connection.

If you want to talk Detroit-fuelled proto-punk, you have to give a definite nod to the ol' Coop. This cross-

dressing, makeup-wearing band routinely played with the Stooges and MC5 in their adopted town of Detroit. Even Johnny Rotten said that Alice Cooper's *Killer* was the greatest rock 'n' roll record of all time. (He was wrong though: It was Coop's previous stunner, 1971's *Love It To Death* released six months prior).

Celebrating the 50th anniversary of Cooper's incredible records *Killer* and *School's Out* are two deluxe editions that are just now hitting the shelves of your local wax shack and is absolutely necessary for any fan of glam/proto-punk/psych/prog/goth. Both deluxe editions include three LPs as well as the usual doo dads that make this truly special. The remastered versions of each record is done by the wizard of mastering, Chris Bellham, and sound absolutely glorious compared with the first presses I have.

Rounding out the package of both editions are two amazing live shows — that sadly feature almost the same set list. There are also alternative versions that don't stray too far from the renditions we're used to, but if you're a completist, this will definitely scratch that itch. Rhino/Warner also outdid themselves on the packaging, with *Killer* coming in a trifold cover, with extensive notes from the surviving band members on each song, a personal look back at being a Cooper fan from the perspective of Bill Holdship and the 1972 calendar



that came in the original edition. *Schools Out's* three records are housed in a book-like sleeve with the panties that appeared in the original edition clinging proudly onto the remastered record. Again, the remaining two records feature the alternative versions, but if you're buying this just for the live records, this document of their Miami 1972 concert outshines the *Killer* live set through sheer take-no-prisoners energy.

If you want the blazing, stripped-down, Detroit-style rock, pick up *Killers*. If you want theatre-tinged street-gang drama, pick up *School's Out*. But really, you should just pick up both — these editions are guaranteed to wipe away any recent sightings of Cooper's "cumberbund years."

Current Obsession: Drive Like Jehu, Yank Crimes

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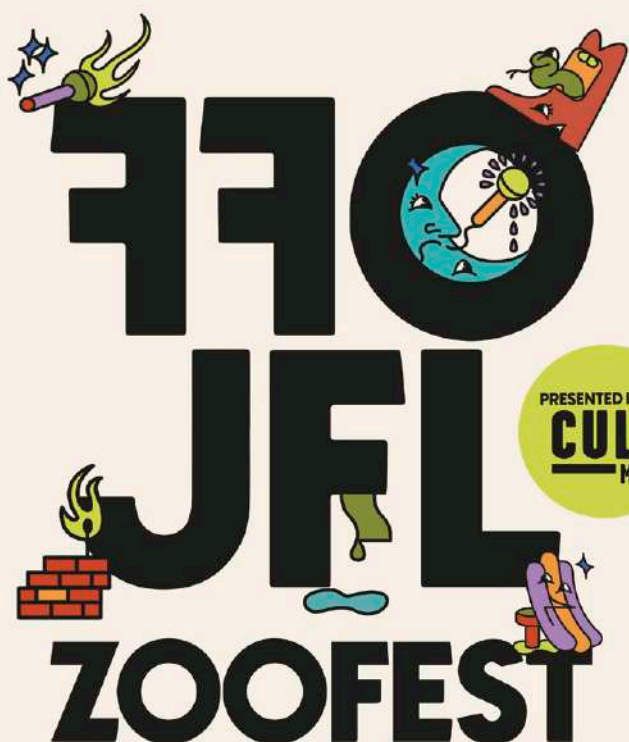
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Summer ennui



BY JUSTINE SMITH

With her debut, *Something You Said Last Night*, Luis De Filippis captures the ennui and longing of a Canadian summer.

Twentysomething sisters Ren (Carmen Madonia) and Siena (Paige Evans) go on vacation with their parents. By all accounts, they're a happy family; they laugh and sing together. They're all close but also holding onto dynamics that are perhaps slipping away as the children enter adulthood. Staying at a cabin resort, the activities are mostly for kids and seniors. Siena goes partying all night, while Ren, who is trans, feels increasingly ill at ease in the more conservative beach town. Both girls are also keeping a secret from their blunt though supportive mother.

The loving chaos of Italian families feels like lightning in a bottle. The performances feel embodied and lived in as their dialogue piles up on each other. The energy is dense with love and nostalgia, catapulted by Mona (Ramona Milano) and Guido (Joey Parro) as parental figureheads who model the "work hard, play hard" motto. Speaking with De Filippis, it's surprising to hear that the film was shot in only 19 days, due to restrictions imposed by COVID-19. "It comes down to the old adage, 90% of directing is the casting. When each actor came to the screen, it was almost like a gut reaction, and right from the jump, we put them together. It was very

specific. I didn't want to be general about anything because I think it's in specificity that you find the universal," she says.

De Filippis worked with the actors as much as possible leading up to the shoot. She explains that they went to the resort as a family. "We didn't really do rehearsal, per se, but we hung out a lot. We talked about the characters. We did therapy sessions. I had them write letters to each other in character and tell one secret only they'd know. Ren and Mona would share something no one else would know about. We also did specific work, like what is Sienna and Guido's relationship like versus Ren and Guido? We really got nitty and gritty, down to, like, who is each parent's favourite child?"

Though the film centres on the family unit, we really see the story through the eyes of Ren. She's recently out of work, almost out of money, and aspires to be a writer. Carmen Madonia had never acted before stepping into the role, but she embodies the character. Madonia worked with her for a year and a half, workshoping the character. They also worked with an acting coach, Vivien Endicott-Douglas, picking a scene and working on it for weeks. That process also helped build Ren's character. "I could see all these little moments that Carmen offered organically," says De Filippis. "Like, Ren was never supposed to be a vaper, but Carmen is, and it became this very interesting character tic."

More than just an actor's showcase, however, the film's cinematography captures the haziness of summer. It was shot by Norm Li, one of Canada's most esteemed

cinematographers, who has worked on films like *Beyond the Black Rainbow* and *The Body Remembers When the World Broke Open*. "First of all," says De Filippis, "Norm is not just talented but an incredible collaborator. He's the kind of person you can volley back and forth with until you land on the perfect image. We wanted to establish a very specific language for the film, as if you're on this vacation with the family but also seeing everything from Ren's perspective."

The camera becomes an important vehicle within the film for translating point of view. "For example," explains De Filippis, "the camera never moves unless Ren moves. The camera never enters a room before Ren enters a room. We're always experiencing things with her. We don't use POV shots, and we're also confident we don't have to show everything." It's all in the hopes of achieving a "fly on the wall experience," she says. "It's not just about what's on the page, but how you use cinematography, production design, costume and sound to create a world and craft characters who are real, raw and vulnerable."

Something You Said Last Night subverts most of the clichés we've come to expect from stories about trans characters and complex family units. The film feels grounded in the tensions of the mundane, blending naturalism with a subjective perspective. It's a rich cinematic experience that finds specific universal feelings and emotions.

→ *Something You Said Last Night* opens in Montreal theatres on Friday, July 7.



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On Screen



Oppenheimer



Barbie



Joy Ride



Sympathy for the Devil

BY JUSTINE SMITH

The film news that's on everybody's radar is the big double-release day of *Barbie* and *Oppenheimer* on July 21.

Material Girl meets Atomic nightmares! Barbenheimer! In *Barbie*, Margot Robbie and Ryan Gosling star as Barbie and Ken in Greta Gerwig's pink fantasy turned nightmare, as Barbie's perfect world begins to crumble as she goes through an existential crisis. Christopher Nolan's *Oppenheimer* documents the evolution of J. Robert Oppenheimer (Cillian Murphy) from an ambitious scientist into a man tormented by the central role he played in the development of the atomic bomb.

Montreal's fantasy and horror event of the year, the Fantasia International Film Festival (July 20 to Aug. 9) — one of the biggest genres festivals in the world — has already revealed some highlights from the 2023 program, including new films from Zach Clark (*The Becomers*), Joe Lynch (a Lovecraft adaptation called *Suitable Flesh*) and Pascal Plante (whose new film, *Les Chambres Rouges*, will open the festival) as well as the latest Nicolas Cage vehicle (*Sympathy for the Devil*). The full program will be announced on July 5, and ticket pre-sales will open on July 15, at 1 p.m.

Tom Cruise saved the movies in 2022 with the astronomically popular release of *Top Gun: Maverick*. Can he repeat that success with *Mission: Impossible — Dead Reckoning Part One* (July 12)? We're going to say yes. The *Mission Impossible* film series is one of the most consistently entertaining franchises going right now. The highly anticipated *Dead Reckoning Part One* has Ethan Hunt and the IMF team tracking down a terrifying new weapon that threatens all of humanity if it falls into the wrong hands.

If you're looking for some summer scares, the final chapter in the popular *Insidious* franchise hits the big screen early this month. *Insidious: Red Door* (July 7) follows a now grown-up Dalton, ready to head off to college before his dreams become a living nightmare as the repressed demons from his past come back to haunt the family. Patrick Wilson, who also reprises his role as the family patriarch, Josh Lambert, makes his directorial debut by stepping behind the camera for the first time.

Straight off the success of *Everything Everywhere All at Once*, Stephanie Hsu stars in *Joy Ride* (July 7), a comedy from the co-screenwriter of *Crazy Rich Asians*. The film follows four Asian-American friends as they travel through Asia in search of one of their birth mothers while bonding and discovering what it means to know and love who you are.

In the tradition of the *Marigold Hotel* franchise, the "older women go on an adventure" genre takes up this summer with *The Miracle Club* (July 14). Maggie Smith, Kathy Bates and Laura Linney star in this 1967 period film about a group of women who win a pilgrimage to the sacred French town of Lourdes.

Looking for a comedy for the whole family? Disney is releasing *Haunted Mansion* (July 28) about a woman and her son enlisting a motley crew of so-called spiritual experts to help rid their home of supernatural squatters. The live-action film features an all-star cast including LaKeith Stanfield, Tiffany Haddish, Owen Wilson, Danny DeVito, Rosario Dawson, Dan Levy, Jamie Lee Curtis and Jared Leto.

If you'd like to take full advantage of summer, there are also many outdoor screenings. Check out Film Noir au Canal every Sunday (July 16–Aug. 20) for some crime cinema. Cinéma Public presents *Bleu Soir* in collaboration with Livart, Sundays through Thursdays (through Aug. 31). Their summer program this year includes films like *The Virgin Suicides*, *Gaz Bar Blues* and *Love Streams*. Cinéma Sous les Étoiles presents screenings in parks all over the city, showcasing films like *Big Fight in Little Chinatown*, *Geographies of Solitude* and *Les années Super 8* (also through Aug. 31).

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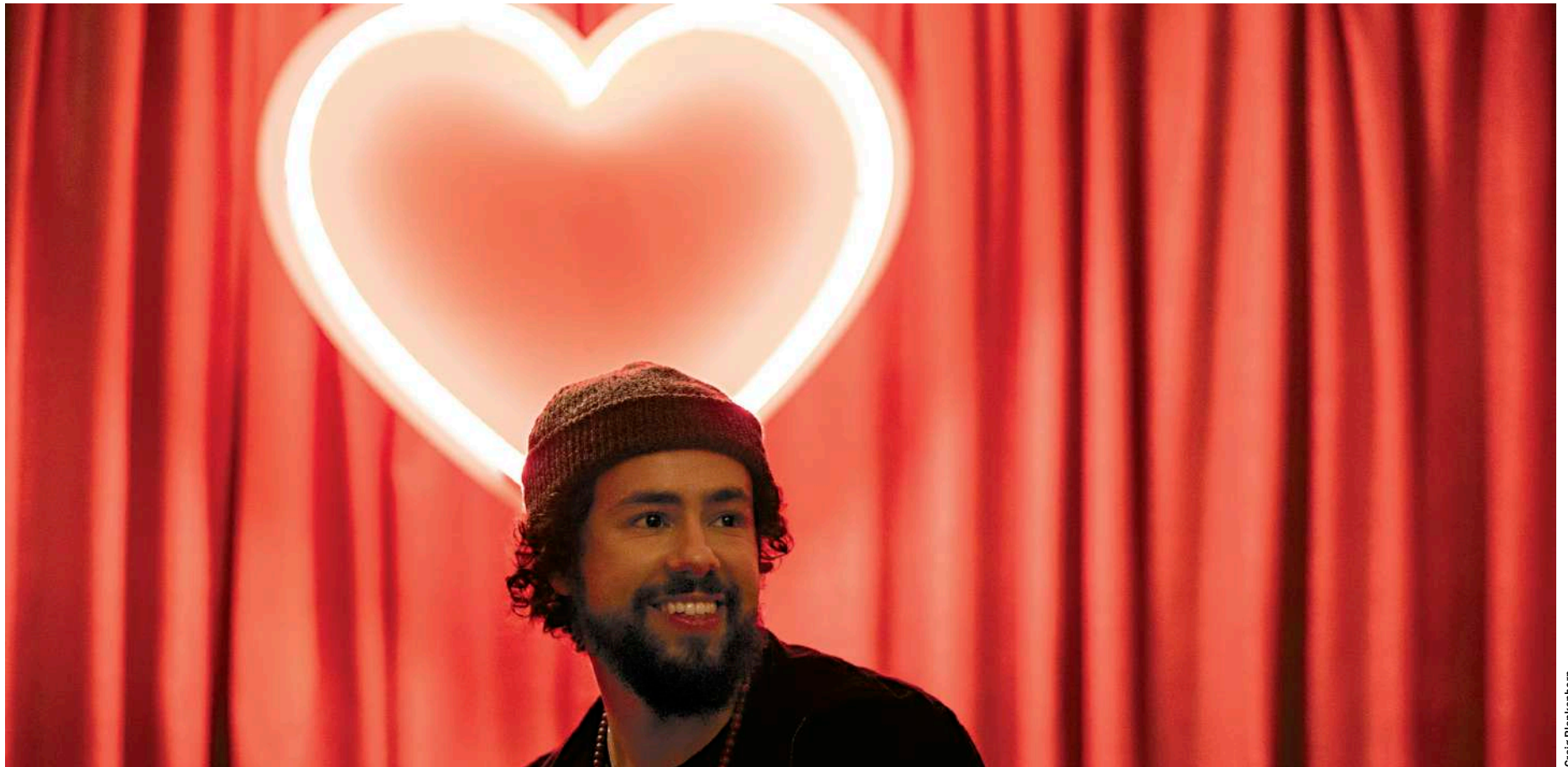


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For art and audience



Craig Blankenhorn

BY SRUTI ISLAM

Sometimes I describe Ramy Youssef as the Muslim Lena Dunham.

The two couldn't be more different, but they do share a millennial affinity for auto-fiction, in that they both created shows based on people that, on the surface, would seem to easily align with their off-screen, offline personalities. Fiction is fiction, however, and Ramy Youssef is an entirely different beast from the awkward, fumbling and spiritually existential kid he portrays on Hulu's hit comedy show, *Ramy*. But just like the ways in which many young white women saw themselves in Hannah Horvath, many young Muslims found representation in Ramy Hassan.

Youssef's career, thus far, intersects Islam with comedy, and he is bringing this intersection to the Just for Laughs festival in Montreal this year.

My early experience of navigating the push and pull of ethnic and Western identities very much took place online, where I built a community of equally confused members. I asked Youssef whether this was his experience, too.

"I never engaged in the internet too much," he says, "but I think, for me, a lot of the standup that I did when I first started would involve, like, halal sets of standup. I would be performing at fundraisers, like a charity raising money for (Palestinian Children Relief Fund), and with these shows, you'd have to do a clean set. And I'd be like, 'Oh, cool, I'm performing in front of a bunch of Muslims here. I want to make them laugh and I want to connect.' And it'd be really interesting because I'd

be there, and I'd realize they love talking about politics and religion, but if you talked about sex, they were uncomfortable. And then I would go to the comedy club later and they loved talking about politics and sex, but if you talked about religion, they were uncomfortable." He stifles a laugh at the absurdity.

The point being that he's eager to leave television and film sets, for a moment, to return to the stage. "What I do miss," he says, "is that when I used to do comedy, it involved being in the room with people. And I think you lose something when you're not in the room, you know? We can see each other and realize we're human. It's something I'm really looking forward to on this tour."

From the success of his stand-up came television opportunities. In 2020 he won a Golden Globe for *Ramy*, and as the crowd applauded, he quipped and said, "I know none of you have seen my show." He says this response was rooted more in awe, than anything, but did admit award shows were silly. Opportunities are wonderful but, "I don't believe in gamifying art."

This is especially evident when we look at Ramy's spin-off series released on Netflix in 2022: *Mo*. Youssef took a fan favourite character and extended the opportunity to fill yet another writers room with diversity and complexity. *Mo* tells the story of an immigrant in an interfaith and interracial relationship who's desperate for American citizenship, and spends a lot of the series aghast at the ways white people abuse olive oil and hummus. It's very funny, and as I point out to Youssef, more palatable than *Ramy*, a show who sees a character so desperate to be good, and who, as each season develops, only seems to be getting worse.

"With *Ramy*," Youssef says, "I think we're tracking a bit of the death of ego. We're really looking at the intimacy of a

spiritual journey, and peeling those layers back and getting closer to the wound. I think that's the space where we actually shift something and move. And what I think about *Mo* is that it's almost the opposite. It's a bit more outward — about a guy and his family and what they have to face in a system."

As he prepares to share new stand-up material, I wonder whether fans can expect the work to stay political. Will the personal always be political for Ramy Youssef? "For sure, I think that's always going to be intertwined with the material. For anyone who hasn't seen me do standup since the first special, it will be really fun. Because it's been four years, and I've been playing with a bunch of different types of versions of the new hour for probably a few years. I'm excited to really get it together. So, yes, definitely there's the personal being political, but also a lot more personal in general."

This fall, fans will also get a chance to see another side of the actor in Yorgos Lanthimos's next feature film, *Poor Things*. While he won't be playing Ramy — he had to learn a British accent — and I still wonder if, like the rest of his work, there was a spiritual element that drew him to the role. "You know, Yorgos is his own universe. I think the spiritual draw for me was just getting to work with truly one of the greatest living directors. It was very fulfilling." Youssef pauses. "I mean, it is funny, the character I play in the film might be the only character that believes in God, or claims that he believes in God, which is interesting."

→ Ramy Youssef will be performing three Just for Laughs sets at the Gesù (1200 Bleury) from July 28–29 (\$51–\$59.25), and will speak at Faith In Comedy: In Conversation with Ramy Youssef at the DoubleTree by Hilton (1255 Jeanne-Mance, Inspiration Room) on July 29, 1 p.m., \$33

A lot of f*ckin' work

BY TAYLOR C. NOAKES

“Hi Taylor, this is a Russell Peters... impressionist.”

‘Oh good. He’s a goofball in real life, too,’ I thought. Par for the course when it comes to comedians? Not always. Some, perhaps more than some, can be cranky. Others take themselves too seriously. This wasn’t the case when I called Russell Peters to ask him about his upcoming Just for Laughs gala hosting duties. It never felt like I was speaking with arguably the most famous and successful comic this country ever produced. Rather, it felt like I was chatting with an old friend from college.

I remember watching Peters’ television specials and Just for Laughs appearances back in the late ’90s and it’s hard to convey just how radically different he was from literally everyone else coming out of Canada’s comedy scene at the time. It wasn’t just that he was of Indian descent (though, admittedly, that novelty had a long shelf life in this country back then), but rather it felt like he had moved the ball forward by a considerable distance in terms of the evolution of comedy in Canada. It felt like the era of Jim Carrey and Jerry Seinfeld impersonators came to an end with Peters’ ascension back then, and that Canadian comics were finally free to be themselves.

It’s no surprise that it would take the kid of immigrants to show us that.

The other thing to remember about Russell Peters is that he personally represents another important evolutionary step, one that extends far beyond our borders. Back in 2004 or 2005, people began uploading Peters’ comedy to a then new video-sharing website called YouTube and not only launched him into the stratosphere of global fame, but further demonstrated a titanic shift in how comedians would get their product to the masses. Professional comedy, previously a waiting game of limited opportunities, was now democratized, available on demand to a global audience, and without any of the middling middle men who once built careers as bookers and talent scouts. Though Peters himself wasn’t responsible for this revolution, he may very well have been the first person to benefit from it. Peters, who has graced the Just for Laughs stage many times since the mid-1990s, will host a blockbuster four galas over two nights this year, featuring 32 comedians. He seemed to be looking forward to it, but also potentially caught off guard, when I asked him about it in a recent interview.

“Now that I think about it, that’s a lot of fuckin’ work.”

Taylor C. Noakes: How important was Just for Laughs to you in developing your career?

Russell Peter: Well, I started in ’89, in Toronto, and did my first appearance at Just for Laughs in ’96. Back then, people were still giving away deals at the festival [Author’s note: ... meaning comedians could still get a TV development deal, often for a sitcom, after a successful festival appearance], and that was the goal at the time. But in 1996 I was only seven years into my career, so A) I don’t deserve a deal, and B) I’m thinking I’m all about trying to get the deal. There were still some lucrative deals to be had, but by the time I started doing the festival, that was coming to an end. I did my first show in 1996, my first Just for Laughs television appearance in 1998, and my first gala in 2000. Since then I think I’ve done the festival 12 or 13 times.

TN: I heard you met George Carlin early in your career. What was that like, and did he give you any advice? RP: Yeah. I met Carlin in ’92 in Toronto. It was the night the Blue Jays won the World Series and everybody was partying up and down Yonge Street. And I was just a punk ass kid. I was partying and I see this old guy with a beard and a grey-haired ponytail walking



towards me. And just to be a smart-ass, I yell to my friend, “That guy looks like George Carlin,” so then I say, ‘How’s it going George’ and he says, “How’s it going kid?” And I was like, “What the fuck, that guy was actually George Carlin?!”

So I ran after him and I walked him back to the hotel and I was grovelling the whole way. And then I asked him for some advice and he told me to get on stage as much as possible, that it didn’t matter where or for how long it is, that it doesn’t matter whether you kill or bomb, just that the more stage time you get, the better you get. At the end of it I said, “Hey, maybe we’ll get a chance to work together one day,” and he said, “You never know kid, it’s a crazy business.”

About 10 months before he died in 2008, I got a chance to work with him in L.A. at the Comedy & Magic Club in Hermosa Beach. They knew I was a big Carlin fan and he was coming in to work on a new set and I begged them to let me host. And then I started quivering, and I started to wind up with tears when I was introducing, because he meant so much to me.

TN: Who or what inspired you to become a comedian? And at what point did you first think that you could make it a career?

RP: I was always a fan of comedy. I used to listen to it, back in the ’70s, and I was listening to it even before I started watching it. I was either in Grade 5 or 6 and someone brought in a .45 record of Cheech and Chong’s *Sister Mary Elephant* and I remember crying-laughing listening to it, and I was like, “How good do you have to be to write a sketch that is so funny that it sounds funny?” I remember begging the person to let me borrow it so I could listen to it more at home. And they did. And I remember that was one of my earliest memories of like, “I really like this kind of thing.” So that’s what started the fire. And then in 1986, I saw Eddie Murphy in concert in Toronto at Maple Leaf Gardens. That was the *Raw* tour, but at the time was called *Pieces of My Mind*. And then three years later, I started doing standup, not realizing that all these little seeds had been planted my whole life.

TN: Where was your first show?

RP: It was at Yonge and Eglinton, the Uptown Club, what used to be Yuk Yuk’s Uptown Club. I was terrible. I was fuckin’ awful.

TN: Why do you think you were so bad?

RP: It’s not that I think I was bad, I know I was bad. It’s a factual statement, not a matter of opinion. But my brain was like, ‘If you can get a couple of giggles with this shitty stuff, imagine if you got good at it, how many laughs you’d get?’ That’s how my brain processed it, thank goodness.

TN: How long did it take to hit your stride, to get comfortable?

RP: Well, I don’t think you ever really get to that. I think there’s a 10-year incubation period in comedy, and you need to be doing at least 10 years to figure out what your voice is and what direction you want to go. And for me it was about 10 years in the late-1990s, when I started making appearances at Just for Laughs.

TN: What was the Canadian comedy scene like when you started out? RP: White. Extremely white. And not even crossover white, like Great Canadian White. And all the older comics out there were bitter as shit. They were like, “You don’t know what hot’s like, kid — we used to do cocaine on private airplanes.” You gotta understand, I’m a kid coming from Brampton. I don’t know about cocaine, I don’t know about private planes. I didn’t know about people having cars with air conditioning. For me, back then, anything other than working at Wendy’s or Burger King was a big deal.

TN: Why do you think they were so bitter?

RP: Because there was a boom in the ’80s, and by 1989, the bubble had burst. The market was oversaturated. So by the ’90s, it was like a post-apocalyptic comedy, so to speak. It was literally the perfect time to start doing comedy because nobody cared about it anymore. Every comic out there had their own TV show or TV special, you could see comedians every night, and 9 times out of 10, they weren’t very good.

TN: Have there been any major changes or shifts in themes, tone or voice in your set over the course of your career? Has it been more or less stable or have there been major changes that you’ve implemented?

RP: You’ve got to change with the times and the world around you. So, you know, there’s things I said in the early part of my career that I would never even consider saying again. Language changes, tone changes. As you get older, your experience changes. I started at 19, now I’m 53. I’m not the same guy I was when I was 19, I’m not even the same guy I was when I was 49. You keep changing, you evolve, and if your set doesn’t evolve with you, you’re sitting there spinning around for the rest of your life.

TN: Then the other side of that question: Is there any material that’s stayed with you, that still gets a laugh, that’s been consistent all these years? RP: No. Once I record something, it’s dead. It’s like sperm—once it hits the air, it’s dead.

→ The RP4 (Russell Peters Just for Laughs galas) takes place at Place des Arts’s Théâtre Maisonneuve on July 26 and 27, 7 and 9:45 p.m. nightly, \$47.08–\$117.08 (four price points)

As Nasty as they wanna be

BY DAVE MACINTYRE

If you don't know Donnell Rawlings by name, you'll most likely recognize his face.

Rawlings has made a name for himself over the years for being Ashy Larry on *Chappelle's Show*, his role as Day-Day on *The Wire*, and as Mr. Earl in HBO's *Winning Time: The Rise of the Lakers Dynasty*. Dave Chappelle is also executive-producing Rawlings' to-be-released Netflix special, as part of the *Chappelle's Home Team* special series.

The last time Rawlings rolled through town for Just for Laughs was in 2019, and he's coming back to the festival this month to be part of the lineup for The Nasty Show club series.

Dave MacIntyre: You're hosting The Nasty Show at Just for Laughs this year. What can we expect from this year's show?

Donnell Rawlings: Somebody's who's unedited, unfiltered. Somebody who doesn't subscribe to cancel culture. Somebody who's going to bring the pain and bring the fire. That's what you expect from me.

DM: What do you think it means to be "nasty" in comedy today?

DR: A lot of times, when you hear "nasty," you think about vulgarity. I think it's just to be someone who, again, is unedited. Someone who's not trying to appease a certain group of people. Someone who's unfiltered, and someone who has edge. I don't think it's about going up there and doing dick and pussy jokes or whatnot. I'm thinking of comics who think outside the box — edgier comics.

DM: How much of that definition of nastiness in comedy do you think has been impacted by cancel culture?

DR: A lot of it. There are people who are concerned with what people think. Sometimes, people protect certain interests. I know some comics who had relationships with networks and other things where, if they actually said some of the things they really feel, it could cost them some opportunities as far as money. But I think cancel culture's overrated, especially when it comes to standup comedy.

When people go see comedy, they're not going to see somebody who thinks exactly like them. (They're seeing) somebody with their own opinion and observations as well. That's what I do when I do my show. I'm not going to focus on the "nasty" part of the show. I like the idea of the name of it. But if you're going to be walking out totally disgusted — that's not what I do. That's not what I think "nasty" should be considered. It's a provocative word.

DM: This is your fifth time in Montreal. What are some memories you have of being in Montreal that really stick out to you?

DR: The vibe, the energy, the restaurants, the people, the excitement. The fact that, leaving Montreal [after JFL], you think that this could be an opportunity to break your career, or for people to see you. It wasn't that for me — it was always just a showcase. I wasn't one of those guys who walked out with a development deal or anything like that. But it gives you an opportunity for the decision-makers to see you in one area, and they could elevate or push your career.

DM: How are you feeling looking ahead to this year's Just for Laughs?



Paul Smith

DR: For me, it's a reunion with members of the community I haven't seen for years — some agents, people in the business, network execs. It's a good time for me. I'm not really looking at this as a make-or-break situation. I just want to have the best shows I can. I'll get to establish myself in a Canadian market, and get to do something that I have fun doing.

DM: What separates a great joke for The Nasty Show from simply a good one?

DR: How honest you can be with yourself. I love the type of jokes where, when I do them, people are like, "Oh my God, he's talking about me," or, "I share those same experiences." Those are the jokes I like the most. That's the way I know that I made a connection with them, and they made a connection with me.

DM: How much do you think standup comedy has actually been affected by "cancel culture"?

DR: I think that, some years ago, it was trying to kill comedy. But I think people like Dave Chappelle, people like Chris Rock, people who stay true to themselves and stick to their guns — I think they're cancelling cancel culture. Then people are realizing some of these complaints that people have are very absurd, especially when it comes to this art form of standup comedy. This trade has been around for years — it's just comedy. We're not trying to be activists. I ain't trying to be a preacher, I ain't trying to be a mentor or any of those things. I'm just trying to be true to myself, and talk about things that are fun and funny for me.

DM: What else do you have planned for JFL this year?

DR: I just want to have a good time. I want to connect with some friends. I want to leave Montreal with people saying, "Donnell is one of the funniest comics I've seen," and then whatever happens from there, I'll deal with it. If something great comes out of it, cool. If nothing great (comes) in

regards to a show or anything, I know I'll have had another experience of working with one of the biggest, baddest comedy festivals in the world.

DM: And what do you have planned for the rest of 2023?

DR: Just keep being funny, keep building my audience, and keep giving people a reason to want to spend their money and buy a ticket. At the end of the day, for a comic — especially in standup — if you can look at your calendar and see that you're booked for an entire year, that's the ultimate goal. Anything else is a bonus. The fact that you can put your name on a marquee and people want to see you, that's a win. You can't lose when people support you. You can't be cancelled when people say, "I want to pay to see him." Ultimately, for a standup comic, that's your true goal, for people to want to pay to see you.

DM: Why is Just for Laughs such an important showcase in the world of comedy?

DR: Because it's one of those showcases that could break comics. Years ago, when I first started, you do a five-minute set and you could walk out with a quarter-million-dollar development deal. That's without even having a show. There's a lot of talent out here. But for some reason, a lot of times, people don't get to see them. This brings (together) everybody who could be influential to your career. It's a platform to showcase what most people have been doing, and that's making people laugh.

DM: Anything else you want to add?

DR: If you see me on *Chappelle's Show*, if you see me on HBO's *The Wire* — any of those platforms — and you come see me do live standup, I'm pretty sure that you'll become a lifelong fan.

→ Donnell Rawlings performs as part of Just for Laughs' The Nasty Show at Club Soda (1225 St-Laurent), July 18–26, \$58.50

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Mother's day

BY DAVE MACINTYRE

It's pretty ballsy to call your first standup comedy special *One in a Billion*, but that title fits Zarna Garg perfectly.

Having immigrated from India to the United States, the New York-based comedienne has gone from being a regular at the Comedy Cellar to getting her own aforementioned standup special on Amazon Prime, being named among Apple TV+'s gutsiest women in comedy and winning Kevin Hart's *Lyft Comics* series, to name a few.

Having a strong social media following hasn't hurt, either — Garg has more than 728,000 followers and 100 million+ views on TikTok and more than 673,000 on Instagram. Her hilariously relatable comedy — which touches on topics like being a mother of three, her experiences living in America as an immigrant and dealing with one's in-laws — will be on full display at this year's Just for Laughs. She'll be featured on Just for the Culture, happening over five nights at Club Soda, as well as hosting her own show, *Truth Bombs*, for two nights at Le Balcon. These will mark her first-ever appearances at JFL.

Dave MacIntyre: Have you been to Montreal many times before?

Zarna Garg: I have visited, yes, for tourism, before I was even a comic. Not having anything to do with comedy, I've been to Montreal a few times.

DM: What comes to your mind when you think of the previous times you've been to Montreal?

ZG: It's very cool. It's very chic. I feel like Montreal is like a Canadian Paris. Easier than Paris-Paris — a one-hour flight is great! (laughs) In general, I think that the food is outstanding in Canada. I was just in Vancouver for a month shooting a movie, and it was the best — everyday food, but it was so good. So much better than anything I eat in America. I'm sure I'm going to get in trouble because I just said that.

DM: I mean, we're a Montreal publication. You can shower us with as much praise as you want!

ZG: I mean, you deserve it. Honestly. It's such a fabulous city. Beautiful, so charming. I think I was in Old Montreal years ago walking through a little bit, (and in) the stores. Just lovely. I mean, look, I'm Indian. We don't go skiing. Montreal is a good fit for us. We're not looking for the mountains and the dangerous stuff. We don't even care about the whales and the things that people go to watch in other parts of Canada. That's not what we do as a people. We're just happy to walk around and breathe your free Canadian air!

DM: Yeah, too bad the air quality was the worst in the world here just a couple days ago.

ZG: I know! You know, it's funny because I just told everybody I was so excited to breathe air in Vancouver. I sounded like a crazy woman saying that. But I think you know what I mean, because the Canadian air is so clean. The next day, the fires and the process started. So maybe I should be careful before I say those words! (laughs)

DM: Yeah, or at least definitely keep an eye on the air quality monitor. A couple days ago, I did not leave my house at all because it just was too hazardous.

ZG: You know what's crazy is that the Indians living in New York... they would smell that (and) it smells like we were in Delhi. (laughs) We're so used to that air back home! They're like, 'Oh, it feels like we're back home!'

DM: So you'll be part of the Just for the Culture Show, as well as hosting your own show, *Truth Bombs*. What can people expect from these shows?



ZG: I call it "clean-ish, family-friendly humour." There may be a naughty word here or there, but it's mostly family stuff — husband, wife, children. I have three kids, so I'm always yelling at them. That's my main day job. I try to find the humour in the things that I do with them, because otherwise I'm going to lose my mind. I've already maxed out on the drugs! (laughs) I don't know if you're a parent, Dave, but if you are, you'll know exactly what I'm telling you.

DM: I'm not a parent, but maybe one day I will understand!

ZG: No no no, don't do it! I tell everybody, what a mistake! I wish they came with a return policy. Don't do it. You find out entirely too late what a big mistake it is.

DM: My dad is actively discouraging me from ever having kids, so maybe I'll never find out.

ZG: Exactly. Your dad needs to come to my show. He's going to love it. It's all family stuff. People have told me that when they go to my show, they feel like they just took a quick trip to India.

DM: You entered comedy after spending 16 years as a stay-at-home mom. At what point did it hit you where you realized, "Oh shit, comedy could become a viable career option for me"?

ZG: Well, it still hasn't hit me. Is it? I don't know when it becomes a viable option. Comedy is like the Wild West. I come from a world where everybody goes to college, goes to professional school, gets a licence and then you have a job or a business, right? I'm still trying to figure it out. I'm like, "Okay, let's do a show. And if the tickets sell, great! Yay!"

Every day is a new battle, the way I see it. I don't think I ever think about, «Is it a viable option or not,» because I think that would overwhelm me. But I focus on how many people are having fun with me and are willing to go on that ride with me. As long as that number is growing and growing in real life and the digital space across the board, I feel like I'm doing something okay. I'm doing something right.

I didn't come into this through the traditional path. When I started comedy, I really thought a few of my friends would come to one show, and that would be the end of it. I didn't ever in my life expect to be where I am right now. But the

thing that keeps me going is that I stay largely ignorant of where I am and the status of the thing. It was a beautiful journey that brought me here, and I want to kind of pretend that that's all this is. Is that crazy? I don't know.

DM: No, no. I mean hey, life can be a series of weird and often serendipitous events, and look where that's taken you.

ZG: Exactly! I think the reason I say that is because I know people who are always waiting. Will they get into JFL? Will they get that late night set? Will they get this? Will they get that? Not thinking about all that has helped me tremendously. I just focus on, "Well, 200 more people bought tickets today in Atlanta, so I'm doing something right." They told their friends, and then their friends are telling their friends. So as long as friends are telling friends, and their friends are telling friends, I will have some sort of a career, I guess.

DM: Well, there you go. And it's gotten you far enough that you have a special on Amazon Prime now.

ZG: Yes! I mean, I tried to hide it from my mother-in-law but that didn't really work.

DM: You often joke about American life as an immigrant from India, as well as raising your three children. How do you find a balance between sharing personal stories and observations while also connecting with a broader audience?

ZG: You know, the big, beautiful realization of being in the digital space for me — especially through the pandemic, when my accounts really started growing — is that, even when I think I'm sharing my personal story, it seems to resonate across the board. The first joke I posted on TikTok was about how I've never said "I love you" to my husband. That's a true life experience of mine. I really thought I was the only person on Earth who had never said it. But that joke went viral almost overnight, and millions of people have since come forward with all kinds of experiences and their own anecdotes of the things they do for their spouses and partners. Saying «I love you» is not as widespread as I thought it was.

Everything is a balancing act. I want my material to resonate in a broad way. But what I have found is that, even my smallest, most detailed experience seems to find an audience across the board. The frustrations of raising a daughter or

having a daughter who's dramatic, the joys and the pleasures of having a very handsome son — the word seems to relate! (laughs) I also work a lot. I work six, seven nights a week. If I love a concept or a joke, but it's just not resonating, I'm very harsh. I will take it out. I'm doing comedy to serve my audience. If it's an experience that's not speaking to my audience, I'm not precious about it. I'm not writing these jokes and performing for my own personal jollies.

I'm constantly trying new material. I'll give you an example: I really, really wanted to make jokes about fathers-in-law, because my father-in-law in real life is a comical character. But it just gets no reaction from the audience. I can say the craziest thing about him, and no one seems to care. And yet, if I say nothing, and just say, "I spoke to my mother-in-law today," it immediately pops. I don't know what it is!

DM: You were recently profiled as one of the gutsiest women in comedy by Apple TV+. What does the word "gutsy" mean to you in terms of comedy?

ZG: You want to know the honest truth? To me, it means "dumb." I didn't know I was being gutsy. I would've had second thoughts if I knew I was being gutsy! (laughs) I wasn't trying to be a trailblazer or path-breaker and all those words. I was just trying to work.

The thing is that, when you're living under a mountain of diapers and formula and baby stuff for as long as I was, you just assume that the world has moved on without you. You just assume that everybody is doing everything, everything has been done and you've just been sidetracked. So when I came out from under that world, and decided to do comedy, I didn't really think about whether other women like me are doing it or not. I was just trying to get something going.

As it grew, and as it evolved, people started saying to me, "Oh, you're such a unique voice! There is not a voice like you in this world!" And I was like, "There isn't?! That can't be right! There must be hundreds of Indian women doing this back home!" Then, as I realized that I literally am the only brown woman I know who does this — especially in a bindi and a kurta, ethnic clothes onstage — a little fear stepped in. You know when you're the only one somewhere, you're like, "Is there a bomb threat that I don't know about?" (laughs) Like if you're in an

airport and you're suddenly the only one there, you might be like, "Well, maybe I shouldn't get on this flight."

The "gutsy" thing was a beautiful experience with the Clintons [Hillary and Chelsea]. I was honoured to be part of that group of women. But the truth is that I didn't set out to do anything gutsy. It was all an accident. I didn't even think of that. Now in hindsight, thank God I did, because had I thought about it, I may have gotten scared off. That's the real truth. There are people in that series who wanted to change the world. I'm not one of those. I kind of accidentally fell into it.

DM: Speaking of gutsy, you were also recently interviewed on Fox News by Brian Kilmeade. What was that like?

ZG: Look, it's Fox News. I kind of knew that I'm walking into the lion's den not knowing much about what to expect, because I don't really watch much Fox News. But I do accept and respect that a big population in the world — and certainly in America — watches his show. Brian's team was extremely respectful, and invited me with a lot of love. We just talked about my comedy and its place in a conservative society. I was very comfortable having that discussion.

I'm not a political comedian, so I don't really get into the politics of it all. But I'm not so close to the idea that if half the nation is watching Fox News or his show, it's my obligation to be out there and speak to that half, as well as the liberal half that you might expect to follow my work. The truth is that they have been so kind to me at Brian's show, and at Fox in general. They've been full of support. They've extended all kinds of support to me, so I have nothing bad to say about them. Even though I went in with a little trepidation, I'll be honest with you. I didn't know how it was gonna be, but it was perfectly fine. I said everything that I wanted to say, and I stayed true to my ideologies.

DM: What has winning Kevin Hart's *Lyft Comics* done for your career so far?

ZG: It's opened all kinds of doors, because that show was on TV. It became my first quote-unquote "TV Credit." Otherwise, had I waited for late night and all of that — that still hasn't happened. Different shows have different agendas. Kevin Hart's team was very forward-looking. I'm blown away by how

they even knew who I was, and where to find me. I'm pretty sure they found me doing comedy for free on the streets of New York, in the subway, on the bus or under a tree.

They found me during the pandemic, when I wasn't cast at any comedy club. In fact, most clubs weren't even open — I was just doing jokes for free as a community service exercise. But because they put me on that show, and that show was on TV, I was later able to use it as a TV credit to get into clubs. I don't know, if that show hadn't happened, how long it would have taken otherwise. Typically, the late night sets, they don't really put people like me on.

DM: It's a little hard to predict at times, especially in a pandemic.

ZG: Exactly. Kevin Hart's show opened a lot of doors for me. It was the first time I did something competitively, but I completely did it out of my heart. I didn't know what other people were doing. I just followed the directions they gave me, and I put on the performance that I could. When I won, it totally gave me a lot of confidence in my own abilities.

DM: What do you have planned for the rest of 2023?

ZG: My second hour is coming along — that's the hour that I'm going to be running in Montreal, *Truth Bombs*. It's really coming along. I'm hoping to take it all over the world, and maybe get a deal to film it. Fingers crossed. I'm on a beautiful journey. I believe it's all going to happen, so I'll just keep at it.

DM: Is there anything else you wanted to add?

ZG: The one thing I am trying to do is get my mother-in-law put on the no-fly list. So if any of your readers have contacts in that space, can you please encourage them to connect with me? She's the one person who's going to bring down my career! I need somebody who can put her on the no-fly list, so she can stay in India and I can focus on what I'm doing here.

→ Zarna Garg performs at Just for Laughs in Truth Bombs at le Balcon (463 Ste-Catherine W.), July 26–27, \$32.50, and as part of Just for the Culture at Club Soda (1225 St-Laurent), July 18–26, \$58.50

CHRISTINE AND THE QUEENS

PARANOIA, ANGELS, TRUE LOVE

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Women's rage

BY SAVANNAH STEWART

Iconic Iranian-American visual artist Shirin Neshat filmed her latest piece *The Fury* before the murder of Mahsa Amini in Iran and the ensuing “Women, Life, Freedom” movement, yet the parallels between art and life are astonishing.

Both *The Fury* and the women-led protests that continue to play out in the Middle Eastern country put the focus on women, their bodily autonomy and the state's infringement upon it. And though the news cycle has shifted its focus away from the ongoing protests, what the international response exemplified is a theme Neshat is preoccupied with in this video work: how witnessing the pain and trauma of another provokes within us an urge to act in solidarity.

“Women's bodies have become a very contested space for the dictatorship. It's almost like by controlling the women and their bodies and their lives, they maintain a certain identity and a grip on the country. Their fear of a woman unveiling is beyond just women showing their hair, it would indicate that the government is losing its grip on the society, and it's a profound impact,” she says.

Neshat's work has long been concerned with the role and experiences of women in Iran, and is intimately familiar with both the power of women's dissent in the country and also the target it paints on their backs.

In *The Fury*, Neshat presents us with a fictionalized version of an all-too-common experience for women who dare dissent — sexual violence, in war, in prison, sanctioned by the state and sometimes even before execution.

“I was obsessed with this idea of how sexual assault, particularly within a political parameter, in a prison, the trauma is so deep,” Neshat explains. “It became an obsession of exploring the mindset of a woman who has been sexually assaulted, tortured, and even now that she's free, and possibly in the U.S., she's still in this other world. She never left a trauma, and it disables her to connect with reality as we know it.”

The *Fury* is a video exploration of sexual assault and its lasting impacts in two parts. The first part is a 16-minute,



Ryan Muread

highly stylized, two-channel video showing the protagonist post-assault living far away from the scene of the trauma, but psychologically stuck in the place where it happened, haunted by the men in uniform who committed it. Using dance to allow the viewer to infer the nature of her trauma without the explicitness of the central theme, dance is also how Neshat demonstrates the expression of solidarity that witnessing her pain incites in the onlookers watching her on the streets of her new home, sensing her difficulty connecting with the world around her.

“Going from these moments where her body is an object of desire but quickly becomes an object of violence, then she's outside among all these foreigners, strangers — there's this complete wall between her and them,” she explains.

“Her trauma, suffering, pain and grief become contagious to others who don't quite comprehend what happened to her, but the wall is broken, and there's a sense of solidarity, humanity, affinity, this idea that her rage became their rage.”

The second part is a Virtual Reality component, taking viewers into a visual representation of the physical and emotional impacts of the assault the protagonist experiences.

“I've been very interested in (video) installations as a way of making the audience a participant as opposed to a passive viewer, where you physically and emotionally are in the work,” says Neshat. Hence her frequent use of a two-channel format, showing two videos side by side, “a way to awaken the audience in a way that they're not just going to sit back and be entertained, but they have to really draw meaning from what they're seeing.”

The goal is the same for the VR portion: to bring the viewer into the story, to incite an emotional response.

“I don't want a spectacle, because I'm always interested in how to provoke emotions from the audience,” she continues. “The proximity of the audience to this brutality is really very powerful, where you feel like you're inside of that room. That's not something I can do in a video installation, or in a feature film.”

The piece reflects a blending of cultures, not only through the two central settings but also in the music and the movement. The piece features music composed by Johnny Azari and voiced by Tunisian singer Emel Mathlouthi, singing a Persian song translated into Arabic. For the movement, Neshat was inspired by the African dance she has been studying; her fellow dancers appear in the piece.

“The work is meant to be about Iran, but it really doesn't want to remain only related to Iran, because this is a subject that is extremely international. It could be Ukrainian women being assaulted by Russian soldiers, or anywhere else. It's a question of power.”

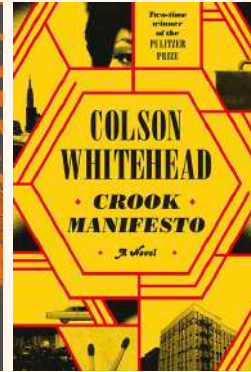
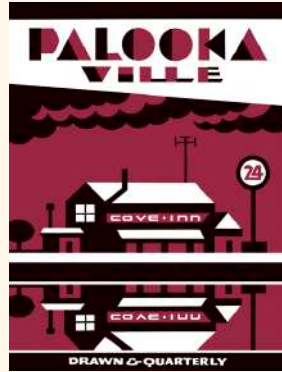
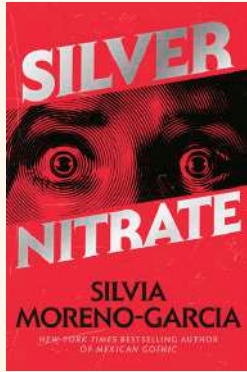
→ *The Fury* is on at the PHI Centre (407 St-Pierre, Espace 1/Habitat Sonore) through Aug. 20.



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NEW AND EXCITING THIS MONTH



UPCOMING BOOK CLUBS & EVENTS

MON, JULY 17 | 7 PM | **ZINE CLUB** | with zinester **ELLIE** (@log___off)

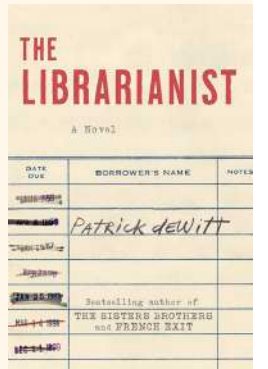
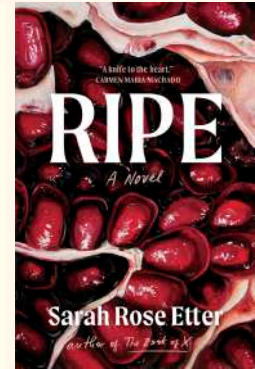
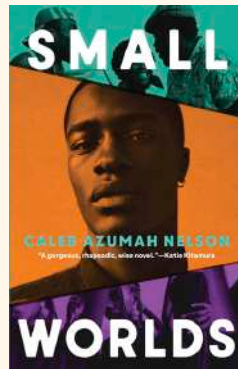
THUR, JULY 20 | 7 PM | **GRAPHIC NOVEL BOOK CLUB** | *Shortcomings*

THUR, JULY 27 | 7 PM | **TRIPLE BOOK LAUNCH**

Join **CATRIONA WRIGHT** (*Continuity Errors*), **AARON TUCKER** (*Soldiers, Hunters, Not Cowboys*), & **KATE SIKLOSI** (*Selvage*)

WED, AUG 2 | 7 PM | **BOOK READING**

Join **JAMI ATTENBERG**, **LADEE HUBBARD**, & **MEGAN GIDDINGS**



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FREE* | Thursdays, July 6, 13, 20 & 27
1:00PM - 3:00PM

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LEGAL INFORMATION CLINIC

FREE* | July 10, 17, 24 & 31 | 9:00AM - 5:00PM

REGISTERING YOUR BUSINESS

FREE | Monday, July 10 | 10:00AM - 11:00AM

CONFLICT RESOLUTION CLINIC

FREE* | Wednesday, July 19 | 1:00PM - 4:00PM

ELEVATING WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS: WORKSHOP

FREE | Friday, July 28 | 1:00PM - 3:00PM



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: weird era



BY SRUTI ISLAM & ALEX NIERENHAUSEN

More about books you should read, and the authors who wrote them, that were recently featured on the Weird Era podcast.

Big Shadow by Marta Balcewicz

Big Shadow is a novel that looks at its surroundings with laser sharp focus. Judy is a young girl who very much lives to observe, and aches to experience. She was raised by an overprotective mother, and at the book's onset, her closest relationships outside of this involve her cousin and his friend — two characters who are devoted to a momentous (and possibly non-existent) event that they dub, the "Big Shadow." In an effort to escape the claustrophobic albeit genuine care of her family, she loses herself when showered with attention by a summer poetry class professor, Maurice, a man formerly famous from the 1970s New York punk scene. There is an obvious #MeToo element in the book that's so obvious, I already regret mentioning it. Yes, there are

power and gender dynamics at play, but is Judy naive or wistful? She's smart, that's for certain. I spoke with Balcewicz about how intimacy can tether us to things (and people) we don't actually like, Sarah Schulman novels, why young women seek to feel singular, and so much more. (Sruti Islam)

Lapvona by Ottessa Moshfegh

Freshly released in paperback, this absolutely unhinged novel is set over one year in the fictional Lapvona, a mediaeval fiefdom plagued by drought, disease and incessant bandits. You'll follow a morally questionable cast of characters as they navigate a world that really couldn't care less about them and their needs. The depravity of the period and setting is on full display here, but fret not! Moshfegh delivers said depravity in the most consumable of ways — especially if you have a taste for cannibalism and pitch dark humour. Our episode with Moshfegh covers a myriad topics, including her stance on mentorships, her recent foray into screenwriting and whether or not anyone is truly "happy." (Alex Nierenhausen)

The Marigold by Andrew F. Sullivan

With Toronto's housing crisis in full swing, Andrew F. Sullivan brings us to the fictional Marigold, a theoretically luxurious tower of high-end condo units in the GTA, that realistically cannot deliver on its promise of opulence. Stanley Marigold knows this, but decides to build the Marigold II anyway, as a means to secure his legacy. Meanwhile, a mysterious and murderous sludge is creeping its way through Toronto's sewer systems and claiming lives as it does so; it will take this novel's stacked cast of characters to work together to figure out just what is happening. Don't let the novel's slow start put you off — much like a real-life build, construction starts slow but will eventually take you to vertigo-inducing heights. Tune in to this episode to see what Andrew had to say when I asked him why capitalism makes the illusion of choice something desirable. (Alex Nierenhausen)

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