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We spoke with Montreal-born and -raised tennis player Leylah Fernandez, who's making a rare return to the city this month to play in the National Bank Open (and head straight for the nearest poutine).

Photo courtesy of lululemon.

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Dreams can come true

BY LORRAINE CARPENTER

Since the heyday of Eugenie Bouchard nearly a decade ago, Montreal has been starved for women's tennis stars. From the ROC, the likes of Milos Raonic, Vasek Pospisil, Denis Shapovalov and Bianca Andreescu gave Canadians more players to cheer for, but it wasn't until Felix Auger Aliassime emerged on the scene that Montrealers had a homegrown tennis hero again.

And then came Leylah Fernandez.

Having already won her first title at the Monterrey Open in March 2021, Fernandez had a star-making ascension at the U.S. Open that year, reaching the final but ultimately falling to Emma Raducanu. Since then she's played at the Olympics in Tokyo, all the Grand Slam tournaments and the vast majority of stops on the WTA tour, becoming a local ambassador for the tennis world — alongside Auger Aliassime — and an inspiration to the next generation of girls pursuing the sport in this city.

Born and raised in Montreal, the now-20-year-old Fernandez grew up with a range of tennis and other sports heroes, chief among them the titans of contemporary tennis Novak Djokovic, Rafael Nadal and Roger Federer. Her father and coach Jorge Fernandez, who imparts valuable expertise and unique training exercises as a former soccer player, also taught his daughter about legends from other sports.

"I didn't know who Wayne Gretzky was but my dad showed me a lot of videos growing up, analyzing how he played the game, and it was so beautiful to watch. That's what I want to do with my tennis, to be able to move and hit the ball with so much grace and elegance that it makes it look easy when it's extremely hard."

Fernandez says her father's most important lesson, one he learned from his soccer years, is to hone the mental side of being a pro athlete.

"You need to have so much mental fortitude and mental toughness in sports because you're experiencing such stressful and physically demanding situations in a very short amount of time. He always says, 'If the mind allows, the body follows.' If I can push through the fatigue, push through the soreness, I feel amazing. I feel happy that I was able to fight through what I was feeling inside emotionally and just accomplish what I needed to accomplish."

Fernandez tells me she has not watched *King Richard* — the film about Serena and Venus Williams and their father/coach Richard — and likely won't do so for many years in case it hits too close to home (Leylah's 19-year-old sister Bianca is also a tennis player). She says she has nothing but respect for the Williams sisters, but she went a different way in terms of her own female tennis hero.

"There's one female tennis player that I absolutely love," she



Thompson Chan

says, "Justine Henin. At the time, she wasn't playing, she was retired, but there was a coach who mentioned to my dad and me that I have a very similar style. I watched her play on YouTube, and she was so inspiring. She was definitely my hero and she also inspired my dad and my training, to keep going that way."

Among Fernandez's other sports heroes are Brooklyn Nets Coach Steve Nash and Lindsey Vonn, both of whom supported her during the 2021 U.S. Open run. And among her fans from the world of culture is one of the biggest names in Broadway.

"Lin-Manuel Miranda sent me a couple of messages, and when I got them I think I fan-girled because he's so inspiring. The way he sings and performs, it's just amazing to see and hopefully I can witness it live in person at one of his shows. It would truly be a dream come true."

Fernandez and her family have been living in Florida for nearly six years, and while she rarely has the opportunity to visit Montreal ("which breaks my heart because it's one of my favourite cities"), her memories of growing up amid the city's cultural touchstones continue to provide inspiration.

"The Jazz Festival was probably my favourite because I would go with my mom and my sister, it was like a girls' afternoon. I wasn't a big fan of jazz but it was so cool and I was always in awe of how they're able to get up there, with nerves and everything, and remember all the notes. They just played their hearts out, and it fascinated me."

When she does make it back to Montreal, as she will this week for the National Bank Open tennis tournament (aka the Rogers Cup), she has two culinary go-tos.

"Every single time I go back to Montreal, the first thing I want is a poutine — anywhere, any restaurant where I can

get a poutine, that's where I'm gonna go and that's what I'm gonna order. Around the world, you don't get that, and even if they do have it — like in Paris, they have one restaurant where they make poutine — it's never as great as it is in Montreal.

"I haven't had this in a long time but BeaverTails were always my favourite dessert to get after a long training day," she adds. "I would also always ask for a BeaverTail with Nutella and strawberries and brown sugar and cinnamon — that's my order."

Fernandez has faced her share of professional slumps, being eliminated in first rounds of WTA tournaments and the occasional Grand Slam, but she's also seen peaks in the past year. In June, she got to the doubles final at the French Open alongside Taylor Townsend. But whenever she's slipping in a match or a tournament, her mind goes to that sudden near-win at the U.S. Open, which ended for her not just with a loss but with a touching speech about New York City and resilience that helped win the hearts of fans.

"It was such an important moment for me, not because of the result or what I did in the tournament but because of what it meant to me. As a little girl growing up, I had this big dream and I've encountered so many obstacles and people who said, 'You're not gonna make it,' 'It's not going to happen,' and when it happened, I was super happy and excited. And right now, when I'm going through tough moments, which has been happening, I try to think about those moments and say, 'Okay, I've achieved this, so I can do it again.' I want to keep going because I want to show, not only all the people who have doubted me that yes, I can do it, but also to prove this little girl's dream is there, it's still alive, it's still important. It keeps me motivated."

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BY DAVE MACINTYRE

“PUNGENT. POWERFUL.
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Those are the words Tribal used to describe the weed I'm about to review in this column, and they're pretty damn evocative. But are they accurate? You'll soon find out, but this indoor-grown, indica-dominant hybrid is known as Triple Burger, whose name throws one's imagination and sense of curiosity (and hunger) into overdrive just looking at it. The name alone makes my mouth water, and it's giving me the expectation that A) I'll feel hungrier after smoking it than I would with most other strains, and B) it'll literally smell like a burger when I open the container.

I usually quite like the products that Tribal — who are headquartered in Ville-St-Laurent — have to offer, so I didn't go into this feeling too worried. Nonetheless, the three words I just wrote as the lede to this column seem quite menacing (especially in their presentation), so here's how things went when I tried to see how much it lived up to my (likely unrealistic) expectations.

Tribal Triple Burger (Hybrid)

At 26.8% THC and 2.7% terpenes, you're most likely in for a wild ride once you actually inhale this bad boy. As a head high, it can be quite enjoyable but also pretty overwhelming, even when you only smoke a pipe hit's worth. The buds look to be in good shape when I get them, despite not coming with an Integra Boost humidity regulator included. Sadly, I wound up cutting my thumb while opening the seal on the tin can — those things are sharp, kiddos!

The question remains unanswered up to now: Does it actually smell like a burger? Disappointingly, not really. It does have a bit of a cheesy scent, but it's definitely just dank and gassy for the most part. But considering certain elements missing my personal mark, I'm generally happy with how the buds looked, smelled and felt.

It can, however, sometimes leave you a bit freaked out. Those experiencing panic attacks will see this as a double-edged sword, since they can either worsen or lessen depending on how much you smoke. I also probably wouldn't recommend this as a daytime smoke,

as it's quite powerful when you take enough of it. At its worst, it can get uncomfortable to the point where you're actively waiting for the high to simmer down a bit.

Though it took a good two-three hours minimum for this stuff to subside for me, it got me pretty high at the right times. For example, I recently travelled to Baie-Saint-Paul for le Festif!, and had quite a trip on this strain watching Backwash perform — especially with the smoke machines onstage during her set absolutely smothering your face at times.

Perhaps that's a hilarious metaphor for the high you get at its peak — life throws all kinds of weird coincidences at us, after all. It can also feel a bit overwhelming when you're in a new place (like I was, since I'd never previously been that far east in Quebec) and the town is full of people walking.

But other times, I'll smoke it earlier in the day and it feels... not that bad? Even when I'm not feeling great sober beforehand? Perhaps that's one of the upsides of this one. At its best, it's a pretty relaxing and mood-stabilizing high, but it's also — like most other weed strains, of course — best enjoyed in moderation.

Rating: 7.5/10

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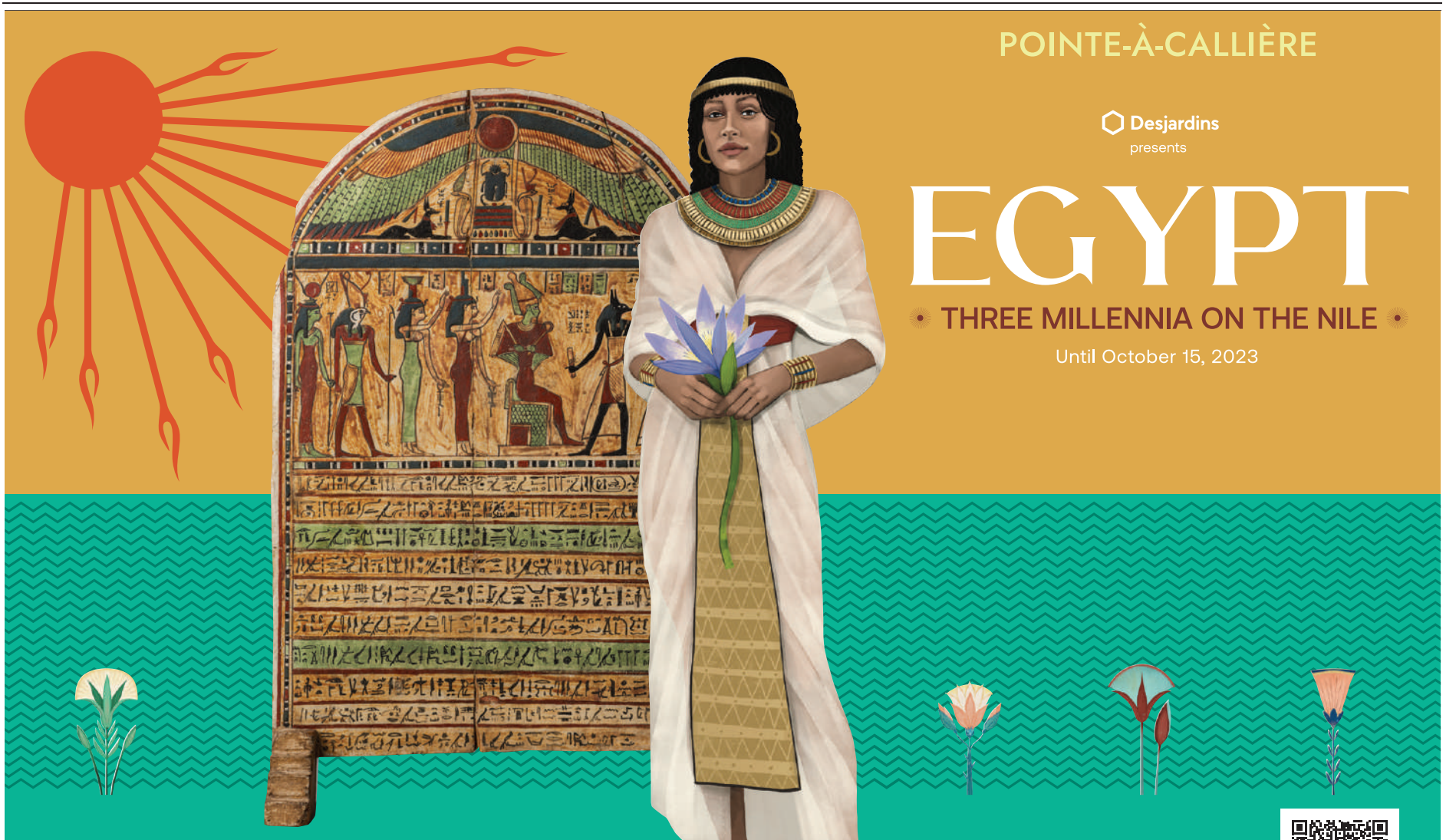
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food

Nice work

BY CLAY SANDHU

The first time I visited Paloma, just a few weeks after the restaurant opened its doors in 2019, I felt like I was uncovering a secret.

Co-owners Rosalie Forcherio and her father Armand were unknown to me, despite possessing over 50 years of collective restaurant experience. I had heard of this little Niçoise restaurant in Villeray and I loved the idea of a place that combined the cuisine of France and Italy using the Mediterranean as the tangential link. My experience, however, wasn't exceptional. That isn't to say it was bad, but it felt somewhat stifled. There were moments of brilliance, dishes that underwhelmed and a disappointing cake named after a cartoon monkey. Again, it's not that it was bad, I just wanted to love this restaurant and it failed to delight in the way I hoped it would.

Fast-forward four years and a lot has changed. Paloma is no longer an unknown restaurant tucked away on the industrial strip of St-Laurent that meets the 40 — it's a sought-after destination that ranked 48th on the list of Canada's 100 Best Restaurants this year. Last week, I had the opportunity to revisit Paloma and I am overjoyed to say that not only has it become the restaurant I hoped it would be — it's even better.

In order to understand what Paloma does so well, you need to understand Nice. The coastal city and capital of the French Riviera, Nice was originally a Greek settlement that was conquered by the Romans and belonged to Italy until it was officially ceded to France in the 1860s. Nice is very old and is an amalgam of cultures and traditions, and those characteristics show up in the food. Niçoise food combines the riches of the Mediterranean with Provençal produce and olive oil. It is simple on the surface yet powerfully complex — just like good Roman food — and it borrows recipes and techniques from Liguria and Piedmont, which lie directly on the other side of the border. Nice's influences and resources make it one of Europe's most singular and interesting cuisines.

Take, for example, the ravioli. My first time around, it was a mediocre sage and pumpkin affair — very underwhelming. This visit: ravioli Niçois, a perfectly cooked packet of braised beef studded with Swiss chard and parmesan and dressed in a silky sauce of beef jus mounted with plenty of butter. It was absolutely incredible. Flavourful and rich while managing to stave off weightiness, it's a dish that reminds me of all of Nice's influences while remaining unique.

We also enjoyed a rendition of *Vitello Tonnato*, rosy veal sliced thin, served cold and topped with a condiment made of tuna, mayo and capers. Perhaps Turin's most well-known dish, Paloma's *Vitello Tonnato* rivals the best I've had anywhere. The same goes for the tripe. Braised in a chilli-flecked tomato sauce, it is reminiscent of *Trippa alla Romana*, one of Rome's most storied dishes, but remains distinct somehow. Maybe it's the sauce, which feels lighter, or the absence of breadcrumb crumbs and pecorino — in any case, it's deliciously tender and flavourful. Around the table, heaving spoonfuls are being spread on grilled bread and devoured with glee.

We ate a beautifully cooked piece of *onglet* dressed in *sauce viêrge*, a quintessential Provençal sauce made of chopped tomatoes, shallots, vinegar and herbs that's typically used



Dominique Lafond

as a sauce for fish. It's a fantastic piece of meat and the sauce, which works a lot like a chimichurri, feels both familiar and entirely iconoclastic at the same time. The *Poisson Mystère*, as it's billed on the menu, was halibut served with chanterelles (foraged by the chef himself) and a *jus de viande*. While I thought that the fish was just slightly overcooked, the dish came together beautifully. The halibut and mushrooms were a spectacular combination and the richness of the sauce, which I worried might overpower the fish, actually served to highlight its overall meatiness. The real surprise was that the wine: Dolceacqua from Ligurian producer Testalonga, which was ordered to complement the beef, also worked beautifully with the fish.

The dish of the night, however, was the one of which I was most apprehensive: calf's brain in lemon butter. I have eaten brain a few times before and I've cooked it a few times, too, back in my Lawrence days, but it's always felt like a bridge too far. It's a mental hurdle (no pun intended) to eat brain — it just feels wrong in some way. And yet the brain at Paloma looks pleasantly appetizing. Flattened, dusted in flour and seared in butter until it develops a golden crust, it looks a lot like sweetbreads. Sitting in a pool of soft-yellow lemon butter, I'd go as far as to say that it was inviting. Texture is the gift and curse of brain; unsurprisingly, it's very soft. Luckily for me, Armand Forcherio's version is the best I've had. The crispy crust gives way to a custard-like brain that is incredibly delicate, and with the flavour of butter-basted veal. If you're brave enough to seek out brain, you will be rewarded by this preparation. What elevated this dish, however, was Rosalie's excellent choice of wine: 2021 Mustagno from Roussillon producer Domaine de la Nouvelle Donne. Elaborated in a Burgundian style, this blend of Grenache blanc, Grenache gris and Carignan brings acidity to the dish while matching and amplifying the texture of the butter and the presence of the lemon. Since my dinner, I

can't stop thinking or talking about this pairing.

Rosalie's service and superior wine knowledge have always been high points for Paloma — nothing's changed there. It's worth mentioning that her wine list is much deeper than it was last time, and full of lesser-known references and producers. Of the three wines we drank, the two chosen by Rosalie were the most interesting. Suffice it to say that when it comes to the wine list, you're in incredibly good hands.

The major difference at Paloma, in my opinion, isn't the food, wine list, or service. It's the confidence and assuredness with which each of these elements is rendered. The stifled feeling I got when I first visited — it's completely gone. Now, the food feels confident and self-assured — exactly what you need to serve a plate of brains in butter — and it feels reflective of real Niçoise cooking. More than that, I feel like I'm seeing the real expression of Armand, a chef who has spent the last 47 years working in kitchens. On my first visit, I felt I was seeing someone in conflict with what they wanted to cook and what they expected people at restaurants wanted to eat. Now, I see a menu with personality, depth and authenticity. I'm interpolating a bit here but I've always believed that this father-daughter-run love letter to Nice wasn't about opening a great restaurant — it was about encapsulating the feeling of meals shared together in a part of the world that was so meaningful to the Forcherio family. It's a powerful feeling and it comes across.

I want to end with a disclaimer. After nearly five decades behind the stove, Armand Forcherio will be stepping away from the kitchen. There was a rumour that Paloma was scheduled to close but, according to Rosalie, that is untrue. With that said, if you want to experience Paloma as it was always meant to be, I urge you to book a table before the end of summer — you'll be glad you did.

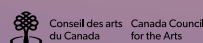
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 Twin Rising ^{CA/QC} ■■■ upsammy & Jonathan Castro ^{NL+PE/NL} ■■■ Ura ^{CA/QC} ■■■ x/o ^{CA} ■■■
 ■■■ Yuri Urano & Manami Sakamoto ^{JP} ■■■ μ-Ziq & ID:Mora ^{UK+CZ} ■■■ *DJ set

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music

Find your beat at MUTEK



Joji Wakita

BY STEPHAN BOISSONEAULT

If you're reading this article, you're either someone who lives for the party — the sweaty dance-filled rooms that reverberate deep into the twilight hours — or maybe you're someone who doesn't get out much, by choice, and you're looking for a personal odyssey or some kind of collective escape.

Either way, the 24th iteration of MUTEK will provide. Yes, for 24 years this immersive electronic music and digital arts festival has been a refuge for people looking for something more from a music festival; a place where technology and creativity go hand in hand and audio visual performances are permanently burned in your memory banks and retinas.

It can be quite exhausting and anxiety-inducing to come up with your own itinerary for a festival, especially one as expansive as MUTEK. So we at Cult MTL made a little cheat sheet for you — follow it to a tee, or don't; we won't fault you.

MUTEK is six days of constant stimulation, which can be a lot for any mere mortal, so sometimes it is best to just walk into a random late night show at the SAT. Personally, I go based on the craziest name without having any prior knowledge as to what I'm about to experience. Hieroglyphic Being, the experimental Afrofuturism / ambient acid-jazz meets techno moniker of Chicago's Jamal Moss, might win based on that criteria this year.

The next event I'd check out actually takes place the weekend before MUTEK proper — on Aug. 18 and 19 at Usine C. It's called INSCAPE: NEW HOMEOSTASIS and promises a large collaboration between a bunch of sound artists, programmers, video installationists and more. It's also meant to celebrate the creative relationship between Canada and the Republic of Korea with the Korean artists GRAYCODE, jiiiiin, Kohui, and ASTATIC | YEONO. It's two nights and I'd definitely at least check out one.

New to MUTEK's programming this year is a series called Experimental Listening, which promises to be an "intimate and welcoming setting" for an optimized music consuming experience. Based on photos, it looks like a bunch of bean bag chairs in a small room while some strange lights and some of the most experimental IDM reverberates between the walls. It sounds like a great time, and one act to definitely check out during this optimized experience is Ale Hop, a Peruvian, Berlin-based artist who utilizes real-time sampling devices and modular synths that she makes sound like guitars. It's kind of like building a wall of sound, but sometimes it feels like you're in the jungle.

For the rave crowd — but the rave crowd looking for something intense and more thought-provoking than your typical techno — check out Paraadiso, a collaboration between Italian DJ and producer Guglielmo Barzacchini aka TSVI and multimedia sound wizard Matteo Zamagni, who goes by Seven Orbits.

Even though MUTEK has never had a "true headliner" list before, Kyoka, a Japanese sound and installation artist, electronic music producer and DJ based in Berlin, could easily

fill that slot. She's the first female artist signed to Raster-Noton — a label home to artists such as the late Ryuichi Sakamoto and William Basinski. If those names mean nothing to you, I feel sorry for you, but trust me when I say Kyoka is hardcore. And in this iteration she is collabing with Shohei Fujimoto, a Tokyo-based media artist, for a hypnotic live set all about neuroscience and the human brain.

Next up is Rich Aucoin, a, East Coast Canadian who is probably better known as an experimental pop guru who runs around the stage (and in the audience), but his latest projects are an album series called *Synthetic*, a four-part "tentacular opus composed with the rare and historic synth collection of Calgary's National Music Centre." I doubt he'll be able to haul 40 synths across the country, but you never know with Rich.

Last, but not even close to least, is Honeydrip, a local, experimental bass/house/dancehall cerberus led by Emma Forgues, a Montreal digital artist with a BFA in computation arts from Concordia University, and King Shadrock, a Jamaican-born, Montreal-based "reggae singer known for his timeless and conscious music." Honeydrip is a bit Burna Boy, a bit Bassnectar, but also echoes some vibes of acts like Prodigy or even Portishead. Actually, the whole show that Honeydrip is midway on has a wild lineup of electronica, breakbeats, ambient, drum & bass and dirty techno, all the way till three or four in the morning. Let your freak flag fly high at this year's MUTEK.

→ MUTEK is on from Aug. 22–27 at various venues. For more, please visit montreal.mutek.org.



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Guide to Pride

BY DAVE MACINTYRE

Pride is upon us yet again, Montreal!

From Aug. 3 to 13, Fierté Montréal plays host to all kinds of events showcasing some of the best entertainment the LGBTQ+ community has to offer. Live music, drag shows, standup comedy, opportunities to meet community organizations and (yes!) a Pride Parade downtown are all part of this year's festivities, with much of the entertainment happening at Parc Olympique (for free!).

In a time where LGBTQ+ rights feel under attack more than ever (especially in the United States), Pride remains an incredibly vital event to have, and proof that our support and solidarity with the queer community should remain just as strong all year round. This year's Fierté Montréal looks to do all that and then some, with a strong lineup of events and performances from every corner of the 2SLGBTQIA+ spectrum.

Here's a preview of some of this year's must-see events at Pride/Fierté, starting this coming Thursday.

Me Joke-Tu?

Hosted by non-binary Acadian comics Sami Landri & Chiquita Mère, Me Joke-Tu will be a can't-miss event for Montrealers looking for some of the best and brightest in queer comedy. Standup and sketches from the likes of Charlie Morin, Maxime Ève Gagnon and Justine Philie will be among the highlights of this two-hour event, one Fierté Montréal promises will be "so hilarious, you may pee your pants!" *Le National (1220 Ste-Catherine E.)*, Thursday, Aug. 3, 8–10 p.m., \$28.25

Them Fatale

Fierté Montréal is flexing its diversity of pride events with this year's programming, which includes a non-binary/non-conforming/trans cabaret. Them Fatale at le National will see Rosie Bourgeoisie (who developed the event's animation and concept), Gay Jesus, Jake DuPree and Nox Falls strut their stuff during an immersive show (with live shows beforehand that even include Shibari) after guests are treated to cocktails and food, followed by a dance party with by DJ LFHOMME spinning.

Le National (1220 Ste-Catherine E.), Friday, Aug. 4, 8:30–10:30 p.m., \$28.25/\$46 for VIP/meet&greet

Klô Pelgag

The ICI Musique-sponsored ImmiX concert will go down at Parc Olympique, with a house band backing a vast array of local talent. Though there's plenty of amazing music to be heard there (Kanen, Blxck Cxspcr, Jade Above and Lumière come to mind), Klô Pelgag is the biggest name on the bill. The singer-songwriter from Gaspésie has yet to release a follow-up to 2020's acclaimed *Notre-Dame-des-Sept-Douleurs*, but rest assured she'll have the crowd at Pride/Fierté well and truly in their feelings when she takes the stage. *The ImmiX show happens at Esplanade du Parc Olympique — Scène TD on Wednesday Aug. 9, 8–11 p.m., free*

Rita Baga

There'll be a host of incredible drag performances at this year's Drag Superstars show (Jimbo, Lady Boom Boom, Océane Aqua-Black and Alexis Mateo, for example), but arguably none bigger than drag icon and the queen of Montreal herself, Rita Baga. Known for her appearances on *Canada's Drag Race season 1* and *Canada Vs. the World* as well as *Big Brother Célébrités*, she's also the first-ever drag queen to grace *Elle* magazine's cover. *The Drag Superstars show happens at Esplanade du Parc Olympique - Scène TD on Thursday, Aug 10, 6–11 p.m., free*



Drag Superstars, Aug. 10

Hamza Aboutoufaa

Vivek Shraya

A transgender artist who's a true multi-hyphenate, Vivek Shraya is bound to put on one hell of a show. The Calgary-based artist comes to Montreal riding on the May release of her first non-independent album, *Baby, You're Projecting*, with her debut play *How to Fail as a Popstar* set to be adapted for TV by the CBC. Shraya is a musician, visual artist, author, publisher, makeup brand ambassador, filmmaker, playwright and even a creative writing professor at the University of Calgary — in other words, is there anything she can't do? *The DistinXion show happens at Esplanade du Parc Olympique - Scène TD on Friday Aug. 11, 5–11 p.m., free*

Mýa

The R&B queen of "Case of the Ex," "Lady Marmalade," "Ghetto Supastar" and "My Love Is Like.. Wo" fame will headline this year's DistinXion concert, bringing a healthy dose of pop nostalgia to Fierté Montréal. Now 43, Mýa is still actively touring and releasing music while looking and sounding as good as ever, which will be a treat for all in attendance at Parc Olympique. *The DistinXion show happens at Esplanade du Parc Olympique (Scène TD) on Friday Aug. 11, 5–11 p.m., free*

Xcellence and After Xcellence

LGBTQ+ culture helped give the world electronic music in the first place, and this year's edition of Fierté Montréal offers no shortage of DJing talent who've cut their teeth spinning for queer audiences. Eclectic, bassy local DJ Honeydrip is among those performing at Xcellence, with ASH BANKS, pony, TEYKIRISI and San Farafina also on the decks. *Friday, Aug. 11, Esplanade du Parc olympique (Scène Loto-Québec), 4–11 p.m., free*

If you're feeling wide awake and ready to keep the party going, head to SAT's Dôme for After Xcellence, headlined by a DJ set from Pierre Kwenders and featuring KidCrayola and DJ Karaba. *Friday, Aug. 11, SAT Satosphère (1201 St-Laurent), 10 p.m.–3 a.m., \$32.79*

Syana

The SuXession concert during this year's Fierté Montréal will be showcasing the best in underground local queer talent, with DJ/producer/businesswoman Syana as its marquee name. Fans of electronic music will enjoy this Montréalaise's hard-hitting, restless, trance-fuelled beats. Some may also recognize her from her Boiler Room set in Toronto from earlier this year, and she also owns a local DJing studio DJTAL Studios. *SuXession happens at Esplanade du Parc olympique (Scène Loto-Québec), Saturday, Aug 12, 8–11 p.m., free*

RÊVE

Toronto-based local girl done good RÊVE (now based in Toronto) is coming home to help close out Fierté Montréal as its closing show headline act. With her music being featured in Canada's Drag Race, the 27-year-old chanteuse born Briannah Donolo is fresh off a Juno victory for her platinum-certified/Michael Pezzetta-approved hit "Ctrl + Alt + Del" and looks to show those in attendance why she's earned her ongoing rise to pop prominence. *The Closing Show happens at Esplanade du Parc Olympique (Scène TD) on Sunday, Aug. 13, 10–11 p.m.*

Pride Parade

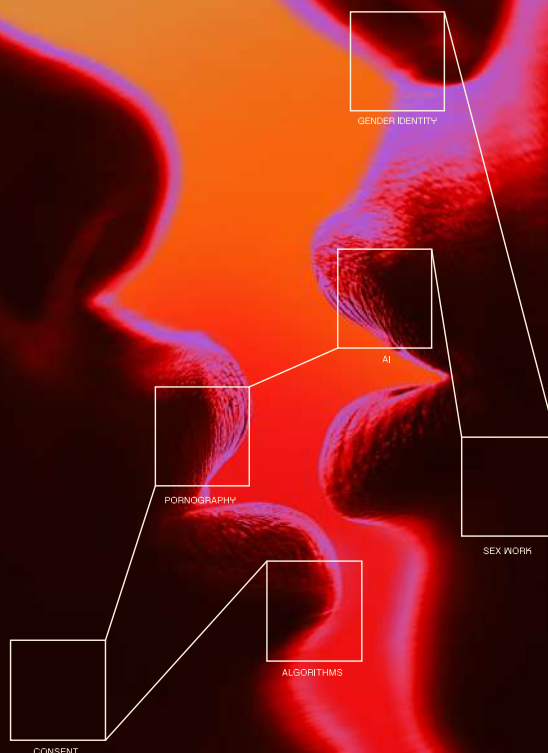
Montreal's annual Pride Parade is back, with thousands of participants and spectators expected as they once again take to the streets to fight for LGBTQ+ rights and campaign for further societal progress on top of what's already been accomplished.

The parade will start at 1 p.m., with a moment of silence scheduled for 2:30 p.m. to commemorate those who have lost their lives to homophobia (in all its forms), transphobia, and AIDS, as well as missing and murdered Indigenous women and members of the Two-Spirit community. *Sunday Aug. 13, 1 p.m., Boulevard René-Lévesque from Metcalfe to Alexandre DeSève*

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Album reviews



Shane Ghostkeeper, *Songs for My People* (Victory Pool)
If you've been keeping up with the latest names in Western Canada's alt rock/psych scene, the name Ghostkeeper might already be on your radar. But Shane Ghostkeeper, the singer of that Calgary outfit (made up of members that have worked

with Chad Van Gaalen, JOYFULTALK and Alvays, to name a few) has just released this debut solo album, and it's more of an outlaw country blues meets '60s folk affair. At the front of every track is Ghostkeeper's conversational but shapeshifting singing style — sometimes akin to the ramblings of Lou Reed or Bob Dylan on the track "Into the Night," or even Grateful Dead's Bob Weir on "Hunger Strike." He and his band also really nail the outlaw country or countrypolitan instrumentals; bright slide guitar, backbeat drumming, breakneck acoustic and electric guitar and familial stories aplenty. You can really sense that Shane Ghostkeeper is feeling the music on every track, as he sings about and reflects on his Métis heritage, upbringing and general "feel-good" outlook on life. *Songs for My People* is indeed a rare album, telling rich and real stories in the form of wondrous song. 9/10 Trial Track: "Uncle John" (Stephan Boissonneault)



Claud, *Supermodels* (Saddest Factory/Dead Oceans)
Coming of age albums have a way of tugging at the heartstrings, and Claud's *Supermodels* is yet another entry in that musical canon. The first artist ever to be signed to Phoebe Bridgers' imprint

Saddest Factory Records, the Chicago singer-songwriter showed signs of serious promise on their 2021 debut *Super Monster*. On their sophomore LP (and second straight album to have "super" in the title), Claud tightens their pop songwriting while making musical lemonade out of a devastating breakup.

Lead single "Every Fucking Time" is a stripped-down indie breakup anthem, and opener "Crumbs" is a similarly bare-bones folk tune followed by a grunge-ish stomper in "Dirt." The boppy "Wet" feels almost like a Phoenix song, "It's Not About You" is a fuzzy midtempo jam that could've worked as a song for her label boss and the '90s-adjacent "Paul Rudd" boasts some of the album's catchiest songwriting. It's a personal and intimate body of work, and one that also swings more indie rock than bedroom pop this time around. Some songs hit harder than others, but *Supermodels* is a clear step forward for the 24-year-old as they document their early 20s on wax. 8/10 Trial Track: "Blue Lights" (Dave MacIntyre)



Private Lives, *HIT RECORD* (Feel It Records)
Naming your debut *HIT RECORD*, is a bold move that takes a tremendous amount of confidence, but the local garage punk quartet, Private Lives has lots to be confident about on this 10-song

concoction. There's straightforward, dirty, punk guitar—played by Chance Hutchinson of PRIORS—backed up by his wife/ Private Lives' singer Jackie Blenkarn's (Pale Lips), hazy,

matter of fact vocals piercing high in the mix of "Trust in Me," or "Misfortune" Some songs take a more melodic approach like the song "Private Lives" or the nebulous closer "Dark Spots," which has no business being so sonically twisted on an accessible garage punk record.

There are a few moments that really make this record shine, like the time change during "Dead Hand"'s outro and the drums and bass cutting through on tracks like "Head/Body," which has a more post-punk atmosphere that leaves room for a catchy high equalized guitar line that sticks to your synapses like honey. These songs are screaming to be played loud and live and now with their debut out, I anticipate future Private Lives' shows upping the ante. With HIT RECORD Private Lives does a fantastic job of keeping your attention, and because this record is on 27 minutes, doesn't overstay their welcome. 8/10 Trial Track: "Head/Body" (Stephan Boissonneault)



Jungle, *Volcano* (Caiola/AWAL)
London based neo-soul/funk project Jungle return with album number four, and it's fairly obvious from the jump that this isn't a copy-pasted retread of past glories. Instead of the male vocals we've been used to hearing on songs like

"Busy Earnin'", "Heavy, California", or "Keep Moving", Volcano sounds more based on vocal samples, even if they're actually original vocals. Some of them are muffled, like on "Holding On" and "Every Night", while others are sped up like on single "Candle Flame."

For the most part, this approach works nicely. Pan flutes ("Us Against the World" and the effortlessly groovy "Problemz"), Chemical Brothers-esque synth effects ("You Ain't No Celebrity"), and light, feathery electric guitar flourishes (closer "Pretty Little Thing") add a different sonic dimension to the record. Guest appearances from hip-house emcee du jour Channel Tres ("I've Been in Love") and producer Mood Talk (the shimmering, mostly instrumental disco-house jam "Don't Play) inject life and colour to the project in their own right. The album as a whole is a bit stylistically uneven, but *Volcano* is nonetheless a sunny, enjoyable body of work. 7.5/10 Trial Track: "Problemz" (Dave MacIntyre)



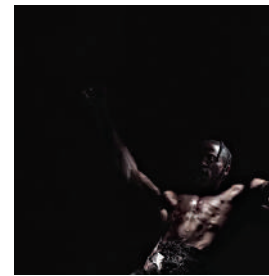
Being Dead, *When Horses Would Run* (Bayonet)

Being Dead from Austin, Texas, is a weird band. With the main members going by the names Falcon Bitch and Gumball, it kind of feels like Being Dead is ripped from an adult cartoon.

Of course, they weren't always named Falcon Bitch (real name Juli Keller) and Gumball (real name Cody Dosier), but have been going by the monikers for the run of their latest album, *When Horses Would Run* — a combination of hairbrained psychedelia, DIY art pop, and country-tinged surf rock.

This album would fall into the category of what one of my dear friend's would call "glue-sniffing music," right up there with wackos like Ween or the more unhinged version of Violent Femmes. Being Dead is the kind of band who creates a side joke band, Zero Percent APR, (with its own discography) to troll the Austin Chronicle. So there's no room for reprieve on this 13-song album and the song choices feel almost bi-polar, sometimes like an unruly acid trip (which I wasn't surprised influenced some of the songs) like "Muriel's Big Day Off," which might be a favourite—if not for its change from a freak folk romper to a complete jazz prog interlude on ludes. Some of the

songs do fall kind of flat and feel like a random, unrefined jam between two very good friends ("Come On"), but you have to wonder if that's the point. Still, songs like "Treeland," (about a new age cult that worships trees?) or the synthy title track are quite catchy and stick on the mind stem. 7/10 Trial Track: "Muriel's Big Day Off" (Stephan Boissonneault)



Travis Scott, *UTOPIA* (Cactus Jack)

The George Clinton "Maggot Brain" vocal sample tacked to the end of album opener "HYAENA" is as good a way as any to consider the loftiness of Travis Scott's latest: "I knew I had to rise above it all or drown in my own shit." The Houston

rap star certainly dived into a deep pile of ambition on *UTOPIA*, inviting damn near every pop/rap bigshot of the last two decades to muck around with him. But there's just too much happening on this album. Some of it is excellent, much of it is glorified content, and a polished dookie is what it is. Nonetheless, Scott is a gifted artist. As overlong, overstuffed and lacking concrete direction as *UTOPIA* is, intention saves it. The sum of its parts is not worth dissecting, much like a single maggot in the mind of the universe. But its whole, from end to end, if not mind-altering, is undeniably compelling. 6.5/10 Trial Track: "Sirens" (Darcy MacDonald)

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:hammer of the mods

BY JOHNSON CUMMINS

Hello, my darling lovelies. Seeing as the fine furry folks that run this rag are planning a special issue for the September print edition — and bumping this swell column — I will be hipping you L7's to the happening happenings not only for this month but for September, too. Here's six essential gigs coming up — get your tickets now.

Aug. 16

You will not want to miss the rapid return of black metal wizards Batushka, who will blast-beat your puny mind to bits with Swallow the Sun and Stormruler at le Studio TD. If you squeezed into Bar le Ritz to see them a couple of months back, you know how sheerly pulverizing this is going to be. 305 Ste-Catherine W., 7:30 p.m., \$44

If shrieking and epic blast beats aren't your bag and you just want to hear some righteous riffs, all put to bed with some serious pipes, don't miss the rock action of Sheer Mag who will willingly wage battle with Batushka as they are playing the very same night. Sheer Mag simply demand that your hips get into motion but also boast considerable songwriting prowess hiding behind

the beats. Stellar local support from Young Blades and the increasingly busy Street Panther really puts the thumb on the scale for this one. The good times will be found in the basement of Sala, la Sotterenea. 4848 St-Laurent, 8 p.m., \$27.89

Aug. 31

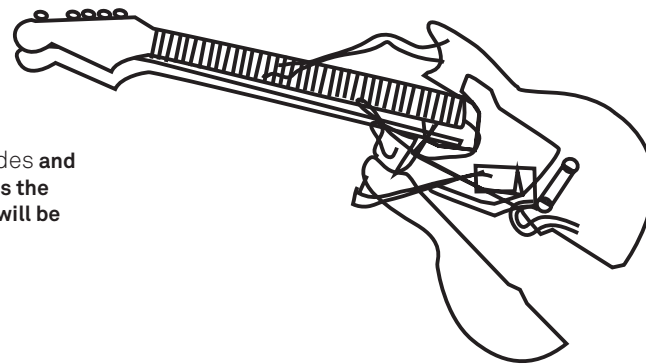
Fans of brutal heaviosity, "brown note" low end and decibel blasts you will want to have your fillings liquified when experimental duo the Body lay waste to le Ritz with Troller and Dead Times. As they're a definite Montreal favourite, I would mos def rec that you grip tix now — selling out is imminent. You may as well prepare to be crushed and just tell your boss now that you won't be in on the following Friday. 179 Jean-Talon W., 8 p.m., \$25.08

Sept. 16

A band whose moniker is as dumb as a bag of hammers, Tomb Mold, will obliterate with doom fueled superiority at Foufs with the bong bubbling support from Outer Heaven and Serpent Corpse (I will never not love this band name). Patch adorned jean vests will be mandatory attire and you can expect a roomful of synchronized gentle head bobbing much like prehistoric beasts at a watering hole. Bring your drool rag to catch the ooze. 7:30 p.m., \$28.66

Sept. 23

If this were the Lower East Side and it was 1984, I would have completely lost my noggin over the announce-



ment of these two final blasts in September, happening only mere days apart. First up, at the comfy confines of Casa, are legendary noiseniks Live Skull. Holy fuck! If you were at Cherubs and want to keep the bludgeoning going, you will not want to miss this one. Openers are Feeling Figures. 4871 St-Laurent, 8 p.m., \$24.56

Sept. 27

Finally, probably my favourite live band of all time, Swans, return to town to bring true musical ascension as we surrender to their will. Opening is Norman Westberg. I don't really know what to say other than this should be your favourite gig you will ever see in your fleeting life. There is absolutely nobody who can follow Swans, especially in the past 10 years as the band is truly playing for keeps. This is happening in the killer room known as le National. 1220 Ste-Catherine E., 8 p.m., \$42.75

Current Obsession: Syd Barrett, Barrett
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How to interview John Wilson



BY EVE THOMAS

After three seasons and 18 episodes, *How To With John Wilson* is wrapping up. Each episode is a funny kind of love letter to New York's (and America's) eccentricities, a collage of clips that lures you in with a benign theme — scaffolding, small talk, wine appreciation — then goes firmly off the rails. One minute you're learning about public toilets, then casket sales, then college campus cult recruiters, all spliced between shots of buskers, rats and public toe-sucking.

It's a uniquely strange, sweet and unsettling show. And though some of the clips feel like natural fodder for social media, the series itself is an antidote to a scroll full of stolen content and context-less videos — an invitation to reflect a little longer than the half-second laugh or cringe most Tik Toks provoke. And even with names like Nathan Fielder and Susan Orlean on board, it's Wilson's tireless voyeurism and shaky voiceover that tie it all together.

As a huge fan of the show and an occasional observer of Montreal's own oddities (via FNoMTL), I wanted to know what Wilson had to say about capturing the trashy side of a city.

Eve Thomas: **Though the show is done, you also have a personal Instagram account where you share strange things you see around New York. Does it feel different when you're sending an image into the ether, versus collecting stuff for eventual use?**

John Wilson: **For the Instagram stuff, I've tried not to change my behaviour that much since the show started. If I see something funny on the street and I don't have my video camera, there's no other real place I can think of to put that. But if there's a video of something really exceptional, I'm not just going to put it on social media.**

ET: **Have you ever left your phone at home, to just go into the world without recording anything?**

JW: **I would *never* leave home without my phone. No.**

ET: **Do you ever feel like a digital hoarder?**

JW: **Yeah, totally. Or, you know, an analogue hoarder, sometimes. I still shoot on this in the off-season [holds up a small video camera], a DV camera, not broadcast quality. It's nice to get back to filming stuff just for me.**

ET: **What does "just for me" mean? Personal use, or some project you haven't planned yet?**

JW: **I go back and forth. I mean, this is more just like home movies. A friend's wedding, a party. I just turn this stuff into little movies that I show to my friends.**

ET: **And your friends are okay with it all?**

JW: **Yeah, they're cool. I mean, they understand what the terms are to hang out with me, in general. And they know that I wouldn't put out anything that would make them look really bad. I run things by them.**

ET: **What about strangers? It feels like the role of journalism and social media have shifted — our concepts of public and private — since you started the show, which you get into a bit in the season three premiere. Has your own approach changed?**

JW: **We occupy an interesting space with the show. Because yes, it is a documentary, but it's also a comedy. And it's like, I don't have to apply... What's the phrase? I don't have to abide by the same journalistic ethics, you know? Like, when you're writing a story about someone, you can't buy them a meal. I don't really have any of those rules.**

ET: **You almost can't get a human on camera who doesn't know what reality TV looks like, anymore. How do you get people to not perform?**

JW: **That's totally true, but people are still themselves, no matter what. I'm kind of allergic to really hammy people, so I can tell when someone is going to act like that, almost instantly. But most New Yorkers are not like that. And I feel like most people are not like that.**

You know, the documentarian Frederick Wiseman, he's one of my favourite guys. He's been making documentaries since the '60s. And I remember asking him the same question after a Q&A. "Do you think that people in the '60s, the way that they respond to a camera, is different than today?" And he just immediately shot me down. He was like, "Absolutely not." And I've kind of noticed the same thing over the years. People may drift in and out of their schtick sometimes, but if you know what to ask them, they're very much themselves. Even if they've seen a lot of reality TV.

ET: **What's it like living in New York now, when there are so many voyeuristic accounts, and everyone can be paparazzi for, you know, a rat eating pizza?**

JW: **You mean like everyone is filming the rat now?**

ET: **Yeah. If everyone else has their phone out, do you still shoot?**

JW: **Then you just film in the other direction, you film the crowd. Or sometimes there is value to what everyone is watching at the same time. You just try to find a different angle. I think everyone is filming all of this stuff, that inspired me to film it more, in a way. Because I would see all this amazing footage on Instagram or whatever, and I would just get so sad that it was so decentralized, and didn't really amount to much outside of a temporary video. And it would kind of disappear, in the churn. The show for me is a container for all this stuff, so it doesn't get lost forever.**

ET: **Sometimes at FNoMTL we get accused of being negative because we show Montreal's decay. Can you truly love a city if you don't embrace the bad bits?**

JW: **I think loving something means having a complicated relationship with it. The show is like a good litmus test, because I see some people comment, "I watched *How To* and it proved that New York is the biggest shit hole I've ever seen and makes me never want to go there." And then other people are like, "This makes me miss New York."**

ET: **Have you ever captured anything where you just kind of felt like, 'Well, that's it, I'm never going to top that. I might as well pack it all in'?**

JW: **I felt that way at the end of the episode about batteries, when I'm interviewing the sex offender, and the trash can just ignites. And I'm just like, sitting there, watching this bus station burn down with an advertisement for vodka behind it that says, "Good vodka should not burn," you know. And it's like — I'm getting chills just thinking about this again now — I cannot believe that the universe has delivered the perfect visual metaphor for everything we've experienced up until this point. Moments like that are some of the only religious experiences I feel like I have, because I don't know how to explain it.**

→ *How To With John Wilson* season 3 is streaming now on Crave via HBO, with new episodes airing on Fridays through Sept. 1.

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Kill thrill



BY JUSTINE SMITH

In Pascal Plante's latest film, *Red Rooms*, much of the first act occurs in Montreal's Palais de Justice. The accused sits in a glass box in a room. The white space reflects a more Canadian approach to justice: bureaucratic blankness overtakes the judicial American pageantry we are used to seeing on the big screen. Two lawyers make their opening statements regarding the accused, who is under investigation for the murder of young girls. From the courtroom, a young woman watches with an inscrutable gaze.

Stories of serial killer groupies inspired *Red Rooms* — people, many young women, who fawn over people (primarily men) accused of heinous crimes. The film focuses on two women who wake up early to ensure a spot in the courtroom. Our protagonist, Kelly-Anne (Juliette Gariépy), is a reserved tech-genius and statuesque model with ambiguous motives, while the more naive Clémentine (Laurie Babin) is sure of the killer's innocence. The pair strike up an unlikely friendship over the film.

Producer Dominique Dussault has worked in the Quebec industry for nine years and also produced Pascal Plante's previous feature *Nadia Butterfly*. *Red Rooms* recently opened the Fantasia International Film Festival after a successful world premiere at the Karlovy Vary film festival in the Czech Republic. While producers aren't always present from the start of production, Dussault initiated the film's focus.

"A friend of mine had encountered serial killer groupies in real life, and there were no films on the subject," explains

Dussault. "It was not only an underexplored idea but an opportunity to do a social critique; touch on how the media and the public are culpable. Pascal brought in elements of the cyber thriller."

From start to premiere, the movie took about three years — an astonishingly fast process within the Quebec industry. "We got very lucky. Our project was accepted right away by SODEC, which is rare," says Dussault. While many films germinate for years as an idea, *Red Rooms* quickly came together, though on the project end, that doesn't mean it was easy. The production was relatively small, and finding the suitable locations was difficult. COVID still heavily impacted production. It took about six months to secure the locations at the Palais de Justice. "They were helpful," says Dussault, but the process was still long. Finding the three condos in the film wasn't easy. "Montreal has many condo towers, but we're not Toronto."

Dussault also worked closely with the casting process. Both she and Plante saw Juliette Gariépy in the role of Kelly-Anne. "We saw her in short films. We knew we needed her," says Dussault. She auditioned and got the part. Laurie Babin was not what the filmmakers had in mind for Clémentine initially. Still, even doing auditions via Zoom, she exhibited a profound empathy while many other performers opted for caricature. "We did a dual audition with Gariépy and Babin, which worked so well."

The hard work pays off. The film has the unmistakable sleekness of late-period Fincher. Movies like *Gone Girl* and *The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo* blend ambiguous moral questions with sleek, even cold production design. Plante's filmmaking feels inspired by cinema from the Romanian New Wave, movies like Cristian Mungiu's *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* that blend genre elements with a rigorous naturalist style to explore the challenging unstable reality of post-Communist Romania. *Red Rooms* may be unmistakably Québécois, but it has international aspirations.

Though having only played at festivals so far, *Red Rooms* has thus far won over its audiences. The reviews are strong. At Fantasia, Dussault notes, people were "gasping and

leaning forward in their seats." The audience response thus far suggests Pascal Plante may finally find a wide audience. *Nadia Butterfly* was set to premiere at the Cannes film festival in 2020 when the pandemic hit. The movie, which uses non-actors and a minimalist, observational style, tells the story of one swimmer's journey at the 2020 Olympics in Japan. The film, which only ever got a minimal theatrical release, was rigorous and ambitious but is now mainly remembered as an alternate history of 2020 if COVID had never happened.

Dussault got her start working on short films and documentaries. She also worked in distribution, which helped her better understand release strategies. Dussault is a hands-on producer and sees the role as a different storytelling. With her projects, she favours ambition and sees an opportunity to help bring unconventional and daring films to the public.

At this year's Fantasia Film Festival, Dussault is also pitching a film with filmmaker Olivier Godin as part of the Frontières co-production market. Based on the novel *Anna Nous Parlera*, the film is about a book that makes people's heads explode once they finish reading it. "It's universal; we see the question of our liberty of expression worldwide," says Dussault. "It's a dark comedy that explores a very serious subject." Godin, whose feature film *Irlande cahier bleu* also had its world premiere at Fantasia, similarly won the Camera Lucia prize from the AQCC (the Quebec Critics Association).

With a wide release looming in Quebec, and a festival run underway, *Red Rooms* feels like a visionary, contemporary film. Without showing too much gore, the film uses sound and insinuation to draw itself into the audience's psyche. It's a stark and haunting film that is not easily forgotten. At Fantasia, it picked up four awards in the main Cheval Noir competition, including Best Picture, Best Score, Best Lead Performance and Best Screenplay. For Dussault, seeing one of her projects come to fruition is special. "It's extremely precious to me," she says.

→ *Red Rooms* opens in Montreal theatres on Friday, Aug 11.

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On Screen



Passages



Blue Beetle



Gran Turismo



Strays

BY JUSTINE SMITH

If *Barbenheimer* was intended to restore the all-mighty power of the big screen experience, Hollywood has decided to completely quash that goodwill with a limp and unambitious August.

If you ask the studios, the SAG and WGA strikes are to blame for them pushing back projects like *Gran Turismo* (Aug. 11) from a mid-month release date by two weeks. When the film inevitably fails, they'll likely blame the unions, despite the fact that the movie based on a popular driving video game looks terrible.

Other major releases are also franchise projects. At the top of the month, we have *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Mutant Mayhem* (Aug. 2). Our favourite mutants want to win over the hearts of New Yorkers and be accepted as normal teenagers. Produced by Seth Rogen and Evan Goldberg, the film also features a voice cast that includes Rogen (naturally), Jackie Chan, John Cena and Ayo Edebiri.

After *The Flash* failed to inspire at the box office, DC has

another superhero film set to hit the big screens this summer. In the superhero origin story *Blue Beetle* (Aug. 18), an alien relic chooses Jaime Reyes (Xolo Maridueña) to be its symbiotic host, bestowing the teenager with a suit of armour that's capable of extraordinary and unpredictable powers, forever changing his destiny as he becomes the superhero Blue Beetle. The supporting cast includes Susan Sarandon, George Lopez and Harvey Guillén.

In 2018, I watched *The Meg*, a film about a giant shark, and instantly thought, "Wow, I can't wait for a sequel." Five years later, the sequel no one asked for *Meg 2: The Trench* (Aug. 4) is back on the big screen. Jason Statham returns in the lead role and heads a research team that encounters multiple threats while exploring the ocean's depths, including a malevolent mining operation.

If you're hoping for some raunchy adult humour, look no further than *Strays* (Aug. 18). The R-Rated "dog movie" stars Will Ferrell, Jamie Foxx, Will Forte, Isla Fisher, Randall Park, Josh Gad, Harvey Guillén, Rob Riggle, Brett Gelman, Jamie Demetriou and Sofia Vergara. Though the film about an abandoned dog that teams up with other strays to get revenge on his former owner may seem

dumb enough to skip, it's written by comedic genius Dan Perrault, creator of one of Netflix's best original programs, *American Vandal*.

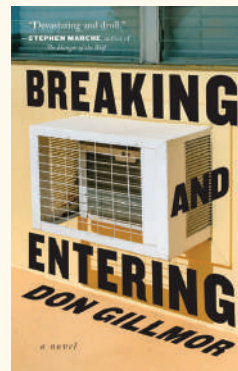
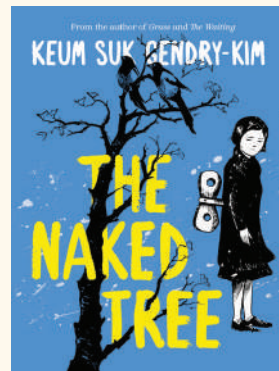
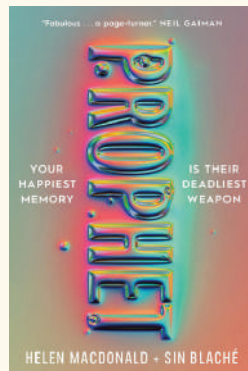
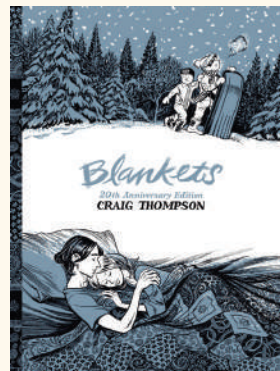
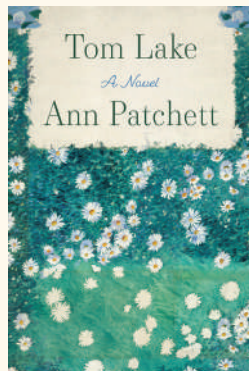
For something a little lighter, Randall Park (*Fresh Off the Boat*) makes his directorial debut with *Shortcomings* (Aug. 4), a dramedy that premiered earlier this year at Sundance to strong reviews. It's based on a comic by Adrian Tomine (who also pens the screenplay) about a trio of young Bay Area urbanites as they navigate a range of interpersonal relationships, traversing the country in search of the ideal connection.

Look a little beyond Hollywood and the August release schedule looks slightly better. Quebec's *Red Rooms* (Aug. 11) is a dark drama that follows two serial-killer groupies. The harrowing cyber thriller directed by Pascal Plante recently premiered at Karlovy Vary and Fantasia and has really won over audiences. Montreal is also finally getting the very sexy *Passages* (Aug. 18), the latest film from Ira Sachs. Franz Rogowski, Ben Whishaw and Adèle Exarchopoulos star in the love triangle about two men married to each other whose marriage is threatened as one has an affair with a woman.

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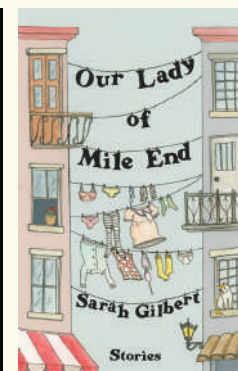
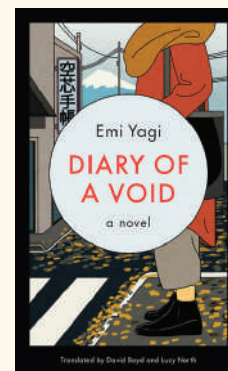
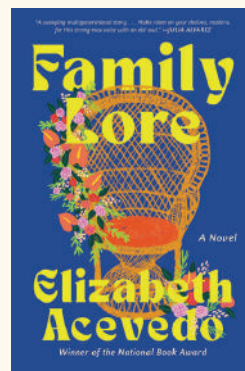
MON, AUG 14 | 7 PM | **ZINE CLUB**

TUE, AUG 22 | 8 PM | **DOUBLE BOOK LAUNCH** | Social Fiction by Chantal Montellier and Like Every Form of Love by Padma Viswanathan

MON, AUG 28 | 7 PM | **ZINE CLUB**

WED, AUG 30 | 7 PM | **BOOK LAUNCH** | Bottom Rail on Top by D.M Bradford

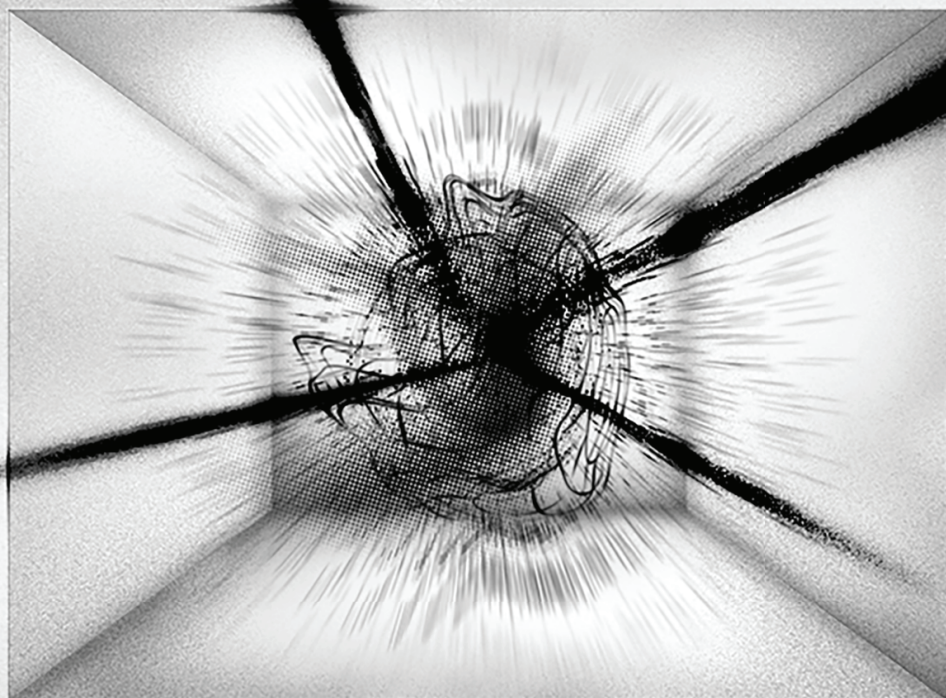
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Do Phan Hoi

BY ASHLEY FISH-ROBERTSON

Montreal contemporary dance promoters Danse Danse are kicking off their 2023–24 season with the JOAT International Street Dance Festival, happening in the Quartier des Spectacles from Aug. 29 to Sept. 4.

Launched in 2014 as a smaller-scale dance battle competition by Handy Yacinthe, JOAT quickly evolved into a full-fledged festival by 2016. Yacinthe says that the festival has earned its “international” designation, evolving from a staple of the street dance scene to “growing more and more on the international circuit because now we attract international street dancers.”

While street dance remains the festival’s primary focus — the main events at Club Soda are Battle Breaking, Battle Hip Hop and Battle Popping — Yacinthe explains that since Danse Danse became co-producers of the event, it “was a trampoline for us to go up, and to offer a bigger production value. And that on its own makes JOAT the biggest street festival in Canada and the largest in North America. People were inspired by this new idea, and then this idea of being multidisciplinary evolved more, so we thought, ‘Let’s go further than just dance with this festival.’”

In more recent years, JOAT continued to focus on dance battle sessions and exciting performances, but it also began to offer other events, such as exhibits and learning sessions related to street dance. With 29 events scheduled for this year’s edition of JOAT, regular attendees will notice some new additions to the event programming, including an inline skating performance, a research and creation session in beat-making, musical performances from numerous DJs and more outdoor activities.

Some events that people can expect this year include international dance battles, beat-making battles and an art exhibition by Montreal Loves Hip Hop that portrays the history of hip hop in this city. “While there’s different types of activities, the main thing (attendees can) expect is that there will be an international street dance community there. I know lots of people from the U.S. and Europe who are coming to be a part of the festival,” says Yacinthe.

As with any major festival, the planning process can be arduous. Yacinthe notes that planning for JOAT begins with a meticulous search for the artists, the ones who will take the stage for the main events. The team then has to find judges and battle guests for the main events. “So, the way the process goes is finding the artists, and while we’re doing that, working on the funding from September to January and then working on the festival programming and production.”

Yacinthe, who is a street dance ambassador and has

been involved in international street dance culture for a little over 25 years, drew on his own experiences when developing this festival. His involvement in the international sphere of street dancing granted him many opportunities to travel across the world to learn more about the many street dance communities abroad.

“My experience comes from me experiencing street dance festivals all across the world,” he explained. “So, when I came up with the festival, it was kind of to challenge the status quo, but also it was to inspire the community, which then inspired the international street dance community.” Some notable street dance scenes that Yacinthe has encountered over the years include those in Singapore, Japan, Taiwan and the U.K.

Yacinthe says that when it comes to the international battles at the JOAT festival, he wanted to challenge participating dancers to become more multidisciplinary in their practice. The dancers who participate in these main events have challenges that they have to accomplish and are restricted in their movement. The innovation that must stem from these restrictions is what makes the performances so captivating for audiences.

→ The JOAT Festival, which takes place from Aug. 29–Sept. 4, hosts three main events at Club Soda (1225 St-Laurent), Aug. 31, Sept. 1 and Sept. 2, 8:30 p.m. each night, \$30 each or \$80 for all three. All other events are free. For the program, please visit joatfestival.com.

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Family ties

BY SAVANNAH STEWART

What's in your head, represented on your head.

That's the central theme of hair braider Yasmine Cloutier-Maalouf's project, using her unique skills to spark reflections about mental health and that tender place of early adulthood trying to figure out what the hell you're doing with your life.

An exploration of anything weighing heavily on the minds of young people through braid-ups, from addiction to difficult emotions to toxic relationships, IC System lives and thrives on social media, particularly TikTok, where Cloutier-Maalouf has over 15,000 followers. But the 21-year-old doesn't plan on resting on her laurels — you can expect IC System to start to take up space IRL as the project continues to grow.

"The 'IC' stands for 'identity crisis,'" she explains. "That feeling when you're asked, 'What are you going to do with yourself?'"

What distinguishes Cloutier-Maalouf from other braiders is her skill in braiding shapes, letters or symbols. That's the type of work she most enjoys doing, as it lets her be creative and tell a story. Some of the braid-ups she's done as part of the project depict a woman's legs, a weed leaf or a pair of eyes with a single blue tear.

"Most of my inspiration is through communication," Cloutier-Maalouf says. Some of the styles she creates for the project come from a spark of inspiration on her part, and some are devised in collaboration with the person being braided. Her longtime clients will often gladly be the subjects for a specific design she has in mind.

"I have the main idea sometimes, there's stuff I want to express. Most of the time it's when I'm having a good moment, stuff just appears in my head. I'm like, 'I need to do that!'"

TikTok and Instagram are how she finds new clients and shares IC System hairstyles. As a content creator, she frequently organizes photoshoots for some of her more elaborate ideas, getting friends or models to sit in and get braided up. The hair salon she works at, APART Studio, collaborates with a modelling agency for their stylists to have models to showcase their work.

Cult MTL sat in on her latest photoshoot, a five-person scene about the complicated nature of family ties.

"I wanted to represent how, with the people of your family, you're stuck with that link. There's something that holds you all together," Cloutier-Maalouf said while she was braiding model Salma Aber. "I will braid people together to represent how we're attached to those people. you may want to get detached, but it's family."

Aber and Bisungu Tychique, who Cloutier-Maalouf met through TikTok, were braided together with one long, continuous braid.

"I wanted to represent also the different types of roles that people could play in a family. Some people are more involved, some people are more a victim."

And as shapes are her favourite things to braid, her longtime client Alejandro Alvarado got a house braided onto the top of his head to demonstrate the domesticity of the scene. Alvarado gets his hair braided by her before his muay thai



Lam Dam (Đàm Nguyễn Hoàng Lâm)



fighters, and has been the subject of some of her more creative pieces and photoshoots for a long time.

"I feel blessed with the people that I have around me for this," Cloutier-Maalouf said.

The photoshoot was taking place in the apartment of another client who had responded to her social media callout asking for someone to provide the setting. It was a laidback atmosphere; the models and makeup artist Estelle Moubarak discussed the highs and lows of content creation in the age of TikTok. It's free advertising for Cloutier-Maalouf, but hard work goes into making it happen.

"What I like about Yasmine is she is creative in terms of the haircut but also in how she markets her work, the fact that she takes the initiative to do photoshoots," said James Dissake, who had offered up his apartment for the day. "She goes looking for photographers, makeup artists... she is really very direct in her way of doing things."

Dissake, a YouTuber, commended her use of video and noted that some of her TikTok videos have over a million views, including one they created together.

It was through Instagram that Dissake first saw Cloutier-Maalouf's work, when he arrived in Montreal and was looking for someone to braid his hair.

"I looked at what she was doing and I thought it was super cool," he said. "She advised me on products, she explained to me how to wash my braids, that I had to put on a cap at night so that it wouldn't frizz, that sort of thing. What's good about Yasmine is that when you don't know anything, you're accompanied from start to finish."

More than simply more fodder to feed the algorithms, this scene was Cloutier-Maalouf's largest IC System project to date. And she's not stopping there.

"In the hair like industry or art industry, sometimes I feel like there's like certain stuff you have to do a certain way," she said. "I don't know why, but even very good artists, they will tend to follow trends instead of creating their own. But I feel like I have my own universe, and I don't want to follow any trends there."

→ Yasmine Cloutier-Maalouf can be found on TikTok @braidsycm and braids out of APART Studio (3643 St-Laurent, #410).



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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.

Girlfriend on Mars by Deborah Willis

During my time as a bookseller, customers often came in requesting something simply “fun,” and if I was still working at the store now, I would hand them this. It revolves around a couple who, after several years of monogamy, have reached a fatigued state in their relationship. Or at least Amber has. Amber is tired of her partner Kevin's lack of ambition, and of their shared marijuana-growing business. A relatable sentiment for many, sure, except that Amber not only abandons her relationship, but instead of moving to a new city, a new neighbourhood even, Amber decides she's going to... Mars. Readers get to refreshingly read reality TV in this novel, as Amber enters herself

into a competition funded by a megalomaniac tech billionaire, Geoff Task. Readers also get to intermittently jump back to Kevin's narrative, as he sits slumped and heart broken in their Vancouver basement, watching his ex-girlfriend attempt to leave Earth. In this episode of *Weird Era*, Deborah and I talk about monogamy, and fighting for oneself while still utterly loving others. (SI)

Daddy Boy by Emerson Whitney

In *Daddy Boy*, we follow Emerson as he meditates on gender. Raised by a non-biological father, as well as having a relationship with his biological father, Emerson wonders what both their roles have taught him. This is a book about wanting masculinity without any of its toxicity, about wondering if that's even possible. This is a book about defining yourself outside the binary, and yet still in constant comparison to the people surrounding you. This is a book about a person who finds a lack of control in life so dizzying, they feel steadied to the ground most when chasing tornadoes in a van full of

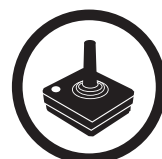
strangers. In the podcast, Emerson and I talk about gender, elders as maps and the ways in which masculinity and capitalism are inherently tied. (SI)

Terrace Story by Hilary Leichter

Terrace Story, Hilary Leichter's second novel, concerns a young family in the city forced to downsize their apartment after rent prices soar. Their new home is small and boxy — until one evening their friend, Stephanie, comes for dinner and reveals a large outdoor terrace hidden behind a door that should be just a closet. The caveat? When Stephanie leaves, the closet is back and the terrace is nowhere to be found. What follows is an inter-generational epic spanning space and time as we learn the histories of both the young family and Stephanie's particular abilities. One of my favourite books of the year, tune into my episode with Leichter to hear what she thinks about the idea that *Terrace Story* is a fable about giving too much of ourselves away. (AN)

→ The *Weird Era* podcast is available via Apple and Spotify. @weirdera.ca

: game jam



BY NATALIA YANCHAK

Loto-Québec is the ongoing sponsor for something called Zone de Jeux Indie, which supports showcasing opportunities for indie titles from Quebec at various conferences and events. Their sky-high gaming tower dominated the main exhibitor hall at Montreal Comiccon, and provided playtesting stations for dozens of indie games.

Central to the Zone was a family-friendly chillout area dotted with the Zone's signature neon green beanbag chairs. It's a great spot to take a break from the general Comiccon chaos while playing some of the previous years' indie games — I saw some young players trying out *Floor Kids* and *Ultimate Chicken Horse*.

Next to that is one of two livestream stages. One hosted the Twitch stream of French-language talk show *La Face des internets*, as a rotating cast of internet icons interviewed devs and cosplayers alike, while playing this year's Zone-supported games. Farther back in the hall, a second stage piled with PCs hosted some *switches to boomer voice* Pokémon

eSports. I felt like a true boomer as I watched in awe, asking myself, 'What is happening here?' as two gamers tried to *catch them all*.

AceGamerSam from the Quebec-based NoReset Speedrun channel was competing against Emeii_ in a speedrun battle of *Pokémon FireRed*. The stage was partially sponsored by the Fondation des Gardiens Virtuels, a resource network for streamers and digital well-being, and featured a weekend's worth of speedrunning retro titles like *Zelda: Ocarina of Time*, *Mega Man 2*, *Halo 3*, *Super Mario 64* and *Super Metroid*.

GAMES WERE PLAYED

One game I can't stop thinking about is *Goodbye Volcano High* from KO-OP, which comes out on Aug. 29. I got to play the demo, running on PS5. The level of polish and refinement on this title is phenomenal. It really plays like a graphic novel RPG. It's definitely narrative-driven and reliant on conversation and cutscenes to get to know the complex characters and story. If that's your thing, you'll love this game.

While I played *Goodbye Volcano High*, my 10-year-old son played a puzzle game at the station behind me. I kept looking back to see if he was bored (I expected immediate boredom) and he wasn't. In fact, he was captivated. He was playing a demo of *Amant*, a Sokoban 3D puzzle game where you must figure out

how to attach two magnets in order to navigate through tile-based levels. *Amant* is made by Felix Gagne. I chatted with Felix, a solo developer, and he told me he had been working on *Amant* for around four years and that he expected to continue working on it for another four years before launch.

I love meeting indie devs, especially solo devs. I admire the dedication to putting all the parts of a game together. It's a lot of work and their capacity to balance creative vision, technical savvy and patience is admirable.

In the realm of games that look great is *Spirit City: Lofi Sessions* from Montreal studio Mooncube Games. I spoke with co-founder Keith Ebanks about *Spirit City* — a cozy game, playlist provider and productivity companion. This extremely wholesome idle game helps you curate an ambience and vibe to help you stay focused on your workday tasks. Chock full of lo-fi beats, soundscapes and adorable customizable characters, the game will help you churn out those TPS reports in record time. A very cute and unique concept.

Showcasing and getting people to try your game is an invaluable way to build an audience. We're fortunate to have this showcasing opportunity for homegrown indie games, and while there is a selection process to get in the Zone, the opportunity granted to the 20+ games that are highlighted at these types of events is unique to Quebec.



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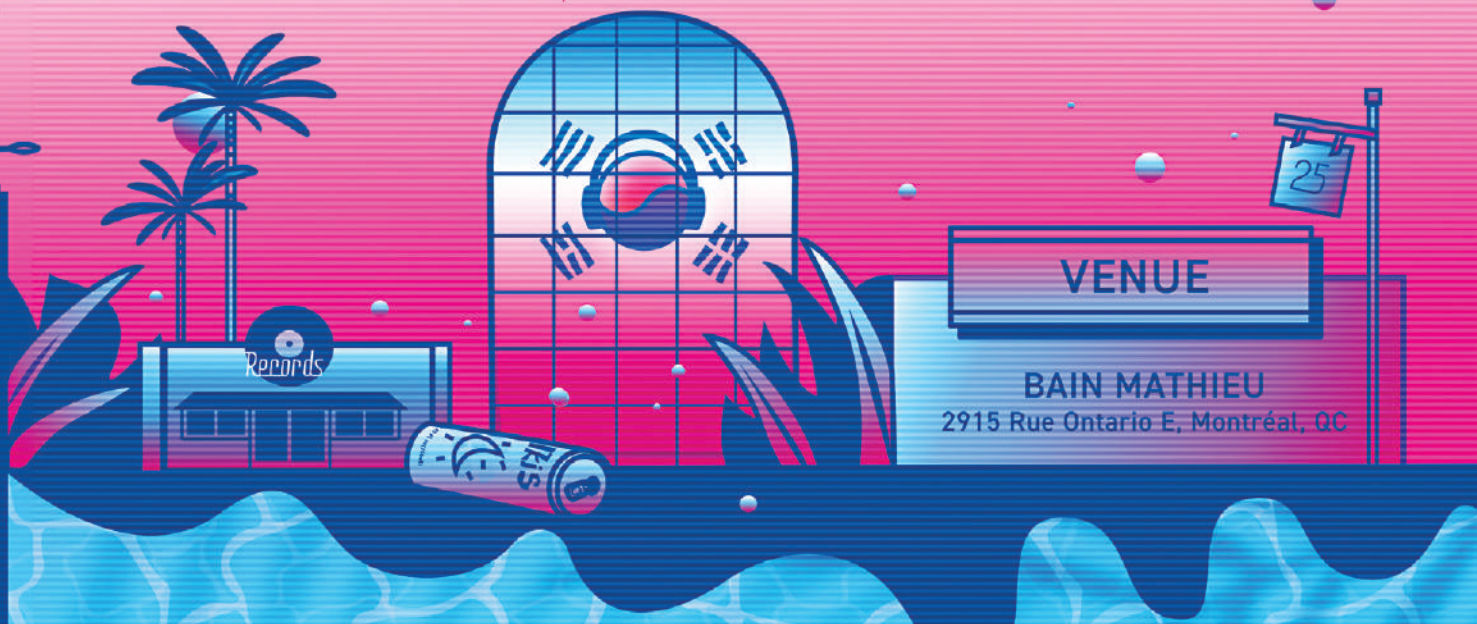


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