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Montreal rapper Remy Picasso and singer-songwriter Paul Cargnello made an album together called *Underground Capo*, a project borne through the tragic death of Picasso's uncle Nicholas Gibbs, a 23-year-old NDG man who was shot and killed by police in 2018.

Cover photo by
Rene Ricardo Bernal

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Don't mess with Montreal's magic



BY TOULA DRIMONIS

The CAQ government's recent decision to double tuition rates for out-of-province students attending Quebec universities — justifying it as a necessary move to protect Quebecers from the “threat” of non-francophones coming here to study and “anglicizing” the province — has not only rattled English institutions, but caused frustration and unease among once-upon-a-time outsiders who are now full-fledged Quebecers.

Chef-owner Dyan Solomon is a familiar name to those who love Montreal's dining scene. For the past 25 years, she's been the co-owner, alongside her business partner Eric Girard, of three top-rated restaurants in the city. It's safe to say this savvy businesswoman is a big part of what makes the city special. Most Montreal guides list Olive + Gourmando as a must-try destination, Foxy continues to get rave reviews and Caffè Un Po di Più is a personal favourite of many.

But Solomon, who along with many other of the city's chef-owners proudly promotes Montreal's culinary charms, wasn't always a Montrealer. Before she arrived here from Kingston, Ontario and fell in love with the city, she was one of those dreaded McGill students the current government would rather see decrease in number.

UNFAIR AND STIGMATIZING RHETORIC

Solomon is concerned about how unwelcoming the language being used is. She worries that it messes with what makes this city so special. She also doesn't like being seen as a threat to the French language.

“Non-francophones who come here and choose to stay here are people who truly want to be here,” she says, “because the opportunities are fewer, the economy is tougher here, the taxes are higher and you have to learn another language. People like that are highly motivated. Those are people you want here.”

Her own family is a good example. Solomon's father, who's from NYC, came to study at McGill at a time when quotas for Jewish students still existed and when you could get by with not speaking French. “If that was very annoying to French Quebecers, I can understand why,” she says. “There was a stigma attached to speaking the language at the time.”

But her father wanted to learn French — and he did, later working as a surgeon at the Jewish General. “It was cool seeing my dad, a New Yorker, speaking French all day at work,” she says. “He was really proud to do so.”

Everyone moving here today, Solomon says, knows they have to learn French. “They're not the ones diluting the language. They speak the language.”

APPRECIATING THE FRENCH FACTOR

Growing up in Kingston, Queen's was the obvious university choice. But Solomon, like so many young students, wanted to experience something different. She was attracted to Montreal's cosmopolitan and multicultural scene, and the

city's French factor. She decided to attend McGill, where she completed a BA in English Literature and a Master's in Feminist Literary Theory before studying at the New England Culinary Institute.

“Even when I did my two degrees at McGill, I wasn't necessarily thinking I would stay here,” she says. “But once I started cooking and spent my first stage at Toqué!, which at the time was mostly men and all French, I wanted to speak French, I wanted to understand what was going on — I wanted to know these people.”

She quickly realized Quebec was “another culture,” she says. “It felt very different from Ontario. I could get down with the kisses on the cheek, this was so much more fun than straight arms, which is so Ontario. I was drawn to the warmth. When people say it's distinct here, it is! I get that there's something to protect. I really do.”

Solomon worries the government isn't taking the right approach when it comes to protecting French. She believes more investments should be made in culture, and in promoting exciting and more creative ways for people to fall in love with the language. She dislikes rhetoric that alienates and discourages people from moving here, as well as scapegoats those who've long contributed to the province.

“I've always felt that Quebecers liked me and were proud of me, so this feels particularly hurtful,” she says.

Solomon also believes the rhetoric surrounding McGill students living solely in English here is exaggerated.

“Do some people come and spend four years here and never really leave the McGill Ghetto and never engage with the French world around them? They do,” she says. “The same way some go to Dalhousie or Queen's and never interact with the locals. That's a universal thing, it's not unique to McGill.”

Don't mess with the city's diversity!

But Solomon says student life in Quebec is their first introduction to another language, another people, and this is where the real magic happens in Montreal.

Back in 2020, when the Olive + Gourmando cookbook was published, she described her restaurant as “an organic series of happy mistakes and general fumbling.”

Life is often that way, too. We make plans that don't pan out, but new ones take their place. What materializes — often by complete happenstance — becomes your new trajectory. Your unintended choices come to define you and the people you meet along the way and the environment you find yourself in ultimately change you.

People from all over the world come to Montreal and mix with the people already here for generations, and they create this magic that can't be replicated. Tampering with that fragile formula, trying to socially engineer a different outcome, messes with the city's DNA and what makes it so special.

“We can't just have one type of person living here,” she says. “This type of thinking is dangerous and archaic.”

FRIEND OR FOE — WHICH IS IT?

“Olive + Gourmando is almost entirely staffed by young students from everywhere,” she says, “and their stories are so unique and beautiful. I fear that colourful rainbow of people would become much more homogeneous, and I think that's sad. The rhetoric is telling people, ‘You don't belong here. You're not even welcome to come and try!’ That feels harsh and isolating. And makes it hard to attract people here.”

Skepticism of “outsiders” certainly won't do at a time when Quebec's hospitality and restaurant industry (industries expected to generate \$4-billion in economic spinoffs for Montreal this year alone) rely so heavily on immigrants. Especially when they're just bouncing back from three hard pandemic years.

Two weeks ago, Montreal was voted the third-best city to visit by Lonely Planet for its 2024 edition. One of the reasons for that is undisputedly the city's vibrant restaurant scene. Solomon and other chef-owners are a big part of what sells this city to out-of-towners.

“Olive + Gourmando is a bit of a tourist attraction,” she says, “and I'm not complaining.” She says she's proud to be a part of the fabric of what makes this place a vibrant destination but points out that a tuition hike from \$9,000 to \$17,000 would have most likely excluded someone like her from ever coming here.

“You can't use my face at Trudeau airport to sell Montreal,” she says, “if you're then going to turn around and claim that someone like me, who took my particular path, is the problem.”



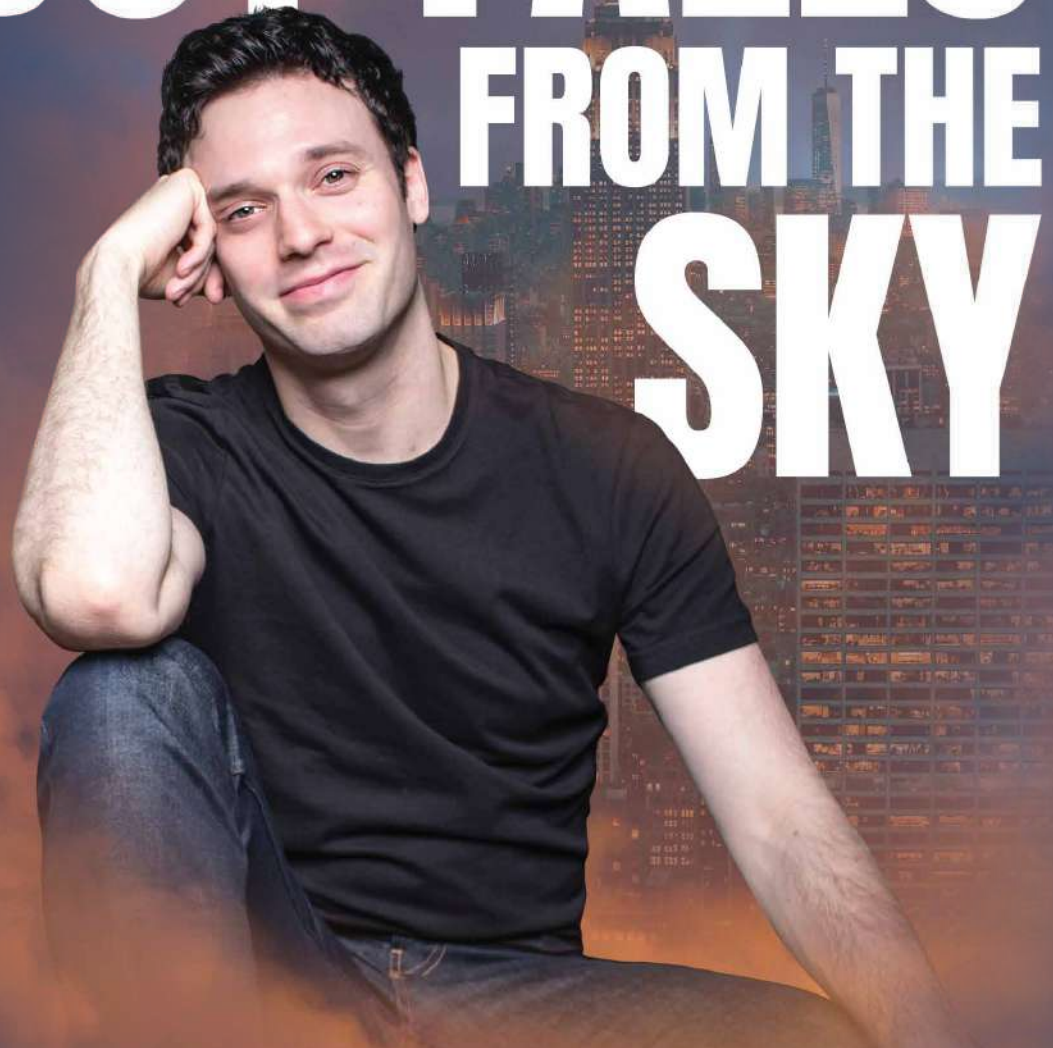
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A blueprint for a future Montreal



R.M. Nunes

BY TAYLOR C. NOAKES

I write regularly on environmental issues for DeSmog, and much of my reporting focuses on the oil industry (and their political enablers), and how neither of these groups have the slightest idea what a post-fossil fuel world is going to look like.

This is more than a little peculiar for a few reasons, not least of which is that Big Oil has a lot of capital and has already taken care of rebranding themselves as ‘energy’ suppliers, rather than oil companies. If anyone could make the switch, it’s them.

I find it odd as well given how much science fiction and speculative fiction is either based on the idea of a dystopian future without fossil fuels, or an ideal future in which we’ve overcome our dependency on fossil fuels and are better off for it. It is as though we’ve already identified the problem, and we’ve also imagined a better future, but are still apparently stuck in a rut.

Perhaps because of this lack of imagination, I often find myself thinking about what Montreal might be like in the not so distant future, if Montrealers forced their city to commit to being as climate-change resilient as possible. Though the collective political inaction of the last few decades likely means our planet is already well past the point of no return in terms of avoiding serious disruptions caused by anthropogenic climate change, this obviously doesn’t mean there’s not still going to be a hell of a lot of work to do to minimize the coming disaster.

Cities will be put in a unique position because of this: being centres of industrial activity and emissions, they have an important responsibility to lead on emissions reductions. Because they’re population centres — and usually densely populated centres at that — they can lead on emissions reductions with improvements to public transit, as an example.

On the other side of the equation, cities are disadvantaged in a few important ways. Lacking agricultural lands, cities have an important food security vulnerability — a key concern given how climate-change-related droughts, storms and bad harvests will seriously impact global supply chains as much as the ports needed to support trade. Moreover, cities like Montreal lack the means to generate the funds they need to support the services their populations depend on, as much as develop the infrastructure they need to mitigate the effects of climate change. Compounding this fact are provincial governments, much like our own, that have essentially leveraged political divisions in cities — as much as provincialist, populist, retrograde, anti-city, anti-tax rhetoric — into an effective campaign platform. This is as true of Montreal as Toronto, Vancouver or Edmonton as it is of New York City, Chicago or San Francisco.

FIRST THINGS FIRST

Montreal already has a few things going for it that might give us a leg up when it comes to mitigating the climate crisis. For one, we have access to cheap, renewable, plentiful hydroelectricity. Second, we have a comparatively well-developed public transit system and have aggressively pursued the development of bike lanes, further driving down car dependence. Third, we have desirable inner suburbs, and, at least until recently, strong protections for renters that have kept housing comparatively inexpensive.

This is a great foundation to work off of.

If the city were to focus on mitigating the effects of climate change, this foundation has to be protected and expanded upon. Our first set of priorities would have to focus on these items more than anything else.

This means fighting back against newly-minted Hydro-Québec CEO (and well-known privateer) Michael Sabia’s plan to raise rates on hydropower. Rather than selling that comparatively cheap energy to the Americans or for battery factories (or, god forbid, crypto mining), Montreal’s going to have to stake its claim to inexpensive renewable energy as part of our own plan to fully electrify transport, home heating and industrial applications.

That said, if Sabia’s willing to work with us to increase our own energy security and independence—such as by building and expanding wind farms throughout the Lower Saint Lawrence River Valley, and retrofitting Montreal buildings with solar power panels — we would then require less energy from the James Bay hydro dams, which could then be sold for both a tidy profit as much as the decarbonization of other places’ energy needs.

What’s the city doing right on this file?

Banning the use of heating oil, natural gas and propane in new buildings, as was announced recently, is a good step forward. That said, eliminating fossil fuels from existing buildings will be the bigger and more meaningful challenge, and replacing these energy systems with renewable electricity (or other energy sources) is crucial to taking a big bite out of the city’s emissions.

While Montreal needs to push hard on the means to generate its own revenue (outside of property tax increases) to pay for what Quebec City won’t, one area to focus on will be transit funding. As Geneviève Guilbault has amply demonstrated in recent days, the CAQ hasn’t the slightest clue what Montreal’s current transit needs are, let alone what they might be in a city that could easily be car-free within a decade. Montreal will simply not work with a metro that closes at 11 p.m., nor with fewer bus lines, buses to operate on them or bus drivers. I don’t know what planet Guilbault lives on, but it increasingly doesn’t seem like Earth, especially not an Earth threatened by climate change. That Guilbault thinks Quebec City should play any further role in administering how we spend money on transit is all the more reason to reject them entirely. Guilbault seems to be coming from the vantage point that transit needs to turn a profit, which any transit planner will tell you is a recipe for defeat and disaster. Transit is a public service, and profit shouldn’t even enter into the conversation.

So Montreal is going to have to pull out all the stops to secure far more funding for public transit. It’s ironic that Mayor Plante brought up Habs games and the Grand Prix when talking about the need for public transit; not only are these terrible examples given how many Montrealers



Marc Bruxelles

depend on transit to get to and from work and everywhere else their lives take them, but it's precisely the municipal subsidies to these events that would have to go in order to fully fund public transit.

And as much as we'll need to expand our transit system to fully replace cars, transit expansion can't reasonably occur if we're unable to run the systems we have. Playing hardball with the province might be the only option: suspending municipal participation in the REM, which is supposed to provide Quebec City with an annual return on its investment, might need to be considered.

It might seem like a drastic measure, but we need to consider just how much of our city's CO2 emissions (as well as the national carbon footprint related to oil production consumed by its second largest metropolis) come from the continued use of combustion engines. If we're operating from the perspective of reducing our carbon footprint as quickly as possible, as much as making as big of a contribution to cutting emissions nationally, it's clear fossil-fuelled cars need to go as soon as possible. And while there's been great progress made with EVs in recent years, the transition isn't happening fast enough.

The goal in this respect is relatively simple: transit has to be developed such that it provides the most efficient means of getting between any two points in the metro region, at any time of day during the week. Policy makers and our leaders at City Hall need to be working backwards from that goal.

SUSTAINABILITY, SELF-SUFFICIENCY, SECURITY

There are many other things that need to be done to best prepare our city for a potentially rocky future of climate chaos, but exactly what we need to do is essentially shaped by three considerations: sustainability, self-sufficiency and security.

Considering the issue of security, the first and most important thing to do will be to buttress Montreal against flooding, which could happen due to rising ocean levels as much as increased river water levels due to high winter snow accumulation. Add to that torrential rains from freak storms in the summer months, something we're seeing more and more frequently. This points to a set of potential solutions, including everything from building berms along the rivers and lakes that surround the island in flood-prone areas, to building "swampland parks" in the same areas, the latter of which would increase groundwater retention.

The city is already moving in this direction, with planned and promised sponge parks and sponge sidewalks specifically designed to mitigate these problems. While that's the good news, the bad news is that this isn't quite happening on the

scale that will be needed — only 30 parks and 400 sidewalks are currently on the books — and is further largely limited to the city proper. Climate change doesn't care about municipal boundaries, so a water management strategy for the metro region needs to be developed.

Moreover, it seems the city isn't developing this from the vantage point of an overall flood mitigation strategy. Speaking to CBC Montreal, mechanical engineering professor Amar Sabih said the city ought to be prioritizing areas with histories of flooding, and that sponge parks and sidewalks must go hand in hand with revamped sewer systems. This contradicted the city's position, which seemed to be that the sponge parks are more effective and efficient than underground infrastructure.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to get municipal politicians to get serious about sewers and large underground water retention systems. It's not 'sexy,' and most people don't really understand how it impacts their lives, irrespective of the fact that most of us would prefer to not live in a city of shit-soaked streets every time it rains.

I don't think it will be possible to properly secure our city against rising water levels and a greater frequency of torrential rainstorms without developing some rather sophisticated and expansive underground infrastructure, including massive stormwater collection reservoirs. That said, it's not without potential uses. All the earth and rock removed from such systems could be re-used elsewhere, whether it's to build berms, extend the shoreline with new parks, or create new island parks in the river.

Maintaining our current quality of life will be difficult in a future where the supply chains we depend on are either no longer available or seriously compromised. To address this problem, we're going to have to become far more self-sufficient. I already mentioned retrofitting with new solar panels and wind farms to increase our energy security, but it's food security that will pose the greater problem. While Montreal is in the midst of a large agricultural region, most of what's grown locally isn't going directly to our plates. The city will have little option but to get into the business of growing our food if we can't orchestrate a re-orientation of local agriculture to primarily support local food consumption. Some combination of the two will likely be needed.

Fortunately, with ample water resources and plentiful cheap renewable energy, Montreal could work towards a degree of food security relatively quickly. Urban agriculture makes a lot of sense here, and we've already got a toehold of sorts, with both private enterprises already in business, as well as a premier agricultural college out in Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue. The city is moving in the right direction, having

issued an urban agriculture strategy earlier this year. But to get it to the point of providing full food security, this will have to be extended with just about as many rooftop gardens and backyard chicken coops as we have space for. Crucially, there's a lot more land for urban agriculture out in the suburbs (most of which was built on what was once farmland). Meeting our city's daily caloric requirements from hyperlocal sources will require a whole new level of cooperation with the suburbs, but on the plus side it may mean the end of boring grass lawns.

Along the same lines of sustainability and self-sufficiency, we're basically going to have to get recycling and composting down to an exact science, minimizing the amount of trash we generate as much as maximizing the re-use of whatever we once considered waste. If the city takes a leading role in urban agriculture, it should go all in on urban composting as well, ensuring that the average citizen has every opportunity imaginable to compost their biodegradable waste, and further knows all that can biodegrade. A strong public education program would have to be a part of this effort.

Recycling would have to become a wholly new affair as well. I can imagine an absolutely massive facility that wouldn't simply separate paper from plastic, but would actually be involved in returning recyclables almost to their elemental state. A city that aims to recycle absolutely everything that can be recycled would necessarily seek to reduce consumption of new goods as well, so refurbishing, repairing, and re-using would have to be integrated into the broader strategy. Imagine a revived schmatte sector making new clothes from old, carpenters refurbishing old furniture, electricians repairing old toasters and microwaves. If you've walked through the student ghettos at the end of the school year, you've seen just how much still-usable junk gets left on the sidewalk. Imagine city workers carting that off to be recycled — and lowering our carbon footprint as a consequence of lower consumption. It would be a gigantic operation for a city our size, but well worth the cost if it lowers emissions while simultaneously providing insurance against disruptions to global supply chains caused by climate change.

This is all just the tip of the proverbial (and rapidly melting) iceberg. Actually, I think there's a book in here: a blueprint for a future Montreal. But it's not fiction, or even speculation at this point. Climate change is happening now, and the cities of the future won't be livable unless bold actions are taken. The question is only whether Montrealers think their city is worth saving, and what they're willing to do to ensure it survives even if other cities don't. The future might be rough, but it doesn't necessarily mean it has to be a dystopia. We're already ahead of the curve in certain important respects. Let's make sure all we've accomplished isn't wasted.

: best buds



BY DAVE MACINTYRE

Even if it's the start of the season where we swap sunny days of drinking in the park for cold nights spent entirely indoors while binging entire seasons of shows in one evening, there's no cold day that some weed — government-approved or not — can't fix.

Yes, the weather has officially gotten colder, friends — and I type this right as snow is starting to hit Montreal once again. This month, I'm back with some more dried flowers for you after reviewing drinks instead for the October issue, and it's yet another hybrid (yeah I know, but I like my strains of weed to give me some of the best of both worlds). I also listened to a lot of Talking Heads while smoking it, as I'm still chomping at the bit to see the new A24 restoration of *Stop Making Sense*.

Without further ado, let's see if this weed is enough to leave me crosseyed and painless, even if it's not a "once in a lifetime" strain. As long as it doesn't start burning down the house, I guess (okay, I'll stop now).

Chasse-Galerie Souvenir (Fruity Pebbles OG)

Coming from the Vaudreuil-based supplier C3 Innovative Solutions, this batch is definitely fruity-smelling, but its aroma doesn't feel significantly pungent. It's very much a head high, and you especially feel it around your eyes when it's at its most intense — they start to feel heavier. The high dies down a bit more quickly than I'd like, but it's strong while you're still riding that train. Given that it's 26% THC, though, I was expecting something a bit more consistently powerful, and it also burns quicker than you'd want. Nonetheless, it's an enjoyable high when you smoke enough to hit that sweet spot.

If you've been stuck ruminating a lot and have a lot on your mind, I probably wouldn't recommend this one. I find myself distracted by my own thoughts when my high is peaking, which can either be a good or a bad thing, depending on what's going through your head. It's also probably not the best if you're trying to calm yourself down. Nevertheless, it takes me into another world mentally when I smoke it, which is what any good batch of weed should do. It's not a lights-out strain, but I'd buy it again in a pinch.

As I mentioned earlier, this sends me down a Talking Heads rabbit hole of sorts — enough that while I was watching their recent reunion interview on Stephen Colbert, it made me forget about the Habs game

happening at the same time. Luckily, I tuned in just in time to see Cole Caufield score a dazzling OT winner. Anyway, back to Talking Heads.

The interview was good (and seeing them in a room together again after so many years can really freak one out while baked), even if Colbert can ramble WAYYYYYY too long when formulating questions. Chris Frantz is a funny dude, as is his wife Tina Weymouth — she of the classically hypnotic bass lines that hit even harder while stoned.

I then find myself listening to their set at the 1982 Montreux Jazz Festival in Switzerland while smoking this, since I don't want to watch the old version of *Stop Making Sense* before seeing the new one. But man... will we ever see a band like them come around again??

All I can say is, if this is just the start of more things to come for Talking Heads, I can't wait to see what'll be next. (You know what to do, Osheaga.)

The weed: 8/10

Talking Heads: Always 10/10

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:the 1st half



BY PAUL DESBAILLETS

The 2023 Major League Soccer (MLS) regular season has ended, and for CF Montréal, it was a campaign marked by highs and lows. Despite flashes of brilliance and moments of excitement, the team ultimately finished in 10th place in the Eastern Conference, a position that left fans and players with mixed emotions.

As the season began, there was a sense of optimism surrounding CF Montréal. Fresh off a playoff appearance in the previous year, expectations were high. The team had made some strategic signings during the off-season, and there was hope that they could build upon their success.

As seen in my interview with Coach Losada at the start of the season in this very publication, the club was ready to go, with positive energy and a solid team mindset.

Early in the season, CF Montréal showed glimpses of their potential. They had some notable wins, and their attack displayed moments of fluidity and creativity. The emergence of young home-grown talents added an extra layer of excitement to the team's prospects.

However, the journey through the 2023 MLS regular season was not without its challenges. Inconsistencies in form and struggles with injuries plagued the team. The Eastern Conference was as competitive as ever, making it difficult for Montreal to gain a foothold in the top half of the table.

Let us also not forget the addition of the new mid-season competition, Leagues Cup did not help momentum either.

Despite the difficulties faced, CF Montreal demonstrated their resilience in the latter stages of the season. A late push saw them secure vital points and climb a few spots up the Eastern Conference standings. The team's supporters remained passionate, and their faith was rewarded with some thrilling performances.

As the regular season came to an end, CF Montréal narrowly missed out on a playoff berth. While this clearly isn't the desired outcome, there are positives to take from the season. Young talents have gained

valuable experience, and the team has shown the potential to compete at a high level.

The offseason will undoubtedly bring changes to CF Montreal's roster as they evaluate and plan for the future. The goal will be to build a squad that can consistently challenge for a playoff spot and, ultimately, an MLS Cup.

With a full offseason to further push his philosophy and potentially make strategic player purchases, Coach Losada will be a central figure in shaping CF Montréal's strategy and ambitions for the coming seasons. The synergy between coach and squad will be critical as they aim to climb higher in the Eastern Conference standings and pursue a playoff spot in the years ahead. The 2023 season may have had its ups and downs, but under Losada's guidance, the team and its supporters can look forward to a brighter future in the MLS.

As the dust settles on the 2023 MLS regular season, CF Montréal will use this experience as a stepping stone towards greater success in the years ahead. The volatility of this campaign will offer valuable lessons, while continuing to shape the team's identity and determination as they prepare for the challenges to come.

Pub Burgundy Lion — the Home of Football in Montreal — will be hosting a very special event for the MLS Cup final on Dec. 9, with several chances to win the coveted Messi jerseys, home and away.

More details to come.



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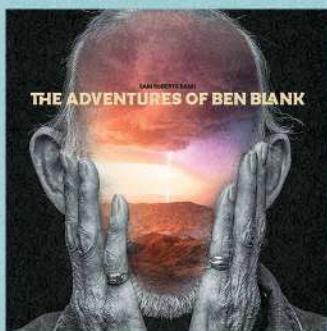
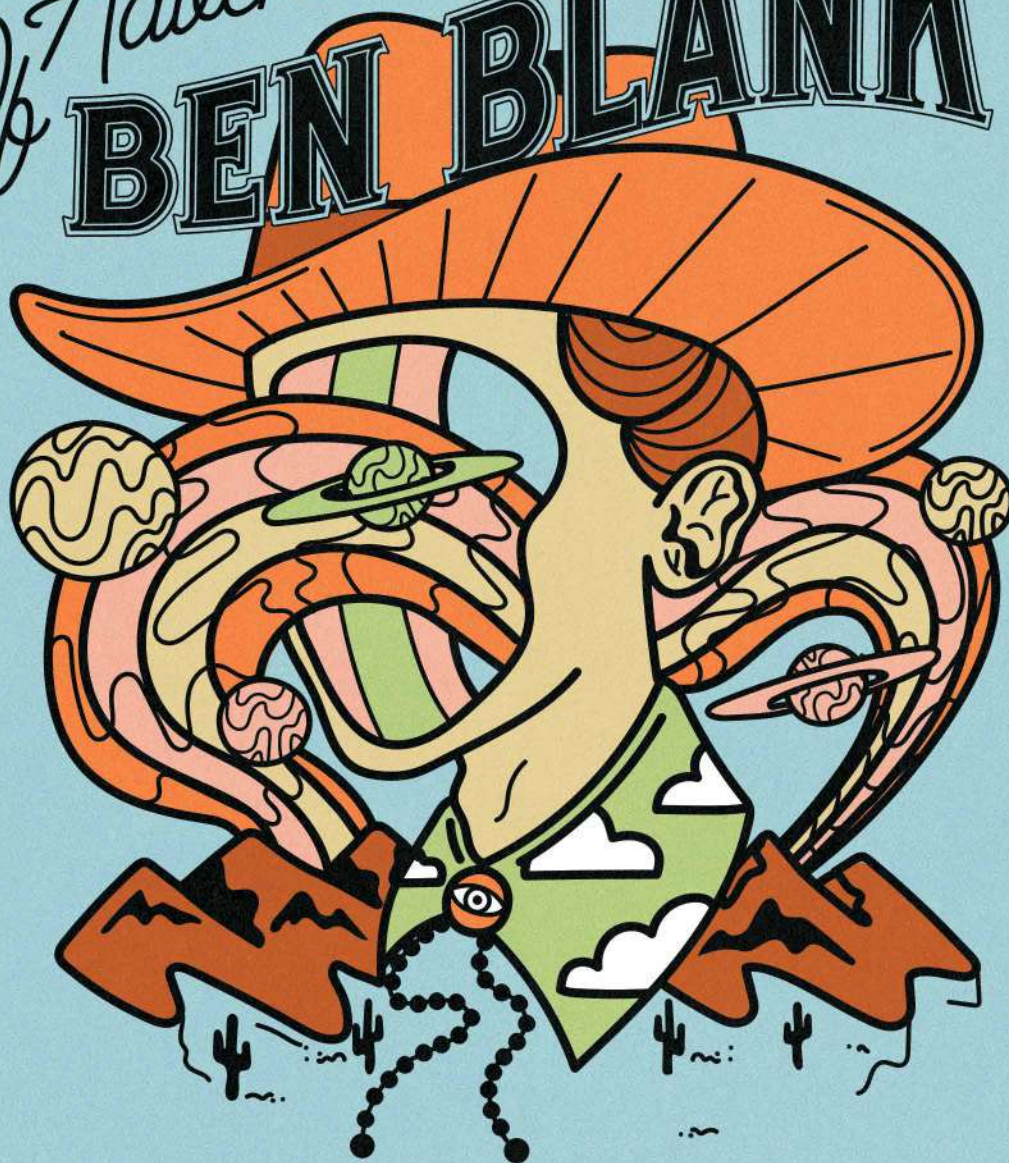


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food

Revelation



BY CLAY SANDHU

Heni, a new restaurant focusing on the ancient and diverse culinary traditions of the SWANA regions (an acronym for Southwest Asia and North Africa), is, for me, the revelation of 2023.

In a year defined in large part by the explosion of the *buvette* concept and the revival of the French restaurant, the opening of an entirely non-eurocentric but altogether refined and considered restaurant like Heni is a breath of fresh air. If the driving force behind the French revival is a return to classics, then Heni takes it a few steps further by revisiting some of the world's oldest and most influential cuisines and giving them a contemporary treatment. It strikes a rare balance between traditional and contemporary that feels genuine, devoid of gimmicks and entirely authentic. It's a balance that requires tremendous cultural consideration and technical deftness to pull off. Fortunately, Heni has those qualities in spades.

The team behind the project is a slightly eclectic bunch — a mix of seasoned pros and first-time restaurateurs. Soufian Mamlouk (of Lulu Épicerie and Barley) is joined by General Manager Noah Abecassis (ex-Nolan) along with Omar Boubess and a sommelier known only as Rami (and who is also a winemaker in Lebanon). The kitchen is headed up by Chef Julien Robillard (ex-Pastel and Hotel le St-James) along with sous-chef Rami Nassim (ex-Vin Papillon), and pastry chef Tien Nguyen (ex-Pastel). For the ownership, it's a first foray into the world of fine dining, but with Robillard's extensive fine dining background, they're more than well-equipped for the task.

One thing that stands out about Heni from the moment you enter the elegant and inviting dining room is the role that design plays in creating a defined sense of place. From the warm lighting that cascades onto a pale brick wall, evoking the imagery of a clay amphora, to the subtle but ornate tile, the swirling sand-hued granite table-tops or the tufted banquettes upholstered in emerald-coloured corduroy, you feel situated in the Middle East.

On to the food. We began our meal with *loubieh b zeit*, a snack-sized dish of blistered green beans with stewed

tomatoes, whelks and mint. Served cold, the salad is deeply flavourful, drawing on the unctuous sweetness of the tomatoes and char of the blacked bean yet surprisingly light thanks to the slivers of briny whelks and fragrant pops of mint. A squeeze of lemon wouldn't have gone unappreciated but the dish was still quite good without.

Next up, the *kibbeh nayye* — a Lebanese *incontournable*. On a menu like Heni's, which seems focused on more obscure or inventive dishes, putting a *kibbeh nayye* on felt like a bit of a crutch. In Robillard's preparation, the dish uses rosy PEI beef, minced nearly to a paste (which is standard practice), and mixed with fine bulghur, onion and a blend of spices. Heni serves theirs with some raw radishes, green onion, a handful of mint leaves and a dollop of wild garlic toum, which is floral, fragrant and much less pungent than its traditional counterpart. It's a delicious version that's as good as any I've had. What really makes the dish, however, is the pillowy, baked-to-order Levantine flatbread that is served alongside — the combination is spectacular.

My dining companion, who doesn't eat raw beef, opted for the *kashk-e bademjan*, a dish of roasted and mashed eggplant served with a sauce of fermented whey, caramelized onions, candied walnuts and saffron. Luxurious and profoundly flavourful, the star of this particular dish is the fermented whey, which tastes somewhere between tart yogurt and aged parmesan. Unsurprisingly, this dish was also a hit with the warm bread.

The entrées were undoubtedly delightful but Robillard and co's real talents were put on display during the main course. I should make a point to mention that the portion sizes here are generous. At this point in the meal, it would have been more than sufficient to order a single main to share but for the purposes of being thorough, we opted for two: the mushroom couscous and the quail pithivier. The pithivier, for me, was the most impressive dish of the night. Made from two disks of puff pastry filled with terraced layers of meats and stuffings, the pithivier is a study in technique and timing. To pull it off, the pastry needs to flake, the meat must come to temperature and not over- or under-cook and the lot must hold its shape to reveal a magnificent cross-section. Perplexingly, it's also a quintessentially French dish which seemed counterintuitive to the restaurant's concept. That is, however, until our server drew the ingenious parallel between the pithivier and the

Moroccan pastilla. Though slightly different in form and style, the fundamentals remain very similar and the dish works as a *clin d'oeil* to Robillard's French background and to one of North Africa's most beloved pies. To me, it's the encapsulation of exactly what Heni does right. Moreover, the dish is exquisite. The pastry is impossibly flaky, and when cut into, reveals layers of herbs, beautifully cooked quail breast and still-runny quail egg wrapped in a mixture of pulled quail meat seasoned with almonds and rose water. I will think fondly of this dish for a very long time.

The couscous, however, is the dish that stole the show. Couscous at a restaurant like this presents a challenge — do you try and make it as traditional as possible or do you give into the understandable temptation of trying to reinvent the classic? The answer, in this case: neither. Robillard and co., using masterful restraint and confidence in their cooking, created a dish of perfectly tender and savoury couscous topped with a silky mushroom demi-glace and an assortment of chanterelles and plump maitakes. It's a thoughtful appreciation of couscous showing that it's not simply a catch-all tagine base but a vehicle on which exceptional ingredients can imprint. It's this type of restraint that lets me know the cooking here is at a truly high level.

We finished our meal with the *layali lubnan*, a delicate and sumptuous semolina flan topped with white chocolate ganache, candied pistachios, rose water and the very last of the Quebec strawberries. It's a dessert that's layered with plenty of textures and tastes yet it's entirely familiar — the way the rose and pistachio combine with the subtly malty taste of the semolina is unmistakably North African. It's an ideal way to end an excellent meal.

I have not been so impressed with a new restaurant in a very long time and I may never have been this impressed with one that has only been open for three months. The places and culinary histories being explored by the team at Heni are endlessly rich. My hope is that, as they continue to explore and uncover the possibilities therein, they remain earnest and confident — it has served them exceptionally well so far. I am often asked for suggestions on new restaurants and to be honest, I occasionally have difficulty with offering an answer I completely stand behind. That's no longer the case. If you want my suggestion for a great new restaurant to try, my answer is, unequivocally, Heni.

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Rirkrit Tiravanija, *Untitled 1996 (Rehearsal Studio No. 6)*, November 22—December 31, 1996, Kunsthalle Sankt Gallen, St. Gallen. Courtesy of the artist andneugerriemschneider, Berlin



music

Building resistance

BY DAVE MACINTYRE

Brilliant, thought-provoking art can often come from tragedy and circumstances fed by high sociopolitical tension. Remy Picasso and Paul Cargnello's new collab album, *Underground Capo*, is informed directly by both of those things at once — and the end result delivers, and then some.

Despite this musical collaboration, Paul and Remy didn't initially meet through music. Instead, the two were introduced at an anti-police brutality protest in NDG by veteran activist Jaggi Singh — fitting, since Paul has done anti-police brutality work for more than 20 years.

"I remember him going like, 'Paul, you should really talk to this guy Remy. Seriously, talk to him,'" Cargnello says. "You don't know how many times people tell me I should be working with somebody. I kind of didn't believe it at first. Then when I checked out Remy's stuff, I was like, 'Oh shit, he's the real deal.'"

The duo's relationship on a personal and working level, especially after collaborating on the album and performing together frequently, has made them "comrades in arms," as Cargnello describes it. Funnily enough, though, the two had already met before, at the first-ever concert Cargnello had organized for MTL vs Racisme. Meeting through activist circles would create a friendship that eventually extended into a musical partnership. ("Just the sheer political force of what was happening in NDG [at the time] brought us real tight," Cargnello adds.)

"When I first met Paul, he gave me a business card," says Picasso. "I'd never had someone give me a business card before. It had his little emblem on it and shit. We didn't even talk about music at that time, either. He was just like, 'Here's my card, we should talk sometime.'"

The album was also borne through tragic circumstances. Picasso's uncle was Nicholas Gibbs, a 23-year-old NDG man who was shot and killed by police in 2018 — a murder those police officers still haven't faced consequences for. (According to Picasso, no cop in Montreal has ever gone to jail for killing someone). Gibbs' death shook the local community, and led to protests and vigils, while residents also donated money to Gibbs' family's legal fund.

After this, Cargnello commissioned a mural of Gibbs to be painted on the wall of his studio, as a symbolic gesture of appreciation, with the plan also being to place the mural close to where Gibbs was killed. The mural — painted by Ottawa artist Drippin' Soul — took a week to complete despite attempts by the borough to block it, and Cargnello was working on music on the other side of the wall as it was being painted — something he describes as "symbolically beautiful" to have while Picasso was recording in-studio.



Rene Ricardo Bernal

"Paul came up to me and was like, 'I'm going to find a way, bro. I'm going to do it at this spot,'" says Picasso. "At the time, I was just like, 'Whatever.' You're going through your own shit, and everyone's making promises to you at this time. Everyone's saying 'My condolences' — you hear that shit all the time.

"But this motherfucker really acted on it. He really went out of his way and painted this dude on his mural. I was like, 'Bro, that's the most genuine shit I've ever seen...' I go there more often than the grave now. I feel positive energy when I go there."

Despite resistance from the city and police over the mural (making it difficult to secure permits), there wasn't much they could actually do to stop it from being made since it was painted on a private wall. The mural effectively set the tone for the duo making the album before they'd even cut a single track.

Blending elements of funk, jazz and rock — the two both admire Gil Scott-Heron, whose album cover even inspired the mural's design — with Picasso's hard-hitting verses and Cargnello's production style (and "revolutionary mindset," if you ask Remy), the album is a raw, ferocious 11-track body of work, one where politics and personal upheaval collide lyrically just like rock and rap fuse together on it musically.

Underground Capo came together over a few weeks, after Cargnello sent Picasso "a little over a dozen" completed instrumental tracks — with no samples or features — to rap over. "There is literally no bullshit on this record," Cargnello adds.

"It's kind of interesting to be doing a hip hop album and going, 'Okay, I'm not going to sample anything. I am going to create every single sound.' If there's a drum beat, I played it on a drum. If there's a guitar, I played it on the guitar. I played bass. Everything is performed. I definitely would loop certain

things, but I'm looping myself I tried to compose much less with the guitar, and much more with a Rhodes (keyboard)."

Cargnello — an artist known for his prolific nature, having released 19 solo albums — then sent his beats to Picasso, who gave him a ton of lyrics in return. Many parts of the songs were also done in one take, without ad libs or doubling or any other bells and whistles.

When Picasso first heard the instrumentals Cargnello sent him, he admits he was a bit thrown off at first, as they weren't beats he was used to rapping over. "I think they grew on me over time," he says. "I was working on another project, too. I'll sit on beats for a month or two and listen to them a dozen times, smoke (weed) and listen to different playlists of them. The beat for 'Meet the Gibbs,' that's the first one that flashed to me. I was like, 'Yo, this is fucking hard.'"

One would assume making a hip hop album like *Underground Capo* would challenge Cargnello in ways he's never experienced before. Admittedly, this project did feel like a risky endeavour for him in some ways, even though he's worked on projects for rap artists like Shem G in the past.

"I'm a white rock artist," he continues. "You can't walk into this thing half-stepping, or pretending. You can't be shitty. It's the same thing producing reggae. You can't walk into it and not know what's happening in the scene right now. I don't think I've always had the confidence to work in hip hop the way that I've worked in hip hop this year. This album existing has given me the confidence... There's always a bit of cultural appropriation in what you're doing no matter what you do, unless I'm playing country music."

As far as Cargnello's concerned, Picasso isn't just a rapper or mouthpiece — he's a songwriter and a poet, too. Fusing both of their worlds onto the same album without "faking the

funk" has resulted in a strong, robust LP, even if its politically charged nature may ruffle some feathers.

"It's always challenging, because you're going to have people sniping from left and right when you try to do something different or new, something that fuses two scenes, or something that is (confrontational)," Cargnello says. "We're being critical of Montreal. We're being auto-critical. Being auto-critical is sometimes the hardest thing. We're talking about activism, but from the point of view of two activists. Everybody's going to be a little bit pissed, but that's what moves art forward."

Across 11 songs, the influence of Montreal, and specifically NDG, looms large even if Cargnello and Picasso come from two different worlds — you only need to look at titles like "Loners N' Loyola," "DG Shit" and closer "Below the Tracks" for evidence. Picasso's lived in NDG his whole life; his mother left and moved to Chateauguay while he stayed behind, and he also lived in squats during his adolescence. NDG's influence has been a double-edged sword, as it's been both positive and highly traumatic for him.

"DG's a big place," he says. "We're connected to Hampstead, to Westmount, to downtown. We're connected to everywhere. It's a big fucking place, but how I came up is very different. You're going to hear it on this album, in the lyrical content. Loyola's a completely different place compared to when I grew up. When the Loyola Centre was there, that saved my life and a lot of other young kids coming up."

Though the album hasn't really helped Picasso process losing Nicholas ("I still live with that shit every fucking day," he says), making and releasing *Underground Capo* is a form of activism for both artists, even if it's not a grand gesture like attending a demonstration. "Sometimes, you've got to (let out) what little piece of fucking power and expression

you have. This is what I think we were doing with this record and what I think I was doing with the mural in my studio," Cargnello says.

"We're not going to change the world with a fucking song or a mural. But when we launched the mural and I saw all of Nicholas's family come out and we performed some songs, I think the community needed something. Sometimes, you've got to go and get involved and email your representatives and government. And then every once in a while, you have to make a little bit of personal effort and sacrifice. And what do I do? I make music. This album is for Remy, and for Nicholas. That's the form your political expression has to take sometimes, and that's what it took for me this time."

Cargnello and Picasso have more collaborations in the works for next year, and the two even recently performed together at GROWVE. The connection between the two artists is strong on a personal level — Picasso's been to Cargnello's house a number of times, including to his house parties. Though it's hard to predict the future, Cargnello's ready to provide Picasso with whatever he needs.

So what do the duo want listeners to take away from listening to *Underground Capo*? Cargnello wants to "push people's minds as far open as possible" and be aware of the impact of the police and governmental financial decisions on people's lives. If you ask Picasso, it's okay to be yourself and be vulnerable, even if some might dismiss that as a sign of weakness.

"I feel like (being vulnerable) is more relatable in your music," he says. "That's what I came up listening to. It resonates with me different. I want people to be able to relate to it and know it's okay to be yourself and be vulnerable when you do anything — when you create art especially."



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Dial M for Mikey



BY DAVE MACINTYRE

The chill of November is upon us, and that means M for Montreal is just around the corner.

The festival attracts not only a host of great local, national and international talent every year, but also brings out music industry delegates from across the globe. This year's edition will see representatives from Spotify and labels like Sub Pop and Secretly Canadian, as well as radio stations like KCRW, agents like Tom Windish (who represents Billie Eilish and Lorde, among others) and *Stranger Things* music supervisor Nora Felder.

Last year's edition was the first where M got back into full swing post-pandemic, and seeing people start flocking to shows at trademark M venues like the upstairs floor of Café Cléopâtre (away from the actual strippers, of course) was an incredible feeling — a happy family reunion, if you will.

Catering to local fans of live-music and music discovery, many M shows fall under the Marathon umbrella, meaning they're open to the public, while others are classified as 'Official Selection' and are reserved for industry attendees with PRO badges.

Ahead of M 2023, which runs from Nov. 15 to 18, we spoke with Mikey Rishwain Bernard, aka M4Mikey, one of our local scene's biggest characters — even when he's all the way in his home state of California. Keep reading to find out his thoughts on this year's festival, as well as who he's most excited to see.

Dave MacIntyre: How are you feeling leading up to this year's edition of M?

Mikey Rishwain Bernard: We're stepping into the heaviest season of the year for us. We're definitely on nerves, but that's natural. At the same time, this is my 16th edition with M, or something like that, and I know that the end result will be satisfying and complete. Once I'm at the shows and surrounded by music and new talent, I become a kid again. That's what M does to you. It really puts you in a position to discover new things, and that's what these events are made for. They're not going to be the biggest names you know in the country or in the world, but they're little gems to pick up along the way.

I think M does a good job at presenting them on an international scale, too. We're really focused on getting results from these showcases. We love the public, don't get me wrong, but our eyes are always on the prize — what can we do with these artists in the future, with these international delegates attending M for Montreal? M for Montreal's fun, but what's going to come of it?

I can't describe to you the feeling I get when I get a DM from an artist who's like, "Dude, the guy from Sub Pop just hit me up on Instagram!" Those are the moments you live for. That's why I'm in this business. I've been in bands and I've seen people struggle. I'm so grateful that Canada has this ecosystem that supports these artists in the industry, and giving back to these emerging artists is why I do this, and why I love my job.

DM: How would you summarize how things went during last year's edition?

M4Mikey: Last year was our first full year back at M since COVID. After a pandemic and coming back to M full time, full-on, it was really a "welcome back home" — we're finally getting back to normal. It was great, and especially noting that there were so many results from playing M last year. So many people got deals and travelled the world because of interesting things that happened (at the festival). It was great.

M's getting older, and seeing it grow before my eyes has been really a trip. Last year, it felt like your child just turned 18, and is going to college. Even though I've never been through that, that's where I see M: growing in a mature way, going on its own and having its own identity. I see a huge turning point happening, and I'm happy to be a part of it.

DM: What was your biggest focus while planning this year's edition?

M4Mikey: Diversity, always. This is something I've been doing for as long as I can, to really involve diversity in not only music, but cultures within Montreal and Canada, to really reflect who we are as a country. We're really proud to have a lot of people represent their cultures at M. That's always been a focus of ours. It's all about diversity, in music and culture.

DM: Who are you excited to see this year?

M4Mikey: My list is long. More than ever now, I discover bands on my own, because we book bands that I've never seen before, so I go there really curious myself. You'll see me in front of the stage most of the time at M just because I want to enjoy the moment.



are members of Choses Sauvages and Foreign Diplomats. I saw them at Santa Teresa, it was really good. It had more summer vibes — let's see how it goes in colder November. Les Shirley are playing, they're coming off their (opening for) Foo Fighters high. There's Winona Forever — you know my history with slacker rock and Pavement and working with Mac DeMarco. When you hear Winona Forever, you know I'm going to love this shit, so I'm all about it.

There's a rapper from Wales coming called Mace the Great. That doesn't happen every day where we're going to see an up-and-coming rapper play a small room in Montreal, so I'm really excited about that. On Friday, Mothland hosts (their) annual showcase. If no one knows the bands' names, don't be afraid to just go. Everyone who goes to a Mothland show will be walking out like they got hit by a freight train. And you'll go to bed with that feeling all night. Right across the street from that, at Casa Del Popolo, Lighter Than Air are presenting Sasha Cay, Grand Eugene and Niall Mutter. On Saturday, Heaven for Real's playing with Poolblood, (both are) from Ontario. Poolblood are like Mazzy Star vibes. I love it. Also, on Saturday, we're hosting Marie Davidson, Ouri and Nada El Shazly.

There's a brilliant singer-songwriter from Toronto named Billianne. Folky, and she probably has some of the biggest hits on Spotify out of all the bands we have. Please check her out — she's someone I've been waiting for. I know she's not from Montreal, but she's working with some Montreal people at Lighter Than Air.

She's playing Saturday at Quai des Brumes with Alice, a former member of Canailles. There's also Bells Larsen. I saw him play at SXSW. He made the place feel like his living room. I felt like I stepped into his diary. It was really special, and I'm

really happy to bring him back to M for Montreal. There's also an artist named AVIV, she's on Dine Alone Records. Super nice lo-fi pop — Sunday afternoon vibes that I guess we all need during the week.

There's dee holt, she played her first show at M last year. She's great, she has a bright future. She'll be playing a showcase with Consequence (formerly Consequence of Sound) this year at la Sala Rossa on Saturday. Cartel Madras is on there, and Milk & Bone. The last artist on that lineup is Virginie B. That'll be special. Frais Dispo

And of course, you've got to mention all our (Café) Cléopâtre shows. There's a vibe you can't beat. Everywhere I travel to, people always talk about the showcase at the strip club, at Cléopâtre. It sticks in everyone's minds, and it's become a staple at M. I used to think it was kind of sleazy, but the reaction and vibe speak for themselves every year. We have a hard time letting that one go.

→ M for Montreal runs from Nov. 15 to 18 at various locations. mpourmontreal.com

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:hammer of the mods

BY JOHNSON CUMMINS

As the last leaves fall and crunch under our leaden feet, and fall begins to give way to winter, November is definitely hosting the heavy.

Indie popsters and punkers will get a deserved break while the dedicated heshers are guaranteed a “bangover” come December as there are metal or metal-adjacent shows happening every week this month. There is one exception to this month-load of metal mayhem, with a visit from true indie rock royalty, at a ticket price that will make even the most affluent weak at the knees. Even with the hefty price tag, though, this should still prove to be well worth it.

Friday, Nov. 3

Getting the indie rock ready right out of the gate as this ish's ink is still drying is the return of the transcendent sound of Blonde Redhead. Expect to see a lot of graying around the temples and patched elbow blazers at this one, with tote bags being the merch hot ticket. Again, this price ticket is hefty indeed, but chances to see legends like this don't come around every day. This show is happening at le Studio TD, with openers Bibi Club and Nous Deux. 305 Ste-Catherine W., 7 p.m., \$95

Sunday, Nov. 12

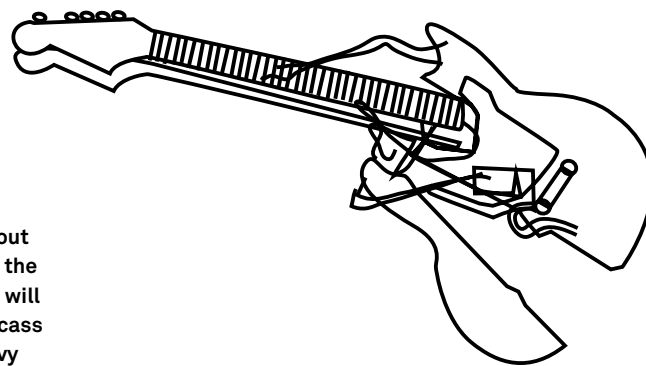
With that aforementioned show announcement out of the way, it is definitely all metal for the rest of the month, so buckle up. Utterly classic death metal will be hitting le Studio TD when the 34-year-old carcass of Incantation will grunt and brutalize with heavy help from fellow death metal legends Suffocation and relative new kids on the death block Skeletal Remains and Stabbing. Can death metal age gracefully and still hit like a mitt full of nickels? Grip some tix and find out! 305 Ste-Catherine W., 6 p.m., \$50

Wednesday, Nov. 15

It may be hump-night of the week here but easily the probable winner of most pulverizing show of November goes to the brutal bashers Full of Hell, who will annihilate the granddaddy of venues, Foufs, along with End and Inter Arma. If you were at the tiny confines of Bar le Ritz when Full of Hell last hit town a while back, you know just how precisely these grindsters can deliver. 87 Ste-Catherine W., 7 p.m., \$28.66

Monday, Nov. 20

A show that will actually drag my grizzled mug off of the couch is the return of the utterly riff-tastic Baroness. To this day, Baroness's seminal *Blue* record proves to be one of my favourite “uplifting” metal releases ever. This four-piece has gone through numerous lineup changes



since *Blue*, diving deeper into melodic structures while delving into pure psych/prog moments — and stopping just short of self-indulgence. Warming up the room at Beanfield Theatre is Vile Creature. Full of Hell will be the heaviest show this month, but this one is probably the best one. 2490 Notre-Dame W., 6 p.m., \$50.50

Thursday, Nov. 23

Although this column is featuring a lot of touring acts, one of the most “toured” local acts who actually take a well needed breather at home is the always great Big/Brave. They will be putting down local stakes at Turbo Haus with buds Second Sight and Drainolith. Big/Brave truly leave a welt with a pure naked emotional catharsis that will separate them from the typical knuckle-dragging “heavy” cookie-cutter bands. This will be nothing short of awesome. 2040 St-Denis, 8 p.m., \$20/\$25

Current Obsession: UFO, *Strangers in the Night*
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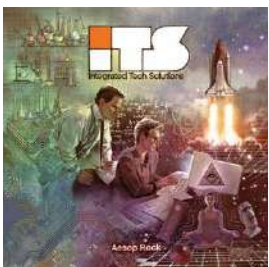
Album reviews



Sampha, *Lahai*
(Young)

Patience is a virtue. Six years after Sampha's phenomenal 2017 debut album *Process*, the South London singer-songwriter is back in fine form with a stellar album, a more electronic-focused progression upon his forward-thinking take on soul and R&B. Certain songs — especially

in terms of rhythm — feel a lot more skittering and chaotic in nature from a production standpoint, not unlike the stuff he's done over the years with SBTRKT. His songwriting ability hasn't wavered, as evidenced by excellent singles "Spirit 2.0" and "Only," while "Dancing in Circles" is a paranoid, piano-driven number — complete with a rap break! — that's also among the album's highlights. Though his debut was a monumentally daunting act to follow, *Lahai* is a considerable artistic step forward for Sampha, and a superb body of work in general. 9/10 Trial Track: "Only" (Dave MacIntyre)



Aesop Rock,
Integrated Tech Solutions
(Rhymesayers)

With an inciting incident that took place "2.5 million years ago," the ever-prolific rap futurist's latest invites the listener on a sprawling adventure through time, human evolution and its tactile relationship to technology

from the wheel onward. Aes rarely comes across as the sentimental type, so there's something particularly satisfying about how often the themes on *ITS* also reference the long-since-relocated rapper's New York City roots.

Though almost certainly unintended, repeat listens suggest a subliminal connection to former Def Jux label boss El-P's dystopian 2002 masterpiece *Fantastic Damage*. Aesop Rock once again outdoes himself on production and lyrical composition alike, as only a select few artists with comparable longevity manage. And none have Rock's patented, time-stamped, encoded creative signature, a hip hop innovation neither man nor machine will ever decrypt. 8/10 Trial Track: "Pigeonometry" (Darcy MacDonald)



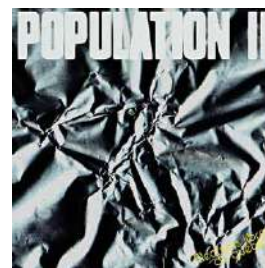
Emilie Kahn, *Maybe*
(Secret City)

Formerly known as Emilie & Ogden (the latter being the name of her five-foot-tall harp), Emilie Kahn has returned to her birth name for the release of her debut album *Maybe*. The result is a heartfelt and sometimes haunting collection of tunes partially influenced

by a leap-of-faith move to L.A. she made a few years ago. It's also an album informed heavily by our technological landscape, particularly with dating — alternating between hopeless romanticism and genuine scorn depending on the song. Lead single "Search History" is Exhibit A of that dichotomy, with "Unsend" and the hilariously titled "FU STOP CALLING ME" also in that vein. Traces of Taylor Swift-esque songwriting are present on "Julia," "Responsibility" and especially the closing song "Endless," finding a delicate middle ground between sweetness and pure snark. Switching between sparse, haunting acoustic guitars and her trademark harp — notably throughout the minute-long intro track "Vision" — *Maybe* is a restrained yet assured body of work. 8/10 Trial Track: "Search History" (Dave MacIntyre)

Population II, *Électrons libres du québec*
(Bonsound)

Enthusiasm for modern psych-rock continues unabated as another calendar year draws closer to the next. This Montreal-based band has an upper hand in terms of standing out from the pack. Many emerging players in the genre seem to simply be people who decide it would be cool to start a band, and



that their band should play psych-rock. Population II comes from a school of musicianship that suggests the trio (a singer/drummer, keyboardist/guitarist and bass player) are intricately aligned musicians, first and foremost, who have made a pact to explore their ranges of skill and influence through the prismatic lens of

old school garage rock, and let the listener decide what it all really means. If that analysis is flawed, the ideas at work on their sophomore album most certainly are not. The band is superb in concert. As studio recordings go, there may not be enough space for their ideas to flourish here. Containing free electrons seems counterintuitive. Nonetheless, as a measure of power, *Électrons libres du québec* has a magnetic pull. 7.5/10 Trial Track: "Tô Kébec" (Darcy MacDonald)



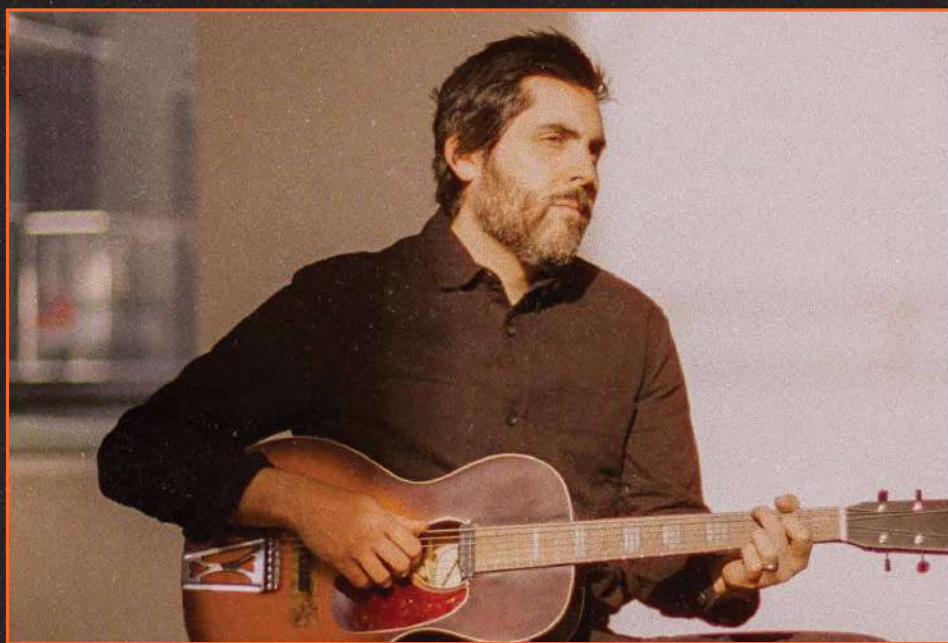
Night Lunch, *Fire in the Rose Garden*
(Mothland)

The second LP by local four-piece Night Lunch fuses modern and old-fashioned influences into a baroque pop blender. Some grand, sweeping strings and old-timey pianos are all over this LP, while frontman Lukie Lovechild

sings a bit like if Matt Berninger of the National modelled his songwriting style more closely to that of Bruce Springsteen (the six-minute-plus "Junkyard of Love" feels particularly indebted to the Boss). Post-punk basslines and a more Ian Curtis-like delivery both drive the blistering "Flames of Love," while single "God Bless the One I Love" — jeez, that's a lot of songs with "love" in the title! — is a warm, refined mid-tempo ballad. While there's still further the band could've gone with harnessing their diverse influences, *Fire in the Rose Garden* is a confident sophomore effort by a band with potential for even bigger and better to come. 7.5/10 Trial Track: "God Bless the One I Love" (Dave MacIntyre)

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BY JUSTINE SMITH

Since its release in 2012, *The Hunger Games*, an adaptation of Suzanne Collins' popular book series, has become a major movie franchise. It's been over five years since the last film, though, and with the upcoming release of *The Hunger Games: The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes*, the series returns to the past and the origin story of the villainous Coriolanus Snow before he became the tyrannical president of Panem.

The film's events occur during the 10th annual Hunger Games, when the fight-to-the-death tournament is waning in popularity. The populace of the Capital sees the games as increasingly barbaric and is no longer entertained by mere bloodshed. Over the course of the film, we watch Snow (Tom Blythe), along with his tribute, Lucy Gray Bird (Rachel Zegler), help reshape and modernize the games, renewing their popularity with the citizens of the Capital.

Producer Nina Jacobson has been involved since day one. Jacobson has had an illustrious and hands-on behind-the-scenes career for over three decades. She sat down with *Cult MTL* to discuss *The Hunger Games* and her work.

Justine Smith: As a producer, you've worked on many literary adaptations. Of course, *The Hunger Games*, but also *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, *The Goldfinch* and *Crazy Rich Asians*. How does it work to bring a book to the big screen?

Nina Jacobson: I'm a huge reader. I am always listening or reading. I just have to have a lot of stories. Any time that I read a book or a manuscript that I can't put down and I can't stop thinking about, my ears perk up, and I think, 'Is this just an amazing book? Or is there a possibility that this would make a great adaptation?' At that point, it's about speaking to the author and ensuring that your vision and ideas align with theirs. With Suzanne [Collins], she is the North Star. She is our backbone.

Any adaptation requires choices. You have to decide what to keep, what is essential, and what is compressed or even omitted. Are you making sure to stay true to the soul of the book? Suzanne is very open and collaborative. The process is about figuring out those priorities and making sure you're aligned with an author and holding onto them through the adaptation process, and never losing sight of what made you love the work in the first place. From hiring a writer to putting the finishing touches on a cut of the film and getting it ready for the audience, you are thinking about holding onto that soul and how you protect it.

JS: With your production company, Color Force, you've chosen a lot of projects that are politically engaged, including the *Hunger Games*, but also things like *American Crime Story: The People v. O. J. Simpson*. How important is it for you to choose politically engaged projects?

NJ: For one, I think that audiences are really smart and want to be treated with the respect they desire. I think audiences want to be challenged. They want something to talk about, to argue about.

When I was in college, I started to study film theory and was very interested in documentaries. I wanted to make experimental films or experimental documentaries. By the time I graduated and started my professional life, I realized I didn't want to preach to the choir. I don't want to just get the ten people who already agree with me. I want to be able to tell stories that have a broad reach and are open to interpretation so that audiences can bring their own ideas. I want [to work on projects] that are not prescriptive but open-ended and open for debate and engagement because, ultimately, television and film are empathy machines. Once you identify with a person, you will never look at a person like that in the same way. It's not about political content as much as it is, and I love this quote by Jean-Luc Godard: it's not about making political films but making films politically. So, a movie like *Crazy Rich Asians*, to me, is not about politics but is made politically.

JS: One of the more compelling elements of *The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes* is that it engages with questions of media literacy as we watch how they learn to "market" the games. How important is it to communicate these ideas to the young audience the films are geared towards?

NJ: Young audiences have always loved these books but I think that they are really general audience movies with young adult protagonists. By the time we get to the tenth Hunger Games, the war is in people's rearview mirrors. They

want to move on. They don't want to dwell on something that upsets them. Snow's rise to power, we learn in the movie, is rooted in what he sees with Lucy Gray.

In the movie, he starts to care too much, and it turns everything upside down for him. It sets him on a course that might have been very different. It even sets him on a course to becoming a better person but instead, it sets him on a course to turn into the villain we all know and love to hate.

JS: Can you talk about casting Tom Blythe as Snow?

NJ: It was a very hard role to cast, as you imagine, because it's much easier to play a hero or a villain, but to play both and express through performance the internal war inside of him, you need an actor who can have layers, complexity and depth. We knew we had to cast our young adults to aspire to the calibre of actors we ultimately got [in this case, Donald Sutherland]. We also needed actors who could hold their own against icons like Viola Davis and Peter Dinklage. It's a lot to ask. We found people played him too much the villain, we didn't believe he might be good. On the flip side, some actors tried to make a hero out of this guy, which is not our intention. He is our protagonist, but he is not our hero.

With Tom's audition, we saw the nuance and subtlety, as well as the command over his craft, that took our breath away. We auditioned a lot of really good actors, but we had to also cast someone who, in terms of physicality, could also grow up to be Donald Sutherland. At the same time, we never wanted an actor who was just trying to impersonate Sutherland. It had to be more than mimicry, which would be wrong for various reasons.

When we first put (Tom) and Rachel (Zegler) together, it was a Zoom, and Francis (Lawrence, the director) had a kind of sidebar where he told Rachel to start singing to him. He had her sing a great June Carter song to Tom and watching the way he responded to her, then going into the scene and working from there, it really showed how they fed off each other as scene partners. Sometimes with young actors, they might think they know their lines so they're reading to go. They think they know how they want a scene to go, but a scene should change based on the person in the scene with you and that was something we saw Tom do masterfully from the beginning.

→ *The Hunger Games: The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes* opens in theatres on Nov 17.

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On Screen



Saltburn



Napoleon



The Marvels



Next Goal Wins

BY JUSTINE SMITH

Despite the fading passion for superhero adventures, Disney & co., regrettably still have some films in their pipeline. Will *The Marvels* (Nov. 10) be good? Who is to say? Carol Danvers gets her powers entangled with those of Kamala Khan and Monica Rambeau, forcing them to work together to save the universe. Brie Larson stars as Captain Marvel.

Another major franchise is hitting the big screen this month with *The Hunger Games: The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes* (Nov. 17). This prequel to the original series is an origin story for legendary villain Coriolanus Snow. It is a rare series geared towards young adults with incisive things to say about war, media and morality. Even without Jennifer Lawrence, this film is more successful than not.

Though mostly hit or miss as a director these days, Ridley Scott has taken an epic stab at *Napoleon* (Nov. 22), which promises to be one of the more interesting late-season Oscar contenders. Joaquin Phoenix stars as the infamous French military leader in a film that charts his rise viewed through the prism of Napoleon's addictive, volatile relationship with his wife and one true love, Josephine (Vanessa Kirby).

Two films that had their premiere at Festival du Nouveau Cinéma are hitting theatres this month. Sofia Coppola's much-anticipated response to last year's *Elvis*, *Priscilla* (Nov. 3), told from his teenage wife's POV, stars Cailee Spaeny and Jacob Elordi. FNC's opening film, *The Taste of Things* (Nov. 10), tells the soft and tender story of two people bound together by a shared love of cooking. Starring Juliette Binoche and Benoît Magimel, it's a gentle and mouth-watering movie.

For something a little more hip and young, check out *Dream Scenario* (Nov. 17), the latest A24 film starring Nicolas Cage as a boring professor who starts popping up in the dreams of people across the globe. The film was partially shot in Montreal. Also this month, Emerald Fennell's much-anticipated follow-up to her feature debut, *Promising Young Woman*, is *Saltburn* (Nov. 17). Barry Keoghan and Jacob Elordi star in this class clash about an Oxford student who finds himself drawn into the world of a charming and aristocratic classmate.

For something the whole family can enjoy, two animated films hit the big screen this month.

The popular film series *Trolls* returns to the big screen with *Trolls Band Together* (Nov. 17) with new music from N*Sync. *Wish* (Nov. 22) is an upcoming original animated musical fantasy set to be released to help commemorate the 100th anniversary of Disney corp.

For something that might also have some family vibes, Taika

Waititi's first directorial effort post-Marvel is the "based on a true story" film *Next Goal Wins* (Nov. 17). Michael Fassbender stars as Dutch coach Thomas Rongen, who tries to turn the American Samoa soccer team into winners.

We also have *Quiz Lady* (Nov. 3). Awkwafina and Sandra Oh star in this R-rated comedy about a gameshow-obsessed woman and her estranged sister working together to help cover their mother's gambling debts.

Though Canadian Thanksgiving is long past, if you're looking for something thrilling this holiday season, gross-out master Eli Roth is back with *Thanksgiving* (Nov. 17). Patrick Dempsey and Addison Rae star in this horror thriller set after a Black Friday riot ends in tragedy and a mysterious killer terrorizes Plymouth, Massachusetts.

For a little Can-con, check out *Dope Is Death* (Nov. 9), a documentary about how Dr. Mutulu Shakur, stepfather of Tupac Shakur, along with the Black Panthers and the Young Lords, combined community health with radical politics to create the first acupuncture detoxification program in America in 1973. Also in Canadian content is an adaptation of Kim Thúy's beloved and critically acclaimed novel *Ru. Ru* (Nov. 27) is the story of the arduous journey of a wealthy family fleeing from Vietnam, before landing in Quebec.

There are also two major festivals taking place this month in Montreal. French film festival Cinemania is on from Nov. 1 to 12, followed closely by RIDM, one of the best documentary festivals in the world, which runs from Nov. 15 to 26.

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Mondo Mado



BY MATTHEW HAYS

It is now pretty much impossible to imagine Montreal nightlife without Mado, the fabulous, hilarious, brilliant, operatic, out-of-this-world drag artist who has ruled the Village for decades. Spawned from Montreal's vibrant '80s club scene, Mado is the creation and alter-ego of actor and writer Luc Provost.

Since developing the ever-evolving Mado, Provost has seen her gender-bending fortunes expand to mind-bending proportions: Mado hosts comedy galas at Just for Laughs, has performed at countless queer Pride events, become one of the city's most popular Bingo hustlers and even opened her own club, Cabaret Mado (which is packed on most nights).

Now, Provost has written *Madographie*, a loving ode to Mado that includes her origin story, tales of growing up in Rosemont, memories of loving, kind parents and the enduring popularity of this drag persona. The book is actually very uplifting — there are no stories of familial rejection, stints at rehab or messy break-ups. Instead, Provost tells an optimistic life story of an entertainer who has hit all the right notes. It's also packed with loads of great photos of Mado in various outrageous attire, as well as some celebrity cameos, including Michel Tremblay and Mitsou.

Provost spoke from his Plateau home.

Matthew Hays: What prompted you to do your memoirs now?

Luc Provost: I've been asked so many questions about Mado and about my career. It's been 35 years! People wanted to know how it started, how my family reacted to me and how it all happened. The story about my life is not complicated, it's not sad, it's not tormented. And I wanted to share that with the public because there are so many stories about drag queens and gay boys that have had a hard time in their youth. I've been blessed. I had a great youth, a loving family and I've been able to achieve most of my dreams by myself. It's kind of reassuring for people to read something like that. If it helps people who are coming from nothing, then that's something. I wasn't rich as a kid, it wasn't easy, but still I have managed to do many of the things I dreamt of. It's part of my personality, to be positive.

MH: I was surprised to read that you are an introvert.

LP: I am an introvert, but Mado is an extrovert! I don't hide my feelings or my personality behind something. I'm just a bit more reserved than Mado is. I'm not a kid anymore. When I was growing up, I always wanted to be the first, to be the centre of

attention; I was making people laugh and having parties. Now if I have dinner with a few close friends, that's my favourite thing to do. I don't need to be at a party with hundreds and hundreds of people.

MH: I was also shocked — SHOCKED! — to read that you are not that into Madonna or Celine Dion.

LP: Can you believe it? I'm probably the only gay in the world who isn't into one or the other. With Madonna, she's a good performer, but I don't think she's a good singer. Her voice is so electronic, there's nothing true in it, no feeling. Celine, there's too much feeling in it. It's syrupy. To me, it's like she wants too much to be in my ear. The themes in her songs are so repetitive. I prefer someone like Kylie Minogue, who doesn't sing about serious stuff. She's quirky, she's funny, she's beautiful, she's drag queeny, she makes me want to dance.

MH: I'm partial to Cher.

LP: I like Cher a lot, too. And I don't want to knock Madonna, because a lot of the gender play she was doing was powerful,

and for a lot of young gay people, she sent a strong message to them, to say that they were okay.

MH: When you first created Mado, did you have any idea her persona would endure this long?

LP: No idea! We just wanted to have fun. Back in the day, when you went out, you always wore something fabulous, you had to dress up. When we were first performing the shows, we were often performing for crowds where there were people as dressed up as we were. Then when I was studying theatre at UQAM, I looked very young and I was too short. In theatre, movies and TV, it's all about looks. You can be very talented, but if you're trying to play Romeo and you're shorter than Juliet, it doesn't work. My teacher then said to me, 'You're going to be a comedian!' I would just open my wide eyes and people would laugh. My eyes have always said it all. If I don't like something, I can't lie. My eyes will tell the truth.

MH: Not many drag personas have lasted this long, and to have their own Cabaret.

LP: It is surprising. We're 21 years old! And we are more popular this year than we were in our first year. We have become an institution. It's probably the thing I'm most proud of. It's so diverse. We used to mainly be drag acts, but now we have burlesque shows and offer a lot of variety. We've had book launches, too.

MH: In the book, you describe Michel Tremblay as your spiritual father. Recently you were in a production of one of his most famous plays, *Hosanna*, in Quebec City, and you got great reviews.

LP: Believe me, when they forgot about Mado and just reviewed me and my performance, I was like 'Woo-hoo!' The most important thing for me was for people to see Luc's work, and that they would love me. And *La Presse*, *Le Devoir* and Radio-Canada all reviewed it and said strong things about my performance. I didn't read the word 'Mado' once. During rehearsals, I had to get Mado out of my system. That was important; I was playing someone else.

MH: The director of the play, Maxime Robin, told me you were incredibly professional and a joy to work with.

LP: He is amazing. He's not an introvert at all! He's like a child when he gets an idea, he gets so excited. He's so devoted to his work, so generous and so motherly. You can feel his passion, and I love passionate people.

MH: Recently there's an increase of transphobia and attacks on drag queens. What do you think is behind it?

LP: I'm so tired of it. It's so hypocritical. It's just about getting some votes. Some of those making the attacks are probably gay themselves. It's also a lack of education. When we read a story to children, we're not reading *Penthouse* to them. People seem to think it's sexual, but it's not. It's someone who's in drag reading a children's story. Why do people think drag queens or trans people are dangerous to children? I can't believe we're back having those arguments again. But I don't think the majority of people think like that. People want power, that's why they're using issues to divide and gain votes.

MH: You've been performing the *comédie française* for a long time, mixing French and English in your act. It's something Sugar Sammy does, but you've been doing it for decades. Right now, the government in Quebec City seems so hostile to immigrants, allophones and anglophones. Many people feel under attack and unwelcome in Quebec society.

LP: I didn't vote for Legault and the CAQ. I would never vote for them. He's a populist, he's just going for whatever the polls tell him he will win. I don't take as much interest in politics as I used to, because I'm so disappointed with Quebec politics right now. I'm 100% pushing for French, because we're a minority in a sea of anglophones in North America. But we shouldn't push people away, and part of what makes Montreal unique is that we have both French and English here. We have gotten along so well, but the government is trying to divide people. Of course we have to protect French, but we can do so without getting rid of other people. It's like protecting the trees by getting rid of the flowers; to me it makes no sense.

→ *Une Madographie* by Luc Provost. Les Editions La Presse. \$31.95

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Fun and games



BY SAVANNAH STEWART

This month, the PHI Foundation is welcoming the exuberant, experimental work of Rirkrit Tiravanija in a (free!) exhibition where attendees themselves become part of the art.

JOUEZ/PLAY, curated by Melissa Karmen Lee, features three immersive works by Tiravanija that invite the audience to participate in the creation. They all reflect the artist's trademark style of breaking down the barrier between the art and the observer.

“‘Play,’ or rather playing, is quite important for me. To dismantle the hierarchy of Art — the high and the low, art and life — was all very integral for my thinking (about these works),” Tiravanija says. “(Joseph) Beuys’ ‘Every man is an artist’ certainly opens up the possibility.”

There are many ways “play” shows up in the three works that will be presented at the PHI Foundation.

The first work on display, *untitled 1996 (rehearsal studio no. 6)*, offers a real music rehearsal studio complete with instruments and sound equipment. Attendees can listen to past recording sessions, pick up an instrument and play along. Bands can even book the space for a one-hour practice session on Wednesdays, provided they don't mind exhibition attendees listening in on the music.

Next is *untitled 2017 (skip the bruising...)*, a functional bar that is literally from a scene in a movie. A TV will play Tiravanija's frame-by-frame recreation of the acclaimed

Rainer Werner Fassbinder film from 1974, *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul*. Attendees can relax and watch the movie at the actual bar that served as a set during filming. On certain dates, the bar will be animated by local actors playing the part of Barbara, the bartender in the movie. The actor who played Barbara in Tiravanija's recreation will be present around the premiere and take on the role once more.

“We've selected about three local Montreal actors to bartend at different times while the exhibition is open,” Lee says.

“They'll be able to study the original Barbara — but he's not really the original, because it's based on the Rainer Werner Fassbinder film where there's another bartender. It's a kind of inside joke.”

The goal of the actors will be to recreate the vibe of the movie's bar scenes and the character of Barbara on Thursday and Saturday evenings while the exhibit is running. There will also be a selection of board games for attendees, accompanied by up to two drinks per person offered by the PHI Foundation.

The third piece, *untitled 2023 (sitcom ghost)*, is a work in progress that attendees are invited to experience with an app available for download via the Apple App Store. The piece “explores the complicated means of art production, investigating the tension between the artwork and the gallery space,” as it's described on PHI's website. And it embodies the “play” theme in a new way — it is a sort of play, as in theatre piece.

Lee said that it was the city of Montreal itself that guided her curatorial work choosing the two completed pieces among Tiravanija's body of work.

“I used to live in Montreal, I lived there for four years. And

what I really remember and what really struck me is a strong sense of music culture, live music, as well as bar culture,” she explained.

“A lot of my fondest memories are of going to live music, whether it's punk, goth or jazz, and then also to go to bars, so many different kinds of bars, cocktail bars, dive bars. I thought it really would resonate with the city.”

She also noted that when there's a lot of live music in a city, there are also a lot of people looking for a rehearsal space, which *untitled 1996 (rehearsal studio no. 6)* provides.

“A lot of what Rirkrit does is he transforms what normal behaviour is in art galleries into a different kind of behaviour. So in art galleries, where one is usually respectful and quiet when looking at art, instead, they can come in and play music and rehearse.”

“In play, one needs to participate,” says Tiravanija. “I think both action and inaction are different forms of participation. It comes back to the dismantling of hierarchies ... Personally, it's a question of philosophical differences, one that values objects and the other that gives value to experience, gives value to life.”

What does he hope the audience experiences in playing along with these immersive works?

“Different ways one could have an experience with art, and in that a shared condition we all exist in, together, with differences.”

→ *JOUEZ/PLAY* is on at the PHI Foundation (451-465 St-Jean) from Nov. 3 to March 10, 2024.

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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.

People Collide by Isle McElroy

People Collide is a genre-bending, mind-blowing introspection into gender, and how to distinguish between the bodies we inhabit from the psyches they carry. In the first few pages, readers meet Eli, who quickly learns he has not woken up in his body, but rather is in his longtime lover and wife's body, Elizabeth. What is going on? Where is Elizabeth? *People Collide* is my favourite novel of 2023 thus far. It taught me so much about never really knowing the people we are closest to (how it not only can never be, but a reminder that perhaps it is a truth we are never really owed). Plus, it has one of the best sex scenes I have read in awhile (I read a lot of sex scenes). Tune in to my episode with Isle to hear us consider if a body is anything but limits, mothers, masc and femme emotional capacities, and if anyone marries for love. (SI)

The Book of Ayn by Lexi Freiman

A *New York Times* writer is cancelled. She is deemed classist for a recent piece. Anna doesn't get it. From the very early pages of the novel, our problematic narrator wonders, "Why should empathy only work when you recognized that someone had been hurt, like you'd been hurt? Wasn't that sort of more about you?" Readers will laugh endlessly at the absurdity of our current politically correct climate, while also finding themselves critical of a 2023 feminist turned Ayn Rand obsessive. This is a novel very much about sex and power dynamics, but also about not feeling bad for being who you are, even though who you are may not be that great. Tune in to our episode and hear us consider why more people should be embarrassed to be the same, what an unflushed turd is in contemporary social discourse, and why Rand was an intellectual top and a sexual bottom. (SI)

Are You Willing to Die for the Cause? by Chris Oliveros

In his new graphic novel, *Drawn & Quarterly* founder Chris Oliveros explores revolutions in 1960s Quebec and the Front de Libération du Québec. In the years before the October Crisis, the FLQ was a chaotic fringe

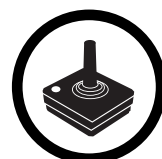
group intent on bringing independence to historically disenfranchised French speakers in the province. The group was small, its mission heartfelt, but they were ultimately plagued by disorder and violent errors. Tune in to this episode for a conversation about history, politics and why we are still trying to define exactly what Québécois identity looks and sounds like in the 21st century. (AN)

Death Valley by Melissa Broder

One of my favourite novels of this year is a book about grief — albeit one of the funniest I've ever read. Our narrator is dealing with both the extended illness of her husband and the hospitalization of her father when she decides to spend a weekend near the desert to do research for a novel she's writing. What follows is at once an Alice in Wonderland down-the-rabbit-hole story, and one of intense survival, alone in the California desert. Listen to our interview to hear how Broder subverts the hero's journey, how women relate to men and how she writes about love. (AN)

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

: game jam



BY NATALIA YANCHAK

Venture to the Vile is a spooky 2.5D Metroidvania set in the foggy town of Rainybrook, which has been corrupted by a mysterious entity known as the Vile. Using your Wolverine-esque claw to defend, or your whip-like tentacle-arm to grapple, you alone possess the abilities to save your town.

Developed in Montreal by indie studio Cut to Bits, *Venture to the Vile's* gentlemanly fashion sense layers perfectly atop its broody, emo-Victorian environments. This world is refined and creepy without being overly serious — carefully balancing whimsical with eerie, while existing on the edges of horror. You'll play through an intriguing and alluring world full of mythical beasts and friendly, animal-masked NPCs that could be something straight out of an Edward Gorey and Neil Gaiman crossover novel. You work with Dr. Crow, a scientist who is a little bit odd, to uncover the mysterious plight that's taken over your quaint town.

This game falls into the Metroidvania genre so your perfectly timed attacks, parries and double-jump

skills are key. A demo version is available now: in it, explore a tomb-like mausoleum, as a ghostly choir chants moodily in the background. You must parkour around stacks of ruined pews and debris, solve environmental puzzles, light candles for the destitute and destroy undead-skeletons and flying beasts.

We spoke with Cut to Bits' studio manager and co-founder Masao Kobayashi about *Venture to the Vile* — their first title — and he assures us the story is one of the game's hidden gems: "We have so much narrative, not just in the main storyline but all the side quests and NPC stories. Our game has tons of world building and lore that doesn't really come across in a 90-second trailer or a 10-minute demo."

There is so much lore behind this game that in fact the studio Kickstarted a collaboration with Lethal Comics for the comic book crossover, which was created with Karl Kershl and Andy Belanger.

Cut to Bits was founded in Montreal by a team of AAA veterans who have worked on titles like *GTA*, *Assassin's Creed*, *Far Cry* and *BioShock*. But a career at AAA doesn't always predispose a team to making or scoping indie games. "Initially we were planning a 1.5-year timeline for the game and we're still working on it four years later," Kobayashi jokes. "We were so naive, which is pretty funny since most of us have been making games for well over a decade."

MAKING INDIE GAMES 101

"I think any experience making games is going to make game dev easier than if you don't have experience," offers Kobayashi. "That being said, indie is very different from AAA. You're on your own so you have to solve your own problems, and also keep yourself motivated and productive. You have to be self-motivated and someone that can figure things out on your own."

"I think the hardest part of indie is taking time off. When you have a stake in the company, in a small team that rely on each other and working on your own project, it can be really easy to get caught up and not take any time off."

Even in video games, the DIY-crunch is ever-present, and folks have to remember to take care of themselves. Kobayashi confirms: "Burnout is real even if you're working for yourself, on a project you love, with a great team. Take time to refresh and step away from the project. It's really necessary."

Another perk of being indie has allowed Cut to Bits to act meaningfully on their core values. "We have implemented a hiring policy that allows for more diverse candidates to surface and we have an inclusive and welcoming work environment. I always felt like I didn't belong in AAA for a lot of reasons, so I'm glad that we're able to provide a positive work environment regardless of who you are."

Overall, the team at Cut to Bits has succeeded in creating an engaging gaming experience with an incredible attention to detail: *Venture to the Vile* balances a mesmerizing art style, a haunting soundtrack and challenging yet fun gameplay with a unique and compelling story.

→ The demo version of *Venture to the Vile* is available on Steam now. A full release is scheduled for 2024.



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