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FREE

* Poor Things * Lisbon * Mont-Brise * Dinasaorium * Politics of Xmas * Best music of 2023



JEREMY SHAW, *Phase Shifting Index* (arrêt sur image), 2020. Installation vidéographique à sept canaux, couleur et noir-et-blanc, avec son multi-canaux et lumières, 35 min 17 s. Avec l'aimable permission de l'artiste et de Bradley Ertaskiran.

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Rirkrit Tiravanija: JOUEZ/PLAY

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SUN 03
Drag Artist Story Hour with Bijuriya
and a Creative Activity for Kids

JANUARY

THU 18
The Interviews – A performance by The
Bureau of Noncompetitive Research

SUN 28
Workshop in Sound Creation
with Magali Babin

FEBRUARY

THU 01
Series Launch: Listening Sessions –
Iconic Montréal Albums

THU 08
Listening Session –
Iconic Montréal Albums

FRI 09
Happy Hour with the Bureau
of Noncompetitive Research

THU 15
Listening Session –
Iconic Montréal Albums

SUN 18
Workshop in Sound Creation
with Magali Babin

THU 22
Listening Session –
Iconic Montréal Albums

FRI 23
Fail/Pass – Lectures and Workshops
on Public Engagement

SAT 24
Fail/Pass – Lectures and Workshops
on Public Engagement

THU 29
Listening Session –
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MARCH

THU 07
Listening Session –
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INFORMATION



All events are offered free of charge.

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Rirkrit Tiravanija, *Skip the bruising of the eskimos to the exquisite words vs. if I give you a penny you can give me a pair of scissors*, 2017, mixed media, variable dimensions. Installation view at Gavin Brown's Enterprise, New York (2017). Courtesy of the artist and Gladstone Gallery.

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Poor Things, the latest film by Greek auteur Yorgos Lanthimos, and an adaptation of a phantasmagorical story by Alasdair Gray, stars Emma Stone, Mark Ruffalo, Willem Dafoe and Ramy Youssef.

Photo courtesy of Searchlight Pictures.

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The politicians who saved Christmas



Emilie Nadeau

BY TOULA DRIMONIS

Gather around, kids. Let me tell you about the time when both Quebec's National Assembly and the Canadian House of Commons saved Christmas.

It was a historic moment when both federal and provincial politicians found the courage to push aside province-wide strikes paralyzing our schools and hospitals, our overflowing ERs and a national housing and cost of living crisis so they could bravely unite and strike the final blow in the relentless war against Christmas. Because, make no mistake, Santa Clause *is* coming to town, even if the Canadian Human Rights Commission (CHRC) found Papa Noël problematic.

For those unfamiliar with the controversy, let me offer up a brief timeline.

On Oct. 23, the CHRC published a discussion paper on religious intolerance. At the time, few people noticed because most folks barely have the patience to read through a two-minute article, let alone a 12-page government report on anti-racism work and human rights. It's not exactly what we'd call a page turner.

On Nov. 23, however, the "Everything I Don't Like or Understand Is Woke" brigade caught wind of it. "Christmas is colonial!" warned Journal de Montréal pundit Richard Martineau, in a column where he expressed displeasure with the paper's acknowledgment that Christmas is given priority over all other faith-based holidays while simultaneously mocking McGill University for recognizing that non-Christian students also exist and having the willingness to accommodate them by implementing policies that allow said students the simple opportunity to celebrate their holidays, too. The nerve!

MEANINGLESS MOTIONS

Immediately, the usual suspects grabbed on to the controversy to make political hay out of it. Folks who had never read (and most likely will never read) the paper were suddenly outraged that a bunch of bureaucrats had dared malign a beloved holiday most of us associate with happy childhood memories, boatloads of food, eggnog, family bonding and maxed out credit cards.

Our politicians, always at the service of the people when minimum effort and meaningless motions are involved, leapt up to defend Christmas.

In Quebec, the Minister responsible for the Fight against Racism, Christopher Skeete, tabled a motion to protest the paper's conclusions. The man is almost nowhere to be found when real racism rears its head, but threaten Santa and, oh boy, he's coming for you.

"We will not apologize for celebrating Christmas," Quebec Justice Minister Simon Jolin-Barrette solemnly declared after the motion was voted unanimously by everyone in attendance, when absolutely — and I mean absolutely — no one requested an apology.

Mathieu Bock-Côté, who's never met a hyperbole he didn't love, also chimed in at the 11th hour with a column proclaiming, "The war against Christmas has never stopped." To which most people with even a modicum of observational skills took one look around them at the Christmas decorations, the Christmas trees, the Christmas lights, the non-stop Christmas movies and Christmas jingles playing since Halloween, and replied, "When precisely did the war begin?"

And then it was the House of Commons' turn.

"Mr. Speaker, according to the prime minister, is Christmas racist?" Bloc Québécois leader Yves-Francois Blanchet asked in question period, forcing Justin Trudeau to, in turn, reply. "I'm

very pleased to stand up and try to answer a totally ridiculous question. Obviously, Christmas is not racist."

As the CHRC clearly explained afterwards, the discussion paper never explicitly said "Christmas is racist" and was merely about promoting equity and inclusion. The CHRC is a human rights watchdog independent of the federal government and Trudeau's administration, not some malicious instrument of federalism and multiculturalism. But that's beside the point for those not remotely interested in the point.

The House of Commons, too, would unanimously adopt a Bloc Québécois motion denouncing the paper's conclusions, because who in the world is going to vote *against* Christmas? What's next on the agenda, a parliamentary motion declaring the Easter bunny adorable? Of course, it's adorable! It's a bunny wearing clothes!

MISUNDERSTOOD DISCUSSION PAPER

I suppose it was only a matter of time before Fox News-type reporting and American-style paranoia about a "woke" war on Christmas would make its way to this side of the border.

The paper merely examines religious intolerance as a form of discrimination in Canada and the mechanisms that perpetuate it.

"Many societies, including our own, have been constructed in a way that places value on certain traits or identities to the exclusion of others — for example, white, male, Christian, English-speaking, thin/fit, not having a disability, heterosexual, gender conforming."

Those are facts.

"Discrimination against religious minorities in Canada is grounded in Canada's history of colonialism. This history manifests itself in present-day systemic religious discrimination. An obvious example is statutory holidays in Canada. Statutory holidays related to Christianity, including Christmas and Easter, are the only Canadian statutory holidays linked to religious holy days. As a result, non-Christians may need to request special accommodations to observe their holy days and other times of the year where their religion requires them to abstain from work."

Again, facts.

Nowhere does the paper say that "Christmas is offensive," or that "Christians need to apologize" or that "Christmas is racist." Those insisting it does, are a) either arguing in bad faith, or b) didn't read the paper.

As columnist Yves Boisvert points out, the paper carries no legal weight and doesn't ask anyone to cancel the holiday. The report merely (and accurately) points to Christmas and Easter as having a favoured status in our society due to historic reasons.

To discriminate means to "treat differently." Because of Christianity's historic presence in our country's colonial past, it continues to enjoy a favoured position today as the majority religion. This is why the only two religious statutory holidays in Canada are Christian holidays and the only ones associated with school breaks and paid days off. Christians don't require religious accommodation to celebrate Christmas. Not so for other religions.

As I pointed out in 2020 during the pandemic, when Premier Legault allowed gatherings during Christmas, while denying gatherings during other religious holidays, "the fact the school break centres around the Christmas holiday is not a coincidence. The fact that Christmas is the 'default' holiday for most of us here demonstrates the pervasive power of Catholicism in today's Quebec and why Catho-laïcité has become such a huge component of the province's so-called selective secularism."

That's not an accusation, that's just a fact.

Although, I will say that the irony of both motions to save Christmas's reputation being introduced by two parties who adamantly support Bill 21 in the name of so-called state secularism was not lost on me.

Now that we've established everyone is (and always has been) free to enjoy a guilt-free Christmas, let me take a moment to wish everyone a very Merry Christmas, Happy Holidays, a Happy New Year, and anything else you may wish to celebrate.

Most importantly, and to borrow from Christmas, "Peace on Earth and Goodwill to All." It's what we desperately need the most right now.

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BY TAYLOR C. NOAKES

For reasons I will never understand, it seems like everyone went a little nuts for dinosaurs back in the early 1990s. Elder Millennials and Gen-Xers will know what I'm talking about — there was a weird moment of 'dinomania' right around the time the Cold War ended (doubtless the two events are intimately related).

Saturday morning cartoons with dinosaur themes abounded — remember *Cadillacs and Dinosaurs?* *Dinoriders?* — basically for no other purpose than to sell some pretty bitching action figures. There was even a band named *Dinosaur Jr.* (whose action figures were rather underwhelming). *The Land Before Time* was my generation's *Bambi*. And when all of that wasn't enough, ABC ran a live-action sitcom I can only describe as 'the Simpsons if they were dinosaurs.'

This is the background context for what was almost the greatest con job ever pulled on the city of Montreal.

Some context first.

Many North American cities were in rough shape back in the '80s and '90s, and Montreal was no exception. Decades of suburbanization had depleted the urban tax bases of major cities, and concurrent deindustrialization had the effect of weakening municipal economies, impoverishing working class neighbourhoods and turning industrial areas into ghost

towns. Having an urban core that emptied out after 5 p.m. most days led to a wide variety of initiatives to revitalize the city. The Biodôme, the Casino, Pointe-à-Callière and the Canadian Centre for Architecture are among the more successful examples of the projects aimed at bringing people back to the city after years of depopulation and disinvestment.

It was around this time that the City of Montreal was trying to figure out what to do with two of the last remaining pavilions from Expo 67, those of Canada and Quebec.

Given the political climate of the time, it wasn't expedient to tear either down, even though this is exactly what happened to most of the other pavilions. The city had already decided that the old French pavilion would be turned into a casino with the help of Loto-Québec, but the adjacent Quebec pavilion wasn't originally intended to become part of the casino complex. There was considerable incentive to repurpose the old pavilions as public attractions.

Enter into the picture Barry Sendel, an enterprising 40-something who claims a PhD in mathematics from Concordia, but who spent much of the 1970s running a series of successful singles mixers in Toronto. Sendel finagled face time with mayor Jean 'Golden Boy' Doré and pitched him on the Dinosaurium, a place where the majesty of prehistoric beasts would come alive via the magic of modern animatronics!

The Gazette's editorial board lamented the evident lack of educational content in the proposed Dinosaurium—as evidenced by the fact that in both English and French, the word dinosaur is spelled D-I-N-O, not D-I-N-A, and neither Sendel nor the City of Montreal could explain why a purportedly educational dinosaur museum couldn't even get the spelling of its name right.

The Gazette further pointed out that animatronic dinosaurs may have a short shelf life in terms of the wow factor, and that it was hard to imagine such an attraction consistently pulling in the high attendance figures promised by Sendel and seemingly believed by the city. Moreover, at a time in which many other North American cities were building state of the art science centres with interactive exhibits designed specifically to get kids fired up about science and technology, allocating public funds towards passive infotainment — essentially a place to park the kids while parents gambled away their college savings at the casino next door — seemed like an inexcusable waste.

Despite all this, the city and Sendel pressed on. It would be ready in 1993.

And then it wasn't. Sendel overpromised and underdelivered, blowing past countless deadlines, all without getting so much as a palm tree or a brontosaurus into position. It was initially estimated to cost \$10-million in 1992 (about \$18.8-million today), to be drawn entirely from private investment. Then the costs started adding up, and then Sendel started talking about how it was conditional on government investment.

The initial plan called for an IMAX theatre and was going to involve actual paleontologists and experts brought in from natural history museums across the country. Plans also called for a setting worthy of a Hollywood movie, perhaps to set the stage (pun most definitely intended) for future film shoots.

"Shooting a Dino-flick eh? Well you know what they say — Montreal has that on stand-by for some strange reason."

By October of 1993, nothing had happened other than the filing of three separate lawsuits against Sendel's company for about \$13,000. Sendel was on the verge of signing a 20-year lease on the former Quebec pavilion. He brushed it off as no big deal. City officials remained bullish on the prospect, anticipating nearly 300 jobs and annual tax returns of half a million dollars. By this point the project was estimated to cost \$16-million, of which Sendel would have to be able to guarantee over \$5-million. Long serving (and suffering) Montreal city councilor Marvin Rotrand remarked at the time that a guy who was being sued over an unpaid \$1,400 bill wasn't inspiring much confidence.

An April 1994 *Gazette* report revealed Sendel's past bankruptcies and fraud convictions. In the 1980s alone, he was hit with 109 lawsuits. Sendel's CV was all over the map, none of which pointed clearly in the direction of opening a multi-million-dollar dinosaur attraction.

The feds pulled nearly \$1-million in loans in April of 1994, at which point Sendel had racked up \$1.7-million in Dinosaurium-related unpaid bills, and lawsuits for \$650,000. The province then pulled their funding. The Dinosaurium went extinct shortly thereafter, though the city was on the hook as it had been named in various lawsuits related to unpaid bills.

Sendel fled Montreal for Mexico, where he then attempted to resurrect his dinosaur theme park idea — albeit this time in a cave. Taking advantage of the mid-1990s Mexican economic crisis, Sendel managed to secure concessions at the Cacahuamilpa Caves, a major national park and a treasure of Mexico's natural environment. Sendel was a fugitive on the run when he inked the deal, hoping to repurpose the animatronic dinosaurs intended for Montreal by sticking them in a Mexican grotto. It became a scandal in Mexico and, thankfully, never came to be. Sendel was ultimately caught up in fraud charges in Mexico as well.

Then, in 1997, Sendel — still wanted for fraud — sued the city of Montreal and Loto-Québec—for \$20-million, arguing that the city and provincial gambling authority had conspired to kill his project. Sendel was ultimately deported back to Canada and presumably dropped his lawsuit against the city.

Sendel is still alive, living in rural Tennessee, where he's the owner of Chef Minute Meals, a producer of instant meals that are marketed to disaster relief agencies or doomsday preppers. He has contributed to Donald Trump's election campaigns.

About two miles away, there's a roadside attraction called Backyard Terrors and Dinosaur Park. I've been assured Barry Sendel has nothing to do with it.

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Beyond the sea



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BY LORRAINE CARPENTER

Portugal has been calling for a long time — especially Lisbon, for so many reasons.

It's ironic but entirely appropriate that the very place that spearheaded Europe's era of colonial exploration has become a powerful magnet for tourism. The city shares the kind of old-world charm and urban bustle you'll find in other cities, but its unique cultural touchstones — from the seafood-centred cuisine to the still-vibrant traditional fado music to the peculiarities of the Portuguese language — set it apart from other European destinations like Barcelona, Rome and Paris.

Sites like the Belém Tower, Monument of the Discoveries and the Praça do Comércio plaza by the Tagus River give the city the historical grandeur you'll find in any European capital, but a large part of what gives Lisbon that essential authentic quality is its uniform 18th century architecture. A sea of rust-coloured roofs is immediately visible as your plane is making its descent, and from dozens of rooftop restaurants and bars and tourist go-tos like the Castelo de São Jorge, which offers a brilliant view of the city — particularly at sunset. Exteriors painted in a range of pastels, as well as decorative tiles, enhance the city's tropical personality, and lend a little calm as you're climbing its chaotically organized cobblestone streets. Walking is often faster than driving, though tired legs

can fall back on the city's cute yellow trams, and the subway offers easy access from neighbourhood to neighbourhood. Or museum to museum — the Calouste Gulbenkian and the MAAT museums are highly recommended, as is the Oceanário de Lisboa aquarium.

Lisbon's relative affordability has helped to make it a top draw for millennials, who flock to the rowdy nightlife hubs of the Bairro Alto and Cais do Sodre neighbourhoods, full of bars, fado restaurants and street art. Cais do Sodre is where the famous Pink Street (aka Rua Nova do Carvalho) is located, as well as the original TimeOut Market, an upscale food hall with a wide array of cuisines, including many Portuguese classics like arroz de Marisco (seafood rice), albeit with an auteurist touch. The shops, artist studios, bars, restaurants and cafés of the LX Factory make the Alcantara neighbourhood a nice attraction for a late afternoon stroll, much like the chic Príncipe Real district, with its 18th century mansions, central garden and the bar/restaurant Gin Lovers, located in an old palace that also houses merchant tables and minimal boutiques.

Another mixed-used address worth visiting is JNcQUOI, a "jewel box" restaurant with a lovely and lively circular bar downstairs. Located in an old theatre, the nightlife hotspot also features a menswear boutique, fitting in with the neighbouring designer stores that dot Avenida de la Liberdade — a massive Parisian-style mega-boulevard.

Just beyond the top of Liberdade is Lisbon's Four Seasons

Hotel Ritz. Though it was acquired by the Canadian Four Seasons company in 1997, the hotel has proudly retained the old branding — including a massive neon RITZ sign on the roof — uniting two giants of luxury accommodation, and it shows. Though dating back to the 1950s, the Four Seasons Hotel Ritz is the most modern five-star in the city, with its first six floors having been renovated during the pandemic. Everything about the hotel is top-shelf: the art deco meets Louis XVI aesthetic of the lobby, the sprawling solarium gym on the 11th floor, surrounded by an outdoor running track with excellent city views, the Varanda restaurant's mind-blowing French/Portuguese/Japanese weekend brunch (the most unpretentiously upscale all-you-can-eat buffet experience you're likely to have in Portugal), the full-service Guerlain spa AND Guerlain-branded afternoon tea service. From the service to the food to the decor to the functionality of the room, every exchange, every bite, every experience hit a pretty much perfect note.

None more so than CURA, the Michelin-star restaurant adjoining the hotel. In a warm and elegant dining room with an open kitchen, casually uniformed waiters present and explain a series of contemporary haute cuisine creations by chef Pedro Pena. The three tasting menus are Meia Cura, Origens (a reduced version of the Meia Cura focusing on dishes that nod to regional traditions, with fish, seafood and bread at the forefront) and the vegetarian Raizes. Every morsel exhibited fine-dining finesse, particularly CURA's signature dish (a tasting menu mainstay) of piled



CURA

squid slivers with halved hazelnuts, roasted seaweed butter, Bergamot and Oscietra caviar.

Of course it wouldn't be a Portuguese trip without digging into vast quantities of seafood and garlic butter alongside the locals. Myriad Lisbon restaurants offer this experience, among them the modest yet refined dinner spot Solar 31, which serves the spectrum of shellfish, squid and octopus as well as white fish, with as wide a range of wines (sampling vinho verde and port are a must in Portugal), as well as



Cervejaria Ramiro

the internationally famous (thanks to Anthony Bourdain) Cervejaria Ramiro. Ramiro is a casual go-to for people in the mood to unpeel king prawns, dig into giant crabs (like the monstrous creatures in the tanks that line the restaurant's windows), sop up the garlic butter with a basketful of already buttered and lightly toasted bread and wash it all down with beer. And natas.

All the tourism guides will tell you to seek out the famous Portuguese egg tart — which, ideally, is a more gooey than

springy, more flaky than mushy — at the place where they're thought to have originated, the Antiga Confeitaria de Belém by the Jeronimos monastery. Unlike "Portuguese chicken," which is not really a thing in Lisbon, the famous dessert known as pastel de nata is everywhere.

And *obrigada* for that.

→ Air Canada, Air Transat and TAP offer nonstop 6-hour and 35-minute flights from Montreal to Lisbon.



Four Seasons Hotel Ritz



Four Seasons Hotel Ritz



Trabantos/Shutterstock

: best buds



BY DAVE MACINTYRE

How the fuck is it already almost 2024?

The weather's officially in the minus columns, folks — and that, unfortunately for us stoners, means going outside to smoke will be significantly less pleasant as the winter months roll along unceremoniously. Luckily, there's never a bad season of the year to smoke (though doing it in -30 weather is incredibly far from ideal), and I'm back with my final column of the calendar year.

Grown by Montreal's own Greentone Enterprises, the OMY Crumbled Lime is the strain I'm going with this month. Despite my utter disbelief about it almost being Christmas again, I figured it was time I taste-tested this bad boy while watching a Christmas special — specifically a 420-friendly one. Turns out I only need to look to Sunnyvale Trailer Park for that. Here's how it all went down.

OMY Crumbled Lime

The name "crumbled lime" definitely checks out here, as it didn't take much for me to crumble these buds through my fingers once I took the container home.

Dry and easily breakable as the buds may be, it's how it makes you feel once it hits your lungs that matters — and at least it delivers on that front. Made of caryophyllene (one of the spicier terpenes out there), the smell is mostly earthy, but with a bit of a gassier scent, too.

Clocking in at around 27.3% THC for me (it ranges between 24 to 30% in general), it's also quite fast-acting, as I got nice and toasty off of merely a pipe hit or two. It's a sativa in the truest sense, as it makes me feel stoned while not feeling entirely and abjectly unmotivated to do things (other than pissing the day away on Netflix). It's not a bad high, though it feels a bit static and mostly focused toward the front of my head. If I do a lot of it, though, the experience becomes substantially more cerebral and visceral.

Speaking of Netflix, I decided to put on the *Trailer Park Boys* season four Christmas special, titled "Dear Santa Claus: Go Fuck Yourself." They had me at the title alone, but the episode itself is another example of why TPB is one of the GOAT stoned-watching shows. Even while smoking, I could tell this was going to be a good strain to watch shows with.

This entire Christmas special is a flashback to Christmas 1997, showing how many key events in the series

originated. Such events include — but definitely aren't limited to — Randy developing his love of cheeseburgers. I've got to say: this show really missed an opportunity to put the Halifax donair at the forefront as far as food goes. But also, I just really miss Halifax donair, and am annoyed I can't easily find any in Montreal. (While we're on the subject of food, I smoked this and wound up ordering from Van Horne Pizzeria — tasty pizza with thick crust if you're in or around Outremont.)

The episode is your standard *Trailer Park Boys* fare: Ricky gets bailed out of jail (much to his chagrin, surprisingly); he has a kerfuffle or two with Mr. Lahey; Cory and Trevor are idiot sidekicks when the boys want to steal Christmas trees; Lahey spills a bottle of eggnog everywhere and collapses to the ground shitfaced on more than one occasion; a shootout erupts at one point; Ricky tries selling drugs during a church service; followed by moments of genuine heart between Ricky, Julian and Bubbles. And of course, there's a scene where Ricky — of all people — shows us what the true meaning of Christmas is about. Eat your heart out, Linus!

The weed: 8.5/10

The Trailer Park Boys Christmas special: 8/10

Halifax donair: Always 10/10

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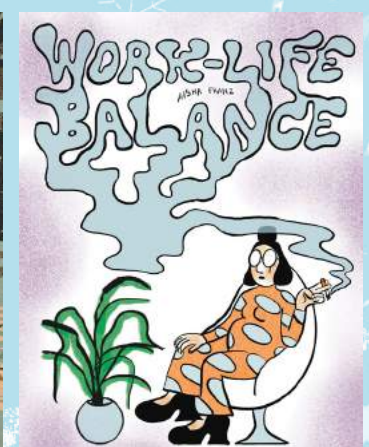
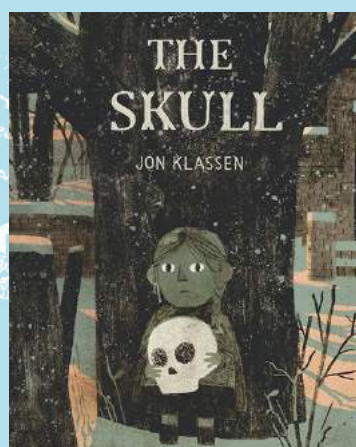
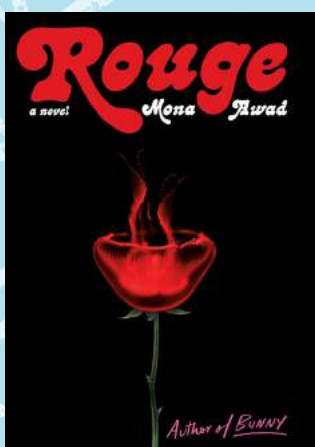
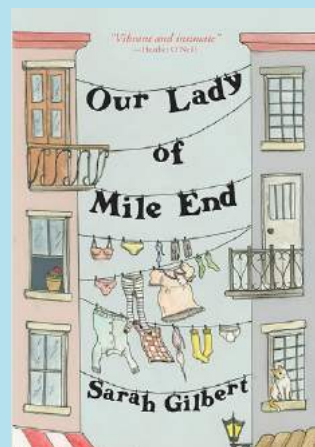
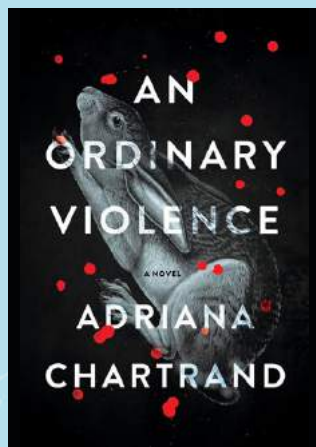
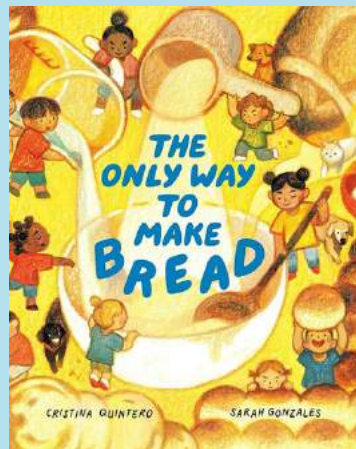
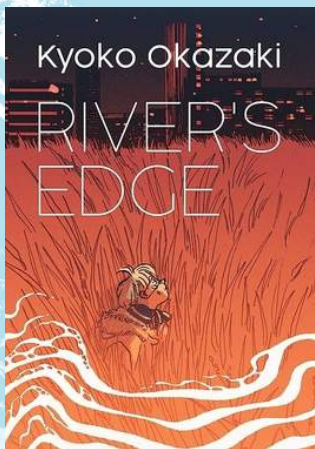
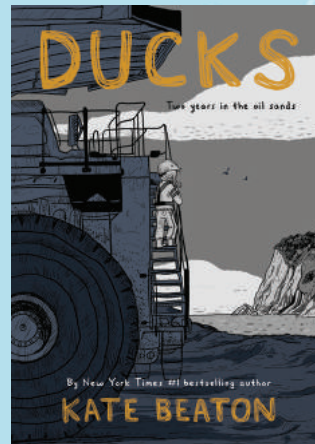
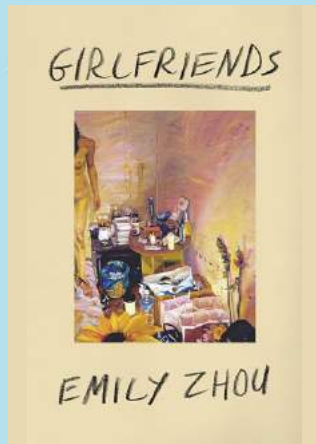
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food

Exceptional sashimi

BY CLAY SANDHU

Saint-Anne-de-Bellevue, a small village on the island of Montreal's westernmost tip, isn't a place you'd peg for having one of the city's best Japanese restaurants. And yet, Mont-Brise, a restaurant run by two Chinese expats and certified Japanophiles, is just that.

Better known as the home of John Abbott College, McGill's Macdonald campus and its bustling waterfront boardwalk, Sainte-Anne's culinary claim to fame is the Halle Berry-approved chicken wings at Cunningham's Pub — which are great, for the record. Over the last few years, as the West Island's population demographics have become increasingly diverse, several great restaurants have popped up. From Taiwanese dumplings to Korean barbecue, Szechuan noodle soups and Birria tacos — there are a lot of good things to eat in the West. But where fast-casual joints have flourished, Mont-Brise takes a decidedly more finessed approach and represents one of the few restaurants in the region tackling a finer dining experience.

If you've never been to Sainte-Anne, let me say it's a lovely little village. It's got a maritime feel to it with its small winding streets lined with clapboard cottages and 1800s stone farmhouses — all of which converge on a picture-perfect waterfront promenade. It's the kind of place where you might expect to get a half-decent plate of fish and chips by the water, but sashimi of seasonal *buri* (Japanese amberjack) flown in fresh from Taoyama, or a *Chirashi* bowl with immaculate Bluefin tuna and Hokkaido uni is something entirely unexpected.

Chef Bingran Yu and his partner Jia Liu (who manages the front of house) opened Mont-Brise back in March of 2022. Originally from Tianjin, China, their relocation to Montreal was a sort of leap of faith. Yu had worked as a chef cooking traditional Chinese fare at hotels in Tianjin while fostering a growing love for Japanese food. After a few years of apprenticing in Japanese restaurants in China, the couple uprooted their lives to join friends already living in Montreal. The choice to open up shop in Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue was also a leap of faith and one based almost exclusively on the charm of the boardwalk promenade in the summer.

After arriving in Montreal, Yu took a job working for True World Foods, an importer of high-quality Japanese fish, seafood and sundries. During his time there, he learned bluefin tuna butchery and would go on to butcher whole tuna for the premiere sushi restaurants in Montreal including Park, Okeya Kyujiro and Hidden Fish. A self-described fish obsessive, in his own restaurant, Yu works with the very finest seasonal Japanese seafood available (except for the Ora King Salmon imported from New Zealand) which he selects for its quality, texture and taste.

I have eaten at Mont-Brise a half-dozen times to date and each time I have the pleasure of enjoying something different. Invariably I have found the food to be thoughtfully prepared, entirely authentic (at least to my limited experience of spending six weeks in Japan) and delicious. What sets Mont-Brise apart, for me, is Yu's dedication to his craft. On my first visit, early in the spring, I enjoyed an incredible *chawanmushi* (a steamed savoury egg custard made with dashi), which was topped with a generous portion



Clay Sandhu

of fresh snow crab. During the season, snow crab shows up on just about every menu worth a damn, but here, the crab was treated with exceptional consideration. Rather than being smothered in mayo and lemon, the sweetness of the crab was met with the subtle sweetness of the warm custard and accentuated by the lingering smokiness of the bonito-flaked dashi used to make the mixture.

On another occasion, I opted for the *Unadon*. Served in a lacquered wooden box, a bed of perfectly steamed rice was topped with two ample filets of grilled freshwater eel glazed with *tare* (a sauce of soy, mirin and sake) and an artfully rolled tamago omelette. While this is something extremely common in Japan, I have never encountered it on any menu in Montreal. Yu's preparation, as in all of his food, seems devoid of ego or self-congratulation. Rather than trying to put *his* imprint on a dish, his measure of success seems derived from how faithfully he can execute the recipes he's so closely studied. On any given day, you can enjoy seasonal grilled fish — in other visits, I had beautiful black cod from B.C. or the head of an Ora King Salmon, which instantly transported me to a very memorable dinner I had at a Ryokan in Kyoto some years ago.

The star of the show, as you might expect, is the raw seafood — this is where Yu's talents and passion shine most. Watching Yu work, you get an immediate feel for this appreciation of the ingredient. From the way each fish is portioned and processed to the meticulous choice of crockery and the intricate way in which each element is positioned on the plate, everything is done with great care and intention. On the particular plate of sashimi I'm envisioning as I write this, I think very fondly of the *chutoro* and *otora* (the fattiest and most prized cuts of tuna), which

melted on the palate and offered a richness and depth of flavour I have not experienced elsewhere in the city. On the same plate, a crystalline jar was filled with a generous pile of sweet and fragrant Hokkaido Uni, which I spooned onto some *shari* (vinegared rice) and wrapped the morsel in an envelope of high-quality nori. Yu's food is both delicious and theatrical — a combination I usually find annoying but is successful here because of the genuine delight behind each of Yu's decorations, including my favourite: a hand-carved lantern made from a paper-thin sheet of carrot. Brilliant. Even seemingly simple things like the wasabi, which is grated fresh from the root to order, or the miso soup, which is filled with tender tofu, sweet clams and plump shrimp, are rendered exceptional here.

But despite all that Mont-Brise offers, in the many times I've visited the restaurant, I have never seen it full. I mention this only because I believe it is a criminally underappreciated restaurant. In some ways, I am writing this review to give Yu and Liu the credit they so clearly deserve but I'm also writing in praise of a restaurant I worry may not last. While Mont-Brise isn't cheap, it's comparable to an average night out at a good restaurant in the city and significantly cheaper than Park, Okeya Kyujiro, Hidden Fish and Marcus, which offer seafood of comparable quality. I believe that it languishes a bit in Sainte-Anne, where it's only appreciated by a small few.

For that exact reason, however, I believe Mont-Brise offers a rare and coveted opportunity for the curious diner: the opportunity to uncover a truly hidden gem. So many Montreal epicureans have made the pilgrimage to Parcelles in the Eastern Townships and to Bika Farm in Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu. Why not make the short trip to Sainte-Anne for one of the better Japanese meals you're likely to have in town?

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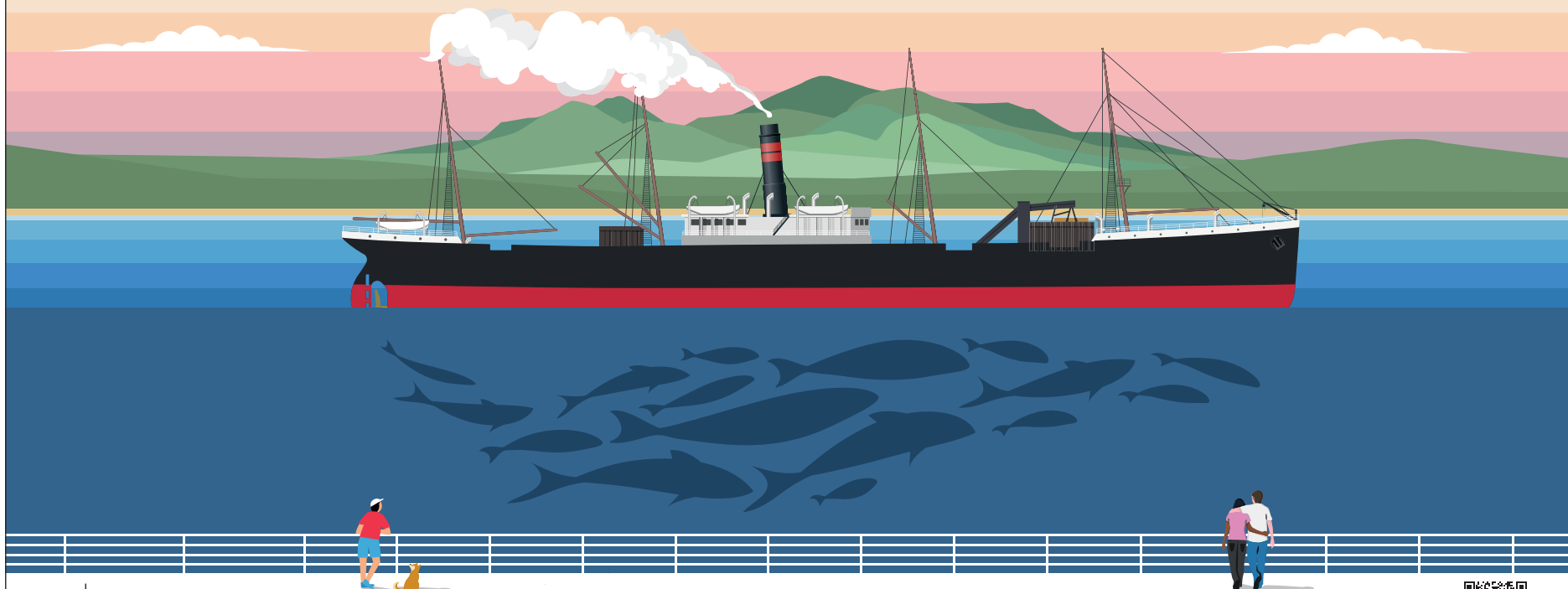
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music

Stranger danger

BY DARCY MACDONALD

In a content-obsessed creative culture driven by the almighty algorithm, the live music experience is increasingly predictable.

Footage of touring bands fills our newsfeeds daily. Festival bookings around the world predetermine which ones may or may not make it to our city in the next fiscal quarter.

Fans who pay exorbitant ticket prices expect to see exactly what they've been hearing about on social media for months or even years, come show time.

Granted, the local small-venue scene may not adhere to such stringent demands. But honestly, when was the last time you went to a concert excited by the prospect that anything could happen?

DVTR is all-surprises, all the time. The band busted out of nowhere late this summer with a screech of feedback, showering Quebec stages with pummelling tunes and facefuls of crotch sweat. But the band's swift and sudden profile surprised them, more than anyone else.

"We called it 'punk.' But is it really? Think about Ghost and the way metal fans argue about if they're a metal band," says DVTR guitarist Jean Divorce.

"We're not gonna start trying to explain that we're some rock-punk-post-electroclash-*blah-blah-whatever*. We get on stage and play loud. That's our 'punk.'"

"Everything he said is true!" interjects singer/antagonist Demi Lune, laughing.

You may know Demi Lune as Laurence Giroux-Do, from Quebec indie outfit *le Couleur*, but in DVTR she's Demi Lune, point final.

Jean Divorce is JC Tellier, *le Couleur*'s touring guitarist, founding member of *Gazoline* and label manager at *Ambiances Ambiguës*.

Neither of the DVTR co-founders is at a loss for industry success, which removes constraints and gives them leeway to fuck around and find out, with the side project they started without ambition or structure.

"We tour together with *le Couleur* and this was something to do to have fun. We were just thinking about songs drunk at 3 a.m. and plugged in guitars and started. That process hasn't changed," Divorce explains.

"We don't reflect on anything or consider the results very much. We avoid the long, drawn out and annoying process that a lot of bands put themselves through and keep the rawness."

"I felt like doing what I wanted and pissing off whoever I wanted without having career repercussions!" Demi Lune blurts out.

"And so far it's working. At a show, if I want to get within an inch of someone's face while I sing, I can do it. Which I wouldn't permit myself with *le Couleur*."

Their debut EP, *BONJOUR*, has been available on cassette for some time and hit streaming platforms last month.



Ariana Motly

After opening on a string of dates with *Vulgaires Machins* in November, they found themselves at #14 on the Quebec music sales charts for the week.

"We sold 55 tapes and some juice," Demi Lune enthuses. "*Numéro quatorze!*"

Early this month, they won the GAMIQ Award for best video production on a budget under \$5,000 for their self-titled debut single "DVTR," performing at the award gala in full wedding attire.

Their onstage antics, accompanied by a punishingly tight drummer and bassist, can't yet be described as the stuff of legend. But they're getting there. At one performance last summer, they invited the entire audience to get low and squat to the floor. When everyone in the packed room had complied, the band just walked off stage. Game over.

DVTR officially launches *BONJOUR* at *l'Esco* on Dec. 20. Beforehand, they're off to France for an overseas debut in Rennes.

"The EP was done quickly, too, like drunk on molly. We were just fucked up *ben raide* and poof — we had an EP and (*Lisbon Lux Records*) wanted to put it out," explains Demi Lune.

"And we signed with a booking agent with these fucked up drug songs we made for fun. The (next) album might end up being a little more planned out. But maybe not. It'll be what it's gonna be."

Performing with more people on stage, Divorce offered, with complex setups and gear and all that entails, is another animal altogether.

"We wanted to just play live as fucked up as possible without all that prep. Like, just be totalled at 2 a.m. and get on stage and play."

The complexity happens more in the actual music. DVTR's songs are not composed with neat 4/4 structures, to say the least.

"We wrote a lot of the music with (digital tools) and the forms go all over the place. When we wanted to start to play it live, the drummer and bassist were just like, '*What the fuck?*'"

"So maybe sometimes it hasn't been as simple as we meant it to be at first. Occasionally, we haven't been playing quite as fucked up out of our minds as we'd envisioned," Divorce concedes.

Demi Lune, for her part, feels at peace with the momentum, even if their inside-joke side project has led to rapid demand.

"If you're able to touch different elements and be comfortable doing that, by being diverse, it's awesome. I'm at ease in *le Couleur* and I'm at ease in DVTR," she says.

"Not doing the same thing all the time is liberating. If I wanted to do the same thing every day, I'd have been a truck driver."

Jean Divorce describes high-end amps and gear he elsewhere employs professionally only to note that, for DVTR, shitty used equipment keeps him away from the threat of a comfort zone.

"You can have all kinds of rules for a band to have decorum and be nice and that's all fine," he says. "But with DVTR, we just talk all kinds of shit in our tunes and spit poison and move on to the next thing."

"We don't do anything without integrity."

→ DVTR launches *BONJOUR* at *l'Escogriffe* (4461 St-Denis) on Wednesday, Dec. 20, 8 p.m., \$15

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Full throttle

BY DAVE MACINTYRE

There's something about driving while playing a great song that hits you emotionally like few other things can. The newest album by Montreal's Nate Husser tries to capture that exact feeling.

Born Nathan Huskinson, the Little Burgundy-bred rapper first came up more than a decade ago as a member of local rap group the Posterz before stepping out on his own. He's got no shortage of swagger and confidence — he's even referred to himself as the LeBron James of Montreal hip hop — and the mental and physical toughness he acquired growing up in Little Burgundy can be heard through his music, too.

Released on Oct. 13 on +1 Records, *Dark Songs to Drive To* is Husser's third body of work in as many years, though he began work on the project three years ago before his previous LPs *Adult Supervision* and *All-Time High* came out. Now that it's out, he feels like a weight's been lifted off his shoulders, and that it's also a project he hopes will allow people to “finally fully understand me on a better, deeper level!” while listening. “It's like my business card to the world now,” he adds.

Upon the album's release, Husser explained that *Dark Songs to Drive To* captures “the sounds and energies that came from me levelling up in new territories and in all aspects of life.” Moving to the United States to continue his rap career in L.A. while meeting and working with artists and producers he admires definitely helps with the levelling up part.

“As much as it is a blessing, you don't really see too many Canadian artists doing it like that and having the opportunity to take it to the levels I'm taking it to,” Husser says.

For Husser, driving enhances the music-listening experience partly because he “literally lives” in his car, as he describes it. “I'm always driving,” he says. “I love driving. It's my favourite place to listen to music. I make music with that in mind, for those environments. Smoking J's, driving, living the 'street life,' per se. Just getting the job done.»

When asked which sonic elements first spring to mind when he thinks of music to drive to, Nate points to the bass, the tempo and the overall feeling it gives you. “It's music to feel yourself to, feel your vibe, just turn up,” he says.

“It's just good-energy music. When you're driving, it's almost like you're in a trance, in a way. You're focused (but) what's playing in the background supplements the entire vibe and atmosphere. That's kind of what it's about — adding to that, and putting you in that zone. Putting you in the driver's seat of every stage of my life, whether it was grit and struggle or coming up and flossing and feeling good.”

As for “Up the Pipe” boasts a feature that might pop out at hip hop fans: Merlyn Wood of Brockhampton fame, who lays down a typically boisterous guest verse. The two linked up via Husser's good Montreal friend, who's also based in L.A., and introduced him to Merlyn at a house party he threw.

“He was like, ‘Yo, y'all should have a freestyle session and shit!’” Husser recalls. “We just started kicking it, freestyling, vibing out. Then we were playing our music for everybody in the house partying.”

“I was like, ‘Yo, I got some shit I might want you on.’ That was the song ‘Get Out’ from my last album. We linked up a couple more times, made a bunch of records, and ‘Up the Pipe’ was one of them. We've got more in the bank coming out — some on his project, some (for) my man Connor (Barkhouse). He's the producer behind most of the tracks with me and Merlyn.”

The album leans heavily toward contemporary trap, but isn't afraid to dabble in genres like the U.K. garage and drum & bass-



Gabriel Eugene

flavoured “Lemons.” One could argue there's a British flavour on the production of “Body,” too (specifically grime and drill).

Another standout track is “Itchy Palms,” which is carried by a distinctly groovier swing than the trap-oriented, 808-soaked beats you hear up to that point. Husser came up with this one alongside producer Brody Myles, with one beat in particular catching his ear.

“I had some flows in mind that just jumped at me,” he says. “It's kind of got more of a real ‘hip hop’ feel to it, beat-wise. I always feel like that's necessary to have on the album. I hit it with a new little flavour.”

The album closer and first single “Did It B4” is a two-headed monster, with the original version followed immediately by a funky disco/house remix. This comes from a remix contest Nate held for fans to reinvent the song for the chance to win \$500 and a spot for the remix on the album — house producer Sorena ultimately took the grand prize.

“There were a lot of super dope entries, but I chose that one because when I drove to it, it just hit a different vibe,” Nate explains. “It was still *Dark Songs to Drive To*, but in another genre. I used to DJ a lot. I'm a fan of deep house — it's really a deep house remix. I was like, ‘This would be a good addition to the album, especially to reflect my taste and love for deep house.’”

Though he now resides in L.A., Nate was back in Montreal when I chatted with him, getting ready for his album release party — aka the “(DON'T CALL ME NO) HYPEBEAST” pop-up event where the video for his track “Hypebeast” was premiered — in Saint-Henri the following night. Nate also sold new album-themed merch from his brand, E*W Studios, and even showed off a custom-made, album-themed Porsche “for the vibes.”

Saint-Henri is, appropriately, where the process for making *Dark Songs to Drive To* began at the home of friend and collaborator DJ Coco. While exploring and experimenting with some stems, Nate found himself “always gravitating toward” the darker sounds he'd discovered.

“(They) helped bring out my stories and the real me,” he says. “Three years ago, I started this playlist called *Dark Songs to Drive To* on my SoundCloud. I had just been changing and

editing it and working on songs, removing and adding ever since, until it became what it was.”

Nate moving to Los Angeles is a career transition he admits is somewhat of a business decision, but a logical one nonetheless, even in our increasingly globalized and interconnected world, where it feels almost like you could blow up from anywhere thanks to the Internet.

“It's what makes the most sense business-wise. It's a life growth move. There's more opportunity for anything entertainment- or music-related. I can't really get the same opportunities and reach from being in Montreal or in Canada, at least. I had to make the move to open up the doors.”

Since moving to L.A. makes it much easier to link up IRL with collaborators, attend recording sessions, music video shoots and other events by living close to the action, life's been good for Husser these days — especially considering his daily routine, despite a lot of late nights and early mornings.

“I wake up, meditate. Give thanks. Have a smoothie. Then most of the time, I'll try to go to the gym, play some ball. Come back, shower. Then get some calls in, some meetings, some planning, some work in. Get creative, start creating. Go to the grocery store, come back home, walk the dog, make some food, and do it all over again.”

As far as future plans go, Husser's intentions for the 2024 are to “just run it up,” making clothes and movies with his brand and production company E*W Studios, touring the world and bringing the same pop-up event — album-themed car and all — to other cities, in lieu of traditional tours and shows.

“I feel like I've kind of got to bring something new to the game and to the table, especially right now,” he says. “After COVID (restrictions), there's a huge surge of artists all doing shows and trying to sell out places. They're thinking the fans are just waiting for them.”

“They're overselling tickets, but fans could really just see 100 artists at a festival for the same price of seeing that one artist. I'm trying to make an experience that is worth people's time and energy and money to come out and see me. I honestly don't even really want to perform unless it's in front of a crazy crowd. I'll do a few songs for the vibe, but I'd rather just create a dope, immersive experience.”

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:hammer of the mods

BY JOHNSON CUMMINS

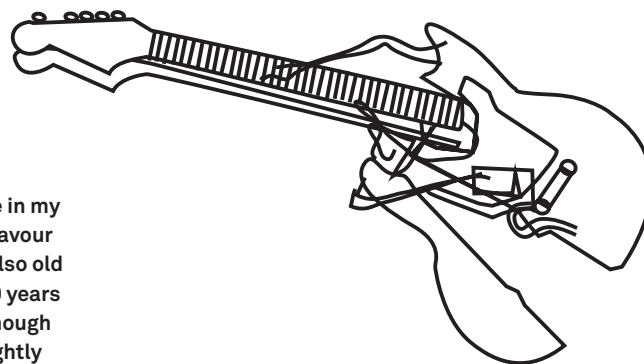
Okay, would you humps stop littering your Spotify Wrapped lists all over the internet — just stop it!

Thanks to Spotify, it's gotten even harder for indie musicians to promote self-released records and for established indie labels to continue, while true musical icons of yesteryear get cut off at the knees. While artists are reduced to licking their lips in anticipation of corporate gruel (the average payment from Spotify is 0.004 per play), smug Spotify CEO Daniel Ek slashed 17% of his staff to increase profits — the music industry Grinch even had them cleaning out their desks three weeks before Xmas. But (ahem) he thanks you for all of the free ads he got from you sharing your fuggin Wrapped list. Spotify pays peanuts to artists who slavishly self-release, self-promote, master, record etc, and then the artists are expected to give a reach-around to the ogres that hold the keys to a smidgen of recognition — and hell, they're the only game in town.

I don't want to come across as a Napster-soured Lars Ulrich here — streaming is obviously the only way to get your music heard. While physical sales have increased over the past decade, things are finally starting to get

a bit limp in that department. As you may notice in my Best Albums list of 2023 in this ish, I definitely favour vinyl as a format for listening to music — I am also old AF and have been buying records for the past 40 years and just prefer the sound by a large margin. Although I am a Luddite, I obviously stream music on a nightly basis (but not Spotify!) as a way of discovering new music, but I am just more invested in a deep listen when that needle is digging into that vinyl groove. Very romantic, huh?

But the trend of vinyl trainspotting fiends may have peaked. Not long ago, when younger peeps wanted to support a band financially, they played their record on their demonic Crosby turntables. Now they've moving on to streaming media into earbuds. The fact is that vinyl is holding on for now, but will it be around after I and people of my generation take our well deserved dirt nap? Nah. While the myopic, bald and bearded wage war over the record bins, elbow to elbow, the kids just want the tunes, maaaaaan, and they want 'em now!!! Too bad, because artists actually make a half decent royalty rate from physical product. And that's not to mention that the artwork is more immersive due to the fact that it's bigger than a thumbnail, while the ritual of placing a tactile object on a turntable just sucks a listener into every nuance, note, breath and heft that I have yet to receive from 0's and 1's.



I am well aware that most of you reading this think I'm just screaming at clouds, and maybe I am, as there are now audiophile streaming platforms that will go toe to toe with vinyl playback (minus surface noise and mono subbed bass) but I can't help but think if we all just strolled over to a far more artist-friendly site like Bandcamp (which I love) and actually purchase a direct download for the price of a pint, we at the very least will help the next generation of songwriters and artists survive the soulless corporate shit storm generated by fucks like Mr. Ek.

Current Obsession: Neu!, Neu2
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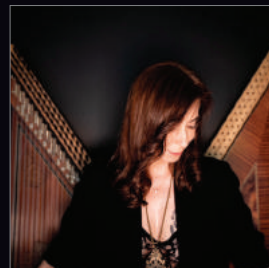
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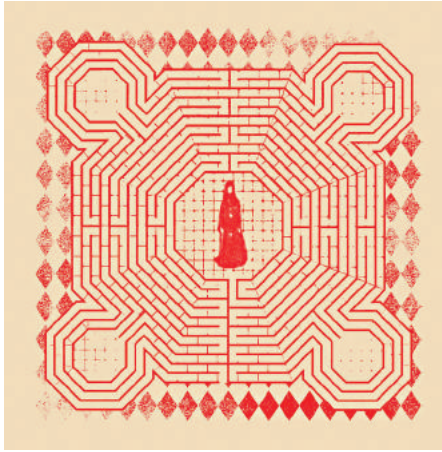
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Yves Tumor, *Praise a Lord Who Chews but Which Does Not Consume; (Or Simply, Hot Between Worlds)* (Warp)
King Krule, *Space Heavy* (Matador/XL)
Puma Blue, *Holy Waters* (Blue Flowers Music)
Atsuko Chiba, *Water, It Feels Like It's Growing* (Mothland)
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Slow Pulp at Bar le Ritz PDB, Nov. 6

BIGGEST DISAPPOINTMENT

This was tough, but one event that has kept irking me is the Bandcamp takeover by Songtradr. Bandcamp, an online music marketplace that is ridiculously important to emerging artists for not only cataloguing their music, but allowing music fans to discover new artists, was sold by Epic Games (who acquired the company only 18 months before) in late 2023 — resulting in half of the Bandcamp staff being laid off. Bandcamp Daily, a portal for really good music journalism that highlights Bandcamp releases, has already changed, making their articles smaller and smaller in the last few months. There is also less content and I envision more changes to Bandcamp on the horizon. It just seems like a shady deal and I don't understand why a major label or even Spotify didn't buy Bandcamp once it was for sale. Songtradr is more of a B2B music licensing platform and it seems like they're only out for profit. I mean, could you imagine what will happen if they get rid of Bandcamp Fridays? Maybe I'm a jaded music journo, but I don't foresee anything good here.



JOHNSON CUMMINS

BEST ALBUMS

Tomb Mold, *The Enduring Spirit* (20 Buck Spin)
Liturgy, *93696* (Thrill Jockey)
Alice Cooper, *Killer* remastered, expanded (Warner/Rhino)
Alice Cooper, *Billion Dollar Babies* remastered, expanded (Warner/Rhino)
The Replacements, *Tim* (Let It Bleed Edition) (Warner/Rhino)
Syd Barrett, *Vault #57* boxset (Third Man)
The Dream Syndicate, *The Days of Wine and Roses* (Expanded Edition) (Fire America)
Les Rallizes Denudes, *Citta '93* (Temporal Drift)
PJ Harvey, *B Sides, Demos and Rarities* (Universal/Island)
Swans, *The Beggar* (Young God)

BEST CONCERT

The Swans at le National, Sept. 27

BIGGEST DISAPPOINTMENT

With many local venues having closed their doors due to ornery condo dwellers putting up stakes in our cultural hotbeds in recent years, the recent snuffing out of the Diving Bell in the Plateau really smarts. All the ingredients were there as it was run by people who are passionate about the arts and provided a great small room for new bands that would struggle to fill 400-cap spaces. It was the perfect encouragement for a bands just getting their first shows under their belts. Latest in this steaming pile of horseshit is Turbo Haus who are starting to get noise complaints despite having bands over by 11 p.m. and being at their current digs for years now. With venues still feeling the financial effects COVID, this is a dry shave indeed.



DAVE MACINTYRE

BEST ALBUMS

Boygenius, *The Record* (Interscope)
Brent Faiyaz, *Larger Than Life* (ISO Supremacy/United Masters)
Gayance, *Mascarade* (Rhythm Section International)
George Clanton, *Ooh Rap I Ya* (100% Electronica)
Grian Chatten, *Chaos for the Fly* (Partisan)
Kelela, *Raven* (Warp)
King Krule, *Space Heavy* (XL/Matador)
Sampha, *Lahai* (Young)
Skinny Pelembe, *Hardly the Same Snake* (Partisan)
Slowdive, *Everything Is Alive* (Dead Oceans)

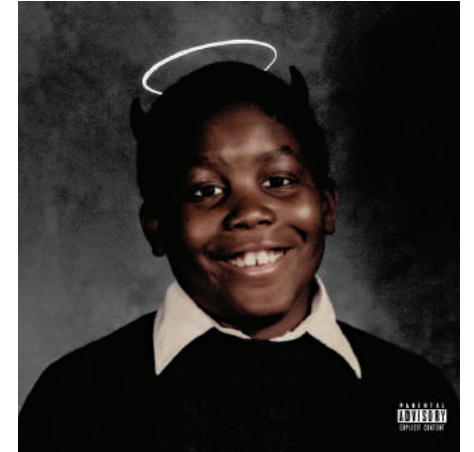
BEST CONCERT

Man, there are so many I could choose from. Little Simz at MTELUS. Billie Eilish's triumphant Osheaga headline set. Thundercat's free Jazz Fest set. Lisa LeBlanc's free Francos set. Amyl and the Sniffers kicking absolute ass at le Festif! in Baie Saint-Paul. The 1975 at the Bell Centre. All the short sets I saw at the Polaris gala in Toronto. Getting to see various Montreal artists across the pond at the Great Escape in Brighton, England.

That said, the most fun I've had at a show all year is unquestionably Gayance's festival-closing set at POP, which went down at Entrepôt77 and was a joyous and truly invigorating spectacle despite being initially marred by sound issues. The vibes were immaculate, Aïsha's stage presence and the contributions from her band/onstage collaborators were lights-out and the energy was infectious — enough that, if you were there, you likely saw me dancing up a storm across the floor. I probably made a complete ass of myself, but I'd do it all again in a nanosecond.

BIGGEST DISAPPOINTMENT

Boygenius not booking a show in Montreal on their world tour despite referencing our fine city on their album TWICE.



DARCY MACDONALD

BEST ALBUMS

Killer Mike, Michael (Loma Vista)
Myst Milano, *Beyond the Uncanny Valley* (Halocline Trance)
MIKE, *Burning Desire* (10K)
Aesop Rock, *Integrated Tech Solutions* (Rhymesayers)
Danny Brown, *Quaranta* (Warp)
KAYTRAMINÉ, *KAYTRAMINÉ* (Venice Music)
Noname, *Sundial* (self-released)
Planet Giza, *Ready When You Are* (self-released)
FELP, *Help* (Bonsound)
Open Mike Eagle, *Another Triumph of Ghetto Engineering* (Auto Reverse)

BEST CONCERT

The Pharcyde at le National, Oct. 4

Whether it was a sincere embrace or a free marketing hook, Hip Hop 50 allowed the genre's old guard to celebrate longevity on the road as the culture observed five decades of influence.

LL Cool J and the Roots' The F.O.R.C.E Live Tour sold out Toronto's Scotiabank Arena, which was a 2023 live highlight, as was Nas and Wu-Tang's co-headlining siege on Place Bell this fall. Openers De La Soul kept their flame alive minus rapper Trugoy, who died suddenly in February.

In June, underground folk heroes Souls of Mischief packed the Belmont. More recently, POP Montreal witnessed a precision rhyme attack by Philly rap queen Bahamadia.

Influential L.A. weirdos the Pharcyde, though, pulled it all together at le National in October for my favourite live experience in any genre this year. The group commemorated 30 years since their iconic debut, *Bizarre Ride II*, with their first proper show in Montreal since the mid-'90s. The Pharcyde gave it all, the crowd gave it back, and hip hop was proven once more to be timeless, unifying and good for the soul.

BIGGEST DISAPPOINTMENT

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Phantasmagoria



Atsushi Nishijima (courtesy of Searchlight Pictures)

BY JUSTINE SMITH

Adapted from a novel by Alasdair Gray and set in a phantasmagorical alternate universe, *Poor Things* is the latest film from Greek filmmaker Yorgos Lanthimos.

Dr. Godwin Baxter (Willem Dafoe) has brought to life a young woman, Bella (Emma Stone) — a newborn mind in a beautiful body. Bella stumbles through the world with the ambling heavy-footedness of a toddler learning to walk.

Locked in a menagerie with Godwin's other creations, Bella learns to "be" within the safe confines of his towering London home, which spirals upwards towards the clouds. No ordinary creation, though, like a "Dolly Surprise" toy, Bella doesn't age like other people, her hair becoming a flowing black cape that begins past her shoulders as the film opens and trails on the ground by the film's end.

When men meet the doll-like Baxter, they are charmed by her. She's a beautiful woman, to be sure. Emma Stone's wide eyes and slightly crooked smile echo the uninhibited emotions of a young child. She's always trying to figure out how many teeth she should be showing but is also unburdened by the self-awareness to care very much. Her beauty moves them to be sure, but more by her naivety. Inspired by her beauty and curiosity, Duncan Wedderburn (Mark Ruffalo) kidnaps a willing Bella from her prison and takes her to Lisbon, and then the world.

Yorgos Lanthimos, best known for *The Favourite* and *The Lobster*, has gained critical appraisals for his films' leftward strangeness. He favours a stiff, monotone performance style that gives way to brief spurts of hysteria. Even his Greek works, before he entered the English language market, were heavily influenced by the movements and behaviours of the animal world. The actors' faces edge towards blankness, inscrutable unemotiveness. Their bodies are limp until called into action; it's not unusual that they bark, hack or squeal. They contort their body into four-legged shapes and movements, and their interactions with the "real world" are frayed and atypical. They're not just outsiders in the sense they don't belong. They are often isolated and ignorant of how the world works.

Lanthimos's films are shot in a way that echoes this otherness. Starting with *The Killing of a Sacred Deer*, Lanthimos began to embrace a more wide-angle lens. The effect was almost mythic, as characters shrunk in urban environments that suddenly took on awe-inspiring tones, an ironic touch given the film's impersonal, sterile environments. He took it even further in *The Favourite*, working with cinematographer Robbie Ryan, by using a fish-eyed lens, which he also uses in *Poor Things*. For *The Favourite*, part of the inspiration for this style was drawn from the works of pre-Raphaelite painters, like Jan van Eyck, who incorporated convex mirrors into their work. This style continued in *Poor Things*, with a new, more fantastical impact.

Writing for *Hyperallergic*, Olivia McEwan discusses a Tate exhibit on "Reflections" inspired by the works of van Eyck. In it, she explores how the introduction of convex mirrors were used to reject naturalism but also communicate "via complex symbolism as opposed to an explicit narrative." The piece similarly alludes to writing by Alison Smith, who suggests that a mirror in *The Awakening Conscience* (1853) — painted by William Holman Hunt, depicting a woman pulling herself away from her lover's lap — references an attack on the mores of Victorian-era sexuality. The woman, likely the man's mistress and a kept woman, sees the world through the window (which we see through the mirror behind her), drawing her into a more profound sense of consciousness. She is awake, and even if she looks back, the mirror guarantees she can only look outward from now on. Like Pandora's Box, what has been unlocked can never be put back.

While it's unclear if this specific painting was a direct inspiration, we see a similar rise in consciousness with Bella throughout the film. Her naivety gives way to experience and knowledge of the world. In Lisbon, she wanders the streets bathed in golden light, designed like an exterior playhouse, drawn in by the sound of a singer. Pulled into an alley, she hears a woman singing fado music — a traditional Portuguese song with melancholic undertones. My sister-in-law, who sings fado professionally, recently explained that it is not background music; it's music you must stop and witness. As Bella does this in the film, wide-mouthed, one senses a shift in her world. She's already discovered "furious jumping" (her word for sex), but now, Bella is ready to dive not only into her inner world but the experiences and realities of those around her.

Bella's experience of sex throughout the film remains refreshing and eye-opening, disconnected from any morality.

For her, it is first about pleasure and later about survival and, most importantly, about intimate connection. As she similarly learns about philosophy and inequality, her views on sexuality remain open. The film refreshingly treats the expansion of Bella's erotic imagination as integral to her personal development and autonomy. Eroticism becomes a critical lens through which Bella can see the world. Pleasure becomes a liberating force against taboo for her, helping shape her into a strong, reflective and independent person.

Yorgos Lanthimos's filmmaking has never favoured the fantastic more than it does here. The world shifts from black and white to colour. The environments are rich in textures, and even man-made worlds twist with the unpredictable curvature of the organic. When the movie embraces colour, it is explosive, like a bright morning after a long, dark night. The quality of light is astonishing, brilliant but textured, and, as seen through an ultra-wide lens, expansive in a way that suggests that the material world is not just what we can see but what we experience. Few films in recent years have succeeded to this degree in capturing the infinite possibilities of imagination and curiosity to shape a better world.

Yet, as can be expected, Lanthimos doesn't shy away from violence or brutality. Not all is right in the world of *Poor Things*. As Bella learns more about the world, she also learns of its cruelty and inequality. She also learns of her past life in the film's sobering and horrific finale, which casts a strange hue on the rest of the film. Far more profound than a "nature versus nurture" narrative, the film suggests violence innate to a world of privilege that might ultimately be unforgivable. The film presents in broad strokes an upperclass society that sees those below as less than animals. Lanthimos has been accused of being nihilistic, but he manages to counterbalance it through Bella's ability to witness the wonderment of life and humanity and her ability to be awakened to its violence and endure.

Most importantly, *Poor Things* maintains consistent playfulness and a light comedic touch. Stone and Ruffalo, in particular, are astonishingly gifted comedic talents who lean into the fickleness of passion and desire as a means of expressing one of life's greatest pleasures and burdens: the burgeoning anxiety of romance as the backbone of so much human (in)action. It's a film that never allows its characters to forget the violence of birth while also finding the poetic beauty that underlines the cruelty of our existence.

→ *Poor Things* opens in Montreal theatres on Friday, Dec. 15.

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On Screen



Maestro



Eileen



The Color Purple



The Boy and the Heron

BY JUSTINE SMITH

For cinephiles, December and January represent a delicious opportunity to catch up on the last-push Oscar contenders and the big family friendly blockbuster extravaganzas. With musicals, fast cars, superhero films and some very serious movies on the docket, this winter has a little bit of everything.

The biggest films set to be released this month start with the hotly anticipated *Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom* (Dec. 22). As Marvel has seen a year of embarrassing flops, will Warner Brothers be able to step up one last time for the fledgling superhero genre?

The two other December blockbuster films set for release are both family-oriented musicals. While the trailers have rubbed many people the wrong way, early previews of *Wonka* (Dec. 15) have received positive reviews. Directed by Paul King of the beloved Paddington films, and starring Timothée Chalamet, this *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* prequel is an origin story that leans into silly.

December's other major musical release is an adaptation of *The Color Purple* (Dec. 25) starring Fantasia Barrino in her first big screen role. The soundtrack featured songs by music stars such as Alicia Keys, Usher, Mary J. Blige, Megan Thee Stallion, Jennifer Hudson, Keyshia Cole, Jorja Smith and Missy Elliott, and film actors Halle Bailey, H.E.R. and Ciara.

If you really can't get enough of musicals, you'll also be able to catch *Mean Girls* (Jan. 12), a film adaptation of the Broadway version of the beloved 2004 movie. Reneé Rapp, who played Regina George on Broadway (and starred in the popular TV series *The Sex Lives of College Girls*), will make her big-screen debut. Another early-year music film to keep

on your radar is the concert doc *Queen Rock Montreal* (Jan. 18), which brings Queen's iconic 1981 concert at the Forum to the big screen.

Are you looking for something a little speedier? Michael Mann's anticipated big screen return, *Ferrari* (Dec. 25), finally hits the screens in Montreal just in time for Christmas. Adam Driver stars in this biopic of automotive mogul Enzo Ferrari, whose family redefined the idea of the high-powered Italian sports car and practically spawned the concept of Formula One racing.

Fans of Yorgos Lanthimos (*The Favourite*) will finally be able to see his latest, an adaptation of a novel by Alasdair Gray. Emma Stone stars in the fantastical *Poor Things* (Dec. 15), the incredible tale about the fantastical evolution of Bella Baxter, a young woman brought back to life by the brilliant and unorthodox scientist Dr. Godwin Baxter.

Bradley Cooper returns behind (and in front of the camera) with *Maestro* (Dec. 8 in theatres, Dec. 20 on Netflix), a biopic about the life of composer Leonard Bernstein. Carey Mulligan, Maya Hawke and Matt Bomer co-star. Another star-heavy release this December is the adaptation of Ottessa Moshfegh's critically acclaimed novel *Eileen* (Dec. 8). Thomasin McKenzie and Anne Hathaway star in this crime thriller set in 1960s Massachusetts. It is about an unhappy secretary attracted by a new co-worker drawn into an outrageous and horrific criminal situation.

Buff it-boys of the moment Zac Efron and Jeremy Allen White star in *The Iron Claw* (Dec. 22), a "based on a true story" film about the inseparable Von Erich brothers, who made history in the intensely competitive world of professional wrestling in the early 1980s. It might be one of the sleeper hits of the awards season.

Two major releases from Japan include Hirokazu Kore-eda's *Monster* (Dec. 8), a *Rashomon*-like story about a mother who demands answers from a teacher when her son begins acting strangely. Kore-eda's films have won several prizes at Cannes and been nominated for Best Foreign Film. Hayao Miyazaki, who some consider the all-time greatest

director of animated film, makes his final film (until he announces he's come out of retirement again), the beautifully melancholic *The Boy and the Heron* (Dec. 8), about a young boy named Mahito who yearns for his mother and ventures into a world shared by the living and the dead.

Two other films that were critically acclaimed on the festival circuit are also set for a winter release. Jonathan Glazer, best known for *Under the Skin*, is back after a long hiatus with *The Zone of Interest* (Dec. 22), a deeply troubling look at the commandant of Auschwitz, Rudolf Höss, and his wife Hedwig, who strive to build a dream life for their family in a house and garden next to the camp. Though eligible for 2023 prizes, *All of Us Strangers* (Jan. 5) premieres in the new year. From the director of *Weekend*, the film stars Paul Mescal and Andrew Scott (aka the hot priest from *Fleabag*) in this fantasy romance about a screenwriter who's drawn back to his childhood home and enters a fledgling relationship with a mysterious neighbour.

Glen Powell and Sydney Sweeney star in the upcoming rom-com *Anyone But You* (Dec. 15). After a fiery first date goes cold, the not-couple pretends to be together while at a destination wedding in Australia.

The likes of Kumail Nanjiani, Awkwafina, Danny DeVito and Elizabeth Banks lend their voices to *Migration* (Dec. 22), a family-friendly animated film about migrating ducks on a family road trip from New York to Jamaica.

There are some films to keep an eye open for in the new year: *Night Swim* (Jan. 5) stars Wyatt Russell in a family versus supernatural entity in the swimming horror-thriller; LaKeith Stanfield stars in *The Book of Clarence* (Jan. 12) an allegorical retelling of the final days of Christ, and a comedy adventure about a down-on-his-luck family man inspired by the rising Messiah; Jason Statham stars in David Ayer's *The Beekeeper* (Jan. 12), an action-thriller about how one man's brutal campaign for vengeance takes on national stakes after he is revealed to be a former operative of a powerful and clandestine organization known as "Beekeepers."

→ Please double-check listings, as release dates are subject to change.



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Winter arts calendar



Patrick Desrochers

BY SAVANNAH STEWART

The St. Lawrence River, Echoes From the Shores

Pointe-à-Callière, Montreal's archaeology museum, presents a multisensory exhibition showcasing the rich history of the St. Lawrence River. With 300 objects, the exhibition explores one of the longest rivers in Canada through themes like transportation, battles, shipwrecks, fishing, tourism and environmental issues. As a trade corridor and settling ground dating back millennia, the rapids of the river have many stories to tell. **350 Place Royale, through March 3, 2024**

Space Explorers: THE INFINITE

PHI Studio brings its VR experience, created with Felix & Paul Studios and INFINITY Experiences, to the Montreal Science Centre, with new footage captured in space. **2 de la Commune W. through Jan. 7, 2024**

Exhibition events at Fondation PHI

Fondation PHI is holding special events in conjunction with their ongoing exhibitions, which both continue through March 10. Affiliated with *JOUEZ/PLAY* by Rirkrit Tiravanija there will be guided tours (Jan. 18, Feb. 8, March 7), Iconic Montreal Albums listening sessions (every Thursday Feb. 1–29 and March 7) and zootherapy sessions on Jan. 26 and Feb. 4. The exhibition *The Bureau of Noncompetitive Research* invites attendees to witness The Interviews on Jan. 18 and join in on happy hour on Feb. 9.

Puces POP Winter edition

For the two weekends ahead of Christmas, POP Montreal is holding their biannual craft market. Dozens of artisans will be selling their accessories, art prints, jewellery, ceramics, food, body care products and clothing, with a lineup that will change from one weekend to the next. All the more reason to come back for a second go! Église Saint-Denis (5075 Rivard), Fridays, Saturdays & Sundays, Dec. 8–17

FAG QC

To celebrate 40 years of the Archives gaies du Québec, the archive asked 40 queer thinkers, researchers, activists and art makers from around Montreal to each pick one item from the collection to display in a special exhibit running from December until March: *FAG QC* (a play on words for “Fonds des archives gaies du Québec”). Highlights in the upcoming exhibit include a 1912 photo of Québécois men in drag, police reports from the Sex Garage raid in 1990 and matchbooks from long-gone gay bars. **1000 Atateken, #201-A, Dec. 10 to March 31**

Jeremy Shaw's *Phase Shifting Index*

The Musée d'art contemporain will be exhibiting *Phase Shifting Index* by Jeremy Shaw, a Vancouver artist now living in Berlin. The piece features seven videos played simultaneously, which can be viewed individually or all at once. Depicting archival films of movement therapy sessions from the 1960s to 1990s, these videos are accompanied by an anthropological narration, studying the images as if they are from a distant past. **Place Ville Marie #11220, Dec. 12 to Feb. 25**

Les Grands Ballets Canadiens's *The Nutcracker*

The holiday season isn't complete without this classic, put on every year by les Grands Ballets at Place des Arts's Salle Wilfrid-Pelletier. As the Grands Ballets Orchestra plays the iconic Tchaikovsky score, the dancers jeté, pirouette and chassé in stunning costumes, in front of a pristine set. Follow Clara as she ventures to the Land of Snow and the Kingdom of Sweets, to a place where imagination becomes reality. **175 Ste-Catherine W., Dec. 14 to 30**

Cirque du Soleil's *Crystal*

In a first for this world-renowned circus company, Cirque du Soleil is venturing onto the ice. This newest performance, *Crystal*, combines its trademark acrobatics with ice skating, making it a perfect show for this holiday season. Classic circus disciplines like the trapeze and juggling will be mixed

with extreme skating and freestyle figures, on the ice and in the air. **1909 Canadiens-de-Montréal, Dec. 21 to 31**

Centaur Theatre's Wildside Festival

Centaur Theatre's festival of provocative, experimental theatre returns in January 2024. This edition of Wildside features five shows and events, unabashedly delving into the creepy, absurd and unsettling. A writer with general anxiety disorder, an exploration of all the usual present-day fears from sentient AI to environmental collapse, a mysterious arrival on the doorstep of a mother and son and a night of stranger-than-fiction true storytelling are all in store for attendees of this subversive festival promoting emerging and independent theatre. **453 St-Francois Xavier, Jan. 18 to Feb. 3**

plasticity/desires

From the group Other Animals, *plasticity/desires* is a piece using dance, music and visual arts to explore notions of individual and mutual desires. Seven performers interact with each other, a mass of clay and a pool of water in a study of human nature, adaptability, contemplation, memory and sensation, at the MAI. **3680 Jeanne-Mance, Jan. 18 to 27**

Tanzmainz's *Soul Chain*

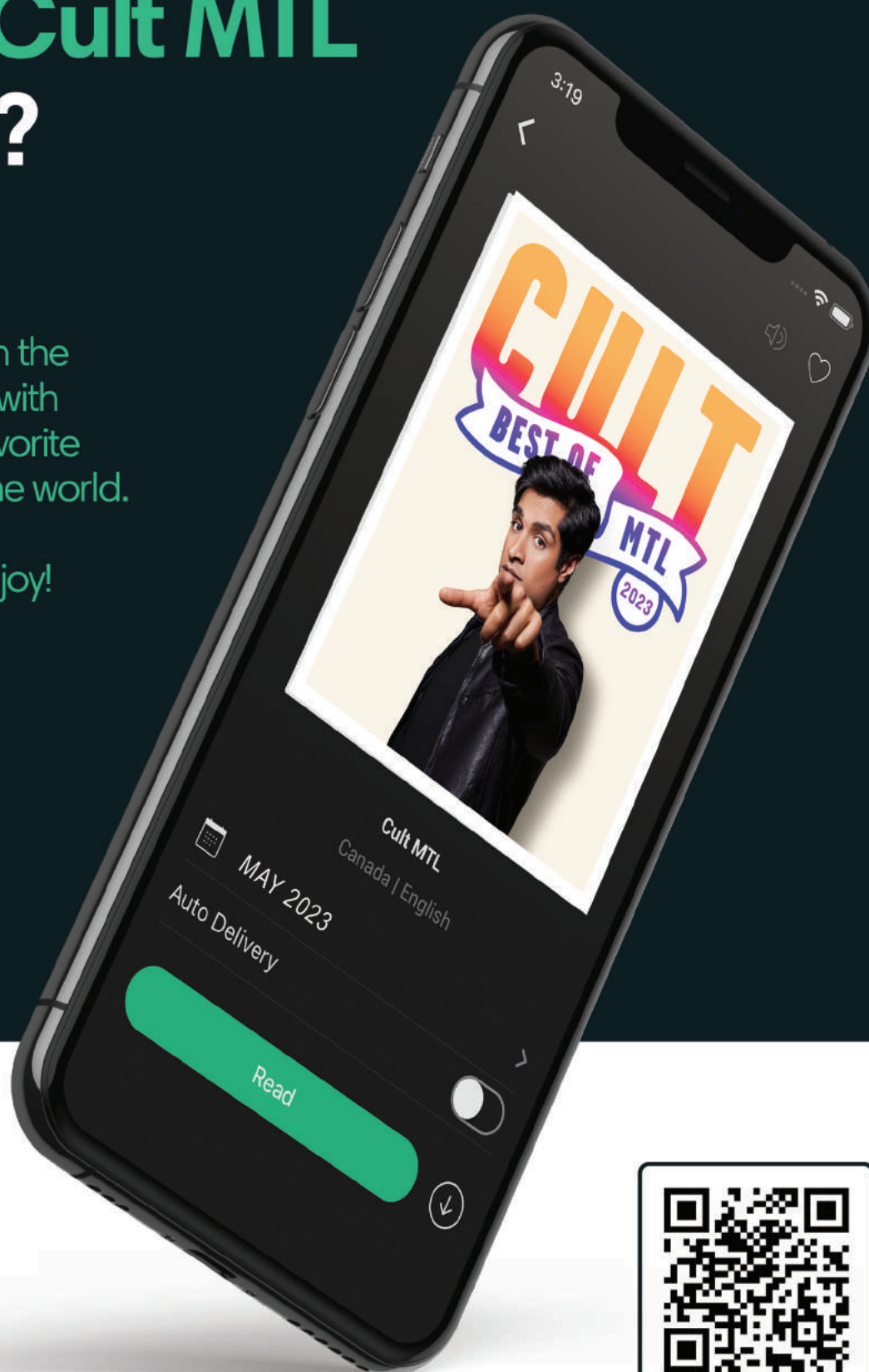
Danse Danse presents German dance company Tanzmainz's award-winning work *Soul Chain*, choreographed by Sharon Eyal and Gai Behar, coming to Place des Arts in January. The show features 17 dancers performing to the techno music of DJ Ori Lichtik, promising a high-energy, hypnotic movement. **Théâtre Maisonneuve (260 de Maisonneuve W.), Jan. 23 to 27**



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: weird era



BY SRUTI ISLAM & ALEX NIERENHAUSEN

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

The Vulnerables by Sigrid Nunez

Queen Nunez does it again. We all knew the pandemic novel was coming for us, pretty much precisely when the pandemic started, and most of us were actually concerned about it — even before its arrival. I was a bookseller on the floor of an indie bookstore, inundated with clients asking me precisely for distractions, and nothing to do with isolations, forced curfews or debates about any kind of vaccine. To them, I wish I could have, and still will, recommend this novel. Nunez paints a portrait of a woman navigating the pandemic, physically and emotionally distanced from loved ones, and, in turn, struck into emotionally and physically invasive spaces with strangers (an unwanted roommate, as well as a very much loved parakeet). If

you're still looking for the silver lining of that really bad time, trust Nunez, who always manages to fill a novel with wisdom, and the shimmering glimpses of light hidden behind dark shadows. (SI)

The Librarianist by Patrick DeWitt

Benjamin Button meets Revolutionary Road as Patrick DeWitt explores a life lived, and the aftermath that is aging. DeWitt timelapses through the novel, first introducing readers to Bob Comet at the tail end of his life, then taking it back to the meaty, broken-hearted middle and reverting yet again to the childhood that comes to shape us all. *The Librarianist* is a tender exploration of how our lives become bookended by unexpected occurrences. It shows us how we can only really know what happened once it's happened — a distant thing in the past. To live *in* something is entirely another matter. I, famously, think all books have an agenda, but this story holds a level of purity that almost feels sans agenda. Like how novels used to be. Texts told, with no tacit contemporary commentary, but instead written for the very sake of telling a story. (SI)

Open Throat by Henry Hoke

Henry Hoke's debut, *Open Throat*, is singular. Our narrator is a queer mountain lion, their thoughts lush with language and a desire to express it. They roam the hiking trails below the Hollywood sign in L.A., surviving on scraps, but when a fire engulfs the area, the mountain lion is forced to flee. Turns out, finding a safe space as a large cat in the L.A. suburbs is easier said than done. It's short — at 176 pages, you can finish it in an hour or two. But will it be one of the most interesting reading experiences you've ever had? Quite possibly. (AN)

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

: game jam



BY NATALIA YANCHAK

This Bed We Made has all the aesthetic and mood you might want from a hardboiled crime novel. The first title from Montreal-based indie studio Lowbirth is a third-person narrative mystery game that allows you to indulge your curiosity as you uncover other people's secrets.

A snoopers' delight, this point-and-click murder mystery is set in 1958 at the fictitious Clarington Hotel located in Montreal. The game totally captures the moody style of Raymond Chandler or Dashiell Hammett — but written and played out from the refreshing perspective of a female protagonist. You take on the role of Sophie, a nosy chambermaid, in order to reveal a mystery that binds the hotel guests through the peculiar objects they bring on their travels.

Eventually your curiosity is bested by a hotel guest that has been secretly photographing you — until you learn there may be something more sinister afoot.

Clearly this game appeals to the voyeur inside us

all. As in any good narrative game, a notebook will definitely come in handy as you rifle through all kinds of documents, memos, receipts, mementos, photographs and notes written on paper scraps and cocktail napkins.

Replete with a cool jazz vibraphone soundtrack, exceptional sound design and voice acting, *This Bed We Made* has an immaculate attention to detail. You'll quickly feel compelled to get to the bottom of all the dark stuff these hotel guests are getting up to.

All the while, the player must fulfill Sophie's housekeeping tasks, which feel like a cozy minigame despite it being her main job. Make beds and refresh towels or risk getting busted for doing what Sophie does best: being an armchair private investigator. This femme fatale is not to be messed with!

"The 1950s in Montreal is a time often remembered for the high cost of personal authenticity," says Lowbirth co-founder Chloe Lussier. "(It was a time) where being true to oneself could mean risking your job, family or social standing. In our game, we wanted to capture this era, focusing on the hidden struggles of people living under these heavy expectations."

"We've laced our story with the glamour and intrigue of the noir genre, which not only reflects the secretive nature of these lives but also adds an interesting layer to the tension between fitting into society and pursuing personal identity."

Lussier acknowledges that the worldbuilding in *This Bed We Made* is inspired by Hitchcock combined with *Life Is Strange*-esque gameplay. But as influences, "that is just the tip of the iceberg. Interestingly, one of the earliest inspirations came from 1950s lesbian pulp fiction novels."

Other genre-adjacent titles we found include the whodunnit-in-a-hotel vibes of *Hotel Dusk*, the genre-heavy *L.A. Noire* and the constant precipitation of *Heavy Rain* — but here, instead, it always seems to be snowing.

"Montreal shapes our work," Lussier states with confidence. "(*This Bed We Made*) takes place in a 1950s Montreal hotel, but we've chosen a *huis-clos* approach to focus on capturing the essence of our city through characters and detailed objects rather than large environments."

The game is playable in both official languages, and was fully voice-acted by a bilingual cast, which Lussier contends is the studio's way of "reflecting the city's rich mix of languages and accents, much like the diversity we have in our team."

The studio was founded as a "modest dream" to develop video games that deliver underexplored narratives by Chloe Lussier, her sister Raphaëlle Lussier and their cousin Olivier Lussier.

"In an industry where certain perspectives tend to dominate, we bring a genuine representation of the underrepresented into our game." Lussier states that the studio seeks to "not conform to the usual mainstream focus on competitiveness or skill, choosing instead to concentrate on immersion and storytelling."

→ *This Bed We Made* was released on Nov. 1 and is available on Steam and consoles now.



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