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* Restaurant Guide * Pasta * CAQ * Eve Parker Finley * Emily Hampshire * BHM



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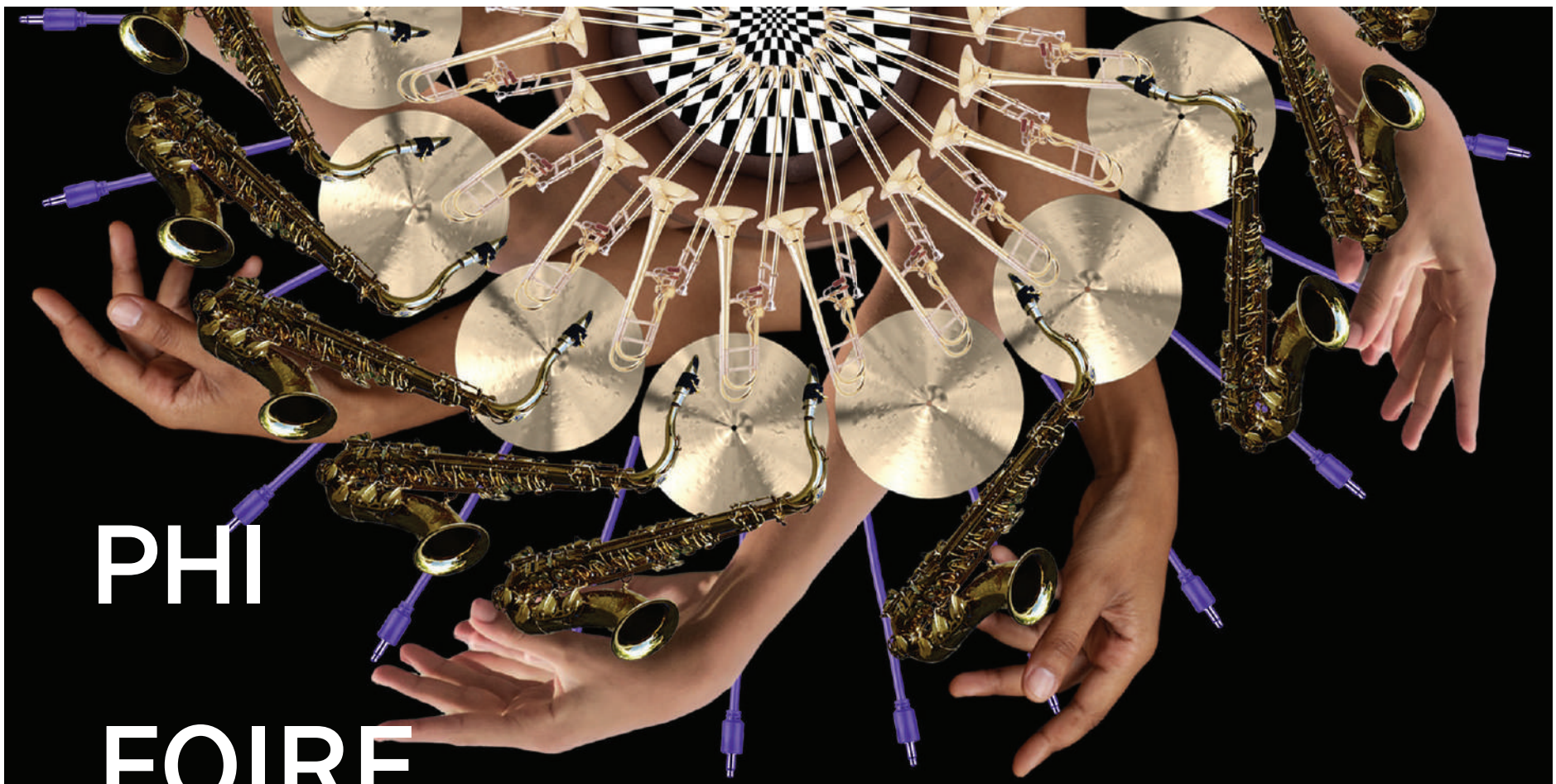
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table of contents



Our 2024 Food Issue features the Restaurant Guide, a forecast for the Montreal food scene in 2024 and a report about being taught to make pasta at Franquette.

Snowden Deli cover photo by Scott Usheroff

city	6
CAQ	6
:best buds	8
:the 1st half	9
food & drink	10
Opening a restaurant in 2024	10
Making pasta at Franquette	12
Restaurant Guide	14
music	20
Eve Parker Finley	20
Gulfer	22
:hammer of the mods	24
Album reviews	25
film	26
Fitting In	26
On Screen	27
arts	28
Black History Month	28
:weird era	30
:game jam	30

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Beyond the Plate

by Heidi Small

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Montréal 

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SPECTRA

'It's me! I'm the problem, it's me'



BY TOULA DRIMONIS

Quebec's National Assembly is back at work after a long holiday break and it's likely going to be a combative parliamentary session as the CAQ government will try and defend its questionable record to opposition parties that will have their guns blazing now that they see the party in power is trending down.

After a long four-year honeymoon period where the CAQ and its leader François Legault appeared to do no wrong, enjoying often inexplicably sky-high popularity numbers, the bubble appears to have burst. Quebecers are angry, disillusioned and deeply worried about the cost of living, healthcare, education and housing — areas that don't appear to remotely show any signs of resolution. And while some major reforms have recently been adapted, many questions remain about how they will be implemented.

Historically, the CAQ has favoured a style of government that rushes through legislation and reforms with little consultation and even less explanation. Quebecers are rightfully concerned and critical. Historic province-wide strikes have eroded support for Legault, who, during the three-year pandemic, was able to govern with little to no opposition, and greatly benefited from that. Reality, however, has finally caught up to Premier Legault. And knowing he's in hot water, some spin doctoring was promptly ordered.

'CHANGE WHAT DOESN'T WORK: YOUR GOVERNMENT'

A few days after the CAQ held its party caucus in Sherbrooke, a partisan ad surfaced that was probably filmed while everyone had congregated at the same hotel. It isn't the first time the CAQ government has produced a purely partisan ad paid for with our money. This one at least had some unintentional entertainment value.

The ad basically informs us that in 2024 "our government" will go back to what it essentially is, "the team of change." We first see Premier François Legault, and then in succession ministers Bernard Drainville, Geneviève Guilbault, Christian Dubé and Sonia LeBel appear to tell us one by one that "more investments in education are coming," that they "believe in better access to our healthcare system" and that "it's time, *now more than ever*, to show you what we're capable of doing."

Why didn't you show us what you're capable of doing before? Were you trying to pace yourselves? Holding back?

Premier Legault then reappears in the ad to tell us, "This is what we were elected to do: change what doesn't work." The video ends with "Your government" which is a tagline the CAQ has used in several promotional campaigns in the past, but in this video, it awkwardly follows "Change what doesn't work," creating more than a few chuckles from many who pointed out that it practically appears to suggest that what isn't working and needs changing is... "your government." Awkward pacing, to say the least.

Regardless of the chuckle-worthy PR faux pas, and much more importantly, people were right to point out that the ad made them feel like they were in the middle of an election. It felt so much like aggressive political advertising that I almost had to remind myself that we're a solid two-and-a-half years away from the next provincial campaign.

The CAQ is clearly feeling the heat and trying to bounce back in the polls by promising action and change. The problem is that this is a government that's already five years into governing, so the status quo it's claiming to combat is... itself. If there's inaction and a feeling of inertia, it can only point the finger back to the CAQ. If there's a lack of change, once again, it can only blame the powers that be. That's them. They're the powers that be. This has echoes of Taylor Swift singing, "It's me, I'm the problem, it's me." Telling voters that they need to vote for change is a tactic that works with a party aiming to *form* government, not one already firmly ensconced in a position of power for half a decade.

CAMPAIGNS USED BEFORE WITH MIXED RESULTS

It's not the first time that the CAQ has used these types

of promotional campaigns meant to stir up emotions paid for with our money — without great success. Back in 2022, it had to apologize for running a Bill 96 campaign ad prematurely, congratulating itself for passing legislation that hadn't yet been adopted by the National Assembly. As gaffes go, it was a tad presumptuous.

The ad was also heavily criticized by many legal experts, including constitutional lawyer Julius Grey, for containing a multitude of "falsehoods" on the controversial language law — primarily the government's claim that it wouldn't affect access to healthcare for English-speaking Quebecers. Constitutional law professor Frederic Berard referred to the ad at the time as "lying to people with public money." Fast-forward two years and they weren't wrong. Access to healthcare has indeed been impeded for English-speaking Quebecers in many documented cases, among many other concerns for the province's linguistic minorities. There are currently six lawsuits against Bill 96 underway, most of them regarding access to healthcare in English, for people who have the legal right to it.

It's clear from the promo video that the CAQ knows it's on the hot seat as it's seen its support plummet recently. It appears to now be using the rhetoric of "change" to re-inspire faith in the government. I'm not sure whether it will work. Voters traditionally have short memories, but five years in, most Quebecers have started to notice that — pandemic withstanding — this government has had a good chunk of time to make incremental and substantial changes in areas it promised it would make some improvements and where Quebecers say changes are most needed in: healthcare, education, housing, climate and cost of living.

Legault recently said he wants the government to "refocus" and named five priorities: education, health, the economy, the environment and Quebec identity. In the past five years, I've unfortunately seen far too much focus on divisive identity politics and far too little time spent on areas that affect all Quebecers profoundly. With two and a half years remaining on Legault's second mandate and with opposition parties coming for him, it remains to be seen what the focus will be and whether any of these promised changes will materialize and be enough for the CAQ to regain momentum.

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DECIPHERS

— naishi wang
+ jean abreu

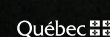
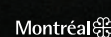


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: best buds



BY DAVE MACINTYRE

This month, I've decided to review a set of pre-rolls AND some good old dried herbs, just because the thought of getting through the slushy, icy, treacherous conditions out there makes me want to smoke myself numb.

All I want to do during winter is chill the fuck out, light up some reefer and listen to some good music. On that note, I listened to Young Fathers' *Heavy Heavy* album while smoking some of this stuff, and it was quite a trip to say the least.

5 Points and R'Belle are based in Pierreville and Louisville, respectively (the trend of combining someone's name with the word "ville" is not lost on me), and both brands delivered the goods, so to speak, with the products I got. They also happen to be good companions during alleyway Plateau walks when it's not too cold out.

5 POINTS ZSWEET (PRE-ROLLS)

I took a couple of these for a spin (it came in a three-pack) during one of those aforementioned alleyway walks, and they did not disappoint. While lights from people's backyards are surrounding you, taking a toke on one of these bad boys can almost make it feel like you're in a trance or a dream. There's something about smoking during the winter months that feels surreal, like a near-transcendental experience. Some folks built snowmen, others still have their Christmas lights up. Regardless, it's a fucking great backdrop for a nice, cozy head high these joints give me.

They don't burn the smoothest, but they're not too bad either, and there's a citrus-like taste there while inhaling. Despite the lofty THC percentage (I got 28.32%), it's not as overwhelming a high as you'd imagine, though it's pleasant and consistent if not terribly enduring. Some puffs hit more harshly than others, but I enjoyed it. 7.5/10

R'BELLE MARSEILLE (DRIED FLOWERS)

The monochrome packaging for this brand is one of its biggest calling cards for me (I'm a big fan of their Apple Fritter strain), and the turquoise colour on this one stands out in a good way. But I never judge a book by its cover no matter how pristine it looks — that said, this sativa is a solid one. Good GOD does it make me feel all nice and tingly around my eyelids in a really nice kind of way.

When I opened up the bag, the aroma was fresh and fruity, while the buds were just the right kind of texture. This is usually closer to 25% THC, but I felt more fucked off of this stuff than the pre-rolls. Surprisingly, it doesn't make me particularly hungry — though it does, of course, have other side effects for me, like causing me to occasionally forget certain things immediately after thinking about them. I won't forget how good this batch made me feel anytime soon, though. 8.5/10

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:the 1st half



BY PAUL DESBAILLETS

Over the past 15 years, soccer — or football as it’s known by the rest of the world — has seen an unprecedented rise in popularity in North America.

This growth is evident through various lenses: increased attendance in stadiums, rising viewership numbers, an influx of international stars and booming youth participation.

At the grassroots level, soccer has become a staple of youth sports. Youth soccer organizations in the U.S. and Canada have reported a consistent increase in participation. This uptick is partly due to the sport’s inclusive and global nature, allowing children of all backgrounds and financial status to partake.

Cities across North America have invested in soccer facilities, leagues and training programs, reflecting a growing infrastructure that supports and nurtures young talent. (Province of Quebec and City of Montreal, we need more facilities please!)

Major League Soccer (MLS) has expanded from 10 teams at its inception in 1996 to 29 clubs. Cities are clamoring for franchises, and the league has seen a significant increase in attendance and viewership. The introduction of marquee players like David Beckham in 2007 and, more recently, stars such as Zlatan Ibrahimović, Gonzalo Higuaín and of course the GOAT of them all, Lionel Messi, have brought international attention and credibility to the league.

The success of international competitions such as the CONCACAF Gold Cup and the Copa America Centenario, held in the U.S., shows an increasing hunger for high-caliber soccer.

The growth of women’s soccer has also been pivotal in the rise of the sport’s overall popularity in North America. The United States Women’s National Team and Canadian Women’s National Team have been particularly influential, as we’ve seen in these past FIFA Women’s World Cups. The team’s successes have not only created a massive following but has also highlighted crucial issues of gender equality in sports.

When I tell you I’ve never felt an energy like the one I experienced at November’s friendly match-up of

Brazil v Canada in Montreal, I am not kidding — it was truly brilliant.

Now media rights deals have skyrocketed, with networks and streaming services trying to get matches to your eyeballs wherever you are at any time. The English Premier League, Spanish La Liga, Serie A and other international leagues now have substantial followings in North America, with games being broadcast in prime slots all week long.

This exposure has created a more knowledgeable and enthusiastic fan base. Additionally, sponsorship deals, pop-up events and merchandise sales have seen a considerable boost, showing again the commercial interest in soccer.

Soccer’s integration into the mainstream also reflects significant cultural shifts. Demographic changes, immigration and the easy mix of cultures have led to a more diverse and connected population, particularly in cities where soccer’s popularity is seen the most. Come on cowboys... get on board.

Soccer’s global vibe and energy aligns well with the way society is going and is making it a natural choice for a new generation of sports fans.

With the FIFA World Cup coming to North America in 2026, it will be game over!

By the time this goes to press, we will be a few days away from the start of the 2024/25 MLS season. CF Montréal has a new coach in Laurent Courtois, a former French professional footballer. (More on him to come.) Coach has taken 32 players to the warmth for training camp this month. CFM will kick off the 2024/25 MLS season at Exploria Stadium against Orlando City SC on Saturday, Feb. 24, 7:30 p.m.



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JUNE 05	VS	OTTAWA	JULY 11	AT	NIAGARA
JUNE 11	AT	OTTAWA	JULY 14	VS	OTTAWA
JUNE 13	VS	NIAGARA	JULY 16	AT	SCARBOROUGH
JUNE 16	VS	SCARBOROUGH	JULY 19	AT	CALGARY
JUNE 19	AT	BRAMPTON	JULY 26	VS	SASKATCHEWAN
JUNE 21	AT	NIAGARA	JULY 28	VS	VANCOUVER



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food

Next up



Clay Sandhu



Clay Sandhu

BY CLAYTON SANDHU

I'm calling it early: 2024 is going to be a big year for restaurants in Montreal.

Leaving 2023, I felt this sense of excitement and optimism bubbling under the surface and that feeling has only grown throughout January. Last year concluded with several exciting restaurant openings and the promise of many more to come. But my optimism isn't buoyed only by the fact that new restaurants are opening (although that's always a good sign) — it's the people behind the openings.

There's a story I like to bring up when I think of what 2024 will bring, one that I took from the time I went to wine school. They say that the best wines are made from vines that had to suffer. That is to say, if the environment in which the vines are planted is too plentiful and generous and the vines receive everything easily, then the fruit that is produced will be overly abundant and bloated with water and sugar (good for a snack) but devoid of the character and complexity needed for great wine. When the vine suffers, when it needs to dig its roots deep into the soil and work hard to bear fruit, the berries that grow are the most exceptional and the most capable of becoming something extraordinary. I don't think I have to explain the metaphor further than to say that times have been tough for the restaurant biz — they remain tough. Despite the inhospitable environment, there are folks out there brave enough to dig down to their roots and it's my belief that this year is when that effort and confidence will bear fruit. How lucky for us all.

It's always been tough to make a buck in restaurants. It's hard work, overhead is high and the margins are slim. With food and staffing costs where they are right now, those margins are particularly slim. In short, it's not exactly an optimal time to open a restaurant. When I speak with restaurateurs who opened in late 2023 or who are working to get their project off the ground this year, however, they don't seem stressed. For the dyed-in-the-wool restaurateur, there's a compulsion to open — a sense of not *if* but *when* and often the when comes in the form of a real estate opportunity. Often, it would seem, it's the moment that picks them.

For Catherine Couvet, the former chef-de-cuisine of Foxy who recently parted ways with the restaurant to open her first solo project Panacée, there was always an idea for a restaurant percolating in the back of her mind, and then, one day, an opportunity presented itself. “My plan was to work at Foxy for at least five years — I love that place. Even though I didn't open it, it's still my baby. I had so much creative freedom there; I really wasn't looking for anything new. But my boyfriend and I were staying at a chalet and we received a call from someone saying that they had this space for us. We weren't ready at all but we saw the space and we just fell in love. We made an offer and it was accepted. It was just the right space at the right moment.”

It's not a unique story. When the space that was formerly home to le Diplomate (chef Aaron Langille's long-time wine bar) became available, it was a signal to Brendan Lavery, Taylor D'ottavi and Carlos Melgar of la Marelle that it was time to open. The nowness of it all was irrelevant. “People are talking so much about the economic precariousness of this year — and I doubt that was something we ever talked about or was even a consideration in opening (la Marelle). It was just time to do something else. While (economics) weren't really a consideration for us, something we were thinking about is having a spot that is more open for people to come and choose their own adventure,” says Lavery.

While this might seem like a calculated decision or foolhearty bravado that boldly screams, “Fuck it, we'll do it anyway,” it's not like that. It's easier and more genuine. The desire to open isn't driven by ego or money — there's this deeply rooted call to hospitality and service that just compels certain people to make a space to do the thing they love. “We love to drink all these fancy wines that are hard to come by but we also love to drink Labatt 50 — it's nice to have a place where you can do both. A lot of places focus on one thing. We're trying to create this place that's like a Swiss army knife: you can come in for a couple pints and a rilette or start with a martini, have your bottle of wine and do a multi-course dinner with cheese and dessert. I think people were waiting for places where they could come without the pressure of playing (the restaurant's) game. You can do what you feel like doing,” reflects Lavery.

For me, the first sign we were in for a good year was when Danny Smiles announced he was going to finally open his first restaurant. It seems insane to put it that way — the guy is one of the city's best known chefs. But it's true, he's never had a place that was entirely his own. His new spot represents a changing of the guard and is inspired by the classic restaurants of Paris and Rome; it's a place where Danny and his team will deliver their highly researched yet deeply personal vision of a great restaurant.

That's the exciting thing for me. When I say that I'm excited about the people, it's because the people I'm referring to are restaurant stalwarts, the lifers whose passion and vision for restaurants is not only informed by their years in the business but also by a careful consideration of the bigger picture of hospitality. Invariably, their independent visions are centred around the guests, to provide the flexibility of grand dinners and simple pleasure, to indulge when appropriate and to otherwise restore, as Couvet puts it, “When you receive someone at a restaurant, you want them to feel good. A good meal with the people that you love and enjoy being with can fix everything.” It's not new — it is in fact the original purpose of restaurants — but it feels novel because we've deviated from that path for so long. It's a long-winded way of saying that these people get it; they know what makes for a great restaurant and it's exciting that this is the year in which they will have the opportunity to do something of their own.

In the year to come, I expect we'll see more flexibility in menu composition — a come as you are and eat how you'd like model. I suspect we'll see less rigidity in menu style, too, with chefs more free to cook what they like rather than what strictly fits the format. Dinners out are going to cost a lot more, and to that end, I expect diners to want great service, generosity and to leave with the sense that they are special. At these prices, a restaurant meal can't only feel transactional. Fortunately, there seem to be plenty of seasoned professionals who understand what we want and are willing to create spaces for the way we wish to experience restaurants today. I for one am looking forward to this next era in restaurants and can hardly wait to watch 2024 unfold.

PHI



RIRKRIT TIRAVANIJA

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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 and neugerriemschneider, Berlin

DIY pasta



BY SRUTI ISLAM

Ever since I discovered the wonders of homemade aioli (why would I mayonnaise ever again?), I’ve developed a newfound appreciation for starting things from scratch.

Not a pro-chef myself, I am lucky enough to have friends in the industry who I can pester for advice. So, sitting at the corner of our beloved Grumpys Bar, I asked chef Louie Deligianis (the culinary brains behind my favourite Montreal restaurant, *Bistro la Franquette*), “What’s the deal with pasta from scratch?” I asked this question as if it were a challenge, and clarified, “Is it difficult?” Louie dismissed this immediately with a shake of his head. Lifting off his cap, and running his hands through his hair (classic Louie), he said, “Anyone can do it.”

Okay, so if “anyone” can do it, I can, I concluded. I’m right up there in the “anyone” category. “How?” I annoyingly persisted. I don’t know why I persisted, given I’ve binged Samin Nosrat’s *Salt Fat Acid Heat* on Netflix on numerous occasions, and considering I fall asleep most nights watching food Instagram videos, I obviously know *how*. You take a bunch of flour, make a little well, dump a bunch of eggs etc.

Louie shrugged and suggested I come by the restaurant so he could show me sometime. I said, “Really??” because, again, annoying. He blinked. “You want me to make pasta at *Bistro la Franquette*?” I asked again. He blinked again. “I want you to want to make pasta.”

Soon after that conversation, Louie graciously carved 45 minutes out of his busy day for us to do the thing. I wanted to make him proud. I *wanted* to make the pasta! With this, however, came the combined anxiety and thrill of being handed an official apron and being guided into the kitchen where the magic happens. The poor staff looked at me with confusion and skepticism, and I nervously confirmed, “I’m not new! Louie’s just helping me!” They nodded in realization, and proceeded to laugh both with and at me — including an

employee who was literally from Italy. Anxiety, again.

We start weighing the dough, and Louie hands me all the eggs. He asks me if I know how to crack an egg, and you know, I cook often at home, so I say, “Well yeah, of course.” After a few cracks, he says, “Yeah, no, you don’t. You crack at the edge of the table, never on the table itself. That’s how it breaks.” Oops. Then he asks if I can separate whites from yolks, and at this point, I start to realize maybe the safe answer to the easy questions is “No.” At home, I separate the eggs using the shell (carrying the yolk over from one to the other, until one holds the whites and the other holds the yolk), but here it was suggested I use my hands as the sieve instead. Our fingers are natural instruments for this. I’m too precious about it at first, as Louie remarks. He suggests I widen the space between my fingers, and let the viscous whites have a little give to slip through. Chef Louie is very obviously right.

Then the basic steps. The aforementioned well in the mound of flour, the eggs gliding in. The most extraneous and probably the best part of doing this at a fine dining restaurant is the inclusion of a touch of food colouring to really heighten the yellow of a good, fresh, pasta. I use a fork at first to beat the eggs into the flour, and once they’re combined enough, I again switch to using my hand. With a bench scraper, we mix everything together, pack it all in and begin the very not fun act of kneading. I don’t do bread because I don’t knead, so after about 20 minutes of kneading this dough, I call out to Louie, “This isn’t fun anymore!”

“You’re not even close to done,” he responds.

Yes, it’s annoying, but Louie was right. It was pretty easy. It involves using the heel of your palm, and a push and pull-over technique. Repetition is key, and despite my brattiness, it’s rewarded. Then, after letting it rest, Louie gets ready to turn the dough into pasta. “This is for tonight, right?” he asks, knowing I often host dinners at mine. “...No,” I say, (because I hadn’t thought about it, and had no plans to have guests over). He blinks again. “Then what are we doing here?” “Oh,” I realize. The benefit of fresh pasta is how good it tastes when *fresh*. This made sense.

He laughs and places my hard-earned dough in a vacuum sealer machine, labels the date of creation (always a chef), and hands it to me. “Freeze, and use when needed.” Thanks, Louie!

The dough sat in my freezer longer than desired, as it was the holidays, and my pasta machine order was continuously delayed in delivery. I waited impatiently for its arrival and kept oscillating, wondering if I’d opt for noodle cut or ravioli. Finally, it arrived, the day before a flight (cruel joke), and I soon ordered a pasta cutter to boot. My best friend had been gifted a pasta machine for Christmas and wouldn’t stop telling me just how much she would never return to boxed pasta again. I was eager! After defrosting the dough and assembling my machine, I began the process in my very own kitchen.

I was delighted by the experience. I felt like a little kid playing with Play-Doh. I loved how perfectly thin the dough got after feeding it through my pasta machine. I loved cutting with my pasta dough, and piping the filling with these long horizontal lines (I went for a mushroom ricotta filling). I boiled one little guy as a test — a little al dente, because who doesn’t love texture — and after cooling shortly, I tasted the thing and thought, “What have I been *doing* with boxed pasta this whole time?” This, in my kitchen, was just pasta, sure, but so much creamier, heavier, so much more savoury — and did I mention the texture?

I texted chef Louie a picture of my ravioli-esque creation and asked if he was proud.

“Ya done good, kid.”

RECIPE	
Pasta dough by Chef Louie Deligianis	
“OO” flour	1.5 kg
Egg yolk	840 gr (48)
Water	200 gr
Citric acid	1 gr

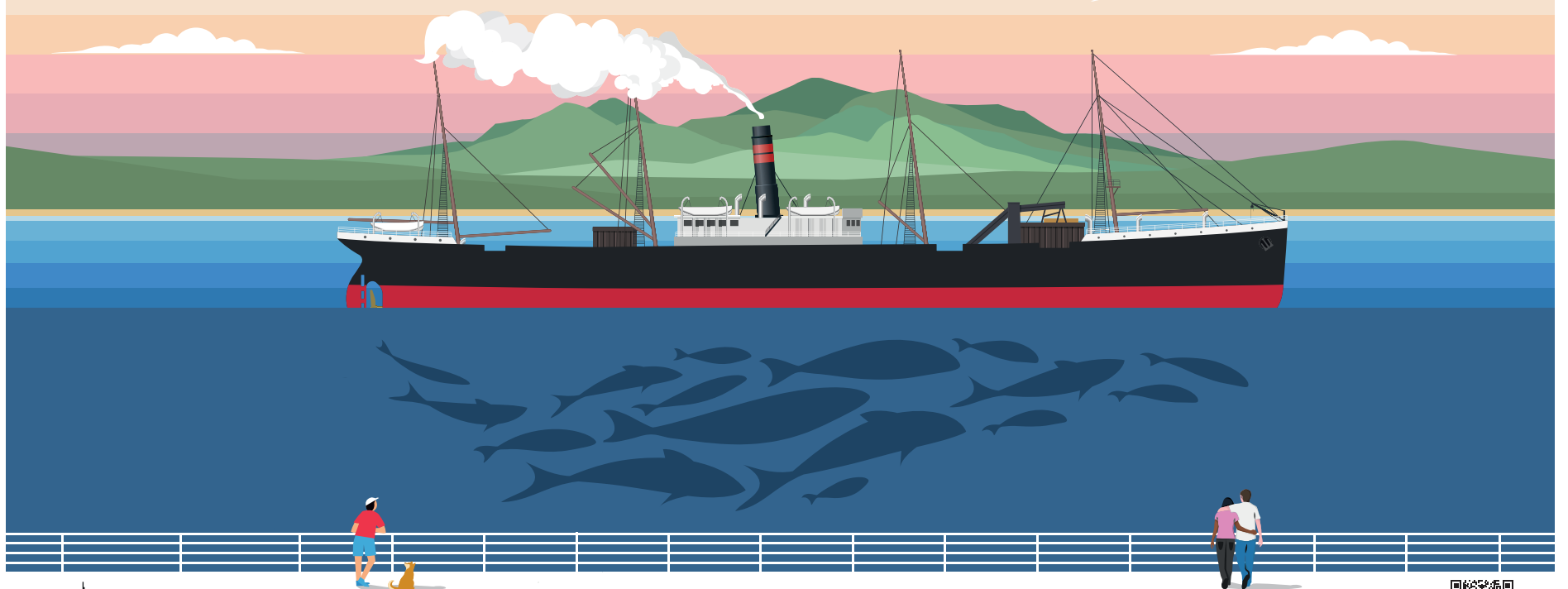
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Restaurant Guide



Pichai

Matthew Perrin

BY CLAYTON SANDHU

Things are looking up for the restaurant scene in Montreal.

Lately, in my visits to restaurants, I've noticed clever solutions to the recurring rising costs of business and staffing shortages — there's a shift toward shorter menus, smaller dining rooms and a return to old-fashioned hospitality. In all cases, the degree of professionalism and execution appears way higher than it's been in some time. It's refreshing to see, frankly. I've also found my personal tastes changing, and where I once was looking

for innovation, I'm now craving tradition — you know the meme “reject modernity, embrace tradition.” To scratch that itch, I've been revisiting some of our city's most beloved institutions and have been pleasantly reminded of how they earned their reputations.

Despite being a restaurant critic, I've occasionally had difficulty coming up with restaurant recommendations in years past. This year, I had to trim the guide because there are just too many good restaurants in the city right now. I've also widened my scope to include the West Island (still working on the East End, North Shore and South Shore) where I was delighted to see that some great food and drink could be found. This year's edition of the restaurant guide

might have fewer discoveries than years past (although, I hope, still a few) but it is heavily researched and I stand by each one of the places on this list.

With that said, I want to acknowledge that any guide is imbued with some level of subjectivity. Still, I believe that the restaurants on this list are worthy of their spot and, in the right place at the right time, are all capable of delivering a delicious and memorable meal. Take this as an opportunity to check in on a classic spot, finally make that reservation you've been holding off on or try a place you haven't heard of — you'll be glad you did.



Taverne on the Square



Hiatus

VERDUN

Hong Mère

Hong Mère is the Sichuan restaurant you’ve been looking for. If the promise of exceptional cooking and a host of delicious dishes rarely seen on menus elsewhere in the city isn’t enough to pique your interest, then I don’t know what will. The crispy pork with cumin is excellent, the mapo tofu is numbing and hot, and the salt and pepper squid is as good as any you’ll find in the city. However, the spicy green chilli salad, which mixes julienned cucumber with long green chillies, heaps of coriander, peanuts and black vinegar, is one of the best dishes in the city. Hong Mère delivers family recipes cooked with intention and without compromise. **Warning:** When they say it’s spicy, they mean it. (Clay Sandu)

(3795 Wellington)

Millmans

As a born and raised Montrealer, I very much remember when Wellington Street in Verdun was empty. It’s a delight to now see it bubbling with a variety of hotspots, a delectable list of options for eats and (as always) vibes. Nicholas Gaudette has carved out a space for everyone’s favourite: brunch. Millmans diner has evolved into a local favourite. Get a classic Millmans breakfast (eggs, bacon, sausages, perfectly crisped potatoes) or sate your desire for a lox bagel. With mimosas, a permanent flow of coffee and a caesar that hits just right, the occasional wait will prove all too worth it for brunch enthusiasts everywhere. (SI)

(3779 Wellington)

CÔTE-DES-NEIGES / WESTMOUNT

Taverne on the Square

For over 20 years, Taverne on the Square has been the restaurant institution of the Westmount dining scene. As classic as they come, Taverne’s intimate and elegant dining room, with its spectacular curved banquettes and expertly draped white tablecloths, is among the most attractive in the city. Maybe it’s the nostalgia creeping in but chef Stephen Leslie’s cooking is better than ever. Having built his reputation on sourcing the best ingredients and putting together pitch-perfect renditions of tried-and-true dishes like salmon tartare, mac n’ cheese (theirs uses 18-month comté) and Caesar salad, the food is dialed-in and just damn delicious. Unfussy and incredibly consistent, it rarely misses. Co-owner Jon Cercone’s wine list also deserves a special mention as it’s filled with an abundance of rare and sought-after wines, and he regularly opens wines by the glass that you’ll never see elsewhere. (CS)

(1 Westmount Square)

Snowdon Deli

A perennial mainstay, the definition of an institution and one of the city’s most cherished Jewish eateries, Snowdon Deli has been feeding families in the area since 1946. There’s a lot on the menu here, but you can never go wrong with the Matzo ball soup (as classic as it comes), the club roll (an institution in and of itself), golden latkes or a good ol’ plate of smoked meat. (CS)

(5265 Decarie)

Nguyen Phi

There’s a lot of debate when it comes to Montreal’s best phở, but a perpetually valid and respected answer is Côte-des-Neige’s Nguyen Phi. The eye test won’t reveal much that’s unique about this place but that’s because it’s the exceptional quality of their broth that sets Nguyen Phi apart. Golden-hued and nearly clear, save for a few residual droplets of rendered fat, the powerfully fragrant and inviting broth is the result of many hours of patience and care. While just about any soup will do the trick, true pho nerds will appreciate the dac biet, which easily counts among the best noodle soups in town. (CS)

(6260 Côte-des-Neiges)

SAINT-HENRI / LITTLE BURGUNDY

HENI

Centred around the ancient and diverse culinary traditions of the SWANA regions (an acronym for Southwest Asia and North Africa), HENI is one of the most unique, clearly defined and well-executed restaurant offerings to hit Montreal in some time. The kitchen is run by chef Julien Robillard (ex-Pastel and Hotel le St-James) whose menu incorporates thematic classics like kibbeh nayyeh, Moroccan pastilla and couscous but delivers them with particular finesse, refinement and a great deal of respect. Aside from the food, co-owners Noah Abecassis and Soufian Mamlouk also run Sienna Wines, an importation agency dedicated to importing low-intervention wines from Lebanon — one of the world’s oldest winemaking regions. (CS)

(2621 Notre-Dame W.)

Elena

A local restaurateur friend often finds herself here, and when I inquired why, their response was, “It’s consistent.” We love consistency. We also love fresh pasta and a variety of pizzas for the table. We love a casual wine pairing for dinner, and the option for lunch, too (see: Elena P.S., their background pizza counter, with hefty hoagies to boot). Opt for the immaculate, dimly lit dining room or the casual background patio — either way you’re eating well, and here’s my favourite part: your bill will make sense. Another fun highlight is the fact that the most popular recommendation among peers is, wait for it... the caesar kale salad. Doused in a perfectly garlicky tahini-based caesar dressing, with crunchy croutons and overflowing in a perfectly shareable portioned bowl, a salad has never proven itself as a main more than this. (SI)

5090 Notre-Dame W.

Restaurant A.A.

Never go here sober. Sorry Andre! I’m not totally serious, of course, but will it be even more worth it when you’re very, very drunk, and it’s almost 5 a.m., and you have the sweet, sweet, relief of remembering this Saint-Henri legend is very much still open, and open for you? Yes. I have found myself joyfully Ubering from the end of a late night in Mile End, knowing that this can be a stop on my way home. Get yourself a steamie,



Mon lapin

cheeseburger, lasagna, honestly whatever your drunk self desires, but above all, get yourself a poutine. A.A boasts as the best poutine in town (I nearly agree, though I'm a classic Belle Province girl myself), so indulge. It's all about that slightly sweet, almost turkey gravy-like sauce, and then it's about the heaping portion (I have to share) and finally, it's about the price being absolutely right. (SI)
(3702 Notre-Dame W.)

Satay Brothers

I am a Satay Heaux. All the Satay boys know this, and chances are, if you're a regular like me, they know this about you, too. This is a Saint-Henri staple that attracts, absolutely, for the vibes. A Singaporean restaurant with the softest, juiciest steamed buns and grilled skewers on deck, and even my Khmer ex-boyfriend confirms their papaya salad is up to traditional par. I always opt for a spicy margarita, and sake shots usually appear at some point in the meal. As the night gets longer, the music gets louder, with a space that can accommodate your one-on-one catch-up with a friend or birthday festivities for large groups (my birthday was lit this year!). For a real personal experience, contact the boys about a private event at their neighbouring bar room, Chinese Laundry. Go on a date, or find a date there. Either way, Satay Bro is flirting back. (SI)
(3721 Notre-Dame W.)

PLATEAU / LITTLE ITALY

Kitano Shokudo

Formerly known as Otto Bistro, Hiroshi Kitano now runs this Japanese eatery in the heart of the Plateau solo. The menu brings together Japanese staples like jewel-box-esque chirashi bowls, unctuous shoyu ramen and crispy karaage and mixes it with Kitano's most creative though no less delicious offerings like the wild boar mapo tofu, uni carbonara and the infamous confit duck leg. Quality is paramount here and the food is always excellent — a great spot that consistently surprises. (CS)
(143 Mont-Royal E.)

Mon Lapin

Marc Olivier Frappier and Vanya Filipovic's contribution to Little Italy has been one of the most celebrated restaurants in the country since opening back in 2018. Having nabbed the top spot in the most recent edition of Canada's 100 Best Restaurants (and the *Macleans* restaurant guide, too), Mon Lapin's list of accolades only continues to grow. It's hard to



Casavant

pin down the type of cuisine here so instead I'll just say that the food is a poetic mixture of French and Italian cooking penned in Frappier's unmistakable and ingenious style. As the city's undisputed authority on natural wine, Filipovic's list is expertly curated and chock-full of covetable classics and quaffable curiosities. (CS)
(150 St-Zotique E.)

PETITE PATRIE / ROSEMONT

Pichai

More than just an exceptional Thai spot, Pichai has firmly established itself as one of the city's best restaurants. Building on the silky curries and mango sticky rice that made its sister restaurant Pumpui famous, chef Jesse Grasso's food is diverse, composed and more reflective of dishes you'd see in northern Thailand. The springy fried fish balls in a sweet chilli sauce are incredible, as is the *Laab Ped*, a spicy salad of duck and duck hearts, but no trip to Pichai is complete without sampling a few seasonal specials. From Japanese firefly squid served with *nam jim talay*, a potent dipping sauce made of lime, coriander and pickled garlic, to grilled veal heart with a fragrant lemongrass relish, the food is powerfully flavourful, unapologetically spicy and damn delicious. (CS)
(5985 St-Hubert)

Ma Mère en Feu

Established in mid-2022, the latest joint by chef and musician Beaver Sheppard (alongside fellow restaurant vet Max Corsillo) offers adventurous daily specials — ranging from blue tuna sashimi and niçoise salads to chimichangas and sticky pork bowls — as well as menu staples like the Blue (cheese) Angel Burger and Nashville XXX Fried Chicken (and their less chewy but still intense tofu alternates). That the comfort-food haven is decorated with vintage trashy restaurant signage and other kitsch knick-knacks, stocks natural wine and is connected and intertwined with the record store 180g — not to mention that they don't deliver and have lots of personality — makes a visit to the random Rosemont corner all the more worthwhile. (Lorraine Carpenter)
(5868 De Lorimier)

MILE END

Lawrence

Having originally started as a pop-up kitchen running out of Sparrow in 2010, Lawrence is a name synonymous with hearty English cooking, whole animal butchery



Lawrence

and, of course, brunch. After the departure of long-time chef de cuisine and collaborator Endi Qendro, co-owner and executive chef Marc Cohen has been running the kitchen solo. The concise but balanced menu focuses on tidy composed dishes that marry the best of old Lawrence's offaly-good cooking with a newfound elegance, sophistication and maturity. (CS)
(9 Fairmount E.)

Double's

Your new favourite sports bar by way of Danny Smiles, Zach Macklovich and Victor-Alex Petrenko (aka Coach Vic). Head down the street-level staircase and into the graffiti-covered storefront and enter Double's, a nostalgia-heavy dive bar for restaurant nerds. Whether you're coming to watch Roma take on Lazio or to catch the Habs game, there's always something good on and plenty of good things to eat while you watch. Beer by the bottle and classic cocktails dominate the drinks menu, and on the food side, the kitchen is putting out one of the city's best (and least complicated) burgers, pie by the slice and a rotating selection of tasty treats.
(5171 Parc)

VILLERAY

Casavant

A stylish new brasserie in Villeray with aspirations of being the go-to after work spot for restaurant folk. Compact, buzzy and sporting a truly beautiful dining room, it's the kind of place where good-looking couples spill out the door, wine glasses in hand, to smoke a cigarette while they wait for a perfect beef tartare to hit the table. The menu is French but with an unmistakable Montrealaise accent — beef tartare with smoked mackerel, pintade with morels and sauce vin jaune and a classic saucisse purée. On the beverage side, there's a decent cocktail list, plenty of beers on tap and an enviable wine list. (CS)
(350 de Castelnau E.)

Petit Alep

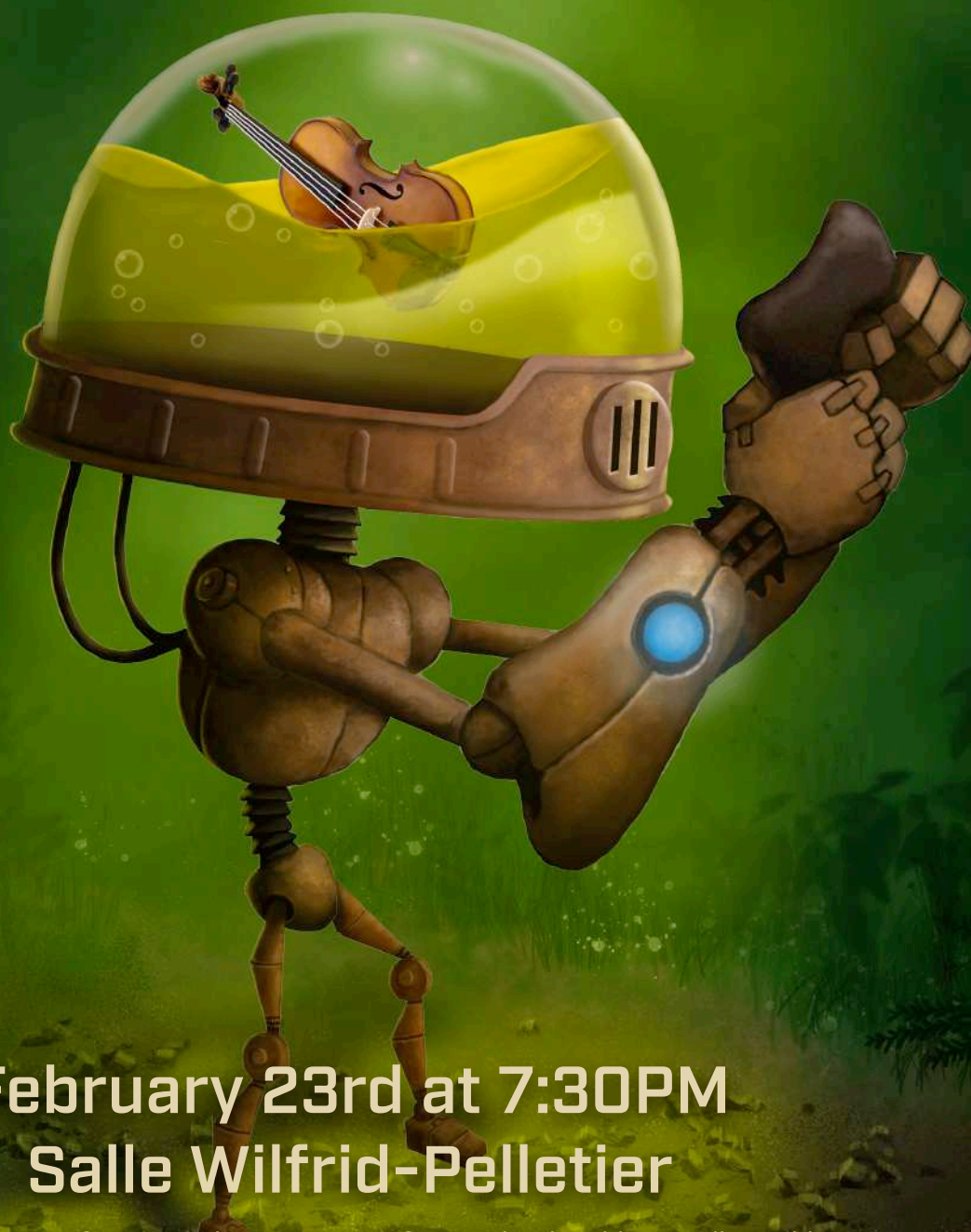
A long-standing and well-loved Syrian/Armenian restaurant by Georges and Jacqueline Frangié. Since the mid-'90s, the restaurant across from Jean-Talon Market has been known for its extensive menu of snack-sized Middle Eastern staples — think sumac-studded fattouche salad, crimson muhammara and flé flé flecked Armenian sausages. Aside from the food, Frangié's wine cellar (which features over 250 references) has some of the rarest bottles (at excellent prices, I might add) in Montreal. (CS)
(191 Jean-Talon E.)

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Foxy

Mange Dans Mon Hood

The king of the smash burger. Unabashedly influenced by in-and-out, chef Michel Lim along with partner Michel Nguyen have been slinging paper-thin and magnificently caramelized all-beef patties (ground in-house) along with crispy shoestring fries fried in beef fat. While the burgers do the heavy lifting, don't miss the Ol' Dirty Fries — an ungodly mess of fries, pickles, cheese sauce and MDMH's signature burger sauce. Trust me, it's good. (CS)

(1380 Jean-Talon E.)

DOWNTOWN / GRIFFINTOWN

Foxy

One of the very best restaurants in the city. As the fine-dining restaurant by Olive + Gourmand and Un Po Di Piu's Dyan Solomon, Foxy is best known for its exclusively wood-fired kitchen. An exercise in hospitality and polished professionalism, a meal here is often flawless. The menu is built around the fire, so it oscillates from region to region but it is invariably interesting and well-executed. Meat and fish is treated brilliantly here but the vegetables are usually the standouts. As an extra bonus, the dining room and wine cellar is overseen by Véronique Dalle, one of Canada's leading authorities on wine and a legendary figure in both the Canadian and European restaurant industry. A place for an exceptional experience, evocative food and often a very special bottle of wine. (CS)

(1638 Notre-Dame W.)

Hiatus

If you're racking your brain for a fresh spot for a night out in downtown Montreal, let the light at the top of Place Ville-Marie be a beacon for Hiatus. Open for dinner as well as lunch on weekdays, Hiatus offers beautiful panoramic



Mange Dans Mon Hood



Ma Mère en Feu

views and fantastic Japanese-inspired dishes, and cocktails — try the baked oysters and “nouilles aux oeufs” (if you're not feeling lobster or Wagyu Miyazaki A5) while sipping on a spicy Skyline Sling (which combines Suntori and Glenmorangie). Located on PVM's 46th floor, with a bar that now serves Japanese bites on the 45th, Hiatus lives up to its status as the restaurant at the top of the city with a blend of aesthetic refinement, warm service and consistently satisfying food. (LC)

(1 Place Ville-Marie, 46th floor)

Garden Room

The downtown off-shoot of chef Pamika Sukla's ever-expanding Thai restaurant empire. Like its sister restaurant Mae Sri, the star of the show at the beautifully designed Garden Room is noodle soup. From the classic Mama noodles (Thai instant ramen) served with mini pork meatballs and char siu to the blisteringly hot boat noodle ayutthaya soup, you'll always find a solid bowl of noodles here. Not in the mood for soup? There are plenty of options for dry (meaning without broth) noodle bowls, Hainese steamed chicken and rice, and a delicious holy-basil studded pad kra pao. A more expensive option near Concordia, but definitely worth the price. (CS)

(1445 Bishop)

CHINATOWN

Dobe & Andy

Located inside Chinatown's Place du Quartier building, this Cantonese BBQ spot run by the Ku brothers has firmly established itself as a new classic. Taking inspiration from *cha chaan tengs*, a style of diner unique to Hong Kong, the menu is all about simple, filling and well-loved dishes. The BBQ is the star of the show — the sticky and smoky char siu, glistening roast duck and soy chicken and audibly crispy pork belly are excellent here and come served with

an incredibly delicious scallion and ginger condiment. Don't sleep on the other part of the menu though or you stand to miss out on some of the city's best fried rice, braised meat dishes and noodle soups. Absolutely delicious and easy on the wallet, Dobe & Andy is a spot to have on repeat. (CS)

(1071 St-Urbain R-12)

WEST ISLAND

Mala Express

Mala, in Chinese, is an expression describing the sensation attributed to the potent and somewhat anesthetizing Sichuan peppercorn. Located in les Galeries Kirkland, a fairly nondescript strip mall on St-Charles boulevard, Mala Express is dishing out some of the most delicious Sichuan food on the island. From steaming bowls of crimson-red braised beef noodle soup to fragrant chilli-oil lathered wontons and the classic Sichuanese “Mouthwatering Chicken,” everything is invigorating and full of flavour. One of the finest hidden gems of the West Island. (CS)

(3630 St-Charles)

Lou's

This swanky New American spot from restaurateurs Max Ruiz Laing (Loïc), chef Liam Barron (Loïc) and Peter Mant (Apt. 200, SuWu, École Privée, Name's on the Way) brings nostalgic fine dining to the heart of Pointe-Claire Village. The stylish, late-'60s-inspired dining room by designer Kyle Goforth (Sid Lee) oozes sophistication and serves as the perfect backdrop for Barron's steakhouse-meets-diner menu. Vintage steakhouse classics like Parker House rolls, onion dip and dry-aged steaks feature prominently but the signature cheeseburger might be the very best in the city. On the beverage side, cocktails are king and damn-good martinis are the star of the show. (CS)

(309 Chem. du Bord-du-Lac-Lakeshore)

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New beginning

BY DAVE MACINTYRE

When one metaphorical door closes, another opens. This could nicely sum up the journey Eve Parker Finley took to complete her new LP *In the End*, dropping on Feb. 9.

Having grown up playing classical music (her parents are both classical musicians themselves), the multi-hyphenate Montrealer moved here from the 3,300-population town of Campbellford, ON (near Peterborough) in 2011 to study sociology and gender studies at McGill. Since then, she's accomplished a whole lot in the worlds of music, comedy, social media and beyond.

Meeting with Finley at a Rosemont café, she's clearly in disbelief that release time is finally around the corner. She even lets out a scream when asked how she feels about the album's impending release, considering she'd begun writing it back in March 2020.

"I can't believe it's the start of so many people's journey with it, and it feels like it's the end of mine!" she says, laughing.

Finley began work on *In the End* within the first couple of days of the pandemic, and also moved into her first apartment alone while on burnout leave from work.

After quitting her job, Eve found herself with plenty of time on her hands, which she spent making improvisational loops for her music — loops that would later evolve into songs heard on *In the End*.

One day, she got a text from friend/fellow musician Nick Schofield, who thought some of the loops were good enough for a new album. "We started talking about it. We got a grant together," she continues. "He came on as producer. We had these phone calls every week for a year sending stuff back and forth, working on the songs."

Later recorded at Hotel2Tango and a complex in the Laurentians (the latter arranged by PHI Centre as a residency), *In the End* is finally ready to be unleashed — four years later. The album — which she describes as "fun indie pop songs, introspective mid-tempo bangers... and a few more contemporary classical ambient moments" — was even in the back of Finley's mind while making its predecessor, *Chrysalia*, released in December 2020. Still, Finley feels she's experienced a tremendous amount of artistic growth between albums.

"I feel like I've learned so many things about what I want my sound to be. I worked on singing a lot, which I was super nervous about doing for that first album. Also, bringing a producer in this time and letting go of that role a little bit was so scary, but so generative. I really feel like we went in a new direction, and found some new sounds."

In the End's lead single is "The Mirror," a swirling introduction to the album that, funnily enough, Finley says doesn't feel like a "classic" single compared with other tracks. Still, it's a special song for her in that it bridges her past work with this new era.

Though "The Mirror" is heavily tied to classical music, Finley also drew inspiration from Hans Zimmer-esque film and TV scores while making it. She's done a series on her socials pairing the track with various TV show openings. "I just really want to create this cinematic, melancholic, optimistic world," she says.

Part of why the song exists in the first place is thanks to Finley's therapist, whom she credits in the album's liner



notes. "We were having a session that was really exploring difficulties with dysphoria, and the stress and anxiety of it," she says. "She was like, 'Have you ever tried writing this down?' Right after that therapy session, I pulled out a notebook and wrote the words to this whole song in two seconds."

Adding those lyrics to a chord progression she was already working on fit like a glove, forming the song's core before adding orchestral violins ("I wanted that moody, introspective, safe texture," she explains).

Therapy has impacted Finley's music-making in a number of ways, most directly in terms of both content and her approach to performing. "I still struggle a lot with feelings of inadequacy," she admits.

"It's so hard to be like, 'Yes, I can be an artist, and I want to make things and share them with people, and ask them to engage with it.' My work with her really helped me figure out how to do that in a way that doesn't feel like you're feeding an evil ego, or not getting stuck on the 'Who am I?' question."

While first writing the album, Eve figured it would be about pandemic isolation, given the global situation at the time. But as months of staying home and social distancing passed by with no foreseeable end, she knew people wouldn't want to be reminded of it, and neither did she.

Three and a half years is plenty of time for one to make some breakthroughs with self-discovery. For Finley, that included discovering she could pursue an interest in comedy. She started browsing TikTok during the pandemic's onset and that scrolling habit snowballed into creating her own

hilarious content. She now boasts more than 75,000 monthly views on the platform.

Finley is someone who wears many hats in general: aside from music, comedy and TikTok, she's the symposium director at POP Montreal and hosts *Ten-Minute Topline* on CBC Music. All of this sounds like it could be a recipe for eventual burnout — she does, after all, have a song called "Anthem for a Burnt Out Girl" — but Finley manages it by not focusing on the same thing for too long.

"The way my brain works, a day in the life when I'm working is I'll be working on the computer on something, and then 20 minutes later, I'll need to play the piano and sing. Then 20 minutes later, I'll work on a comedy thing or a TikTok, and then cycle through those things. I've never been someone who enjoys doing one thing and concentrating on it. I love having a mix of stuff."

As for whether *In the End* has brought Finley closer to where she wants to be in her music career, she says there's still a way to go. "There's so much left to do. Being a musician is exhausting!

"I'm a person who's very ambitious and chronically disappointed. (laughs) I always want to figure out what the next level is. It's very hard, especially right now... There are definitely lots of things left on my career bucket list; a bunch of things I've checked off these past couple of years. But there's lots left I want to do, and am excited to try."

→ Eve Parker Finley launches *In the End* at PHI Centre (407 St-Pierre) on Saturday, Feb. 10, show 8 p.m., \$20/\$25, all ages

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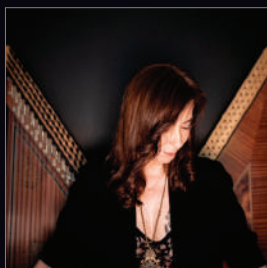
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Nodmie Plante

BY DAVE MACINTYRE

Gulfer have spent nearly a decade molding themselves into perhaps Montreal's biggest emo/math rock success story.

Their fourth album, *Third Wind* (released via Topshelf Records), shows the band building upon that sound while leaning toward more melodic indie rock. Guitarist/vocalist Joey Therriault and bassist/vocalist Dave Mitchell are very happy with the finished product. "It's the most excited I've been for a record of ours to come out," Therriault says.

Though many of *Third Wind*'s songs were written during the pandemic, Therriault — who joined Gulfer in 2016 — doesn't consider it a "pandemic record." "The only way I think the pandemic had an impact on it is maybe that we were writing from home a little bit more," says Therriault. "There was a lot more demoing, and songs came to the band a little bit more realized than they did in the past."

Therriault didn't start becoming a key member of the band's songwriting process until their 2020 self-titled album, writing half of that LP (he only wrote one song for its predecessor, 2018's *Dog Bless*). *Third Wind* has his fingerprints all over the finished product — this is the first Gulfer album where Therriault is truly at the forefront as both a singer and songwriter, having written a majority of the album himself.

For a band known partly for their complex song structures, Midwest emo-ish guitar noodling and unorthodox time signatures, a stronger focus on verse-chorus-verse-chorus structures than their earlier material is hugely evident on *Third Wind*.

«I'm so engrossed in it that it's hard for me to step out and think about it," Therriault says, "but when an outside party is like, 'There's a way more traditional song structure and focus on choruses,' that's a really interesting development for us as a band."

Gulfer's 2020 LP was self-titled due to the band not being able to agree on a name. When asked why *Third Wind* was such an easy title to land on by comparison, Mitchell says it was a reflection of the band's overarching narrative. In late 2015, two members of Gulfer left abruptly, followed by Mitchell going on an extensive tour with another band he was in. "There was this period where we weren't sure if or how we would continue on as a band," he says.

That was when the band suddenly landed an opportunity to open for PUP for their album launch in Toronto, as well

as a European tour offer including a placement at a British festival. After Therriault and Daoust filled the vacant slots, Gulfer were back in business. This was the band's "second wind," as it were.

"For a number of reasons, two years ago, we were thinking of calling it quits or taking a break," adds Mitchell (who also works for Blue Skies Turn Black). "Then we got another crazy tour offer that we felt like we couldn't pass up. [We thought,] 'Let's do this tour, then maybe we'll take a break after that.'"

"All of a sudden, we have this whole record written and recorded. We haven't really thought about taking a break in any capacity since. These songs felt like they inadvertently gave the band a third wind — a third boost of energy, a third identity, a third raison d'être. I thought it was really important to communicate that in the album title, because it felt really significant and important to me."

"Motive" was the first song Therriault wrote for the album, written during the first day of COVID lockdown. Though they'd written songs after that which had been released sooner, the band wanted to treat "Motive" with more care, as it had shapeshifted greatly since it was first put to paper. "It was written, but it wasn't written," says Therriault. "It had to be taken apart and put back together."

Other songs like "Clean" and "Cherry Seed" came together relatively fast, while "No Brainer" and "Talk All Night" were among the last tunes written for the album. The band even went up to Therriault's cottage in Kazabazua (north of Gatineau) to cut some of the tracks for an album that winds up sounding a bit closer to Weezer and Yo La Tengo than to American Football or TTNG. ("Our label keeps calling it shoegaze!" says Mitchell.)

However one chooses to classify the tracks on *Third Wind*, Mitchell sees Therriault and Ford as taking influence from artists outside the emo/math rock sphere for this album. "As we progress, we're doing a more and more interesting job of finding that unique voice of blending the mathy emo stuff and the indie rock stuff," he continues.

"It's really exciting. I can't think of many other bands who come from that kind of math rock/emo world who are able to maintain that identity while still eliciting comparisons to Yo La Tengo. It's pretty damn cool if we can pull that off."

Perhaps it's fitting that their newer material leans further away from complex noodling and more toward straightforward song structures, as Therriault has said in previous interviews that he feels Gulfer "stick out like a sore thumb" in the Montreal music scene. Given how this city has

typically been far more of an indie rock hotbed than an emo one, it's easy to feel that way when it seems like so few other local bands are making the same kind of music compared with a city like Chicago or Philadelphia.

"This might be a weird thing to say, but I don't even know if we fit in the genre we're in," Mitchell says. "Our two songwriters (are) maybe more informed by shoegaze, slacker rock, slowcore and indie rock, versus a lot of emo bands who just love Modern Baseball. Certainly in Montreal, I don't think we fit in. But when I think about it, there are only a handful of bands in the world that I even think we fit in with sonically."

As far as how much *Third Wind* represents the band's evolution compared with their 2015 debut, Therriault — who wasn't in the band for that first album — sees that growth as coming partly through the album's production and sonic arrangements.

"We're doing a lot of things that were not done on any previous Gulfer record," he says. "Using Auto-Tune, the way we layer harmonies. Acoustic guitar's a big one on this. Vocal effects, pitching things, running them backwards and synth. A lot of things we never really made room for, because the songs were previously really dense. Here, we let things be a little bit more spacey."

Though the band members have work and family priorities — not to mention financial constraints and a lack of energy to travel in vans and sleep on floors at their age — that make it more difficult to tour, Mitchell and Therriault look back fondly on when Gulfer toured Japan in 2018.

"I don't know if it's the biggest draw (we've had) necessarily, but I remember being blown away by the number of people who knew our music and were showing up there," says Therriault.

With regards to plans for 2024, the band intends on recording "a bunch" of new material. This is in keeping with the band's prolific nature, as they'd started their 2020 self-titled album while still finishing 2018's *Dog Bless*.

"If you can imagine the shift from the previous record to this one, (the new songs) are even further sonically," says Therriault. "But it's still a mixed bag. There's a bit of everything on there. (We'll) record that, and then just keep writing more."

→ Gulfer launch *Third Wind* with openers Spite House and Dresser at la Sotterenea (4848 St-Laurent, basement) on April 6, 8:30 p.m.

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:hammer of the mods

BY JOHNSON CUMMINS

I'm not going to tart it up for you fine, furry folks: February absolutely sucks.

The constant spectrum of greys seems overpowering as it all too quickly shrouds us in pitch black as temperatures plummet to ridiculous depths.

Having said that, most of us have finally made a dent into credit card bills from the holidays and cabin fever starts poking us in the ribs. The second month of the year is when most Montrealers (who don't snowboard) finally admit defeat and step away from binge-watching Netflix. To further entice you and drag you into the subzero temps is the always great Taverne Tour, which returns again this year and will absolutely take over a hefty chunk of the Plateau from Feb. 8 to 10. Although most of the truly sweet shows this month are happening under the Taverne Tour banner, there are still some pretty rad gigs off the beaten path to get you braving the bullshit that is the mid-winter blues.

On Friday, Feb. 9, Taverne Tour is on its sophomore night and really starts getting lit with a couple of barnstormers, starting off with Sub Pop's sweet trio Sweeping Promises with Dana and Feeling Figures at Sala (4848 St-Laurent, show 8 p.m., \$25). If you

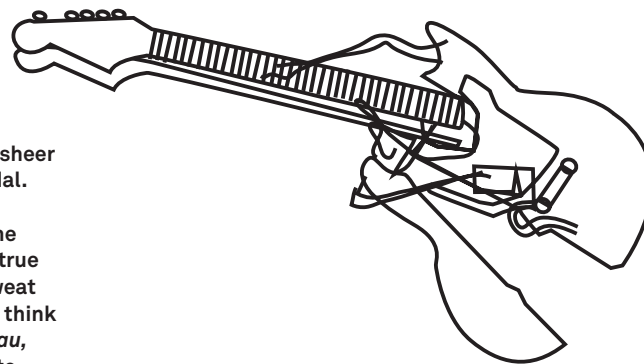
swoon for the croon you can't go wrong with the sheer lung power of Promises' lead bellow Lira Mondal.

On the flippity-flop of Friday night, la Tulipe is the swinging shindig where you can catch tried and true garage legend Jon Spencer, who will put the sweat on the walls with localizers Population II. If you think rock 'n' roll has relic'd, think again. (4530 Papineau, Feb. 9, show 8 p.m., \$34.99). (If you were hoping to squeeze into le Ministère to catch one of our true local treasures, TEKE::TEKE with Pantayo and Samwoy, you are unfortunately fucked without a kiss as the gig is long sold out. Bumeroo!)

The final night for Taverne Tour slams shut, starting with the king of power pop Paul Collins' Beat when he lets the Rickenbacker clang and shimmer with the rock 'n' roll swagger of Dangereens. This is all happening at l'Esco, so bring a tambourine (4461 St-Denis, Feb. 10, show 10 p.m., \$25.17).

Local hypnotists Suuns will provide the hairpin turns and motorik groove at Sala with Activity and Dahl (4848 St-Laurent, Feb. 10, show 8 p.m., \$25). Second Ben Shemie gig in a week! Take that James Brown!!!

Finally, the band that I can't believe is not immense yet, Pypy, will put the punk back into post-punk at le Ministère with Hot Garbage and Shunk. If I were you, I would grip tix as soon as you read this as this will



definitely sell out. (4521 St-Laurent, Feb. 10, show 9 p.m., \$25.17).

There is still plenty happening after the Taverne Tour pulls up stakes for another year, but if you were hoping to see Municipal Waste with the thrash-tastic Ghoul, Necrot and Dead Heat on Feb. 20 at the totally metal approved venue Foufounes, this thing sold out so long ago, you were still in short pants.

You should be excited to see Militarie Gun at Foufs on Feb. 17, but you should really be bursting at the seams to see Spiritual Cramp, who take up the sweat slot for that show. Be there early to watch them wipe the floor with the closer as support acts Pool Kids and Spaced look on stunned. 87 Ste-Catherine E., show 7:30 p.m., \$30.20

Current Obsession: The Body, Christs, Redeemers
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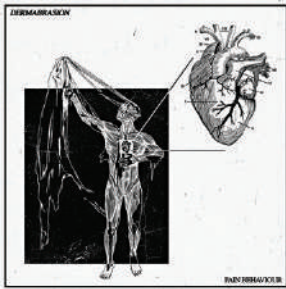
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Album reviews



Dermabrasion, *Pain Behaviour* (Hand Drawn Dracula)
Pull out your finest blackened attire from the cobwebbed attic and crack out the foundation, because we have a new electric goth album from Toronto duo Dermabrasion. *Pain Behaviour* follows the darker post-punk, goth rock sounds of bands like Sisters of Mercy, Jack Off Jill, and the Birthday Party,

but Dermabrasion has modernized the sinister yet grooving sounds of what they call “death rock n’ roll.” Right from the opening song “Halberdier,” the haunting and theatrical vocals of Kat McGouran (who also slays on bass) are, yes, similar to Siouxsie and the Banshees albums like *Juju*, but sometimes take a more scratching, industrial *Lingua Ignota* sound on songs like “Goblin Dance” or straight crust punk on “Proving Ground.” Backed by the buzzing and in-the-red guitar work of Adam Bernhardt (who has nailed the goth rock tone) Dermabrasion covers a lot of ground on *Pain Behaviour* as each song plummets into the next, giving you no time for a reprieve from the bass-heavy nightmare. The outro of “Betrayal Moon” is straight carnage, while “Sleepless” almost dives into no-wave mania and “Psychic Event” screams to be played in a shabby, lightless club. It’s hard to find any faults during *Pain Behaviour*. If an atmospheric goth rock record is what they wanted, they were ridiculously successful. 9/10 Trial Track: “Betrayal Moon” Stephan Boissonneault

The Smile, *Wall of Eyes* (XL)
2022’s *A Light for Attracting Attention* was an audition by Thom Yorke and Jonny Greenwood for the Smile to become



post-punk shape-shifts into a dizzying journey of strings, ride cymbals and sheer paranoia. That said, the eight-minute penultimate track and lead single “Bending Hectic” remains the album’s centrepiece. *Wall of Eyes* likely won’t win too many converts over (*The King of Limbs* vibes are strong at times), but the Smile have very much avoided the sophomore slump with an eight-track album that builds upon their debut while Yorke, Greenwood and drummer Tom Skinner become a sublimely oiled sonic machine. 8.5/10 Trial Track: “Bending Hectic” (Dave MacIntyre)



Ducks Ltd., *Harm's Way* (Royal Mountain)
The Toronto jangle pop songwriting duo of Ducks Ltd.’s Tom McGreevy and Evan Lewis have really hit their stride on the sophomore LP, *Harm’s Way*. A Ducks Ltd. song, building off the treble-heavy U.K. indie eras, always seems to have a momentum to it; you

feel a sense of gleeful abandon wanting to run towards something. The opening chord of “Hollowed Out” signals this need to move as the song morphs into something you might hear at the end of a John Hughes film. Except for a few brief instances, the music always has a jumpy and major-sounding tone, juxtaposed by some somewhat cynical and pessimistic lyrics from McGreevy about the world and human faults. The hammer-ons of “Cathedral City” ring out true, begging for constant head bobs, while “Train Full of Gasoline” feels like the poppier side of the Cure. The title track echoes with a prideful resonance, backed by catchy lead guitar lines, feeling like flipping through a photobook of vague memories. 8/10 Trial Track: “Train Full of Gasoline” (Stephan Boissonneault)



Ty Segall, *Three Bells* (Drag City)
It’s impossible to know exactly which form of Ty Segall we’re going to get now that he’s 15 albums in — the plaid-wearing fuzz riff wizard, softer acoustic rock alchemist or experimental synth crooner. Since his 2014 album *Manipulator*, which kind of signaled his shift into more exploratory waters, I’d say he’s been getting more exploratory and bored, smashing guitar genres together in his haunted mansion of psychedelic mirrors. So with *Three Bells*, we get bits of all of the soup that makes up Ty Segall, along with his Freedom Band backing him up. It’s at times spider-like with the acoustic riffs, droney on the fuzz guitar and sometimes a face-melting, head-smashed-in labyrinth of guitar riffery. Ty’s vocals are as ethereal as ever on tracks like “The Bell,” “Void” and “My Room,” lyrically about his love of isolation and being alone, escaping a busy, scary world. Some points feel like his *Meltd*, *Slaughterhouse* days, and others, more like the chiller vibes on his pandemic albums, *Harmonizer* or *Hello, Hi*. The album is a whopping 16 songs, maybe a bit longer than it needs to be, so be prepared for a journey. 7/10 Trial Track: “My Room” (Stephan Boissonneault)

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Problem child



Emily Hampshire and Maddie Ziegler in *Fitting In*

BY JUSTINE SMITH

Molly McGlynn's pitch-dark coming-of-age comedy opens with a quote from *Jennifer's Body*. "Hell is a teenage girl" sets the tone for a general atmosphere of malaise for the audience. It's a quote with a double edge, one that describes the nightmare teenage girls inflict on each other and the world, and the way the world inflicts horror on young girls just trying to survive.

Based, in part, on the director's experiences, *Fitting In* is a typical teen movie in many ways. Lindy (Maddie Ziegler) navigates love and friendship in high school, but she soon learns she suffers from MRKH Syndrome, a rare condition that affects the female reproductive system and is characterized by an underdeveloped vagina and uterus. If most teenagers feel the pressure to be normal, Lindy is confronted with a genetic reality that forces her to get creative and redefine the hell of teenage girlhood.

In the film, the Canadian darling best known these days for her role as Stevie on *Schitt's Creek* — Emily Hampshire — plays Lindy's mom Rita. She's a great mom, perpetually worried that she's not enough. She's passionate and frantic, a matriarchal force that yearns to be defined beyond her social roles. It's a performance that could have been passive, rooted in stereotypes, but instead feels embodied, brimming with interiority and a frantic "mom" energy that challenges the toneless matriarchal stock roles we often see in teen films.

Hampshire was born in Montreal and began her acting career here. Her first major role was in an episode of *Are You Afraid of the Dark?* She's been a staple of Canadian TV with roles in iconic CanCon programs like *Made in Canada*, *12 Monkeys* (the series), *Ruby Gloom* and *The Rig*. She's had an equally successful film career and has worked with Jacob Tierney, Xavier Dolan, David Cronenberg and Darren Aronofsky.

With boundless enthusiasm and a good dose of humour, she spoke with *Cult MTL* about her role in *Fitting In*, teen comedies and growing up in Montreal.

Justine Smith: *Fitting In* is a truly singular teen movie that captures a very specific experience with a dark sense of humour. What was it about the script and the character of Rita that first spoke to you?

Emily Hampshire: I agree. This movie, and I love that you said it, is so singular. What really got me was that I knew this was Molly McGlynn, the director's personal story. We call it a coming-of-age traumedy. What I loved about the script was that she was able to tell her personal trauma with gallows humour. There's this part where Lindy is looking for anyone else who has been diagnosed with MRKH Syndrome, and the only person she can find is Hitler's wife. That was the moment I was like, "Oh, I'm in!"

JS: It struck me that it's the type of film I would have responded to when I was young. It was rare that I'd watch a film that would "capture" my teen experience. What kind of teen films did you respond to when you were a teen?

EH: When I was young, there was *Clueless*, but I didn't really connect with it. I connected more with older movies like *The Goonies* and the one with Ponyboy, *The Outsiders*. I'm not a good person to ask! I was in a generation between teen movies. There were the John Hughes movies before me, and then after, there was *She's All That* and *10 Things I Hate About You*. We were more grungy with Winona Ryder films like *Reality Bites* and the one where she's in a hospital and depressed, *Girl Interrupted*. I really connected with *Girl Interrupted*.

JS: How did growing up in Montreal shape your career, if it did at all?

EH: I would not be an actor had I not gone to Queen of Angels, even though I didn't want to go because I went to a co-ed elementary school, and everyone went to St. Thomas. And I wanted to go there, too. My mom wanted me to go to Queen of Angels, and I was so mad because I didn't want to wear a uniform and be in an all-girls school.

It ended up being the greatest thing that could have ever happened to me. I had teachers there who stayed after school and read to me because I didn't know at the time, but I was dyslexic. I just thought I didn't like reading. Then I had my vice principal, who I still speak to. I had a tiny part in our high school play in Sec 1 and she came up to me. She was like, "You were good. You were really funny." From that

moment on, I was going to be an actress! I made a contract with myself: I would spend eight hours a day on acting and give myself one hour to do anything else. I went full-on. I had my first part in Montreal in *Are You Afraid of the Dark?*

JS: I loved that show. I watched every episode growing up.

EH: That was my first role, and I was playing the part of the girlfriend. My whole part in the episode was to kiss the boy. I went up to the director and asked, "What kind?" I was really trying to be professional. Like, "What kind of kiss would you like? Do you want a French kiss? Full tongue?" And he must have been *horrified*. What's funny is, I was talking to Maddie about this, and how she had an intimacy coordinator for (*Fitting In*). We never had intimacy coordinators before. So, you had an 11-year-old asking the director how much tongue he wanted. It's just so interesting how much the industry has changed for women in the time I've been in it. In a movie like this, you have a female director, and we had a female DOP [Nina Djacic]. We call them cameramen, like a *camera-man*! It's not expected to be a woman.

But, back to Montreal. My first film role was with Geneviève Bujold. I played her daughter in this movie called *Dead Innocent*. She took me under her wing. I went to L.A. and stayed at her place in Malibu. It was my first time seeing the ocean. All my firsts were in Montreal, and had I been better in French, I would have stayed there, but I couldn't pass as a French-speaking actor. So I went to Hollywood North, Toronto!

JS: There's a really rich dynamic between all the actors in *Fitting In*. How did you guys make these relationships work so well?

EH: There wasn't time for rehearsals. There never is in independent film. Molly had Maddie and me over for dinner before we started shooting just to meet and hang out, which was a great idea. I was nervous about playing a mother because I feel like I don't have a maternal instinct. But I just felt instantly, "I must protect this girl at all costs." She's so special. I never wanted kids before, but now I want a Maddie. I just want Maddie Ziegler in the form she is now to be my daughter. She's such a great kid, and her performance in this movie is remarkable. I don't think people know how good an actress she is, and the movie is such a great showcase of that.

→ *Fitting In* opens in Montreal theatres on Friday, Feb. 2.

On Screen



How to Have Sex



Io Capitano



Mã Sài Gòn



Argylle

BY JUSTINE SMITH

As *Madame Web* (Feb. 16) star Dakota Johnson calls shooting a film on blue screen “absolutely psychotic” and insists she’s not sure if it will be good or not, it’s hard to believe that the film (and its underwhelming trailer) will be able to inject new life into the slowly dying superhero subgenre. Then again, the all-star cast of incredibly meme-able stars (including Johnson), rounded out by Sydney Sweeney, Adam Scott and Zosia Mamet, might surprise us yet!

If you’ve been on Twitter... erm, I mean X, this past month and checked out any viral tweet, you’ve likely encountered the hard-working *Bob Marley: One Love* (Feb. 14) social team trying to will the film into relevancy. The biopic starring Kingsley Ben-Adir (*One Night in Miami*) and directed by Reinaldo Marcus Green (*King Richard*) portrays how Bob Marley became the biggest reggae artist in history.

It’s unclear to me if *Argylle* (Feb. 2) is being memed to oblivion all over Film Twitter and Letterboxd because it’s so good or because it’s so bad. The film is about an introverted spy novelist who is drawn into the activities of a sinister underground syndicate and features an all-star cast including, but not limited to, Dua Lipa, Henry Cavill, Bryce Dallas Howard, Sam Rockwell, Catherine O’Hara, Samuel L. Jackson, John Cena and Richard E. Grant.

The Oscars go live on March 10, giving you plenty of time to catch up in February. Italy’s Best International Feature Film selection, *Io Capitano* (Feb. 16), hits the big screen mid-month. From director Matteo Garrone (*Gomorrah*), it’s a Homeric fairy tale that charts the adventurous journey of two young boys, Seydou and Moussa, who leave Dakar to reach Europe. Japan’s official Oscar submission, *Perfect Days* (Feb. 16) directed by German filmmaker Wim Wenders, is also coming out this month. The crowd-pleasing film is about a janitor in Japan who drives between jobs listening to rock music. At the end of the month, you can go to Cinéma du Parc to watch all the Oscar-nominated shorts, including Quebec’s own *Invincible* (Feb. 23).

While it didn’t make the final cut for an Oscar nod, *Tótem* (Feb. 2) was Mexico’s nomination and one of the year’s most critically acclaimed films. It follows a seven-year-old girl named Sol who’s spending the day at her grandfather’s home for a surprise party for Sol’s father, Tonatiuh. As daylight fades, Sol understands that her world is about to change dramatically.

If you hate the Oscars and only really love movies that are too good for American award shows, a handful of fantastic festival fare is finally coming to Montreal theatres this month. *How to Have Sex* (Feb. 9) was a feature debut and a big Cannes favourite. The visceral coming-of-age film (shot by Montrealer Nicolas Canniccion) is about three British teenage girls who go on a rites-of-passage holiday — drinking, clubbing and hooking up in what should be the best summer of their lives. Mads Mikkelsen stars in the Danish film *The Promised Land* (Feb. 9), a historical drama about Captain Ludvig von Kahlen, who pursued his lifelong dream: to make the heath bring him wealth and honour. You can also see the magnificent *About Dry Grasses* (Feb. 23), the mesmerizing but darkly funny

Turkish film about a young teacher who hopes to be transferred to Istanbul after four years of mandatory service in a remote village but is accused of inappropriate contact by students.

For some great #CanCon (endorsed by Cult MTL’s screen team), you have your pick of *Mã Sài Gòn* (Feb. 2) and *Fitting In* (Feb. 2). Khoa Lê directed the dreamy *Mã Sài Gòn*, an intimate documentary about members of Saigon’s LGBTQ community as they struggle to find their place and reconnect with their families in a city where social norms still reject them. *Fitting In*, directed by Montrealer Molly McGlynn, is one of the most fiercely original coming-of-age films in recent years. The hilariously dark but touching film is about a teenage girl (played by Maddie Ziegler) who gets diagnosed with a reproductive condition that upends her plans to have sex and propels her into exploring unusual methods to have a sex life.

There are slim pickings for audiences looking for something to watch this Valentine’s Day. Your only “conventional” choice is *Float* (Feb. 9). After nearly drowning, a young woman unexpectedly falls for the small-town lifeguard who rescued her. Based on the novel by Kate Marchant.

This month’s other releases include another Cannes film, *Le règne animal* (Feb. 9), starring Romain Duris, Paul Kircher and Adèle Exarchopoulos, a sci-fi adventure about a futuristic world where humans are mutating into animals. Ethan Coen (sans his brother Joel) directed *Drive-Away Dolls* (Feb. 23) (initially titled *Drive Away Dykes*), a comedy caper starring Margaret Qualley as Jamie, an uninhibited free spirit bemoaning yet another breakup with a girlfriend, and her timid friend Marian who desperately needs to loosen up. In search of a fresh start, the two embark on an impromptu road trip to Tallahassee, but things quickly go awry when they cross paths with a group of inept criminals.

Black cultures in the spotlight



Fimo Mitchell

Kevin Calixte

BY SAVANNAH STEWART

It may be called Black History Month, but there’s so much more to it than the name suggests.

“It’s not just history. Black History Month is a celebration of Black culture,” says Fimo Mitchell, English-language spokesperson for Quebec’s Black History Month 2024 edition.

“It gives us time to examine where we are, honestly, as individuals, as a community, and what needs to be changed,” says the meditation teacher, writer and podcast host.

This 33rd edition of BHM Montreal, organized by the Round Table on Black History Month, features dozens of events across Montreal and beyond, events that highlight the diversity of Black history and Black cultures.

“People will speak about the Black community as a monolith, but it’s very inaccurate,” says Mitchell. “Culturally, we have a lot of differences. I don’t think that has to be a problem. I think that’s rich. The question is, can we fit and share our different cultures, our differences, celebrate that and figure out how we can harness and bring all that together to move us forward as a collective?”

It would seem this year’s Black History Month schedule responds with a resounding “Yes!” There is something for everyone to get excited about.

The festivities kick off with a gala opening event on Feb. 1 celebrating this year’s 12 laureates chosen by the Round Table for excellence in their respective fields. This year’s laureates were photographed by Kevin Calixte to appear in the yearly calendar produced and distributed for Black History Month.

It’s Mitchell’s turn to be in the calendar this year as one of

the 12 laureates being honoured. Two years ago, it was his sister who was featured in it.

“I’ve always had the calendar for as long as it’s been around. It’s funny to finally be in it. It’s pretty cool,” he says with a laugh.

Following the opening ceremony, the programming kicks into high gear. The next thing on Mitchell’s list of must-sees is the viewing of the film *SIRA* by Apolline Traoré, on Feb. 2 at Cinéma Beaubien, Feb. 3 at the Cinémathèque Québécoise and Feb. 4 at Cinéma Public.

The movie follows the young Fulani girl Sira as she seeks revenge for her rape and the killing of her fellow tribe members. The film won the Audience Award at the 2023 Berlin International Film Festival and will represent Burkina Faso at the 2024 Oscars.

Another noteworthy event is the yearly blood drive seeking blood donors in support of people suffering from sickle cell anemia, a group of inherited red blood cell disorders that is most commonly seen in Black communities. This year’s blood drive will be held on Feb. 10, at CÉDA (2515 Delisle).

“The most important (event) is the blood drive, just because we need more Black donors,” says Mitchell. Still, he acknowledges it’s hard to get excited about the ordeal of donating blood — “I can’t say that’s the thing I’m looking forward to.”

More than a reflection on what was and what is, Mitchell hopes Black History Month can be used as an opportunity to “live and create a reality where we don’t need an enemy. We’re self-sufficient. We’re healing. We’re thriving.”

MORE BHM PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Diggers – Black Theatre Workshop

A co-production between Black Theatre Workshop and Prairie Theatre Exchange, *Diggers* is the story of three gravediggers doing their best in a difficult period of illness, increased workload and less community support through struggle.

Segal Centre for Performing Arts (5170 Côte-Ste-Catherine), Feb. 1–17

FRKY-LISTEN

In this free event, African and Black diaspora music is on full display, with numerous promoters, DJs, and influencers invited to take part in this musical celebration, showcasing the sounds that marked them.

La Sotterenea (4848 St-Laurent, basement), Feb. 3, 8–10:30 p.m.

Screening and Discussion – *Afrodiaspora Global*

Afrodiaspora Global is an English-language documentary tracing filmmaker and anthropologist Sheila S Walker’s research into African diaspora communities around the world. After the screening will be a discussion with Walker as well as Khadiatou Sarr, a doctoral student at the Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM) specializing in international law.

J. Armand Bombardier Theatre at the McCord Stewart Museum (690 Sherbrooke W.), Feb. 14

The Afro-descendant History of Saint-Henri

Historian Dorothy Williams will present a lecture on the history of Saint-Henri’s Black community, highlighting cultural institutions that were important to the community settled in the area that has since become known as Little Burgundy, and the notable people who lived here.

Pointe-à-Callière (350 Place Royale), Feb. 22

→ See the complete BHM Montreal program at moishistoiredesnoirs.com.



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: weird era



BY SRUTI ISLAM

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

Who's Afraid of Gender by Judith Butler

I am unlearning a lot (as we all should), and this text by the always foundational Butler is a perfect if not necessary gateway to unlearning about trans oppression. If you've ever sat through an undergraduate degree, you've already been schooled by Butler (they who reign supreme on gender theory). Readers will be confronted with the diverse social anxieties that spark so much fear about trans identity, and in addressing them, Butler refreshingly evens the ground between a skeptic of trans history and history itself. For those who see trans identities as a threat towards contemporary feminism, Butler elicits a sort of dubious parallel — aren't women under attack in both instances here? Butler identifies trans religious anxiety in its determinism for reproductive social order, and then fairly asks how well reproductive

social order has been working for us historically anyway. This is not a book about being right, but a starting point to the question of how many ways one could be wrong.

Small Fires by Rebecca May Johnson

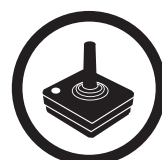
If you're a home cook and a romantic, then this one's for you. Luckily, I am both. During the pandemic, when the world shut down, and my friends felt so far away, I found myself a) bored and b) lonely. And because the only thing that motivates me in a day is my next meal, I took up the habit of cooking. I fell in love. I loved the sizzles and cracks, the way unexpected textures melted into sauces (anchovies!), the lick of heat in spice and the way chicken fat could base an endless variety of delicious sauces. And then the loneliness kicked in, so I started what my friends now lovingly refer to as, "Sruti Dinners." Rebecca May Johnston writes poetically and more significantly, emotionally, of a similar stirring. She identifies the reader as a specific "you" (someone she so obviously *loves*), and writes of the ways in which her heart bursts in the kitchen. She speaks of the magic of *change*, a concept so key to heat, fat and acid, and of the historical ways this loving act has been domesticated to something as silly as, "women's work." Read if you love food and your friends.

Alphabetical Diaries by Sheila Heti

Heti fans unite. Our Canadian legend has done it again. Though, I must admit, as her bibliography expands, and as a former bookseller, I find readers are pretty touchy everytime she releases a book. "I loved this one." "That one was not for me." "I don't know..." And I think the win here is that Heti is so devoted to her artistry, it seems obvious enough to me that the writer never wants to write the same book twice. Though there is a consistent permeating texture of auto-fiction, genre wise, no two books share the same form. *Alphabetical Diaries* exhibits this most directly. Over the course of the last 13 years, Heti has been organizing phrases from her personal diary into alphabetical order, and I still can't believe how wildly readable it has turned out to be — a collection of phrases bulked together, individuated by chapters. Given Heti's brilliantly expansive philosophical mind, each personal meditation, although separated from its context, still sits heavy with the reader. "How much I enjoy pleasure," begins the excerpt on the back jacket. I mean, where to start even there!

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

: game jam



BY NATALIA YANCHAK

Looking for a new game to play? Need to beef up your Steam wishlist? Two events happening in early February will make this easier.

Until Feb. 5, the annual Quebec Games Celebration Steam sale is the ideal way to discover new titles that were developed in this province. From AAA to solo devs, this year's sale features nearly 250 games. The adjacent DemoNights livestream event runs Feb. 1 to 3 and showcases 15 recently released or soon-to-be-released indie games presented directly by their developers on the Loto-Québec Twitch channel.

These events are a boon for visibility: DemoNights boasts over 200k unique viewers, with the Steam sale page garnering over 1 million impressions. Some studios see thousands of wishlists and a huge peak in sales as a result.

I spoke with two founders of these initiatives: Jason Della Rocca, co-founder of Execution Labs and GamePlay Space (RIP) and a pillar of the Montreal game dev community as a game business consultant, investor, funding advisor and ecosystem strategist; and Chris Chancey, CEO of ManaVoid Entertainment,

co-founder of Indie Asylum and chairman of the board of directors at la Guilde du jeu vidéo du Québec.

"We ran the first DemoNight in 2006, as part of the International Game Developer Association of Montreal," explains Della Rocca. Way back then, the community was only beginning to find its footing. "We didn't run another one until 2012 (when *Fez* premiered), but it's been run yearly since then."

The event was also more of a gala party. "Originally, it was a single-night event. It was a big celebration for local developers to show off their games. There was no Twitch stream or PR or Steam sale. It was just developers cheering on other developers."

"Then COVID hit and we couldn't do a big party night with 500+ game developers, so we transitioned to an online broadcast model. That inherently shifted the focus to a more gamer-, consumer-facing format." After both IGDA-Montreal and GamePlay Space closed down, Loto-Québec came on as a production partner. "Loto has been an unbelievably supportive and critical partner ever since!"

The Steam sale, co-founded by both Della Rocca and Chancey in 2021, rode on the wave of the new, online-only edition of DemoNight. The sale grew into a complementary event, allowing more visibility for

Quebec studios. Incubator and studio co-op Indie Asylum stepped in two years ago and took over the sale. "It's quite a bit of work, but we're proud to be able to give back to the ecosystem," says Chancey. "Particularly for local indie studios."

"There's so much competition out there today," Chancey offers. "With over 13,000 games releasing each year on Steam, getting eyes on a project has never been harder. Having a front page regional sale of this magnitude — with AAA's and indies coming together — gives everyone a chance to shine through the noise. Steam has proven their commitment to Quebec studios and their respect for the talent we've developed in the province. They're great ambassadors for games and definitely have the community's best interest at heart."

"Quebec is one of the top five largest video game development hubs in the world and currently home to more than 290 studios across the province," Chancey adds. "The Quebec Games Celebration represents a thriving industry and gives players a look at what the local community has to offer."

"In Quebec, the bigger studios also understand they have a corporate responsibility to help the Quebec ecosystem, which has given them the opportunity to grow over the past 25 years. It's a win-win for everyone involved."



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