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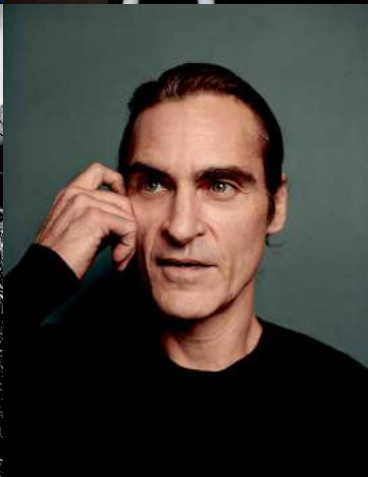
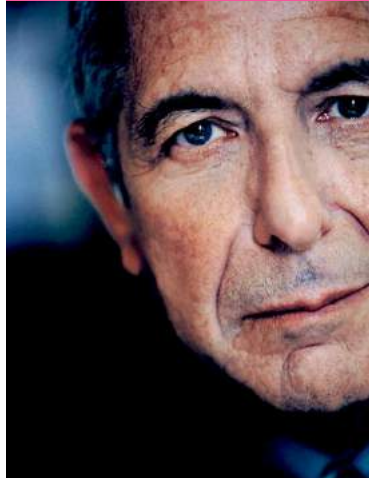
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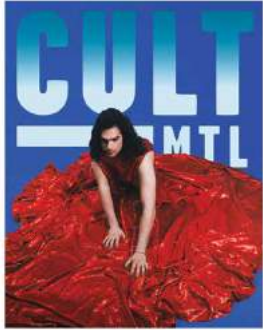
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The acclaimed Montreal-based Indigenous-Canadian tenor, composer and pianist Jeremy Dutcher is one of the scores of artists performing at the 44th edition of the Montreal International Jazz Festival from June 27 to July 6.

Cover photo by Kirk Lisaj

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## EMSB v. CAQ

BY TOULA DRIMONIS

Joe Ortona, the chair of the English Montreal School Board, recently made headlines when he pointed out that the EMSB is better at teaching French than the Quebec government. Education Ministry statistics seem to confirm his point.

Ortona, the 43-year-old trilingual Quebecer of Italian origin who's heading up the Bill 21 Supreme Court challenge, says a big part of his role as EMSB chair is fighting against the falsehood that English-speaking Quebecers aren't interested in French.

"English schools didn't have bilingual programs when I was young," he says, "so my parents enrolled me in Nesbitt, a 45-minute bus ride each way. It was important to them that I attend a school with French immersion. They wanted their kids to not only speak French but speak it well."

### FIGHTING AGAINST MISCONCEPTIONS

"It's an unfortunate perception of the English-speaking community that we're this unilingual class of people who live and socialize exclusively in the West Island," he says. "In fact, French immersion programs started in the 1960's and were pushed by English-speaking parents. It was completely voluntary. A grassroots parent-led initiative got this off the ground a full 15 years before Bill 101. Our community was the one demanding more French instruction in our schools. This idea that French needs to be imposed on us so we can adapt to Quebec's linguistic reality is a false perception, and a historical fact largely ignored."

Ortona, who attended the University of Ottawa and studied civil law, works almost exclusively in French. He suspects many Quebecers are uninformed about the amount of actual French taught within the English-language school system.

"The overwhelming majority of our kids are enrolled in either French immersion or bilingual programs," he says. "French immersion is exclusively or almost exclusively in French from kindergarten to Grade 2. Then, Grades 3 to 6, it's 50% English and 50% French. That roughly translates to 63% French instruction and 37% English instruction over seven years. Bilingual schools are 50% French and 50% English from kindergarten to Grade 6. Even schools with English core programs have 40% of class time in French."

### LEGAL CHALLENGES CONTINUE SUCCESSFULLY

The EMSB was recently successful in obtaining a stay on some of the provisions of Bill 96, meaning parts of the law will not apply to English-language school boards until a legal decision is made on the constitutionality of the bill.

In response, the CAQ government attempted to challenge the ruling, but Court of Appeal Justice Geneviève Marcotte rejected it and upheld the Quebec Superior Court decision regarding Bill 96 on May 31. The injunction therefore remains in place.

"The fact that the Charter of the French Language requires English school boards to communicate exclusively in French when interacting with other English-speaking community organizations, including the QESBA and the English Parents' Committee Association of Quebec, never made any sense," said Ortona. "The decision makes it very clear that English-language school boards are an English institution, and they have the right to work and communicate in English."

The EMSB chair refers to the ruling as a "significant victory" for a community feeling increasingly scapegoated by the CAQ government's identity and language politics. "We're feeling constantly under attack, and that's because we are," he says. "In the last five years, this government has attempted to abolish school boards (the only institutions left controlled by Quebec's English-speaking community),



tried to impose arbitrary measures on who we can hire as teachers with Bill 21 and imposed further language restrictions with Bill 96."

According to him, none of these measures will do anything to change Quebec's linguistic reality. "If you have legitimate concerns about French Quebecers being 'anglicized,'" he says, "that's a problem to address with French speakers."

Implementing French courses in English CEGEPs or restricting English communication among English speakers, he says, won't affect how Quebec francophones behave. "It's not Quebec's English-speaking community — which has been in decline over the last 50 years — that's anglicizing Quebec," Ortona says. "It's Netflix, Snapchat, TikTok and cellphones with internet access. That exposure to English is anglicizing Quebec, not us."

### QUALITY EDUCATION REQUIRED

Ortona warns that punitive legislation or adding enormous bureaucratic hurdles that the community has to jump through won't change things.

The CAQ's zero-sum thinking essentially requires French Quebecers to believe that a loss for the English community is somehow a gain for them. "They're appealing to their base," he says. "If they're aggravating the English community, they must be doing something good." Ortona says the focus, instead, should be on better education.

"The quality of French education needs to be strong," he says. "Current success rates in the French public system show there's lots of work to be done."

With Quebecers' massive exposure to American culture — music, movies, social media influencers — Ortona believes it's essential that students master the language from a young age.

"We need to find ways to incentivise people to speak French rather than punish them if they choose to speak English," he says. "That won't get anyone to want to adopt Québécois culture. I don't think this government understands that at all."

Responding to an OQLF report showing the use of French among young Quebecers is in decline, Ortona says it's like "trying to change the current of the sea with a fan." "If you want a society to evolve a certain way," he says, "you need to find creative ways to make it enticing for people to adopt certain habits, a culture, or language. Otherwise, you're just going against the current, and eventually it's going to overwhelm you. Legislation isn't enough."

Ortona insists that it's not contradictory to believe the English language and culture can thrive within the English community while French thrives in Quebec. "Both can be achieved," he says.

### PART OF THE SOLUTION A

For years, the EMSB has requested money and resources to offer francisation welcome classes in the English system,

for children eligible for English education, like the French system offers. That request has consistently been denied.

"If you're coming into our system from abroad or from another province in Grade 7 and you don't speak French, you have a lot of catching up to do," he says. "Yet we're refused. As a result, these kids graduate not speaking French as well as they could and far more likely to be immersed in English culture. It makes no sense."

Ortona says the government only recently granted the EMSB permission for welcome classes for adults, "only because the French system was overwhelmed and couldn't meet the demand."

The CAQ also appears ignorant of minority-language educational rights, according to the EMSB chair. "Section 23 imposes obligations on the Quebec government to protect English-language institutions," he says. "We have constitutional protections. If you're constantly going to attack us, you have to expect that at some point we're going to fight back."

While the French school system is unquestionably a provincial jurisdiction, explains Ortona, when it comes to minority-language public education, it's a shared jurisdiction between the province and the minority community.

"English education in Quebec and French education in the ROC are not exclusive provincial jurisdictions and haven't been since the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms," he says. "Quebec's English-speaking community has a right to manage and control its institutions. The government can either accept that, and work with us when they legislate in areas of education that touch upon English school boards, or they can continue to be hostile towards us and we'll keep finding ourselves in litigation."

### A 'RADICAL' GROUP?

Reacting to the EMSB's legal pushback, Premier Francois Legault once referred to the EMSB as a "radical" group, a characterization Ortona says is unjust.

Having lived through Liberal and PQ governments and one referendum, Ortona says Quebec has never had a government so hostile towards the English-speaking community.

"This is our home," he says. "All we want to do is be contributing and accepted members of society and we don't get that feeling from the Quebec government. We're constantly vilified and used as scapegoats to score cheap political points."

"I don't think there's anything radical in wanting to be accepted and respected," he says. "Even if Quebec became independent tomorrow, we'd still continue to be a minority community that has a right to exist and to certain protections. We're not going anywhere. We're here, we're raising our families and we have to find a way to coexist respectfully."





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# New England's metropolis



BY LORRAINE CARPENTER

## Boston has tons of personality.

A lot of the things you might think about when you think about Boston, whether you know the city or not — its working class Irish roots and the accent that goes with it, Harvard University, the Kennedys, the Bruins/Red Sox/Celtics — are such strong brands that they all exist as their own worlds orbiting the city. But if you're visiting the city as a tourist, you may be surprised how little these things will be in your face — with the exception of the Kennedys, perhaps, because it's surprising how often you'll see JFK on posters, plaques, busts and statues all around town. What you will find, and where that personality carries over beyond the obvious historical touchstones, is a very vibrant city with fantastic (sea)food, excellent museums and incredible accommodations.

Being in the very blue state of Massachusetts, New England's metropolis has a familiar feel for Montrealers,

sharing a similar climate — literally as well as politically and culturally — as it's the closest major American city to Montreal (a five-hour drive or one-hour flight). Aesthetically, it's a charming town in any season, with the Boston Common park and Boston Harbor area blooming in the summertime with festival programming and family-oriented activities. The Harbor area features the Boston Tea Party Museum, the New England Aquarium and the Boston Harbor Hotel, a lovely spot to stop in for New England clam chowder and a cocktails, located next to the iconic giant American flag hanging in the Rows Wharf archway — though it had been switched up for an Irish flag when we visit back in March, right after St. Patrick's Day.

While there is no shortage of historic hotels (Omni Parker House is worth a stop as the birthplace of Parker House rolls, Boston cream pies and "scrod") and luxury accommodations in Boston (we randomly met and chatted with Boston's former mayor Kim Michelle Janey in the bar at the brand new Raffles), you can't beat the Mandarin Oriental. The Boston location of the internationally renowned hotel

brand — recently named among the best hotels in the world by the 2024 Forbes travel guide — is at once very modern (they have MOBI the robot handling contactless check-in and in-room deliveries) and classic, with the kind of vintage elegance you'll find at five-star hotels, from the lobby to the beautiful rooms and suites. Their spa offers all the services you'd expect along with free access to its steam rooms and vitality pools. And the adjacent restaurant and bar/lounge, Ramsay's Kitchen (part of Gordon Ramsay's restaurant empire), is a great go-to for twists on local favourites — the vast and varied menu includes lobster rolls, crab cakes and oysters but also a Beef Wellington, smash burger and Korean-inspired sticky pork belly bowl.

Only a few minutes' walk from the hotel, in the very central Back Bay area of Boston, is a restaurant to prioritize: Sonsie, a bistro that has been a regular haunt for locals and visiting celebs for the past 30 years. Aside from the quality of food and cocktails, the restaurant's success lies in the fact that it's got everything: the Parisian seating upfront offers a great view of Newbury Street at weekend





brunch or at buck-a-shuck oyster happy hour, while at night, the dining room's dim lighting, eye-catching paintings (which all have cocktails named after them, including the unreal Lady Chainsaw) and good selection of tunes creates a cozy nightlife atmosphere. We were told that there used to be more of a supperclub vibe in the '90s and early 2000s, after Matt Damon and Ben Affleck popularized the place (it was the site of *Good Will Hunting*-related parties), but in 2024, it's a place I wish we could bring to Montreal.

While Montreal has a famous art heist in its history, the 1972 *Skylight Caper* is nothing compared with what went down at Boston's Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in 1990. There's a fascinating four-part Netflix series dedicated to this

incident — former mayor Janey told us to watch it but I'm almost glad we didn't do that until after we visited because it's all I would have been thinking about, and it would have taken away from the pure enjoyment of the beauty of this museum. Established by Ms. Gardner in 1903, this series of magnificently designed rooms is not just about the paintings — those that remain and the 13 that are still missing (their empty frames still hang as a reminder) — but about the distinctive atmosphere of each space in the palace, which has a beautiful interior garden at its core.

A seven-minute walk away is the even more epic (but far more conventional) Boston Museum of Fine Arts, a massive edifice with a sprawling modern wing built onto the already imposing old building — together, they house 450,000 works

of art. If that's not enough walking for you, the 2.5-mile Freedom Trail connects 16 historically significant sites in the city, from churches and burial grounds to the site of the Boston Massacre.

You can't leave Boston without crossing the Charles River to Cambridge to see the Harvard University campus (and stop by the Hourly Oyster House off Harvard Square) and visiting the city's hallowed sports shrines. Even if you don't catch a game, a stop at Fenway Park and at the bronze Bobby Orr statue outside TD Garden is a nice nod of respect to icons of our old sports-rival city.

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Beef Wellington at Ramsay's Kitchen



Mandarin Oriental, Boston



Mandarin Oriental, Boston



# : best buds



BY DAVE MACINTYRE

How the hell are we already halfway through the year??

Thankfully, it means we're approaching the season we all wait for: park hang season, and with that comes a lot of smoking of the devil's lettuce with or without frisbees, bags of chips, portable Bluetooth speakers and/or djembes. For the June issue, I'm reviewing a double whammy of sativa and sativa-leaning dried flowers from Origine Nature, one of the founding members of the Association québécoise de l'Industrie du cannabis (AQIC).

Sold under the name Cheers à Lise and grown in Sainte-Agathe in the Laurentians, this is called the Duo Sorbet Cerise et Lime. It cost me around \$55 for three and a half grams of each variety, which is double what I normally pick up to review. But if you suddenly find yourself with a little more cash to spare, this cherry/lime duo is a pretty solid weed-related investment. Sounds like I'm in for a fruitful experience, as they say (sorry, couldn't resist).

Cheers à Lise duo Sorbet Cerise et Lime

Black Bag: Black Cherry Lime (22.7% THC, sativa-dominant hybrid)

White Bag: ICC Sorbet (25.3% THC, hybrid)

I'm not even going to give a separate rating for these, as each of the two strains are a solid 9 out of 10 for me. The black and white bags come in huge blue packaging that looked and felt almost like a chip bag to me, so you can't really be discreet about buying it.

They do, however, mostly smell nice when you open them. I'm not sure if they necessarily smell much like the fruits they're named after, but that kind of aroma is pungent — in the most pleasant of ways — within the black bag, appropriately titled Black Cherry Lime — its core scents are listed as “zesty, sugar, fruity.” The ICC Sorbet one doesn't necessarily smell like it, and almost smells earthier to me (“diesel, sugar, fruity”), but it's not unpleasant. Buds in both bags still have just the right kind of cannabis texture and aren't too dry yet.

Unfortunately — and this may just be plain old allergies — my left eye starts itching like hell while smoking this. Aside from that minor annoyance, this is a really good batch. Smoking the Black Cherry Lime is a nice way to spend an afternoon in the park, though it doesn't really start to hit me until after I've finished my joint.

The Sorbet is a fun ride, too (especially around your head), and feels like as good a strain as you'll find for Friday nights with pals. But it also made me hungry, so be forewarned if you're easily tempted by food, whether stoned or not stoned. Fall too far down the rabbit hole and you may find yourself with some serious munchies like I did. If you were in the Plateau recently and overheard insanely loud Ruffles chip-eating coming from a basement apartment, no you didn't. 9/10



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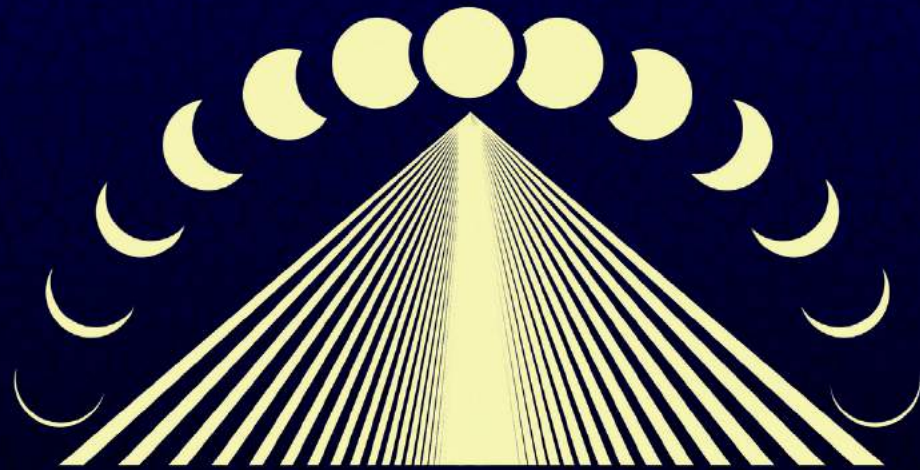


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# :the 1st half



BY PAUL DESBAILLETS

So summer has arrived in Montreal, Manchester City has triumphed for the fourth time and football has ended in Europe till June 14, when the Euros kick off in Germany.

The Premier League season came to an exhilarating end on the last day, with only one point separating ManCity and Arsenal. ManCity started the season as one of the favorites, and lived up to expectations. Pep Guardiola's side demonstrated exceptional consistency, tactical brilliance and sheer determination, making them deserving champions once again.

With a blend of experienced stars and emerging talents, City showcased a style of play that was both entertaining and effective. Key players like Kevin De Bruyne, Phil Foden and Ruben Dias were instrumental in the team's success, providing the necessary spark in crucial moments.

On the topic of the rising popularity of football (aka soccer) in North America, NBC drew a total audience

of 2.12 million viewers for Manchester City-Arsenal in April, making it the most-watched Premier League game ever in the U.S. It was the first Premier League match to surpass 2 million viewers, and this is just the start.

Soccer has never been more popular in North America — where the 2026 FIFA World Cup will be cohosted by the U.S., Canada and Mexico. The MLS and the CPL have played a crucial role in the sport's growth, with the leagues expanding, both in terms of the number of teams and the quality of play. In the MLS, high-profile signings from Europe and South America have raised the league's profile, attracting more fans to stadiums and TV screens. Last month, Lionel Messi playing his first ever game in Canada during the Inter Miami win over CF Montréal showed just how popular he and the sport is in *la belle province*.

Youth participation in soccer has also skyrocketed, with millions of children taking up the sport. This grassroots development is essential for building a strong soccer culture and producing future stars who could potentially shine on the global stage.

Canada's soccer boom is highlighted by the success of its national teams. The men's national team has made significant strides, qualifying for the FIFA World Cup for the first time in decades. The Canadian Premier League

(CPL) has provided a platform for local talent to showcase their skills, further fueling interest in the sport.

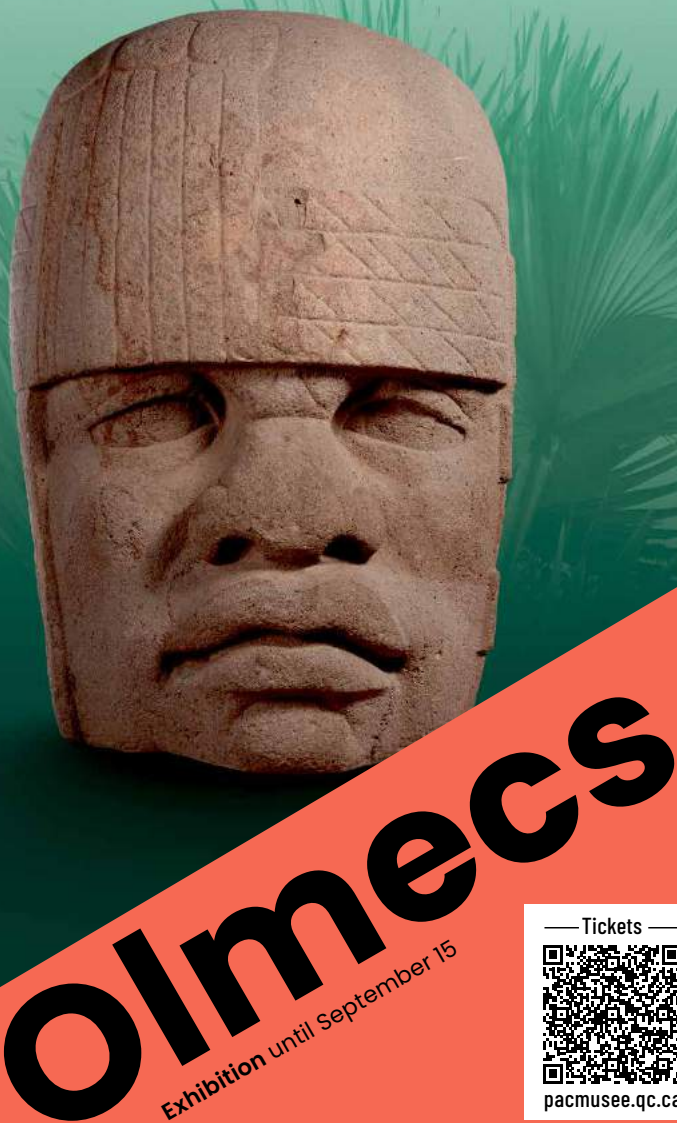
The success of Canadian players in top European leagues has also contributed to soccer's popularity. Alphonso Davies, playing for Bayern Munich, has become a household name, inspiring young Canadians to pursue soccer.

And then there's the Canadian women's national team, which has emerged as a beacon of excellence and inspiration for all. Their historic gold medal win at the Tokyo 2020 Olympics captivated the nation and showcased the strength and talent of Canadian women's soccer forever. With star players like Christine Sinclair, who holds the record for the most international goals scored by any player, male or female, the team has become a source of pride and motivation for young athletes across Canada.

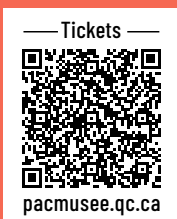
Their success has significantly contributed to the growing interest in soccer, encouraging more girls to take up the sport with dreams of achieving similar heights.

In the last week of May, Canada received some wonderful news in the form of the Northern Soccer League, this country's first ever women's professional soccer league, with six teams to help kick it off. Clubs based in Ottawa, Montreal, Halifax, Toronto, Calgary and Vancouver will hit the pitch in the summer of 2025.

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# food

## A local fave for a reason



Scott Usheroff

BY CLAY SANDHU

It's been 23 years since chef Stephen Leslie opened Taverne on the Square, the much beloved Westmount institution.

For me, and many folks who work or have worked in restaurants, Taverne is a cherished place. And yet, it's rarely a spot that shows up on lists or in conversations about the best restaurants in Montreal. I often ask myself why that is. Park, its neighbour just north-west, is a regular fixture of best-of lists (including Canada's 100 Best), so it's not its Westmount location. The dining room is one of the most elegant and comfortable in the city; there are no bad tables. Co-owner Jon Cercone's wine list is among the best in town and comfortably caters to the snobbiest of wine aficionados and the ABC (anything but chardonnay) crowd alike. It's not the food either. Steve has been a leader in ingredient sourcing for his entire career, and his style of food, though rarely innovative (but occasionally so) is always delicious and well-executed.

Taverne, after all, is the kind of place where you can enjoy a salmon tartare with a glass of Sancerre, eat a perfectly cooked steak with a bottle of Burgundy, or tuck into a plate of comté-infused mac 'n' cheese with whatever quaffable curiosity Jon is pouring at the moment. They make an excellent burger and pour a great pint of Guinness, too. It's hard to say what the life expectancy for restaurants is anymore — but it's certainly not 20+ years. So in a city with such an abundance of restaurants and one where places seem to open and close on a dime, what makes a place like Taverne endure?

"There's a lot of hard work that goes into it — an extreme amount of hard work. We try to buy the best ingredients

we can and make the best food we can while providing professional friendly service," explains Leslie, in a characteristically to-the-point way. But in my experience, what makes Taverne on the Square special is more nuanced than that.

Everybody knows Steve. He's somewhat of a cult figure in the Montreal restaurant scene. Known for his raw, often abrasive personality, his abundant generosity and technical cooking, he's a chef's chef. Roughly 10 years ago, I worked for Steve at a now-defunct *rôtisserie* chicken place called *le Sieur d'Iberville*. At the time, I was a young cook eager to indulge in creative musings (perhaps the most annoying kind of cook). Steve taught me focus, discipline and the philosophy that if you're going to do something, it should be the very best version of that thing. For this far-flung sports bar, we made our own cheese and brined our chickens in the whey, we ground beef daily and rolled into gnocchi-like tubes to make our burgers the Heston Blumenthal way. We bought the very best salmon and cured it the colour of a Parc Avenue sunset with vodka and beets. At the end of the day, it was a simple menu — roast birds, ribs and wings with coleslaw, cookies for dessert. You get the idea — simple stuff that everybody likes. In the short time I spent working on that line, I understood Steve and what makes him so unique in this city. Steve just wants you to have the very best dining experience at his restaurant. It sounds simple, but like he said, it's extremely hard work.

I think it would be easy to chalk the admiration I have for this restaurant up to my appreciation for Steven Leslie and Jon Cercone or the special treatment I get when I dine there. I always get a good table, I am always greeted warmly by whoever is at the door — they remember me. Jon will pull out wines I love from the cellar and Steve will gladly put a menu together for me. That type of treatment, however, isn't just reserved for me — everybody gets it.

On any given night, you can look around the room and see the staff greeting regulars and pouring wine at the bar for restaurant folk out for dinner on their night off. There's likely a visiting chef in from out of town or the president of Shopify all mixed in with families and locals who have been dining at Taverne for two decades.

"Taverne is a neighbourhood restaurant," says Leslie. "We see the same customers quite often so we know them well. I've seen their kids grow up. There's a sense of family and familiarity with the customer base."

That *familiarity* is actually just trust built up over the years. It's the result of that unwavering commitment to doing things the right way at every level. Taverne, for me, is a reminder that a great restaurant experience is harmonious. When all the aspects of service, environment, food and beverage come together, the experience is much more than just going out to eat. It's not easy to achieve this and it's next to impossible to do it consistently for as long as they have. From the front-of-house manager Gabrielle Pottier to chef de cuisine Ryan Dixon, it's evident that there's an established culture. "We know what every customer likes to drink and often have it ready as they walk through the door — we know what they like to eat, too" Leslie notes.

To put it simply, Taverne on the Square endures because it's a very good restaurant. The staff is warm and competent, the food is approachable, made with exceptional ingredients, well-prepared and served in a dining room with plush leather banquettes and tables draped in crisp white tablecloths. When I dine out at restaurants these days, I'm less concerned with creativity and concept. In my view, the most important considerations for restaurants are consistency, generosity and quality — all things that Taverne has delivered on for over 20 years.



# Students at John F. Kennedy Adult Education Centre are thriving in mathematics

BY TERRY HAIG



“The beautiful thing about learning is that no one can take it away from you.”

The thought comes from B.B. King. The words sit in a wall poster on the ground floor of the John F. Kennedy Adult Education Centre that occupies a healthy section of a formidable concrete building that has long housed this popular institution of lifelong learning in St. Michel.

The intersection is Rue Villeray and Blvd. St. Michel, part of a neighbourhood long known as a place where newcomers to Canada can settle to seek the wherewithal to find the place they want to get to in the so-called Canadian Mosaic.

Education, of course, is a key part of that search for a better life. Especially, the math part.

Turns out, math might be a terrific place to start in the quest to find a place—despite the heartache, frustration and panic trying to learn it can bring.

Math, especially as it is taught today, is about way more than just the numbers—especially when those numbers are as near as that phone in your palm.

Just ask ChatGPT:

“Mathematics is the study of patterns, structures, quantities and relationships, using numbers and symbols to describe and explain the world around us. Math is not just a subject; it’s a universal language that helps us understand and interpret phenomena in various fields like science, engineering, economics and even everyday life.”

Got that?

Luckily for a whole lot of people, the principal and vice-principal at the John F. Kennedy Adult Education Centre get it. Big Time!

And they are doing their level best to make sure that the 120 or so students, ranging in age from 16 to 45, who are currently taking math as part of their studies toward a high school diploma get it as well.

The students taking math here are part of a community that includes up to 600 students (both night and day) taking various levels of courses at the JFKAEC. Students shooting for a high school diploma are generally divided into three groups: Immigrants, “non-traditional learners” and students who are “upskilling,” (taking specific courses they need to get into a CEGEP).



Regardless of their differences, it appears they all caught some crucial breaks. “I would describe mathematics as a language,” said Vice-Principal Mauro Corneli. “Algebra is just learning a certain type of syntax. I always tell my students that, in fact, mathematics is an easier language than English or any other natural language. The syntax is simpler, the language is more precise. Yeah, it does cause anxiety and a lot of other associated learning behaviour challenges and that is the thing that a lot of our teachers are really directing and focusing their attention on...it’s not necessarily struggling with the content specifically, but the learning behaviours that come with learning math.”

Adult Education students learn math with the modular approach and not one end-of-the-year final exam. A nine-month course can be reduced to three months. “They will do a section of the program, do a pre-test, a practice test, then they will do an exam on that one section. If they pass, they go on to the next module,” Principal Elizabeth Lagodich explained.

While the students may come from many different backgrounds and circumstances, most—if not all—are seeking a second chance, after not fitting into their previous traditional education models for varying reasons.

When they succeed, the benefits can be heady.

“Mastering math opens doors,” Ms. Lagodich noted. “It opens a lot of doors, not only in terms of opportunities but also in confidence. Students realize, ‘Oh, I’m capable of doing this. I’m smarter than I think I am, than I thought I was.’”

So in the end, what’s the point of learning math in an age when the proper answer can be supplied by a store-bought device?

“It comes back to those analytical skills,” said Mr. Corneli. “That’s what’s really, really important. That’s what you really want to be training. What I tell my students...when they ask why we can’t just calculate something using a calculator, I tell them again, ‘if you are obsessed with the result, or the answer, you have a tendency to think that way. But if you are focused on the process, which is what we’re focused on, you get the sense that someone programmed that calculator, right? We want to figure out how that stuff works cause that’s the interesting stuff.’ And, yeah, most students see that, they recognize this.”

**John F. Kennedy Adult Education Centre** is located at 3030 Villeray.

For more information call 514-374-2888 or log on to [www.jfkac.ca](http://www.jfkac.ca)





## Risks and rewards



Todd Weaver

BY DARCY MACDONALD

In a town renowned for its vibrant year-round festival culture, a debate over which Montreal summer mega-fest takes the crown for all-out best would likely end in a stalemate. But there is no disputing the mother of them all.

The Montreal International Jazz Fest holds its 44th edition from June 27 through July 6, with countless free concerts on several open-air stages at Place des Festivals and in venues and clubs around the city.

Jazz Fest may just be the summer music event that has bounced back most dramatically from the pandemic beatdown. With programming that does its best to please jazz music lovers, fans of prestige acts in associated genres and a general audience of concertgoers, the festival has succeeded in recent years by managing to trim the fat while taking some new risks.

Take last year's decision to book Quebec contemporary classical pianist Jean-Michel Blais on the main outdoor stage — on a Monday night, no less. Blais drew a crowd estimated at over 40,000 attendees, and one could hear a pin drop in the heart of downtown as Blais brought a 90-minute performance to its moving finale.

The old “not enough jazz at Jazz Fest” argument is easily 20 years past its shelf life. If the purist's point of view is that without Dixieland brass and trios, quartets and quintets playing every hour on the hour on every stage, Jazz Fest is just another music festival, then so be it.

The lion's share of festival programming still offers modern jazz discoveries imported from all around the world. The common ground for performers is cross-cultural influence. Tradition is still at the heart of the jazz ethos, and any tradition is unique to its origin. As a cultural event that values discovery over genre, Jazz Fest has always been about music.

Here are a handful of programming picks to point you in the right direction this year.

JUNE 27

The 44th edition gets off the ground with a distinctly Montreal offering at Salle Wilfrid-Pelletier as Elisapie, Martha Wainwright, Alexandra Stréliski, Beyries and Maxime Le Flaguais pool their talents for *Mixtape: Un hommage musical à Jean-Marc Vallée*. Expect this tribute to the departed Quebec director of films that included *C.R.A.Z.Y.* and *Dallas Buyers Club* to honour Vallée's distinct ear for creating memorable soundtracks, with a lineup that can pull at heartstrings accordingly. (7:30 PM, tickets \$89–\$118)

The main outdoor event sending this year's festival into the night air for the next week is not to be missed. A rare visit from Melbourne sound benders Hiatus Kaiyote and their classy brand of cool is a perfect Jazz Fest entree.

JUNE 28

NOLA institution the Preservation Hall Jazz Band shares its legacy at Place des Arts's Théâtre Maisonneuve (8 p.m., \$59–\$89), while across the way in the venue's Cinquième Salle, hometown hero Kid Koala brings the awesome theatrics of *The Storyville Mosquito* back for the first of three performances, with two more on Saturday. (June 28 at 8 p.m., June 29 at 3 & 8 p.m. \$53–\$75)

Don't sleep on the opportunity to catch mixed emotions with Nashville's Sunny War, pre-dusk at the Rogers Stage (7 p.m., free)

Montreal-based Salin is so nice, she does it twice on a Friday. Anyone who witnessed the Thai-born talent in 2022 knows that this drummer, vocalist, composer and bandleader lays down the boogie. (*Rio Tinto Stage*, 8 and 10 p.m., free)

JUNE 29

A little rock 'n' roll raunch with Kurt Vile & the Violators on a Saturday night won't let anyone down. (*MTelus*, 59 Ste-Catherine E., 7:30 p.m., \$48)

Quebec crowd favourite Dominique Fils-Aimé headlines the outdoor lineup on the TD Stage. (9:30 p.m., free)

Afterward, Les racines du hip-hop au Québec bills itself as a block party at the Club Montréal TD stage over on the Esplanade de la Place des Arts. Not sure what to expect, but I'd bet on a good time.

And fest mainstays Urban Science #LeCypherX take the party to the wee hours at M2 (59 Ste-Catherine E., 11:59 p.m., free)

SUNDAY, JUNE 30

If you don't have your tickets yet, you'll have to get to searching the resale market, but I think it's safe to say the FOMO crowd will find a way to be in the building when Outkast's André 3000 brings his experimental flute project *New Blue Sun* to life in the intimacy of Salle Wilfrid-Pelletier. (7:30 p.m., sold out)

Similarly, Elisapie fans will have to figure out how to get into a sold-out performance at Théâtre Maisonneuve. (8 p.m., sold out)

Headlining outdoors to make it feel like a three-day weekend, American rap star and actor Freddie Gibbs gets live with New York's El Michels Affair, together on the TD Stage. (9:30 p.m., free)

JULY 1

Canada Day gets some serious jazz fireworks as festival regular and modern genre icon Robert Glasper and special guests bring it to the masses. (*TD Stage*, 9:30 p.m., free)

Montreal's own Planet Giza gets intergalactic afterwards, on the Rogers Stage. (11 p.m., free)

JULY 2

Another interplanetary traveler, L.A.'s first lady of post-P-Funk Georgia Anne Muldrow lands at the Gesù. (1200 Bleury, 10:30 p.m., \$59)

JULY 3

Award-winning tenor, composer, pianist and Secret City Records artist Jeremy Dutcher takes it to the TD Stage for a mid-evening moondance with the Great Spirit. (7:30 p.m., free)

Proud Atlantan and certified jewel runner Killer Mike celebrates his gospel-steeped, triple-Grammy-winning 2023 solo album *Michael* at MTelus with live band the Mighty Midnight Revival, when the Down By Law tour rolls into Jazz Fest. Must not sleep, must warn others. (59 Ste-Catherine E., 8:30 p.m., \$53)

JULY 4

A live orchestra joins Quebec EDM star Apashe to take on the headlining slot for the night at the TD Stage. (9:30 p.m., free)

JULY 5

Flatbush Zombie Erick the Architect gives the Jazz Fest babies a little something to call their own at Club Soda, with support from a Montreal legend in his own right, Jai Nitai Lotus. (1225 St-Laurent, 9 p.m., \$38.25)

JULY 6

Make the last night of Jazz Fest count and get started early with local soul pop phenom Fernie, who hits the Club TD Montreal stage. (7 p.m., free)

In a decidedly bold and welcome move, the festival shuts down the TD Stage with U.K. legends the Cinematic Orchestra. I'm not sure the last time the outfit — who once upon a time ran the new jazz world with peers such as the Herbaliser — made it to Montreal. This is a solid choice, sure to give fest-goers that discovery vibe one last time as the 44th edition comes to a close. (9:30 PM, free)

But don't go home yet. First Nations outfit the Medicine Singers get the last word when they summon the ancestors to the Rogers Stage. (11 p.m., free)

There is no way we've done much more than scratch the surface of all there is to experience at Jazz Fest, so we'll leave it here: no matter what you do, if you're headed down for one evening or all eight nights, take the opportunity to explore the entire festival site and its many outdoor stages. Ask people what they're excited about. Take risks. Discover something new.

*Cult MTL* will be out taking notes and snapping pics, so check out our online coverage throughout the festival for more suggestions as we do the same. See you there.

→ For more on the Montreal International Jazz Fest (June 27–July 6), please visit [montrealjazzfest.com](http://montrealjazzfest.com).



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# :hammer of the mods

BY JOHNSON CUMMINS

Okay, let's just get right to the main course, which also happens to be the best fest in the city: Suoni per il Popolo.

Year after year, Suoni pushes the envelope of what progressive-minded music can be while giving the underground scene a sluggin' chance against the behemoth fests dominating the warm months.

If you really want to see what Suoni is playing host to this year, I encourage you to check their site, read about picks at [cultmtl.com](http://cultmtl.com) — and just experiment. The greatest strength of Suoni is the sense of discovery it offers, so I encourage you to go out and see a show possessed with as little info as possible and you will be rewarded tenfold.

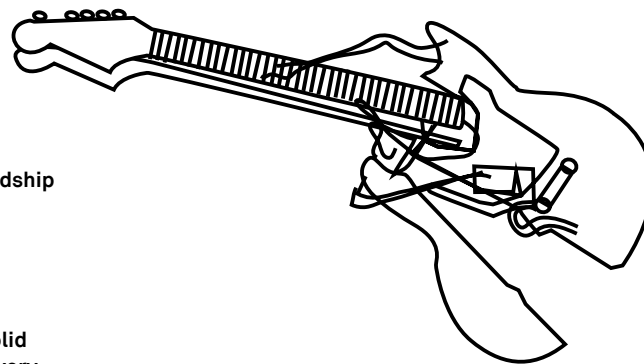
Having said that, I would be remiss if I didn't hip you L7's to Suoni fave Anthony Braxton when his reed goes toe to toe with the decibel squelch of noiseniks Wolf Eyes at la Sala Rossa on June 23 (4848 St-Laurent, 8:30 p.m., \$40/\$45). Braxton's full-blast assault and ability to adapt to any scenario without sacrificing his signature sound is as adventurous as ever, but the pairing with the extreme noise terror of Wolf Eyes will likely be a highlight of the fest. Friendship Cove reunion for the graying-at-the-

temple set? (And for more utterly hilarious Friendship Cove reunion jokes, check out the following gig announcement.)

Suoni aside, there are some killer-diller gigs happening throughout the month, starting with minimalist post-punk faves Tyvek — another solid slammer from 'da Cove daze. Remember when every second kid sang through Fisher Price mics into pawn shop distortion boxes while just gaffer-taping the rips in their pants? Remember when Griffintown didn't completely suck shit? Of course you do!! You may be a set designer now but why not get a little bit of your youth back and make it down to la Sotterenea on June 15 and catch Tyvek with G.I. Jinx and Xv (4848 St-Laurent, 9:30 p.m., \$20/\$25).

If there is anything less sexy than instrumental post-rock, I have yet to turn over that rock, but maaaaaan you have to cut some slack Jack for the panoramic soar of This Will Destroy You. If you have yet to recover from the Eclipse, this is the gig for you. Not only that but they will be performing the 2014 classic *Tunnel Blanket* in its entirety. This is at Théâtre Fairmount with openers Christopher Tignor and Jeremy Young (5240 Parc, 8 p.m., \$36.09). Swipe right!!!

You don't need to tell me that most prog/doom bands suck my grandad's ballz (and he's dead!!!) but Pallbearer actually advance the doom game and will let things ooze like they should while dazzling with hairpin turns that will cramp yer neck. Get yer nod on



at Théâtre Fairmount on June 22, with openers REZN and the Keening (5240 Parc, 7 p.m., \$35). This will get heavy AF.

I gotta tell you about what could be the heaviest show of the summer, which will be going down when the ink will still be drying on the next ish. For those who like punishing, bowel-emptying electronic music, do not miss the beat-down at Bar le Ritz on July 4, when the Body return to town with Dis Fig and Cel Genesis (179 Jean-Talon W., 8 p.m., \$23.17). Expect to see the same people who were at the Pallbearer show.

Current Obsession: David Bowie, Low  
[jonathan.cummins@gmail.com](mailto:jonathan.cummins@gmail.com)

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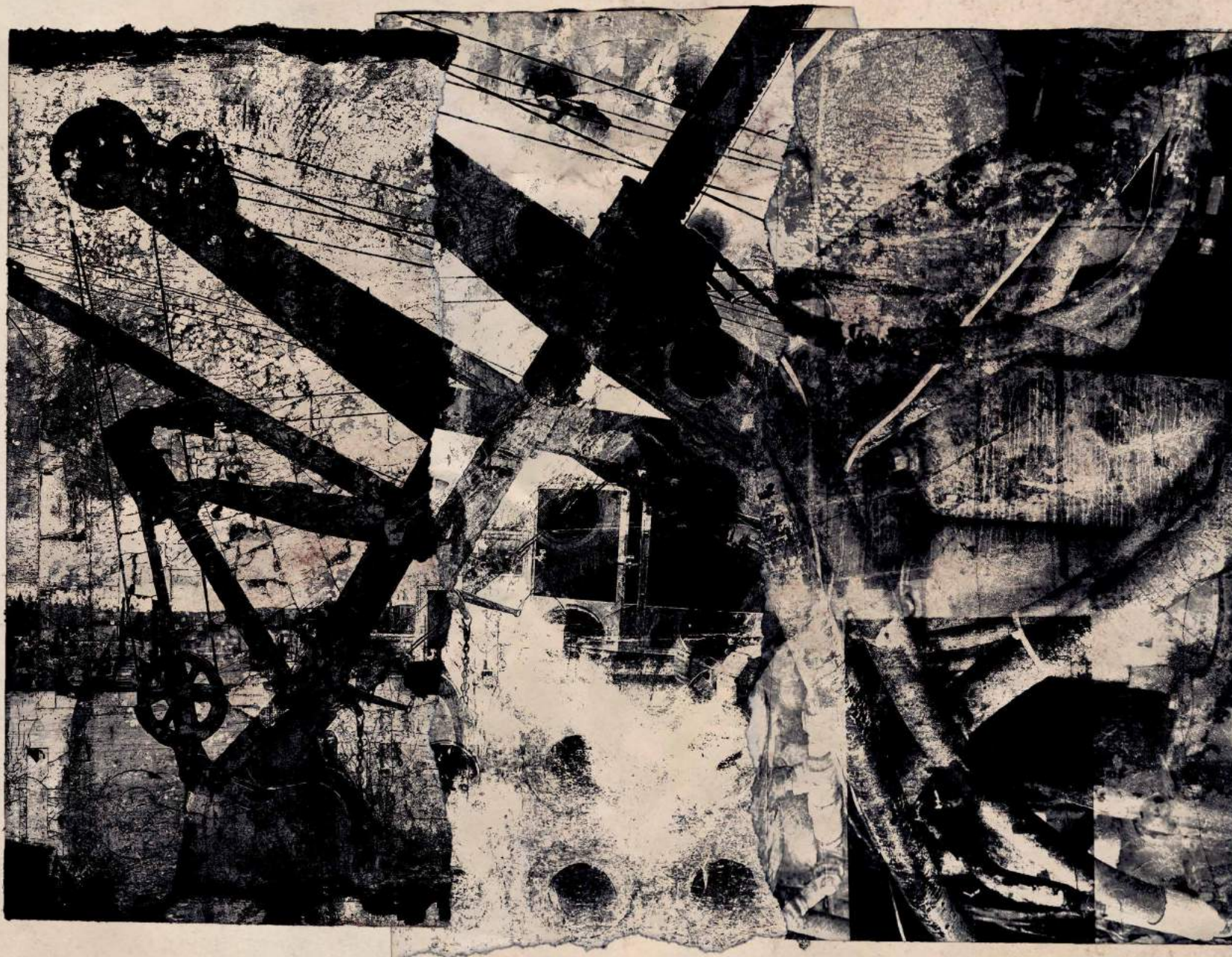
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# Album reviews



P'tit Belliveau, *P'tit Belliveau* (Independent)  
Third time's beyond the charm. The Nova Scotian talent has long since established that he's got the charm down pat. On LP number three, the musical polymath has gripped his sound, style and success more firmly in his own two hands, parting ways with

label Bonsound and packing self-booked shows damn near everywhere he sets his bags down. Live performances have long hinted that Belliveau has distortion on his mind. Devised by 12 fresh cuts, *P'tit Belliveau* goes a little louder and a lot more adventurous, and paints a portrait of an artist more confident than ever with the fact that he has something more than charm, or a sound all his own. He has a vision that he's stamped his name on. And it's wonderful. 10/10 Trial Track: "Ring Ring" (Darcy MacDonald)



Billie Eilish, *Hit Me Hard and Soft* (Darkroom/Interscope)  
After a subdued left turn with her 2021 sophomore effort *Happier Than Ever*, Billie Eilish has returned with possibly the richest-sounding, most concise body of work she's made to date. With older brother Finneas at the top of his production

game, *Hit Me Hard and Soft* is an album that finds one of the world's biggest pop stars achieving a sonic middle

ground between her first two albums with an emphasis on strong emotional heft and more mature songwriting than we'd seen from her previously. Third and fourth tracks "Chihiro" and "Birds of a Feather" immediately sound like singles (the latter's chorus is an absolute knockout), while acoustic ballads "Wildflower" and "The Greatest" are the album's emotionally charged centrepieces. *Hit Me Hard and Soft* is a glorious window into Billie Eilish's journey toward artistic growth, and it's truly exciting to think of where she goes from here. 9/10 Trial Track: "Birds of a Feather" (Dave MacIntyre)



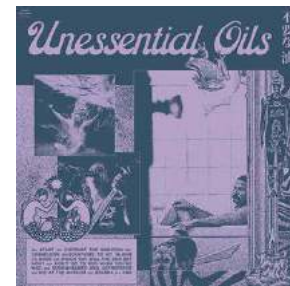
Peggy Gou, *I Hear You* (XL)  
Berlin-based South Korean house producer Peggy Gou has spent years steadily climbing from the underground dance music scene to the mainstream. That journey has now culminated in this 10-track body of work — with a Lenny Kravitz feature, to boot —

where Gou flips between her four-on-the-floor comfort zone ("Back to One») and more experimental places (the Sade-meets-Thievery Corporation vibes of "All That"). Last year's explosive dance anthem "(It Goes Like) Nanana" makes sense to be included here, but putting what sounds like a slightly edited version of her 2021 single "I Go" feels strange. Generally speaking, *I Hear You* is a strong introduction to Peggy Gou as an albums artist, though it still seems like she's only scratching the surface of her potential in that regard. 8/10 Trial Track: "(It Goes Like) Nanana" (Dave MacIntyre)



Mike Shabb, *Sewaside III* (Independent)  
Now that Montreal rap's inimitable dual threat has earned accolades stateside from the likes of Alchemist and Earl Sweatshirt, expectations are sky high for the third installment in his signature series. If carrying Montreal rap on his shoulders is a heavy lift,

Shabbo isn't sweating the increased notoriety: he's got an even more assured flow over his own jazzy samples, which have a more off-kilter spin than the refined grooves of his mentor Nicholas Craven. He's confidently cruising in his lane, and now it's a matter of the city conforming to his whims rather than the other way around. 8/10 Trial Track: "Hey Young World Part II" (Erik Leijon)



Unessential Oils, *Unessential Oils* (Secret City)  
Creative sparks can strike whenever they feel like it, and the judge of a good artist can decide whether to act on those impulses. This happened to Warren Spicer, best known as the frontman/one of the guitarists of Plants and Animals, while he was marinating in the

bath. A deluge of jazzy, tropicalia-styled funk and folk riffs appeared in his mind, and rather than adapt them for Plants and Animals, he ran with this new sound — creating his new project, Unessential Oils. The album of the same name is a whimsical and fun burn, always feeling quite bright yet hazy, with a diverse cornucopia of instrumentation. 8/10 Trial Track: "Solutions to My Gloom" (Stephan Boissonneault)



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## Let's twist again



BY SARAH FOULKES

Two months before the release of the new M. Night Shyamalan film *Trap*, his daughter Ishana Night Shyamalan is releasing her directorial debut, *The Watchers*.

Adapted from A.M. Shine's Irish-set novel of the same name, the film follows Mina (Dakota Fanning), a woman tasked with transporting a parrot from the small Galway pet shop where she works to a zoo in Belfast. Driving through a forest on the way there, her car breaks down and she loses signal. As she wanders around looking for signs of human life, a murder of crows rushes across the forest canopy. There must be some sinister Irish magic at work here. A white-haired woman appears between the trees and beckons her into a bunker before the sun sets. Inside, she meets Ciara (Georgina Campbell) and Daniel (Oliver Finnegan), both of whom have been stuck there for months. But neither have been there as long as Madeleine (Olwen Fouéré), the white-haired woman. As the unelected leader, she instructs them to never venture beyond the forest's perimeters and to always return to the coop before dark. Once inside, they must present themselves to the Watchers. They stand facing the glass as bodies ready to be observed by creatures they cannot see. But who watches *The Watchers*?

Like her father's films, *The Watchers*' plot is full of holes and dialogue that has as much subtlety as a slap across the face. But also like her father's films, *The Watchers* operates on its own fantastical logic that will absorb you if you're willing to let its shortcomings slide.

I sat down with Ishana Night Shyamalan for a brief chat over Zoom.

Sarah Foulkes: I was thinking about plot twists and the sadness, in a way, of a filmmaker that doesn't get to experience the plot twist like the audience does. Since this is an adaptation of the book, was that experience different for you?

Ishana Night Shyamalan: Absolutely. I think that one of the joys is that I got to experience what people feel when they're watching the movie just when I was reading the book. I had no knowledge of what it was gonna be like, of what the journey of the book was gonna be. So it was very, very, shocking and unexpected for me. And I loved that I was quite surprised by the book.

SF: Actually, when you were watching *The Sixth Sense* and all of your dad's movies, did you know the spoilers beforehand or were they kept from you?

INS: They were kept from me. I don't know how my dad maintained that secret, but somehow he did. So I watched very much like anyone else, and was totally shocked.

SF: That's good parenting in action.

INS: Absolutely.

SF: Something that I'm really interested in about horror filmmakers in particular is this decision to show the monster or not show the monster. How do you make that decision as a filmmaker?

INS: I was very interested in that feeling of pushing the

boundaries of what the audience was willing to watch without actually being given anything. So it was just like the idea of both teasing one tiny piece after another and you're just very slowly expanding your knowledge of this space and this place. And then it creates a more massive payoff at some point during the movie where you get to learn what kind of space you're in, what kind of movie you're in. And so I was really enjoying that kind of restraint there. And it was very much a process of both shifting around pieces of the script structurally in outline form, and then playing with that in the edit, removing things or adding things, shifting them around until we had this balance of showing it just enough as you move through.

SF: Yeah. It works super well. And I imagine that you've heard this before, but the ways in which *The Watchers* are discussed in the film reminds me a lot of the way that we talk about AI now.

INS: Absolutely.

SF: Do you feel like this film functions as an allegory?

INS: I wouldn't say it's so literally about AI. All this stuff around AI was happening as I was working on the script, which was kind of weird for me that I was seeing this imagery that seemed so interrelated to what I was writing about. What is palpable in that theme is the idea that we could all be replicated. Maybe we're not so specific and unique. And I think that is sort of what I fear in AI. Can my creativity be replicated or replaced? That fear is there in the movie.

→ *The Watchers* opens in Montreal theatres on Friday, June 7.



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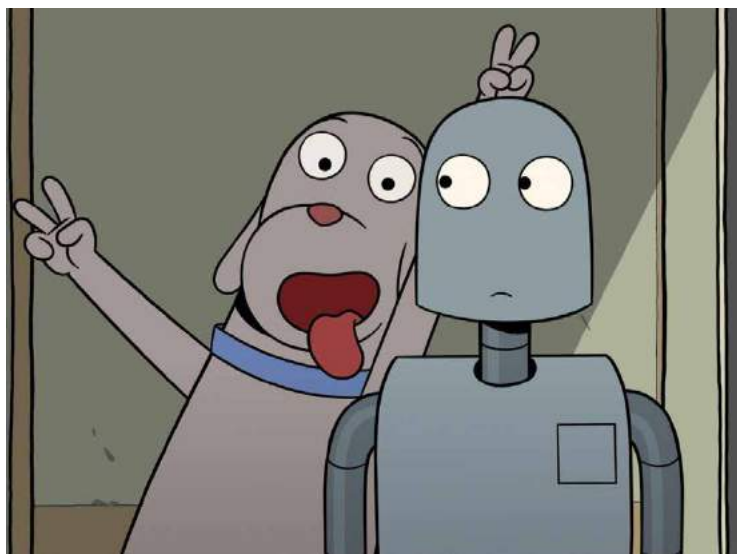
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# On Screen



Robot Dreams



The Bikerider



When Adam Changes



Kinds of Kindness

BY JUSTINE SMITH

The boys are back in town! Will Smith and Martin Lawrence team up again for *Bad Boys: Ride or Die* (June 7). A follow-up to the pandemic-era reboot *Bad Boys for Life*, directed by Adil El Arbi and Bilall Fallah (*Ms. Marvel*), it's unclear how much hype is actually driving this bus. In this fourth instalment in the *Bad Boys* franchise, Lowrey and Burnett try to clear the name of their late captain, only to end up on the run themselves.

Dads and *Yellowstone* fans will be happy that Kevin Costner is back on the big screen with Chapter 1 of his epic Western, *Horizon: An American Saga* (June 28). Costner stars in and directs this multifaceted chronicle of pre- and post-Civil War expansion and settlement of the American West over a 15-year period. Sienna Miller, Jena Malone, Luke Wilson, Thomas Haden Church and Danny Huston are just a few big names featured in the supporting cast. Chapter 2 is currently slated for a theatrical release in August of this year.

With films like *Take Shelter* and *Mud* under his belt, director Jeff Nichols has become a bit of an underappreciated cult phenomenon in the American indie scene. His latest,

*The Bikeriders* (June 21), hits the big screen this month. Austin Butler, Tom Hardy, Jodie Comer, Michael Shannon and Mike Faist round out the all-star cast of this 1960s-era dive into a Midwestern motorcycle club called the Vandals. A story of love and violence, Benny (Austin Butler) must choose between Kathy (Jodie Comer) and his loyalty to the club.

Family fun with a big deal appeal with adults, Pixar returns to the big screen with *Inside Out 2* (June 14), the highly anticipated follow-up to one of their most beloved and critically acclaimed films. Riley is now a teenager grappling with some new emotions. Joy, Sadness, Anger, Fear and Disgust, who've long been running a successful operation by all accounts, aren't sure how to feel when Anxiety shows up. And it looks like she's not alone.

For animation fans looking for something a little different, be sure to check out *When Adam Changes* (June 7). A big hit on the festival circuit, this local film is about 15-year-old Adam. Whenever his body is mocked, it distorts to reflect the callous comments. His physical transformations are in some ways the least of his worries as he tries to navigate teenage life in late-1990s Quebec. Also be sure to see the Academy Award-nominated *Robot Dreams* (June 7). Set in 1980s New York City, Dog assembles Robot as a companion, and they become best buddies. On a Labour Day outing to Coney Island, Robot's metal parts rust, and he can't move.

M. Night Shyamalan's daughter Ishana Night Shyamalan, makes her feature debut this month with *The Watchers*

(June 7). Dakota Fanning stars as Mina, an artist who finds shelter after getting stranded in an expansive, untouched forest in western Ireland. She unknowingly becomes trapped alongside three strangers who are watched and stalked by mysterious creatures each night. For more big screen spookiness, *A Quiet Place: Day One* (June 28) imagines the events before the first *A Quiet Place* film. Lupita Nyong'o stars as Sam, who must survive an invasion in New York City by bloodthirsty alien creatures with ultrasonic hearing.

Less than a year after *Poor Things* was an improbable box-office success, Yorgos Lanthimos and Emma Stone reunite with *Kinds of Kindness* (June 28), a dark comedy triptych about a man who tries to take control of his own life, a policeman whose wife seems like a different person and a woman who searches for someone with a special ability. Margaret Qualley, Jesse Plemons, Hunter Schafer, Willem Dafoe and Hong Chau co-star.

One of the most critically acclaimed films from last year's festival circuit, *Banel & Adama* (June 14) finally makes it to screens in Montreal. Described as a climate drama with touches of surrealism, the film follows a young married couple in a remote village in northern Senegal who must face the odds to survive.

And finally, with summer on the horizon, be sure to keep an eye on Cinéma Public x Livart, Cinéma sous les étoiles and your local park for the beginning of outdoor screening series.

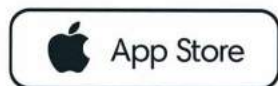
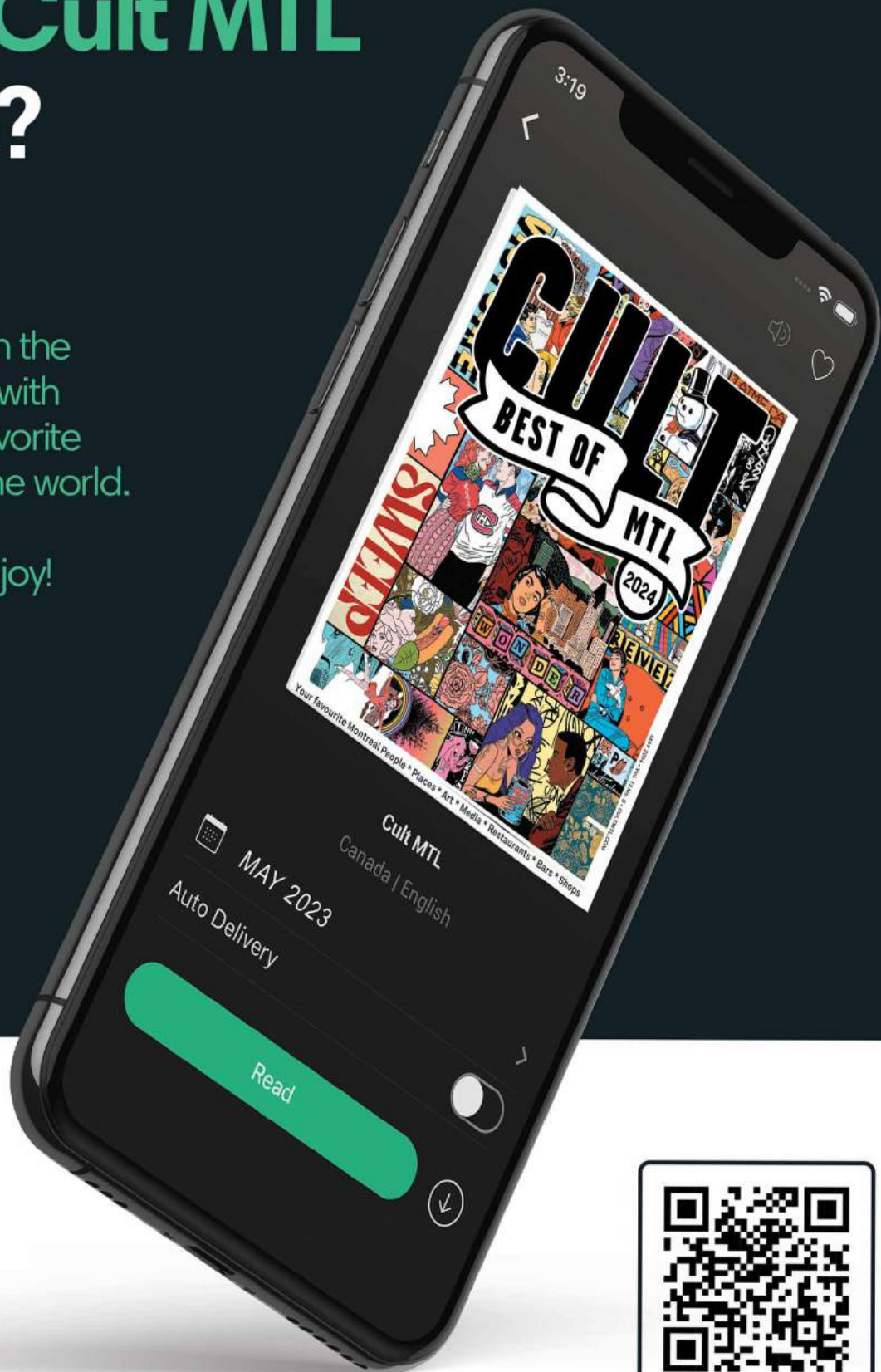




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# arts

## Hearts on fire

BY SAVANNAH STEWART

The Montreal Fringe Festival is on, with locals as well as international talent bringing theatre, dance, music, comedy, puppetry and storytelling from the edge to stages around the Plateau and beyond. And then there's the fest within the fest — free live music in Fringe Park at St-Laurent and Rachel — adding to the festivities, which run from June 6 to 16.

Here are some highlights of this year's program.

### Apolline

Montreal-based artist Mahé is bringing her dreamy electro-pop music to the Fringe. Promising to transport the audience through her sounds inspired by the natural world, *Apolline* is a multi-disciplinary (and bilingual) show blending music, poetry and theatre. (Centre du Théâtre d'Aujourd'hui, 3900 St-Denis, June 7–16, \$8, all ages)

### Au Coeur Du Lotus

Do you know what vaginismus is? Are you sure? In *Au Coeur Du Lotus*, Lady KaThy shares how getting to the bottom of what was going on between her legs brought her on a journey of self-discovery into the depths of her mind and her heart. In this French-language solo show, with wit and unflinching honesty, exploring shame, intimidation and consent, Lady KaThy helps us all learn more about this misunderstood condition that affects 1% of people with vaginas. (Centre du Théâtre d'Aujourd'hui, 3900 St-Denis, June 7–16, \$19, 16+)

### By Our Side

Veterans of the stage Andrea Conway and Wayne Doba, partners in life and in art, are bringing a deeply personal show to the Fringe this year, delving into their experience dealing with an organ transplant. In 2018, Conway, who performed internationally with Cirque du Soleil (among many other high-profile showbiz credits), had a kidney transplant following hereditary kidney failure that left her on dialysis. That whirlwind of a story is revisited through theatre, tap dancing and humour. (Conservatoire de musique et d'art dramatique du Québec, 4750 Henri-Julien, June 8–15, \$19, 12+)

### Cue: Motherhood

Being a parent and having an acting career are two notoriously hectic realities. So what does it look like to live through both, simultaneously? This is the mess Erin Eldershaw tries to make sense of with her solo show. Discount for soon-to-be parents!

(Cité-des-Hospitalières, 251 des Pins, June 7–16, \$16, 12+)



Truck Stop Diner. In the Middle of Nowhere. On the Night Shift.

A Truck Stop Diner. In the Middle of Nowhere. On the Night Shift.

Kendall Savage is getting her clown on for what's promising to be a highlight of this year's edition of the Fringe. The former artistic director of the Montreal Clown Festival will make audience members laugh in her part as IOLA, a waitress at a truck stop diner who discovers her favourite band is in town to judge a beauty contest. The clock is ticking to decide what her talent will be for the pageant, and also how to get there in the first place. (La Chapelle, 3700 St-Dominique, June 7–16, \$19, 16+)

### Late in Life Lesbian

Montreal-based actor Shelby Thevenot came out as a lesbian in their 30s, so they have a thing or two to share about the journey to find yourself and living authentically. They'll be sharing those snippets of wisdom, along with some jokes, in this comedy standup special directed by Lucy Gervais, premiering at the Fringe Festival. (Petit Campus, 57 Prince-Arthur E., June 8–16, \$15, 16+)

### Love the Sinner

Few productions can find a way to include both a dramatic queer coming-of-age story and dildo puppets in one show, yet that's what's in store for audience members who come out to see *Love the Sinner*. Diving deep into religious indoctrination, anti-trans queerphobia and abuse rooted in unhealed trauma, the show presents the story of the undoing of two high school sweethearts, Lenna and Elle, when one comes out as trans. (Conservatoire de musique et d'art dramatique du Québec, 4750 Henri-Julien, June 6–16, \$12, 16+)

Love, Sharks & Frenching: a hot date with Lou Laurence

With her guitar, her deep sultry voice and some charming tales of love and lust, Lou Laurence's *Love, Sharks & Frenching* is part musical, part comedy and a favourite on the festival circuit, snagging the awards for Best Music Show and Best Solo Show at the 2023 Victoria Fringe Festival and selling out at Toronto's Sketchfest. Surely you've never been on a date guaranteed to be this good before. (Café Campus, 57 Prince-Arthur E., June 7–16, \$19, 16+)

### Mom Ballet

Continuing on the theme of identity, which is ever-present at this year's Fringe, *Mom Ballet* explores the decision to become a mother. What do you do when you want two things that appear to contradict each other? Muse about it in your bathroom, of course — which is exactly what the protagonist of this show does. Watch three classical dancers act out her conflicting feelings in this piece blending musical theatre and ballet, presented by Slippery Moon Theatre. (Mile End Improv/Theatre VME, 5377 St-Laurent, June 5–12, \$19, 12+)

### Jimmy Hogg: The Potato King

Why is he the potato king? There's only one way to find out. Toronto-based British comedian Jimmy Hogg has earned rave reviews across Canada with this show. Praised for his tangentiality, jumping from one anecdote to another at breakneck speed, Hogg promises a lighthearted, good-time, old-fashioned standup routine. (O PATRO VÝŠ, 356 Mont-Royal E., June 7–15, \$19, 16+)



SCRAPS

Scrap the raccoon searches through the garbage left behind by humanity to find some scraps to eat, and in so doing searches for identity, purpose, something deeper than simply foraging for survival. Scrap's quest for meaning in the life of the common raccoon will reveal something about what it means to be human, too. The eponymous character is played by Emily Bartlett of It's Not Television Theatre, who has brought clowning fun to the Fringe stage in the past. (Centre du Théâtre d'Aujourd'hui, 3900 St-Denis, June 8-16, \$16, 16+)

Tango, It Takes Two

When the delicate grace of ballet meets the powerful sensuality of the Argentine tango, something special happens. This is attested by the success of PointeTango's two previous years at the Montreal Fringe Festival, where this dancing duo emerged as a clear audience favourite with sold-out runs in 2022 and 2023. Alexander Richardson and Erin Scott-Kafader are not your average tango duo, with Scott-Kafader donning pointe shoes to elevate their performance with classical ballet. Don't wait to get your tickets, because there's a good chance they'll go quickly. (La Chapelle, 3700 St-Dominique, June 7-16, \$19, all ages)

Transcendance

Transcendance is art inspired by queer experience. Each show will result in a whole new artwork, as Romain Bécourt improvises a painting live on stage, creating a vision of tomorrow based on recountings by 2SLGBTQ+ voices. Promising more than a performance, but an exchange, a place of coming together for queer people and their allies, artist and poet Bécourt is creating space for the public to take part in the creative process. (Théâtre MainLine, 3997 St-Laurent, June 7-15, \$15, all ages)



PointeTango

Stoo Metz

Vehicle

Veteran of Canadian Fringe stages Shane Adamczak is back after a prolonged time away from audiences in this country, bringing his Australian company Weeping Spoon Productions to Montreal. Two actors hit the roads of Australia's outback

in this absurdist roadtrip narrative, filling the time with their conversation, patience and unappetizing roadside snacks. (Café Campus, 57 Prince-Arthur E., June 6-15, \$19, 12+)

→ For the complete program and to buy tickets, please visit [montreal.fringe.ca](http://montreal.fringe.ca).

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# : weird era



BY SRUTI ISLAM AND ALEX NIERENHAUSEN

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

## *No Judgment: Essays* by Lauren Oyler

I don't understand when readers or critics are annoyed with Lauren Oyler. That's not true, I understand that it's annoying to hear someone tell you they are sure they are right, and anyone who disagrees is wrong — but isn't that true of all of us? Aren't we all sure we're the best arbiters of our own opinions? What I think is obviously most right, or else, why would I think it? With a reputation as a "mean" book critic (I can confirm, she is very nice to talk to!), Oyler has published a collection of essays that integrates gossip, autofiction and anxiety. In Oyler's second time on the pod, we talk extensively about the pros and cons of drugs, caring what your friends think, why affairs are still exciting, and so much more. (SI)

## *The Wendy Award* by Walter Scott

If *Wendy* is so back, it means Walter Scott is, too. He is one of those rare artists that truly gets this ridiculous(ly wonderful) city of ours. Where else can we get a sketch taking place at the Musée de Heaux Arts? Where else would everyone's favourite side character and queer vagabond Screamo thrive? Not in Toronto (ahem). In this issue of *Wendy*, we find our protagonist experiencing a spurt of personal growth and trying to tackle the newfound success of her popular comic strip "Wanda." Is this level of success enough to finally make Wendy feel, you know, okay? No, of course not. What is particularly illuminating and special about *Wendy*, and Scott's perspective, is the lens readers are given on the young Indigenous experience (read the book to learn about "Big Auntie Energy"). In this episode, I talk to Walter Scott about weaponized therapy-speak, and why "this world is blessed with the privilege to misunderstand you." (SI)

## *Ten Bridges I've Burnt: A Memoir in Verse* by Brontez Purnell

Multidisciplinary artist Brontez Purnell is back after the great success of his award-winning story

collection *100 Boyfriends* to bring us *Ten Bridges I've Burnt*, an autobiography in poetic verse. In this unapologetically Black, queer and deliciously blunt series of poems, Purnell continues to excite readers with his unique, often foulmouthed and always hilarious takes. We had lots to talk about during our interview, including a breakdown of *Cowboy Carter*, why OnlyFans is ruining sex work, and how Black Southern Vernacular has permeated culture so deeply. (AN)

# : game jam



BY NATALIA YANCHAK

Back in late 2022, I accepted a job offer at an indie games studio in Montreal called Goose Byte. At the time, I was on tour with my rock band and signed the contract in the back of the van on our way to the next gig.

I leapt with trepidation into a totally new industry: out of music and into video games. The music biz, for a touring musician, had become very rough. Unless you're selling out arenas, you're operating on razor-thin profit margins. I would quickly learn that a lifetime of training under this type of duress would help me in my role of managing an independent video games studio.

While the pandemic decimated live music and touring, it gave a super boost to video games. Everyone took to gaming as both a way to pass the time without leaving their house and a social activity. In 2020, global gaming sales rose 20% to nearly \$180-billion and continued to rise with the release of next-gen consoles in 2021.

Today, the dynamic is quite different. The post-pandemic slump, coupled with an increased cost of

living, has changed the landscape drastically. The most visible effect came with studio closures and layoffs: 10,000 lost jobs in 2023, and another 10,000 in the first half of 2024. It's so real, the phenomenon has its own Wikipedia page.

Some analysts suggest a recalibration and post-pandemic correction is in effect, while my armchair take is that game development has been getting too big for its britches. For any game to reach a large audience, there was an expectation that it had to be a AAA beast built by a team of 800.

We can build quality games with a smaller scope at maximum efficiency. I'm not suggesting mandating industry-wide burnout levels of work, but smarter, faster development cycles. Of course that's absolutely easier said than done since it requires a magically perfect team to be assembled. A director-level leader coming from a huge AAA studio will struggle to apply their knowledge to a tiny team of 12 or less. In short, solving problems at an indie level is fundamentally different than solving similar problems at a corporate one.

Indie rock requires radical adaptability, which puts Quebec studios in a unique position: if the climate dictates we need smaller, leaner teams, then the Legault government has chosen an interesting moment to roll back the multimedia tax credit that made the province a boon to the industry in the first place.

Commenting on new high-salary thresholds and an increased non-taxable amount, Jean-Jacques Hermans, the general director of the Quebec Video Game Guild, notes that the tax credit amendments "...will create more demand for quite rare senior workers," who command punishingly high salaries, while reducing entry-level opportunities for "cohorts of 900 to 1,000 new graduates each year."

When I joined Goose Byte, they had only recently started work on an ambitious sci-fi open-world survival crafting game called *The Signal*. We had a long-term funding commitment from a huge Swedish conglomerate. Seemed a safe bet at the time; back then, the video games business was flush with cash!

A year later, our funding was pulled as the Swedes divested from several projects, landing themselves at the top of the list of corporations responsible for layoffs on the aforementioned Wikipedia page. Once again, I was indie rock.

You can wishlist *The Signal* on Steam now.



A photograph of three shirtless men in a locker room. The man in the center is a Black man with dark, wavy hair and a goatee, looking slightly to the right. He has tattoos on his chest and arms. To his left is a white man with a goatee, looking towards the center. To his right is a white man with short brown hair, looking towards the center. They are standing in front of red lockers. The text 'COME TAKE A LOAD OFF' is overlaid in large white letters.

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