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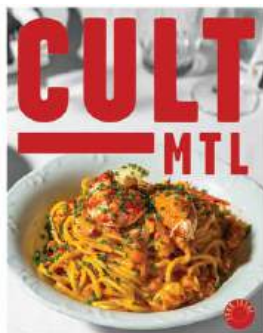
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There's renewed energy in the Montreal restaurant scene, and a renewed appetite for dining out. With so much to fret about in the world these days, it really feels like now's the time to eat while the eating's good. With that in mind, our 2025 Restaurant Guide is a mix of new, relatively new and totally classic Montreal restaurants, offering an excellent point of reference for where to eat well in the city. Bon app!

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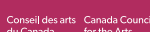
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## Why Poilievre's endorsements matter



BY TOULA DRIMONIS

Earlier this year, *National Post* columnist Michael Taube argued that it shouldn't matter that Alex Jones endorsed Conservative Party of Canada leader Pierre Poilievre. "Politicians can't control who chooses to endorse them," he wrote. "Intelligent and rational Canadians understand this."

At the time, I chuckled at Taube's obvious attempt at removing the dreaded stain of a Jones endorsement. Canadians who questioned it, the pundit implied, were neither intelligent nor rational. Even as his list of troublesome supporters continues to get longer, should we be concerned? After all, it's not Poilievre's fault if these grifters like him.

Let's be serious for a minute.

Of course it matters who endorses you in a political race! An endorsement is a sign of agreement, of similar value systems and political priorities. It's a public declaration of support for your platform and what you stand for as a politician and potentially as a person.

One can certainly argue that a single shady endorsement shouldn't be enough to alienate potential voters. But how many contentious people championing you are too many?

At some point, does it become obvious that a lot of morally objectionable and politically dangerous people are supporting Poilievre?

### GRIFTERS, FRAUDSTERS, BILLIONAIRES AND SHOCK-JOCKS

Far-right radio host Alex Jones endorses Poilievre. The Infowars founder and conspiracy theorist is a morally bankrupt gun nut who's claimed that mass shootings were "suspicious" and "used to try to create guilt on the part of the average gun owner."

Jones alleged the U.S. government faked the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting that left 20 students and 6

staff members dead at the hands of a mass murderer. Jones's lies led to the parents of the Sandy Hook victims being harassed and threatened for years. Who inflicts that kind of pain on people who've already suffered a parent's worst nightmare?

Jones has linked the LGBTQ community to pedophilia, hosted leaders of the Proud Boys and Oath Keepers (both groups took part in the January 6 insurrection) as well as white supremacists and antisemites. The number of lawsuits against him are too long to list here. If I were a politician aspiring to credibility, an endorsement from Jones is not what I'd be looking for.

Convicted fraudster and occasional *National Post* columnist Conrad Black endorsed Poilievre as "someone who has a plan to fix Canada."

We already know why Black waxes poetic over "his old friend" Donald Trump, the man who granted him a federal pardon in 2019. But Black has been a fan of Poilievre for years, claiming attacks on him "are just part of the frenzied and contemptible effort of the mindless, sophomoric, left-wing media of Canada."

While Poilievre tries hard to position himself as a champion of working-class Canadians, a quick look at his track record as a long-standing MP and what he's consistently voted against says otherwise.

Bill Ackman, an American billionaire who's backed Trump, recently endorsed Poilievre on X, saying he should be Canada's next PM — "the sooner, the better."

Billionaires rarely have the average person's best interests in mind.

### ELON MUSK: SUPPORTING FASCISM AND PRAISING POILIEVRE

Elon Musk may or may not have performed a Nazi salute during Trump's inauguration, but he's definitely allowed neo-Nazi and far-right sites to flourish on X. He's also

spent considerable time criticizing the Canadian PM and our government, while heaping praise on Poilievre.

Musk has retweeted prominent race scientist adherents on his platform X, amplified racist accounts and outright lied about undocumented immigrants in the U.S.

Weeks before Germany's general election, Musk claimed on X that "only the AfD can save Germany". The fascist party recently stuffed thousands of fake «deportation notices» in immigrants' mailboxes. Musk recently spoke at the party's campaign launch, telling partisans that Germany should move past its Nazi guilt, a claim the Holocaust memorial chair says is "dangerous."

Musk has claimed Britain was a "tyrannical police state" and called Trudeau an "insufferable tool." Why is he so interested in meddling in democratic countries' free elections and what does his support for Poilievre spell for us, given what Musk supports so openly?

Ben Shapiro is another winner placing his support behind Poilievre, calling him a "man for the people." Like many conservative pundits, Shapiro makes a lot of money speaking at college campuses, complaining about his freedom of speech being stifled. He supports a ban on abortion, thinks homosexuals and trans people suffer from mental illness and endorses the death penalty.

Podcaster Joe Rogan also endorsed Poilievre, calling him a "common sense" guy. Rogan has also called Canada a "communist" country and Trudeau "a fucking dictator" while admitting that he has "zero understanding of Canadian systems of governance and politics" — so make of that endorsement what you will.

### 'MASCULINE ENERGY' AND MACHO MEANNESS

Canadian conservative pundits Jordan Peterson and Gad Saad have also consistently praised Poilievre while mocking Trudeau. That is, when they're not busy having temper tantrums on social media. For "global thought leaders," they certainly bristle at criticism. Saad has called people "retarded" online more times than I can count. Even my seven-year-old nephew knows not to use that derogatory term and yet this middle-aged man seems to delight in its use.

It's not accidental, of course. Use of the slur "retard" tripled on X after Elon Musk shared the word in a post.

This fake bravado, this notion that nasty and derogatory are somehow signs of strength is on the rise.

Watch Poilievre during certain much-praised interviews and what fans refer to as his "no nonsense" approach to answering reporters' questions. It's the cocky, smug attitude they're praising, the way he's angrily chomping away at an apple while being interviewed.

Musk thought that video "was fire." Those looking for someone to cosplay "masculine energy" (everyone wave to Mark Zuckerberg!) will find the video pleasing.

In the exchange, Poilievre pretends to "take down" mainstream media, even though the man he's disrespecting is just the editor of a small community newspaper.

Poilievre was recently interviewed by Peterson, whom he thanked for his convictions as a "free-speech champion." Peterson's speech has never been impeded. He was merely ordered by the College of Psychologists of Ontario to undergo a remedial coaching program after he implied someone should kill themselves online, conduct deemed to be "degrading, demeaning and posing a risk to the public."

What all of these endorsers have in common are their conservative views, self-identification as libertarians, their frequent use of culture wars to assist their grifting — and fawning over Trump.

People have noticed.

Vox referred to Poilievre's tactics as "Canada's polite Trumpism." The Daily Beast called him "MAGA's Canadian sweetheart." *Le Monde* calls him "Canada's Trump-inspired conservative leader."

Watching the chaos now unfold south of the border, do Canadians really want their next leader to be someone compared to Trump or endorsed by so many people gushing over him?

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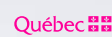
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# food

## In the cut



Mickael A. Bandassak

BY CLAY SANDHU

A royal blue noren hangs in the doorway of the storefront formerly home to the longstanding Peruvian restaurant Pucapuca. Billowing gently in the winter breeze, it is emblazoned with the Kanji characters for Nishinokaze (“west wind”). Emblematic of a cultural current carrying traditions and techniques across borders, it is, more specifically, an eight-seat Edomae-style sushiya that introduces a new echelon of refinement and dining to Montreal.

A joint venture by partners Julian Doan and chef Vincent Gee — who previously ran a celebrated *sushiya* by the same name in Toronto — Sushi Nishinokaze offers a singular experience in Montreal, born from a shared obsession with Edomae sushi and an unwavering dedication to excellence. The Edomae style is rooted in nature’s beauty, emphasizing seasonal ingredients and preparing them in ways that best express their innate qualities. Mastery of this approach demands extensive knowledge and skill, honed over time. Gee, for his part, has spent decades refining his craft in distinguished *sushiyas* in Vancouver, Toronto and Tokyo. The result is

a spectacular 24-course *omakase* menu that seamlessly balances time-honoured tradition with a modern, personal touch. Gee’s blade moves deftly, and each ingredient is handled with precision and reverence.

That level of care extends beyond the food itself. Beginning with the *tokonoma* window — featuring a 17th-century Korean Moonjar and three contemporary works by Kuroda Taizo, an acclaimed porcelain ceramist who studied under Quebecois artisan Gaétan Beudin — the restaurant’s philosophy is immediately evident. The space, a collaboration between Montreal-based architect Justin Nguyen and Taichi Kuma (son of world-renowned architect Kengo Kuma), reinforces the theme of cultural exchange, skillfully combining locally sourced white ash with Japanese Hinoki. More artwork, all from Doan’s personal collection, adorns the minimalist and serene dining room.

That level of attention to detail, it should be noted, comes at a cost. At \$360 (tax and service included) per guest, Nishinokaze is among the city’s priciest tables. Much of the expense, however, can be justified by the team’s uncompromising approach to sourcing ingredients. The fish — all wild-caught and procured directly from fishermen — is the star, but that same dedication extends to every element. The rice is a proprietary blend of grains cultivated on a spring-fed plot at the base of a mountain near Kyoto. The *ikura* (salmon roe) arrives uncured and still in its sac — a rarity outside Japan — and is cured in-house and kept fresh using a medical-grade freezer. The raw Matane shrimp took Doan eight months of research and negotiation to acquire. Even the *nori* comes from a producer with a

300-year pedigree, who is known for supplying Sukiya-bashi Jiro, the world’s first three-Michelin-star sushi restaurant, in Tokyo. Every item in the space is meticulously chosen for its quality.

A striking yet unexpected example of this philosophy is what Doan calls the “Living Gallery” — a collection of dinnerware and serving vessels, again from his personal collection, many of which are museum-quality and, in some cases, nearly priceless. For him, seeing these pieces used as intended is to experience them at their highest form of beauty. On the beverage side, privately imported sake is provided by Déserteur du Vin, complemented by a selection of Champagne and natural wines from esteemed Burgundian producers.

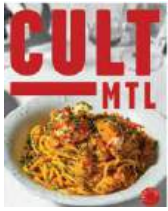
Having officially opened on Feb. 1, Sushi Nishinokaze has already left an impression on many of the city’s most respected restaurant professionals and gastronomes. A question remains, however: Do Montrealers have an appetite for this level of refinement—and at this price point? Fortunately, this model has thrived in nearly every major food metropolis in the world and Nishinokaze’s closest comparison, Sushi Masaki Saito in Toronto, recently earned the city’s only two-star Michelin distinction — and at a price of \$680 per person. By comparison, Nishinokaze’s price feels considerably more digestible.

In any case, its arrival feels long overdue, signalling Montreal’s continued evolution as a global dining destination. The restaurant is open Wednesday to Sunday, with two seatings at 6 p.m. and 8:45 p.m. Reservations are mandatory, with payment required at the time of booking.



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# Restaurant Guide



Le Violon

BY CLAY SANDHU  
ALL PHOTOS BY SCOTT USHEROFF (UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED)

Restaurant dining is back, baby — and the temperature is dialed all the way up!

Last year, I predicted 2024 would be a great year for restaurants. Having recovered from the pandemic era and the rampant inflation that came with it, restaurants and patrons found themselves ready to rekindle the romance of the dining room.

There's a lot of anticipation in 2025, and with a number of exciting restaurants rumoured to be opening in the coming months (from first-time restaurateurs and industry stalwarts alike), there's certainly a lot to look forward to.

This year, as we compiled our restaurant guide, we were pleasantly surprised by the mix of new, relatively new and totally classic restaurants that made the selection. It's a good sign for a dining scene to have this type of diversity and, to be honest — it reminds me of a version of our restaurant scene I worried we'd left back in the 2010s.

There's renewed energy out there and a renewed appetite for dining out. With so much to fret about in the world these days, it really feels like now's the time to eat while the eating's good.

With that in mind, here's our 2025 Restaurant Guide — it's full of favourites throughout the city, and while it's far from comprehensive, we think it covers a lot of bases and offers an excellent point of reference for where to eat well in the city. Bon app!

## VERDUN

### Beba

Ari and Pablo Schor's Verdun restaurant has, since opening in 2019, firmly established itself as one of Montreal's best and most important restaurants. Stemming from the brothers' Argentine roots, the food takes cues from the Italian and Spanish influence on Argentina, the family's Jewish heritage and a deeply held reverence for the best products on earth (whether that's D.O.P. Taleggio, Iwashiflown in from Japan or a bit of locally raised pork). The cooking is always precise and generous and the wines are just as thoughtful. Hard to think of a better place to eat in town. (Clay Sandhu)

(3900 Éthel)



Bonheur d'Occasion



Bar St-Denis

## Rita

Opened in 2018, this Verdun restaurant is where Quebec falls in love with Italy. Owners Sophie Bergeron and chef Joey D'Alleva have done a beautiful job marrying both cultures, and the locals filling the tables agree! The menu is filled with classics and house specialties that rotate with the seasons. Heavenly polpettes (meatballs), cavatelli with fennel sausage and rapini stand out, but save room for their Neapolitan-style pizza. A winning choice was the “Verdun hot honey,” which is made with vodka sauce and topped with provolone, grana padano, coppa, and finished with spicy honey — amazing! Pro tip: finish with the “olive oil” cake. (Heidi Small)

(3681 Wellington)

## Verdun Beach

Besties and partners Philippe Jacquelin, Marc Frandon and Charles Garant have secured their place in the food scene with a street takeover reminiscent of the Joe Beef block on Notre-Dame. This charming *guinguette* on Verdun's bustling Wellington strip has an obvious beach vibe and wondrous throwback vintage feel. The food is seasonal and perfect for sharing, while the wine list exclusively features bottles and producers represented by Primavin — the team's private import company next door. The newly minted Verdun Beef, their neighbouring butcher shop, serves up quality meats from animals primarily grass-fed and organically raised. This delightful trifecta gives locals and food lovers a haven for take-out, light meals, incredible wines and an overall joyful *bon vivant* energy. (HS)

(4110 LaSalle)

## NDG/WESTMOUNT

### Bistro la Franquette

Chef Elias Deligianis has concocted the best steak frites in town. I mean it — tender, juicy, crispy on the outside and a buttery inside that should be doused in the house

aioli, accompanied by triple-fried potatoes and, should you choose (you should choose), a tangy wedge salad. Bistro la Franquette is a rare upscale dining experience, where the price is completely justified by your full belly thereafter. And still, I never want to say no to dessert. With a thoughtful wine list and creative cocktails, it's my go-to spot where I take my out of town guests, it's where you should have a date, and if Jen's at the bar, tell them Sruti said you should do a shot. (Sruti Islam)

(374 Victoria)

### NDG Luncheonette

Sophia Khalil-Griffin and Dillon Griffin's cozy finer-diner NDG Luncheonette has quickly become a neighbourhood staple. Booths are aligned against large windows, allowing warm natural light to fill the space. And the menu is classic: smoked salmon, eggs, bacon, scoops of (perfectly tangy) tuna and a French toast sprinkled with bright pomegranate seeds. Coffee is from friends at Campanelli. My bestie and I have a permanently standing catch-up date here — it's got just the right comforting vibe. The restaurant also hosts special pop-up nights dubbed “Night Hawks,” where their Montreal chef friends take over for intimate five-course meals. It's worth the dive into deep NDG. (SI)

(6800 Fielding)

### Hwang Kum

Best. Korean. Fried. Pancake. In. Town. Fluffy, hearty and packed with so much flavour, it is a treat, and an NDG institution. Although the pancake is a must, the rest of Jun Beom Lim and Young Ui Hong's robust menu offers a variety of equally notable Korean dishes and stews. The space is romantic as hell, dimly lit and intimate. There is one flaw, however: they're only open for dinner three days a week, akin to the emotionally unavailable men who don't text me back. But they are indeed charming, delicious and a rare thing to be desired. I love you Hwang Kum — text back. (SI)

(5908 Sherbrooke W.)

## SAINT-HENRI/LITTLE BURGUNDY

### Gia

Named in honour of Giovanna Tiezzi of the celebrated Tuscan winery Pacina, Gia is an homage to the uniquely joyful and convivial approach Italians take to drinking and dining. Start the night with some charcoal-grilled *arrosticini* and a glass of sparkling *rosato* from Camillo Donati at the beautiful central bar known affectionately as Wine Island, and then move to the dining room to indulge in chef Janice Tiefenbach's menu which is comprised of excellent pasta, a selection of delectable grilled items from both land and sea and, of course, a generous helping of composed dishes which revolve, as they should, around the seasons. (CS)

(1025 Lenoir)

### La Spada

Located smack dab on the exhilarating route that is Notre-Dame W., La Spada has welcomed not only its Saint-Henri neighbours but friends outside the city to its Italian dining experience, care of chef Steve Marcone. The portions are sizable, which feels right. Classic Roman dishes (carbonara, suppli, etc.) are served alongside a series of elevated cocktails (I tried my first Pomodoro Martini there — a delight). Just don't stay too late. My friends live upstairs. (SI)

(3580 Notre-Dame W.)

### Bonheur d'Occasion

Named after the classic Quebec novel by Gabrielle Roy, this restaurant — opened by Chef Philippe Gauthier, with chef de cuisine Eric Carpanzano — has cemented itself as a neighbourhood staple. With a strong emphasis on local products (there's always fresh mushrooms on hand), freshly caught seafood and a diverse selection of wines, the restaurant chose its name well. Operating as a café by day, it is indeed a welcome space for “secondhand happiness.” If you're looking to refresh your regular reservation list, don't overlook this spot. (SI)

(4001 Notre-Dame W.)



Maison Boulud

Courtesy of Maison Boulud

## OLD MONTREAL

### Dorsia

WITH Hospitality went for broke with this ultra swanky, spare-no-expense, *American Psycho*-themed fine dining spot in Old Montreal. With a lavish dining room designed by Ivy Studio and an imported Michelin-starred chef, the aspirations are sky-high. Fortunately, it delivers on all fronts. Chef Miles Pundsack-Poe's menu is elegant, approachable and just plain delicious, the martinis are pitch-perfect and you couldn't ask for a more beautiful space. The best part is, you won't need to kill anyone to get a table. (CS)

(396 Notre-Dame W.)

### Le Club Chasse et Pêche

If you love a dark, opulent atmosphere, this place is for you. A pillar on the food scene since 2004, owners and celebrated restaurateurs Hubert Marsolais and partner Claude Pelletier deliver with le Club Chasse et Pêche. Tucked away on a quintessential Old Port cobblestone street, upon entry, you'll be privy to the finer things in life. The menu, by chef Olivier Larocque, showcases an array of indulgent game, red meat and fish offerings that pair masterfully with the robust wine list. Save room for some of their memorable desserts! (HS)

(423 St-Claude)

### Moishes

While the new Moishes location may have given up some of the original location's historic charm, it's kept all of the finesse and hospitality. The new space is grand, with aesthetic reverent to its roots and to Montreal culture. Most importantly, though, the steaks are as good (or possibly better) than you remember, and the meal still begins with their iconic dill pickles and coleslaw. (CS)

(1001 Square-Victoria)



Fu Chun Soupe Dumpling

## DOWNTOWN

### Fu Chun Soupe Dumpling

Home to Montreal's best Xiaolongbao. Originally founded in Shanghai in 1995, the Montreal location is only the fourth in 30 years, and the only location outside of Asia. Xiaolongbao, the juicy Shanghainese soup dumpling, is the specialty here, but the Shanghai-style wontons and fried pork chops easily hold their own. (CS)

(1978 de Maisonneuve W.)

### Maison Boulud

Renowned French chef Daniel Boulud has restaurants in many cities, but his Montreal location is pretty close to perfect. Its menu is refined but diverse, ranging from oysters and caviar to a truly phenomenal burger. This quality carries over to the restaurant's four distinct areas and ambiances — its setting in the Ritz-Carlton Hotel accentuates that balance of crowd-pleasing and prestigious. With unparalleled service and amazing bartenders continuously upping their cocktail game, Maison Boulud offers ample reasons to stop in for a celebration or a casual lunch. (LC)

(1228 Sherbrooke W.)

### Marcus

Though established and overseen by celebrity chef Marcus Samuelsson, it's the focus and attention to detail on the part of executive chef Jason Morris that has maintained Marcus's high standards. While the Four Seasons Hotel restaurant could have been reduced to supperclub status, it's become both a nightlife hotspot and an elevated dining experience. Its seafood-forward menu ranged from an exceptional raw bar to comfort-food fallbacks like the fried chicken burger. And let's not forget the elegance of the room, and the open terrace in summertime — something to look forward to as seasons change. (LC)

(1440 de la Montagne)



Cabaret l'Enfer

## PLATEAU

### Le Violon

Easily the most anticipated opening of 2024, le Violon takes over the space formerly home to Maison Publique and delivers one of the most elegant and innovative restaurant experiences in Montreal. Co-owned and co-chefed by Danny Smiles and Mitch Laughren, the duo is joined by co-owners Andrew Park and Dan Climan. Designed by Climan and renowned architect Zébulon Perron, the dining room takes French inspiration and is one of Montreal's most beautiful. As for food, the menu claims no particular cultural identity, moving seamlessly from Lebanese-inspired beef tartare to stout bread with mussels and gochujang-glazed sweetbreads — each dish treated deftly and with great refinement. Make sure to save room for dessert. (CS)

(4720 Marquette)

### Cabaret l'Enfer

Chef-owner Massimo Piedimonte delivers a veritable Masterpiece Theatre experience, with him, his team and their creations at centre stage. Piedimonte looms large with charisma and talent, boasting a tasting menu that highlights both a dedication to his Italian upbringing and a show of precise French techniques. With a lineage in kitchens tracing back to Noma in Copenhagen, Maison Boulud and le Mousso, be prepared for a night to remember. The wine list is top-notch, the music is pitch perfect and all conspires to ready your senses for the unforgettable meal that lies ahead. (HS)

(4094 St-Denis)

### Le Filet

If you need to sum up the vibe of our city's food scene and its historical heft, simply proclaim: "Le Filet!" Irresistibly chic, this Plateau gem sits hidden in plain sight below a greystone triplex on Mont-Royal near Esplanade. Service is exceptional under the tutelage of chef Yasu Okazaki who commands with quiet strength and executes with precision on dishes like tuna tataki, miso oysters and seafood linguini, to name just a few gems. For a special thrill, grab a seat at the bar to enjoy the open kitchen and some dinner theatre. (HS)

(219 Mont-Royal W.)

EXHIBITION + POINTE-À-CALLIÈRE

# WITCHES

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café



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4141 Rue Saint Denis, Montreal, QC



Le Filet

## MILE END/LITTLE ITALY

### Parapluie

Ranked among Canada's 10 Best New Restaurants, chef Robin Filteau Boucher and co-owner Karelle Voyer's nondescript white-bricked storefront on the corner of Beaubien and Clark has quickly become a local favourite. Parapluie's classically elegant dining room is a delightfully unexpected contradiction to the otherwise industrial neighbourhood. The francophilic restaurant revolves around the central open kitchen where Filteau Boucher and team prepare sophisticated dishes like *oeuf mayo au homard*, beef tartare with *artichauts bariougle* and braised lamb saddle with peppery rocket. (CS)

(44 Beaubien W.)

### Bar St-Denis

While Bar St-Denis can no longer be considered under the radar (thanks in large part to collabs with Laurent Dagenais and a Matty Matheson plug), Emily Homsey and David Gauthier's Little Italy locale is still secretly one of Montreal's best restaurants. Gauthier's food is gourmand, evocative and always stunningly composed without gilding the lily. From a simple plate of *jambon persillé* to the mind-bogglingly indulgent *pressé de foie gras* with *confit de canard*, or the much lighter but nonetheless delicious scallops with lemon confit, each dish is evocative and utterly delicious. (CS)

(6966 St-Denis)

### Rôtisserie la Lune

La Lune is what you get when the chef from Canada's reigning best restaurant realizes his lifelong dream of opening a rotisserie chicken joint. Heading up the kitchen alongside Marc-Olivier Frappier and Jessica Noël is Mon Lapin chef de cuisine Charles-Eric Boutet. In the front of house, Vanya Filipovic is supported by Mon Lapin mainstay Alex Landry and a duo of newly acquired wine talents, Morgane Muszynski (ex-Denise) and Rosalie Forcherio (ex-owner of Paloma). Roast chicken, golden fries and luscious gravy are of course the stars of the menu, as is the exceptional wine list, but the desserts deserve special mention, too. With a stunning dining room designed by Zébulon Perron and an all-star cast, la Lune casts a shadow far larger than its humble inspiration. (CS)

(391 St-Zotique)

## VILLERAY/ROSEMONT/HOCHELAGA

### Hélicoptère

Hélicoptère is a truly special place and its chef-owner David Ollu is nothing short of a visionary. Located in Hochelaga since 2018, its weekly, evolving menu showcases small plates that allow for un petit goût of everything. And rest assured... the oyster mushroom with feta, onion and sourdough will have you swooning hard. In fact, it has become a menu fixture due to its sheer deliciousness and the incessant demand. Vibe is cozy like a home, staff are

awesome, wine list is impressive (natural, organic and biodynamic) and dessert is not to be missed. (HS)

(4255 Ontario E.)

### Bona Fide

Bona fide is Latin for "in good faith" and after my meal here, I would say this place is a bona fide hit! The genuine sincerity and warmth that envelopes you upon entry is only outmatched by this restaurant's scrumptious dishes, like the lick-the-plate delicious duck ragu. Dish after dish, hit after hit — I could not believe how good they were. Bona Fide was opened in 2024 by three former team members from Antonietta: Renaud Bussièrès Camille Laura Briand, Luigi Minerva and chef David Alfred (Liverpool, Nora Gray). This is a stellar cast bringing gargantuan talent to the smallest of quarters. Cozy and warm, perfect for a date night or on your own vibes. (HS)

(8521 St-Laurent)

### Moccione

Moccione's chef and co-owner Luca Cianciulli leads a team that serves up dish after dish of winning Italian delicacies. Nestled in Villeray, on a quiet block of St-Denis, this resto's concise menu will have you swooning for days, until you manage to snag your next coveted visit. Pasta is the true star and it's all lovingly made in-house, daily. The seasonal menu also boasts an impressive private import wine list and fun cocktails that showcase their mixologist's talents. Save room for the tiramisu to cap off a most memorable Montreal meal. (HS)

(7495 St-Denis)



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# music

## New elevation



Neil Mota

BY DARCY MACDONALD

From her first shot at it on her 2018 EP *Higher Self*, to leaving a 9 to 5 career life in pursuit of a calling in music, and through successive, successful and increasingly refined projects since, Naya Ali has kept the faith.

With a tight collaborative team that harnesses the composition and production skills of Adrian X and Kevin Figs alongside top-notch technical studio talents, the Ethiopia-born, Montreal-raised hip hop talent re-emerges from the lab after a couple of years spent crafting her second studio LP, *We Did the Damn Thing*.

Available everywhere via Bonsound records on Friday, Feb. 7 and launching with a high-concept concert at la Ministère on Saturday, Feb. 15, her latest incorporates new ideas, new sounds and a deeper execution of a distinctive musical vision.

Threading inventive production with live instrumentation, through subtle nods to her cultural roots that complement a polish she's worked hard for and a flex she's earned, *We Did the Damn Thing* sounds exactly like what its title proclaims.

The accomplished ambition of the music speaks for itself. Here's what Naya Ali had to say about the process.

DARCY MACDONALD: **Firstly, what are you most happy with on the new record?**

NAYA ALI: **Honestly, the album as a whole. I'm super proud of what we created. I took my time lyrically, pushed myself in songwriting and experimented with new sounds, like on "Trading Tables" or "Life." I challenged myself.**

I'm also really proud of the title and what it means for the culture, for me, for my community, my family, where I come from and where I am now. I think it's a well-put-together record, both musically and in its messaging.

DM: **Tell me about the (album art) image with the close-up of your eyes and the bead of sweat running down your forehead.**

NAYA ALI: **The one with the sweat ties into the themes of the album — roots, culture and giving flowers to those who came before us. The sweat running down my forehead represents a lot, like the sweat trickling down our brains for generations. It's about recognition, homage and also the present. Blood, sweat and tears. I think most people can relate to that.**

There's also intensity in my eyes. It's a powerful image, even outside the album's context. There are a lot of cultural codes within it — braided hair, baby hair, sweat. It's all very intentional, with clear references to my culture.

DM: **You're very forward about your spirituality. In hip hop, God gets name-dropped. Some artists go deep on the concept (but) fans sometimes tune that part out. How do you bring God into the room when you're creating?**

NAYA ALI: **I don't think I bring God in. God is already present. My spirituality is deeply embedded in who I am, so it naturally comes into my music. Creating is a spiritual experience, to make something from nothing.**

When I'm on the mic, freestyling, and I hit a pocket — what I call a state of flow — it feels like ideas and words come from somewhere beyond me. I'm not consciously thinking; I'm a transmitter. It's ever-present. It's like nature. You don't bring nature inside music. It's already there. You just build around it.

DM: **Do you think there's a new openness to the idea of a higher power, or do you see more rejection?**

NAYA ALI: **I don't preach. It's not my role. But people ask me to share my experience, and I do. Music is powerful. It can shape minds, start riots, and it's energy-based. I use it to uplift and I believe that aligns with God's work.**

People are losing faith in those in power and looking for something greater. I think that's leading to a spiritual awakening. I do think people are opening up to a higher power because of everything happening in the world. There's so much darkness, and people are searching for light.

DM: **Where do you draw from to converge talent, creativity and belief?**

NAYA ALI: **Honesty and humility. The greatest thing you can do is serve others rather than be self-serving. Of course, I have moments of ego. I want to be the best rapper! (laughs) But I try to approach music from a place of giving.**

My mom is deeply religious, so I grew up in the church. That foundation shaped me. As I got older, I branched out and looked for God in different places, only to realize God is within us. As long as you keep the light on, you can create with purpose. If I create selfishly, I can say a lot of nonsense. That's when I could sell out.

DM: **How do you create with your team?**

NAYA ALI: **We start from scratch, setting an intention: what are we trying to say? What's the vibe? I freestyle on the mic, find melodies and my team builds from there. It's very collaborative.**

I'm deeply involved in production, especially on this record. I led the choir sessions on many songs. On "Freedom Creepin'" (with Dominique Fils-Aimé), I had a significant hand in production.

DM: **You're singing a lot more on this album.**

NAYA ALI: **I didn't plan it that way. It's just the evolution of my voice. On this album, I pushed myself with tracks like "Turning Tables" or "Life." Trying new things helped me discover new strengths.**

Musically, I also focused on adding more live instrumentation. There's a lot on this album. There are Ethiopian influences, like the flute you mentioned is a traditional Ethiopian flute. I wanted to incorporate elements of my culture subtly but in an enchanting way.

DM: **In 2019, you told me you left a marketing job to give yourself a year to make hip hop your career. How do you feel about that decision now?**

NAYA ALI: **I've grown so much! Not just musically but as a person, daughter, friend, partner. This journey has shaped my character in ways I didn't expect.**

You know, I'm here because my mom made a bold decision to move to Canada. That's something I have to recognize and truly live. I'm proud of what I've done and who I'm becoming. That's what this album represents. I really quit my job (back then), we really made this album — we really did this! My mom really came from Ethiopia and built this life. It's crazy.

I used to be a fan of myself in a surface-level way. Now, I'm working on myself deeply. I love music, but I've learned it can't take over my whole life. Relationships matter. Life is short and unpredictable.

→ Naya Ali launches *We Did the Damn Thing* at la Ministère (4521 St-Laurent) on Saturday, Feb. 15, 8 p.m., \$25



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# film

## On Screen



Love Hurts



Omen



Parthenope



The Unbreakable Boy

BY JUSTINE SMITH

February, the shortest month of the year, is many things: cold, dark and deeply romantic. In other words, it's the perfect time to go to the movies.

The month starts off with two films that strike the right Valentine's Day balance, blending love and violence — as *Saint Valentine* intended. *Love Hurts* (Feb. 7) is an action-comedy starring Ke Huy Quan as a realtor who is pulled back into the life of crime after a former partner resurfaces with an ominous message. For something more horrific but still carrying some comedic flair, *Heart Eyes* (Feb. 7) follows a pair of co-workers working overtime on Valentine's Day who are mistaken for a couple by the "Heart Eyes Killer."

Among this month's blockbuster-scale movies, Marvel is back with *Captain America: Brave New World* (Feb. 14). Anthony Mackie steps into the star-spangled uniform in this action sci-fi. After meeting with newly elected U.S. President Thaddeus Ross, Sam finds himself in the middle of an international incident. He must discover the reason behind a nefarious global plot before the true mastermind has the entire world seeing red. Danny Ramirez, Harrison Ford, Liv Tyler and Giancarlo Esposito co-star.

After last year's surprise hit *Longlegs*, director Osgood Perkins is already back with his follow-up. *The Monkey* (Feb. 21) is an adaptation of a short story by Stephen King about twin brothers Hal and Bill discovering their father's old monkey toy in the attic — a series of gruesome deaths ensue all around them. The film stars Theo James and Elijah Wood.

For something more family-friendly, there's the third entry in the Paddington franchise, *Paddington in Peru* (Feb. 14). This film sees Paddington travel to Peru to visit his beloved Aunt Lucy, who now resides at the Home for Retired Bears. With the Brown Family in tow, a thrilling adventure unfolds when a mystery plunges them into an unexpected journey through the Amazon rainforest and up to the mountain peaks of Peru.

There's also *The Unbreakable Boy* (Feb. 21), a film about Austin, a boy with both a rare brittle-bone disease and autism. But what makes Austin truly unique is his joyous, funny, life-affirming worldview that transforms and unites everyone around him.

Fans of 1970s rock will enjoy *Becoming Led Zeppelin* (Feb. 7), a documentary concert experience following the individual journey of the four band members as they move through the 1960s playing small clubs until their meeting

in the summer of 1968 for a rehearsal that changes their lives forever.

From the director of *The Young Pope* and *The Great Beauty* comes *Parthenope* (Feb. 14), the latest from Italian filmmaker Paolo Sorrentino. *Parthenope*, born in the sea near Naples in 1950, is beautiful, enigmatic and intelligent. She is shamelessly courted by many. However, beauty comes at a cost. The film stars newcomer Celeste Dalla Porta and co-stars Gary Oldman, Stefania Sandrelli and *Young Pope* favourite Silvio Orlando, who played Voiello in the HBO series.

One of the more interesting films coming out this month is *Omen* (Feb. 27), which first premiered at the Cannes film festival in 2023. Between Brussels, Kinshasa and Lubumbashi, *Omen* borrows from magic realism to paint a portrait of "undesirables" and "sorcerers" through the intertwined stories of protagonists of different genders and generations, confronted with the prejudice and suspicion of those around them.

If you love Quebec cinema, February is a big month, because *Les Rendez-vous Québec Cinéma* runs from Feb. 19 to 27. The festival highlights the best Quebec films from the past year while also featuring master classes, events and a handful of world premieres.

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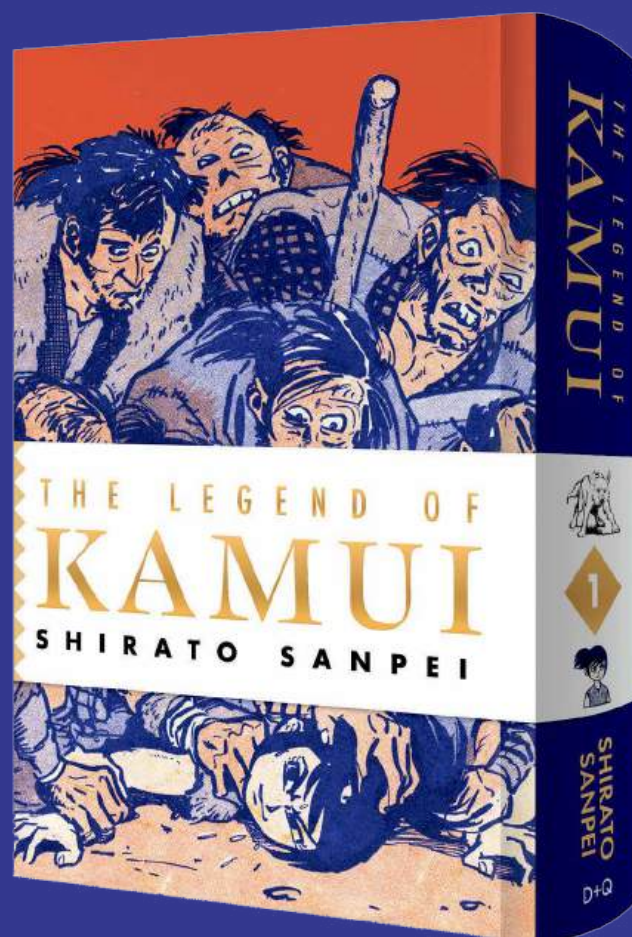
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## Winter arts calendar



Jean-Marc Vallée: *Mixtape*, coming to PHI Centre

BY SAVANNAH STEWART

A guide to some of the most promising performances and exhibitions happening and launching in Montreal in February and March.

### *To Build Law*

*To Build Law* is a documentary by Francesco Garutti and director Joshua Frank that follows *bplus.xyz* (b+) and *station.plus* (s+) as they launch *HouseEurope!*, a policy lab advocating for systemic change in the construction industry. With the sector responsible for 38% of global carbon emissions and driven by profit-focused redevelopment, the film captures efforts to shift cultural and legal norms by promoting renovation over demolition. As part of *Groundwork*, a three-part film and exhibition series at the Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA), *To Build Law* documents architecture as an open, collaborative process — where legislation, storytelling and activism converge to reshape the built environment. *1920 Baile through May 25*

### *Dear Laila*

In an intimate, interactive installation at MAI, artist Basel Zaraq attempts to answer his five-year-old daughter's questions about the land he cannot take her to. Recreating his childhood home in the Yarmouk Palestinian refugee camp in Damascus, the work offers a deeply personal yet universal story of displacement and resistance. Through one Palestinian family's experience, *Dear Laila* reveals how war and exile shape everyday life, turning memory into a form of survival. Inviting in one viewer at a time, it is a testament to the power of storytelling in reclaiming lost places. All profits from ticket sales will support the Palestinian Youth Movement, and entry is free for Palestinians. *3680 Jeanne-Mance, Feb. 6 to 22*

### *Heart On*

This latest exhibit at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts is a landmark retrospective celebrating the radical art of Joyce Wieland (1930–1998), one of Canada's most influential artists. Over 100 works spanning four decades are on display, including drawings, paintings, collages, films, textiles and prints. Exploring Wieland's engagement with feminism, social justice and ecology, the exhibition highlights her innovative approach and lasting impact on contemporary art. Co-

organized with the Art Gallery of Ontario, with key loans from the National Gallery of Canada and a special collaboration with Cinémathèque québécoise, *Heart On* reaffirms Wieland's significance as a global figure in 20th-century art and film. *1380 Sherbrooke W., Feb. 8 to May 4*

### *Vierge*

Black Theatre Workshop's latest production, *Vierge*, follows 16-year-old Divine, whose only true friend is Jesus — that is, until her family joins a new church, which reveals a world more complex than she imagined. The play explores faith, virginity and teenage desires through the lives of four Congolese-Canadian girls, starring Espoir Segbeaya as Divine, directed by Dian Marie Bridge and written by Rachel Mutombo. *5170 Côte-Ste-Catherine, Feb. 12 to March 2*

### Jean-Marc Vallée: *Mixtape*

This multimedia and sound-driven exhibition at PHI Centre immerses visitors in the creative world of the late, acclaimed Quebec director Jean-Marc Vallée, where music was the heartbeat of his storytelling. Drawing on testimonies from collaborators and loved ones, the exhibition explores Vallée's deep connection to music as both inspiration and creative process. Through five immersive installations and a rich sound environment, *Mixtape* highlights key moments in his career while offering an intimate journey into the mind of a filmmaker who translated emotion into cinema through the power of music. Free entry, reservation required. *407 St-Pierre, Feb. 13 to May 4*

### NIEBO HOTEL

*NIEBO HOTEL* is an immersive dance experience that will transform Montreal's Hôtel le Germain into a living stage. A collaboration between Ballets Jazz Montréal, CAPAS, Danse Danse, la Parenthèse, and les Hôtels le Germain, this unique performance, choreographed by Christophe Garcia, invites audiences into intimate hotel rooms where dance, music and visuals bring human connections to life. For an hour, spectators will follow a personalized journey, becoming both witnesses and participants in this poetic exploration of memory and emotion. Blending art and hospitality, *NIEBO HOTEL* offers an encounter with contemporary dance in an evocative, close-up setting. *2050 Mansfield, Feb. 18 to March 1*

### *Life Chronicles (Mondes disparus)*

In just 43 minutes, *Life Chronicles* takes audiences on a breathtaking VR journey through time, following Charlie and her robot Darwin as they explore nine extinct ecosystems filled with extraordinary lifeforms spanning 3.5 billion years

of evolution. From the microbial world of the Archean era to the towering forests of the Carboniferous and the mighty dinosaurs of the Cretaceous, each paleo-landscape is rooted in real fossil sites across the globe. Well-researched and scientifically accurate, this immersive exhibit will introduce you to over 160 plant and animal species from worlds past. *2 de la Commune W., Feb. 19 to April 27*

### *Adventures*, Centaur Theatre

A poignant blend of fairy tale and raw reality, *Adventures* follows PJ and Wendy as they stand at the cusp of a life-changing moment beneath the roots of the Mother Tree in a time of collective grief. Starring Ann-Marie Kerr and directed by Christian Barry, this powerful production is a collaboration between Imago Theatre and Keep Good (Theatre) Company, presented as part of *WinterWorks*, a curated series of experimental performances and events. *453 St-François-Xavier, Feb. 25 to March 1*

### *Those Roots Within*

*Those Roots Within* is a contemporary dance duet by Alida Esmail, Sophia Wright, and Hodan Youssouf, exploring the meeting of Deaf and hearing cultures through movement, signed music, vibrations and lighting. As Esmail and Youssouf trace their ancestors' journeys across a shifting world map, their intersecting and diverging paths reflect themes of immigration, identity and allyship. Each performance at the MAI offers LSQ and ASL interpretation, with a post-show talkback on Feb. 28 and inclusive childcare with a co-creative workshop on March 1. *Those Roots Within* is a powerful exploration of connection, history and communication through dance. *3680 Jeanne-Mance, Feb. 26 to March 1*

### *Replica*

From Andrea Peña & Artists dance company, presented at Agora de la danse, *Replica* is a choreographic odyssey led by dancers Frédérique Rodier and James Philipps, blending myth and technology to explore the history of the body's representation and non-binary identity. Set in an immersive "queer Garden of Eden," the performance challenges gendered conceptions of the human form through movement that evokes painting, sculpture and archaeology. *1435 de Bleury #102, Feb. 26 to March 1*

### Nuit Blanche

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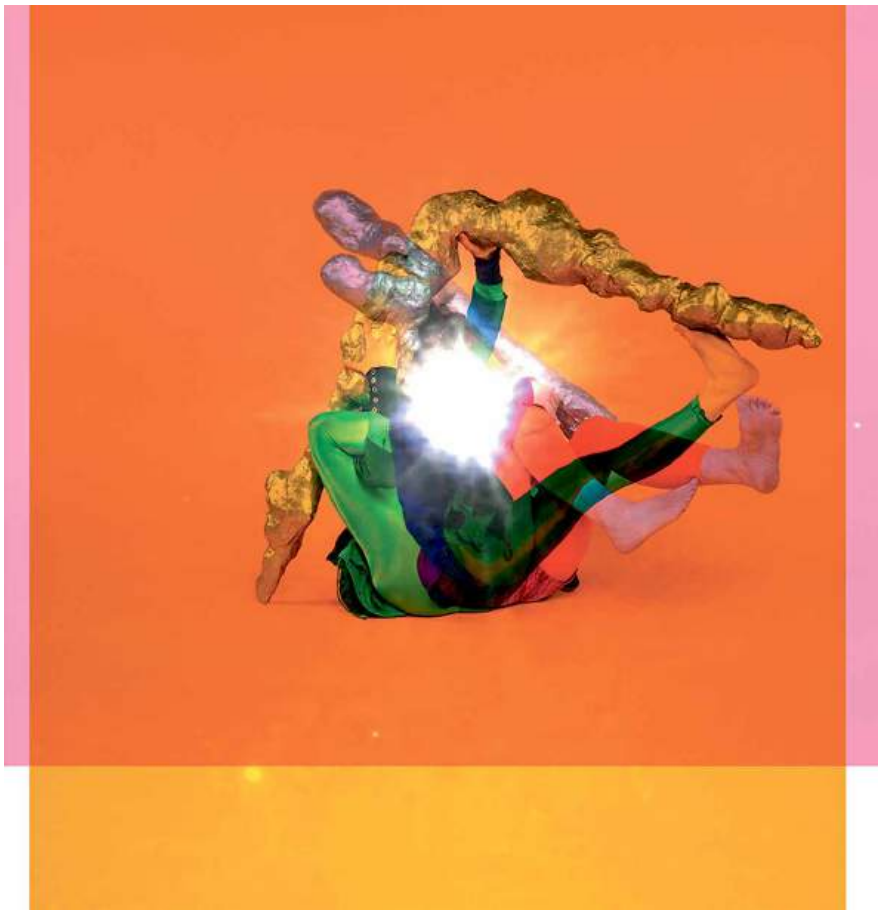
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has once again partnered with PHI Centre for their always-bumping Nuit Blanche event — this year it's La Nuit POP, a collaboration with the POP Montreal music festival.

*agency*

*agency* is a powerful visual arts exhibition at the MAI by tīná gúyáńí, the parent-child duo of Glenna Cardinal and Seth Cardinal Dodginghorse, reflecting on the loss of their ancestral home in Tsuut'ina Nation due to a land transfer for the Southwest Calgary Ring Road. Through film, music and visual arts, they critique colonial institutions that continue to displace Indigenous families while exploring themes of land, healing and reclamation. More than a chronicle of forced removal, *agency* envisions self-determined non-colonial, and non-patriarchal ways of reconnecting with home, kinship, and the land. 3680 Jeanne-Mance, March 6 to 29

*Skyscrapers by the Roots – Reflections on Late Modernism*

*Skyscrapers by the Roots* explores the lasting impact of late modernist architecture through works by Shannon Bool, Kapwani Kiwanga, Rachel Rose, Jonathan Schouela and a new film installation by David Hartt, alongside

1960s and 1970s pieces by Lynne Cohen and François Dallegret. The exhibition examines how functionalism and technological innovation shaped climate-controlled interiors, modular design, accessibility and media integration — once symbols of progress, now deeply entwined with the blurring of private life, labour, consumption and spectacle. Through a critical lens, it reflects on modernism's complex legacy in contemporary spaces. Place Ville-Marie, March 6 to Aug. 10

*On What Ground*

An interactive exploration of how we find, shape and leave the cities that define us, *On What Ground* blends music, movement, and open conversations between artists and audience. A dynamic performance by Other Hearts Collective, investigating what truly makes a place *the place*. Created and performed by Eris Thomas, Yousef Kadoura, Sebastian Marzialli, Silvae Mercedes and Eija Lopenen-Stephenson, the piece evolves in real-time, weaving together personal stories and collective experiences to reimagine our connections to the spaces we inhabit. Presented as part of Centaur Theatre's *WinterWorks*, a curated series of experimental performances and events. 453 St-Francois Xavier, March 7 to 8

*Resurrection*

Part cabaret, part documentary theatre and part live podcast event, *Resurrection* brings to life the story of Michael Callen — an activist, musician and key figure in the AIDS self-empowerment movement. Based on the acclaimed *Resurrection* podcast, which has ranked among Canada's Top 15 and was named one of Amazon Music's Best Podcasts of 2023, this performance sheds light on the resilience and activism of queer communities affected by HIV/AIDS. Praised by AIDS activists, including Sean Strub of *POZ Magazine*, *Resurrection* is an exploration of history, activism, and the fight for justice. Part of Centaur Theatre's *WinterWorks*, a curated series of experimental performances and events. 453 St-Francois-Xavier, March 11 to 15

For Everyone Stuck Chasing the Clock, coming to La Chapelle as part of Centaur Theatre's Winter Works

several of these — happening at venues around the city, way into the wee hours. It's the climax of the annual Montréal en Lumière festival, and while the full programming had not yet been revealed at press time, we can tell you that Cult MTL





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