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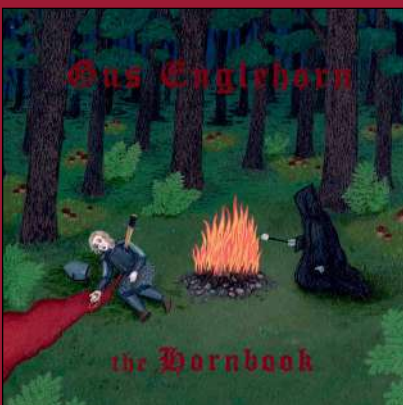


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We spoke with Naomi Ackie and Toni Collette about Bong Joon-ho's long-awaited follow-up to *Parasite* — a sci-fi black-comedy that's revolutionary at its core.

Cover photo courtesy of Warner Bros. Pictures

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Lorraine Carpenter
editor-in-chief
lorraine.carpenter@cultmontreal.com

Justine Smith
film editor
justine.smith@cultmontreal.com

Clayton Sandhu
food editor

Dave MacIntyre
contributing editor (music)

Savannah Stewart
contributing editor (arts)

Paul Desbaillets
contributing editor (football culture)

Chris Tucker
art director

Advertising
ads@cultmontreal.com

Contributors:
Yannick Belzil
Stephan Boissonneault
Johnson Cummins
Toula Drimonis
Sruti Islam
Cindy Lopez
Darcy MacDonald
Alex Nierenhausen
Taylor C. Noakes
Chico Peres Smith

General inquiries + feedback
info@cultmontreal.com



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DEI backlash beyond borders



Tranna Wintour

Courtesy of Pride at Work Canada

BY TOULA DRIMONIS

There's a bad wind blowing from the south and it's threatening to upend years of progress for the LGBTQ+ community worldwide.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives in the U.S. are currently facing serious backlash under Donald Trump's presidency. Programs that merely aim to ensure the fair treatment and full participation of groups that have historically been underrepresented or subject to discrimination based on identity or disability are now being called "radical" and "wasteful."

All federal DEI workers have been put on paid leave, and Trump has signed executive orders reversing four years of work on DEI efforts in the federal government.

Kowtowing to Trump's anti-DEI crusade, Meta and Amazon recently announced they were ending their DEI programs, joining McDonald's, Walmart, Target and other Fortune 500 companies who've backed off DEI.

These developments have many in Canada bracing for the worst, wondering whether locally based companies' DEI commitments and LGBTQ+ allyship will be as flimsy as it has been for corporations operating in the U.S., who've already buckled under political pressure.

Toronto Pride recently lost three major sponsors who also do business in the U.S. to avoid being seen as supporting LGBTQ+ rights.

SCAPEGOATING THE MOST VULNERABLE

Jade Pichette, a Toronto-based DEI professional, is concerned. "As a trans person, I'm very worried about the security and safety of trans people in the U.S. Trump's executive orders have

targeted us very intentionally and directly."

Pichette worries that anti-trans rhetoric and policies have emboldened people who hate their community. "We've been scapegoated, when we're just trying to live our lives."

It's not just a feeling. Hate crimes against queer and trans people are on the rise in both the U.S. and Canada.

As the Director of Programs at Pride at Work Canada, a national non-profit helping Canadian companies create workplaces free of discrimination, Pichette says that as attacks on queer and trans communities intensify, it's critical for employers to reinforce their legal and ethical responsibilities.

"We have been shifting our language from DEI to talk instead about human rights in the workplace," says Pichette. "It's much more difficult for someone to say they have an issue with human rights than it is to say that they have an issue with DEI, a term that's currently been divorced from its actual meaning and experiences."

In February, the nonprofit held their annual networking event in Montreal (Winter Pride), hosted by Montreal comedian Tranna Wintour. She says she's not only scared for her own community, but for racial minorities and women, too.

While Wintour understands the sociological explanations for this backslide, she can't fully understand it on a "soul and heart level."

"The idea that there could be anyone that doesn't just want safety and happiness for everyone makes no sense to me," she says.

Wintour believes some people erroneously mistake DEI as something being taken away from them. "For a lot of people, that sense of power is sometimes the only power they think they have, and they become very protective of it," she says, "to the extent that they don't care how much suffering is occurring in people who don't have the same privileges."

HUMAN-RIGHTS REGRESSION

For advocates working hard for LGBTQ+ rights, DEI cutbacks are a hard pill to swallow.

"As someone who's been out for over 20 years," Pichette says, "I've seen quite the journey from when we didn't have explicit trans rights in Canada, to a time when we are legally protected across the country. We're now seeing a backslide that we haven't seen in decades."

Pichette says they have no intention of travelling to the U.S. while Trump is in power.

Wintour sees the current climate as one of extreme individualism over community.

"The greatest tragedy of this moment," she says, "is that the ultimate privilege right now is wealth and resource privilege. Let's face it: most of us are not in that group. A lot of these people who cling to the power that they think their white, straight privilege brings them, well... they actually have a lot more in common with people who are struggling financially. Yet they somehow see themselves more aligned with the Elon Musks of the world."

For Wintour, hosting the Winter Pride event was a welcome respite from the worry.

"It's easy to spiral," she says, "but gatherings like these remind us that we're not alone. It's important to be reminded of the love and of the people fighting to make things as good as possible for as many of us as possible."

Thanks in part to conservative pundits and politicians, the term DEI has become loaded in many people's minds and misunderstood as a practice that suggests preferential treatment of some groups over others.

Yet, the benefits of DEI programs have repeatedly been backed by research: improved decision-making, increased creativity, better employee engagement, reduced turnover, etc. Diversity of thought creates productive and innovative work environments. But for that to happen, people need to feel safe, protected and valued for who they are.

It's worth emphasizing that under Canadian law, all employees have the right to a workplace free from discrimination and harassment. Upholding these rights is not just a matter of corporate values, but a legal necessity.

"DEI is about creating space for all of us," says Pichette. "Everybody benefits when we implement these programs."

SUPPORT THOSE WHO SUPPORT YOU

Nearly half (49%) of companies currently reducing or eliminating DEI programs in the U.S. cite political climate changes as a key factor. Companies wanting to curry favour with Trump (like Amazon and Meta) are doing it publicly. Other companies like Target and Shopify have done it a little more quietly.

But people are paying attention.

As some companies stand firm on their DEI commitments and other companies bail, advocates urge consumers to use their purchasing power to show their dissatisfaction.

Foot traffic dropped in both Target and Walmart as people boycott these companies for dropping their DEI programs.

In sharp contrast, Costco refused to retreat on DEI and has seen its foot traffic and popularity increase.

Pichette agrees with boycotts as a protest tool.

"People can decide that they're going to spend their money where people are doing the work and they're not going to spend it where people aren't doing the work," they say. "Consumers have power."

"It's extremely important where we spend our money," Wintour says. "It's the only thing that corporations respond to."

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A new home for the UN



BY TAYLOR C. NOAKES

If Montreal ever wanted to make a serious pitch to become the new home of the United Nations, now is it.

With Donald Trump going out of his way to make the United States a global pariah, and President Elon Musk saying the U.S. should abandon the UN, I'd argue the basic conditions have been met for Montreal to put together a proposal.

To be clear, I do not think that Montreal *deserves* to become the new home of the United Nations — plenty of cities and countries arguably deserve that distinction. But I do think there's a case to be made that Montreal has something special to offer, and that the UN would benefit from being located here over elsewhere (and particularly over New York City right now).

Donald Trump — and everything that is rotten about the United States that he represents — proves with every passing day why the United Nations should no longer be headquartered in New York City. I would argue it was a mistake to locate it there in the first place, and that — irrespective of however much longer Trump remains in office — the United States does not deserve the UN.

I suspect there are at least a few people up at the top of the UN who are probably thinking the same thing.

Montreal has every reason to develop a proposal and lobby the UN to consider it. If the governments of Canada or Quebec want to help, that's fine, but it should be clear to all concerned that this is Montreal's effort. At the very least, this avoids getting too wrapped up in federal or provincial politics, and helps Montreal assert itself. We need to be responsible for our own evolution.

The obvious selling point is that Montreal is a cosmopolitan and inherently multilingual city. It doesn't hurt that we're close to New York City, meaning the move would be relatively easy, too. We're a far more affordable city to live in, and this would make participating in the UN less of a financial burden for poorer nations. We also have a well-educated workforce, four major universities that have historically attracted a large international student body and are already home to several international organizations, including a UN specialized agency, the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO).

Montreal's cultural offering punches far above its weight, and the city enjoys a well-earned global reputation for its superior quality of life. It is an exceptionally safe city that's unlikely to be targeted by terrorists, which certainly sweetens the deal.

Being a major metropolis fully powered by renewable energy and boasting an excellent public transit system doesn't hurt either, and is a strong selling point in the era of the climate crisis.

The benefits to us are considerable. It's not just the prestige, though a rising tide lifts all boats. The presence of the UN would bring a lot of attention to our city, and this in turn would doubtless encourage our institutions and political class to think bigger as well. The economic impact would be considerable, with tens of thousands of UN workers and tens of thousands more new jobs created to support it. The construction of a new UN headquarters building would create even more jobs, stimulate the city's construction and engineering sectors and provide an opportunity to build an architectural landmark *sans pareil*.

There are other, perhaps less obvious benefits that should be considered as well.

On the subject of language, while Montreal's multilingualism is a major selling point, the relocation of the UN to a majority francophone city would not only bring many more French-speaking people to Montreal, it would likely go a long way towards reassuring language hawks that the future of the French language is guaranteed in Montreal. It's hard to argue that the French language is in decline in a city that's home to the seat of world diplomacy. Moreover, I suspect that the provincialism inherent to Quebec's language politics and policing wouldn't be very flattering on the world stage.

On a related note, both the federal and provincial governments could be encouraged to reconsider policies that limit the number of international students from attending Canadian universities. That too wouldn't be an attractive look.

The federal government would likely expand their presence in Montreal to take advantage of the newfound proximity to the United Nations, just as major Canadian corporations would find good reasons to expand their presence in Montreal for the same reasons. And it goes without saying Trudeau International Airport would likely become a lot busier, with many more flights to far more destinations. I suspect the very idea of a 'seasonal workforce' would disappear from our tourism and hospitality industry altogether.

And while I don't normally support the idea of giving land away for free, the potential economic, political and cultural benefits of relocating the UN to Montreal may actually make it worthwhile.

As to where it might go, there are more than a few options. The current UN complex in Manhattan only occupies about 0.07 square kilometres, which is smaller than the footprint of the Palais des Congrès.

Back in 2007, the Port of Montreal floated the idea of moving the UN here as a more cost effective alternative to renovating the existing UN buildings and campus in Manhattan. They proposed the site of Grain Silo No. 5 on Pointe-du-Moulin in the Old Port as a possible location.

I like the idea of a new Montreal UN headquarters also being located next to the water, but I wouldn't propose demolishing Grain Silo No. 5. Among other reasons, the silo is an icon of Montreal architecture and the city's industrial heritage, and should be preserved. Moreover, with Trump effectively ripping up CUSMA and giving Canada every reason to find new international export markets for our goods, it might be prudent for us to hold on to a massive grain storage and shipment facility.

That said, there are still plenty of other locations that could work. I'm partial to the Cité du Havre and Goose Village areas, namely because there's comparatively a lot of room to work with and it would create a new hub of activity within the greater city centre. Alternatively, if extensively modified, Olympic Stadium could make for an interesting location. Not only would it give the iconic building a new purpose, it would likely 'pull' high-density urban development towards the East End (which is what Jean Drapeau had hoped the stadium would accomplish 50 years ago) and provide some serious long-term economic stimulus for the area.

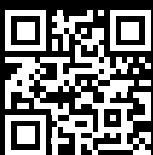
Trump may destroy America, and he threatens Canada in a way we never could have previously imagined, but he is also demonstrating on a daily basis why Canada needs to sever its once special relationship with the United States, and move on. This is a unique situation that provides us with an opportunity to completely reimagine who we are and set ourselves on a new course towards greater sovereignty and a more important role to play on the international stage. I don't think we should waste it.

In threatening our very existence, Donald Trump has ironically given us every reason to imagine how great we might become.



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: best buds



BY DAVE MACINTYRE

If there's any consolation in the fact that it's only March, it's that the worst of this winter is (hopefully) behind us.

While we're still a ways away from the terrasse and park-hang phase of the year, we're about to leave this exceptionally snowy winter behind us and make way for a milder — and slushier — stretch of time to come. Luckily, weed is great in all seasons and in all situations, so I've tested both a pre-roll and a regular old bag o' flowers to get you through whatever's left of the colder temperatures.

This month's batch comes to you courtesy of St-Eustache's C3 Solutions — a sativa and an indica, for good measure. Here's what to expect when you sit down, be humble (insert menacing piano riff here) and relax with some of this locally grown greenery.

BE HUMBLE CHAMPS VERDOYANTS (SATIVA)

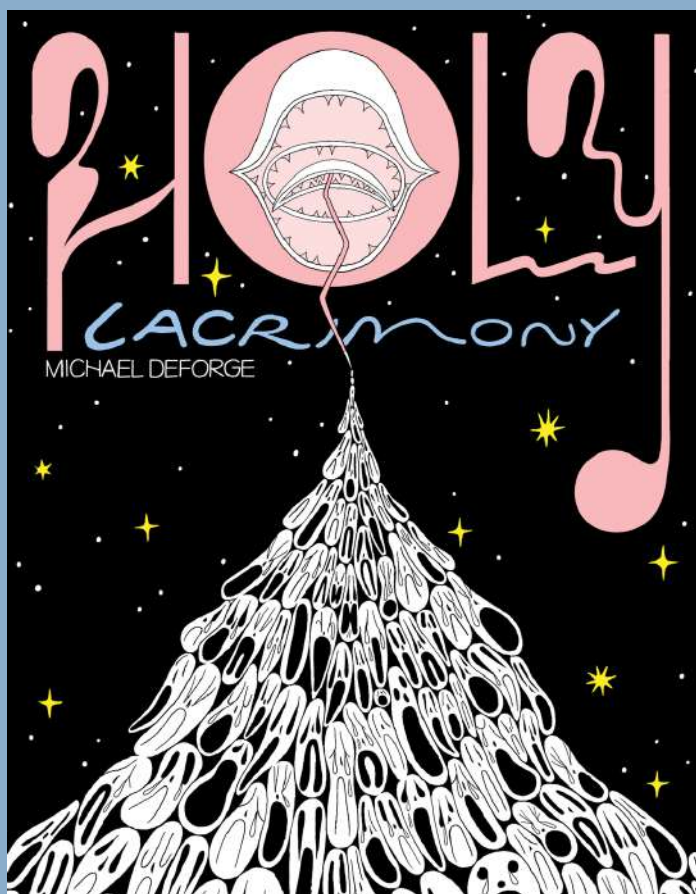
The (mostly) monochrome black packaging and the gold font suggests a certain degree of class with this stuff. I'm not entirely sure that's what we get here, but I have a good time smoking it nonetheless. It's quite potent, though, at just over 28% THC. The head is where this high is mostly concentrated, but it's much more around the brain than the eyes. Smoking it feels like giving my brain a warm hug, which makes sense as the company claims it helps stimulate cerebral activity.

It also does a solid job of relaxing me — of course, this is another effect they advertise. The buds are in decent condition, and the aroma is quite gassy and spicy. The high is comfortable, and I don't feel too short on productivity even during what's supposed to be a lazy Sunday afternoon. I decided to smoke this and watch the NFB's *Ladies and Gentlemen... Mr. Leonard Cohen*. It's honestly trippy: his poetry in the film sounds incredibly deep and thoughtful and yet I can't really follow it word-for-word. I also basically spend the entire time trying to see which parts of the city I recognize. 8/10

BE HUMBLE DEVIL DRIVER (INDICA)

I have to start this one with a gripe, as I would've liked to see a fairly mid-sized joint like this one come in packages of three rather than just the one. Nonetheless, it's a perfectly serviceable indica, and the taste leans on the fruitier side. This high is more concentrated around my eyes, but can take up plenty of real estate in my head — and not in the bad kind of way — at its peak.

The joint burns quicker than I'd like, but gets me plenty high regardless. I cough a little bit, but it's otherwise not terrible for my throat. It's not as intense as I'd expect a strain called "devil driver" to be, though. Having said that, it hits hard once it finally starts to get going. Its name actually originates from the fact that it mixes Melonade and Sundae Driver... but I still fail to see the connection between that and the underworld. 7.5/10



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BY PAUL DESBAILLETS

Soccer is a lifestyle, a passion and, for millions of fans, a reason to gather and celebrate. Whether in the bustling streets of Buenos Aires, the historic lanes of London, the vibrant boroughs of New York or the parks of Montreal one thing is constant: food plays an essential role in the experience, acting as fuel for fans, a bridge between cultures and a reflection of local identity.

European soccer culture is deeply intertwined with its food, from the pubs of England to the tapas bars of Spain. On match days, stadium perimeters transform into buzzing food hubs, offering everything from Germany's bratwurst to Italy's arancini. In the U.K., fish and chips remain a classic pre-game meal, while the famed "pie and a pint" tradition is a staple at stadiums like Old Trafford and Anfield.

In Spain, tapas culture — ie. bars serving dishes like patatas bravas and jamón ibérico — merges perfectly with soccer. In Germany, the bratwurst and pretzels sold outside Bundesliga grounds symbolize not just convenience but deep-rooted culinary heritage. In France, crêpes and merguez sandwiches are essential pre- and post-match indulgences.

In Latin America, soccer and street food are inseparable. In Argentina, choripán — a chorizo sausage in a crusty bun, often drenched in chimichurri — fills the air outside La Bombonera and El Monumental. Empanadas, quick and easy to eat while standing, are another staple.

Brazil, home to one of the most vibrant soccer cultures, is known for its match-day street food. Fans outside the Maracanã indulge in coxinhas (fried dough stuffed with chicken), pão de queijo (cheese bread) and espetinhos (grilled meat skewers). Much like the amazing Brazilian style of play, these flavours are influenced by African, Portuguese and Indigenous traditions.

Mexico, a country where soccer is almost a religion, boasts a street food scene that is just as revered, with tacos al pastor, elotes (grilled corn with cheese and spices) and tamales served en masse.

The United States and Canada may not have the same deep roots in soccer traditions as Europe or Latin America, but our food cultures are rapidly catching up.

The growth of the MLS has brought with it a diverse food scene that mirrors the multicultural fan base. In stadiums in Atlanta, L.A., NYC and Portland, food has become a crucial part of the fan experience.

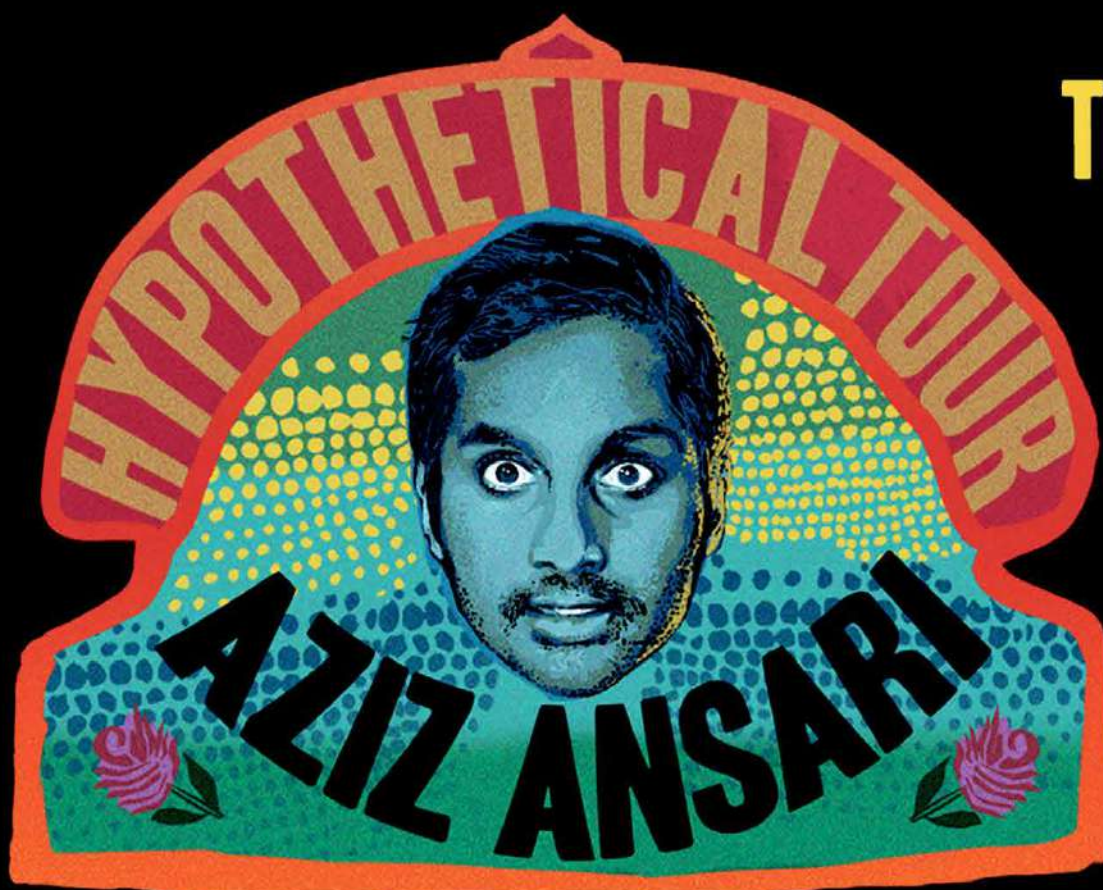
In the U.S., food trucks outside stadiums serve everything from Korean BBQ tacos to loaded hot dogs. Cities like Los Angeles and New York, with their immigrant-rich communities and fan bases, offer match-day food scenes that rival anywhere in the world. LA Galaxy and LAFC fans might feast on birria tacos before a game, while in Portland, a Timbers match isn't complete without a stop at one of the city's famed food carts.

Canada, home to a growing soccer culture, brings its own unique flavors to the mix. CF Montréal matches are known for their poutine, while Toronto FC supporters enjoy everything from peameal bacon sandwiches to West Indian doubles.

Montreal's GOAL soccer festival has used food as a way to bring people and communities together for over 15 years now, and we see the power of that firsthand every summer.

Food and soccer both thrive on authenticity. And for soccer fans around the world, it isn't just about sustenance — it's about tradition, identity and community. Without it, the beautiful game simply wouldn't be the same.

Bon appétit.



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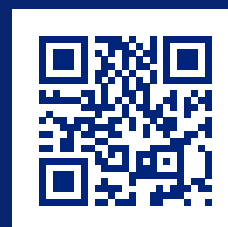
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food

The joy of Italian cooking

BY CLAY SANDHU

Nora Gray was the last restaurant I worked at before I left restaurants for good. I try not to write reviews of places where I've worked in the past because I know too much — it's an unfair bias that most diners won't have.

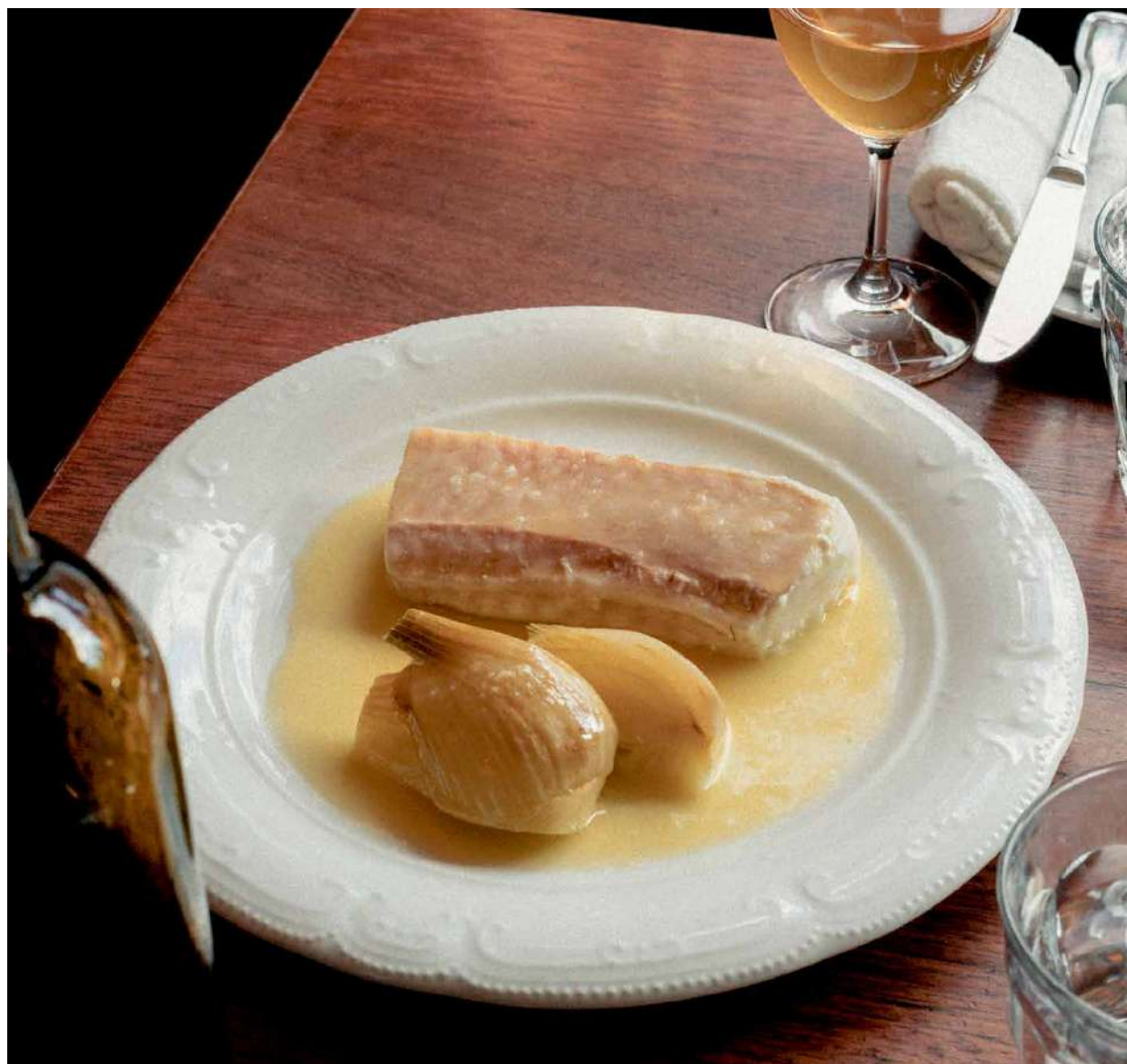
That said, since 2020, Nora Gray has changed substantially, and it's now as new to me in many ways as it would be to anyone else. Following the departure of Kira German, Andrew Korstvedt ran the kitchen rather successfully, with Nora Gray finding its way back onto the *Canada's 100 Best* list. During that window, however, Nora Gray felt like it had taken a back seat to its sister restaurants Elena and Gia. After Korstvedt concluded his tenure, Emma Cardarelli and Ryan Gray made the decision to bring in Dmetro Sinclair (ex-Salle Climatisée and Willow Inn) as head chef. With that in mind, I had the opportunity to eat at the new Nora Gray, and let me say — it's the best it's been in years.

Like all of Gray and Cardarelli's restaurants, Nora Gray's location is somewhat off the beaten path. Tucked away on a nondescript part of St-Jacques, it's easy enough to miss. I like that about the restaurant, though — it's a place that requires you to seek it out and rewards you with one of the most comfortable and welcoming dining rooms in the city. The combination of soft lighting, pitch-perfect sound and wrap-around wood panelling makes for an entirely intimate space, the kind of room that invites you to linger over a slow meal and an excellent bottle of wine, which is exactly the type of thing on offer here. Seated at one of the three banquettes, my dining companions and I tucked into a round of quality cocktails and perused the menu.

Service at Nora Gray has always been an area of focus. In my time working there, there was always an insistence that the experience should feel like a dinner party — welcoming and effortless yet highly professional. Our server, Shelby Skaberna (who also oversees the wine list), was the epitome of that style of hospitality.

Nora Gray's wine list is storied — an early buyer and reputed elder statesman of Montreal's natural wine scene, Gray's cellar is a collection of the finest natural wines available in the city. Decidedly less wild (meaning slightly more traditional in profile) than the lists of Elena and Gia, the wines here are from many of the most sought-after Old World producers and frequently feature back vintages. For our part, we selected a bottle of 2019 Le Feu from the late Savoyard winemaker Dominique Belluard. Spectacularly elegant, this alpine wine (made of 100% Gringet) is a complex combination of salinity, white flowers and warm yellow fruits — a perfect accompaniment to our first course of salty fennel sausage from Aliments Viens and some slices of Flemish Beauty pear.

It's hard to call that a dish, per se — nothing here has been manipulated save for a bit of slicing, but it feels entirely Italian in its simplicity, and I, for one, am happy to see this level of restraint from Sinclair. These are exceptional products, and they don't need anything more to be delicious. A gentle poaching of the pear might have made it feel



more intentional, but it's inarguably a tasty combination. We happened to be dining during a time when a lot of freshly caught Nova Scotia Bluefin tuna was making a brief appearance on menus around town. Served raw, the fatty fish was sliced thin and dressed in peperoncini (a piquant chilli spread) and bright, peppery olive oil. Yet another simple but effective plate of food.

In its simplicity yet abundant generosity of taste, Sinclair's food feels precisely Italian. The popularity and ubiquity of Italian cooking often lead chefs to either become dogmatically prescriptive — choosing to cook only the Roman classics as articulated in a textbook, for example — or feel compelled to make their personal mark. Unlike the often formulaic rigidity of French cooking, Italian food is more emotional. While Sinclair's food freely uses ingredients and techniques outside the traditional Italian canon, it's done in a way that feels more aligned with the spirit of Italian cooking than a cook who just plays the standards.

This is perhaps best expressed by my favourite dish of the night and a dish I suspect will become a staple of the new Nora Gray: *maltagliati* with chicken liver ragù. It's not much to look at — *maltagliati* is a pasta shape whose name translates to scraps, and the ragù is a homely sauce of browned bits of liver flecked with rosemary and black pepper — the epitome of the Italian expression *brutto ma buono* (ugly but delicious). It's deeply flavourful and unctuous, the way liver ought to be, but somehow it never breaks toward liver's overpowering metallic tendencies. Instead, it captures all the meatiness of a proper ragù, enlivened by both the bright, herbaceous rosemary and the floral spice of black pepper. To me, it is the dish among all dishes in recent memory that most reminds me of eating in Italy.

Another pasta, the spinach *rotolo* with tomato, is a much more beautiful dish to look at: two tidy spinach-filled coils set neatly in a puddle of rustic tomato sauce. It's the Italian tricolore on a plate and, while less evocative for me, it's nonetheless a very good dish and something sure to please the table.

The cooking, across the board, is deft, generous and unafraid to do a bit less when less is called for. It's a confident approach to food that is deliberate and demonstrates that good ingredients and thoughtful cooking result in delicious food — and it needn't be more complicated than that.

Take the Berkshire pork chop, for example. Sourced from Ferme d'Orée, the Berkshire pig is pasture-raised and considered to be among the best breeds in the world. At Nora Gray, the chops are perfectly seasoned, grilled over charcoal until they turn a blushing shade of medium, and are dressed, still hot, with paper-thin strips of lardo and fragrant oregano. The dish, when seasonally appropriate, is also served with a bit of braised quince and a healthy glug of Pacina olive oil. A mix of smoke and fat, the tender meat and silky-salty lardo marry beautifully, while the sweetness of the quince and freshness of the oregano offer relief. It's a magnificent plate of pork that reaffirms how noble the pork chop can be when handled with care.

A bit of attention needs to be paid to the *contorni* (side dishes). The blistered Tokyo turnips with smoked butter were excellent, but all the praise is owed to the cipollini braised in reduced whey — I've never had anything quite like it, but it's a spectacular sweet-savoury combination.

We ended the meal with a bit of amaro, as is the custom at Nora Gray, and also with a lovely slice of *torta di riso*. A luscious cousin of rice pudding, this custardy rice tart comes with a bubbly brûléed crust, stewed cherries and *saba* — a sweet syrup made from “grape must” leftover from the winemaking process. Personally, I'd like to see the desserts take the leap to the next level, but I can't imagine anyone finishing their meal with this dessert and leaving disappointed.

When Nora Gray opened in 2011, it was a restaurant obsessed with a certain Italian identity. Over the years, it took many different shapes. As its more specialized sister restaurants opened, Nora's identity became, in my view, less clear. Today, its identity is clearer than ever: It's the unbridled joy of the Italian appetite, the sincerity and generosity of Italian cuisine and the collective vision of a group of Italian obsessives crystalized over time in an intimate dining room.



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music

Folk Alliance fun



Lisa LeBlanc



Basia Bulat

Photos by Cindy Lopez

BY DAVE MACINTYRE

Folk music isn't exactly my area of musical expertise.

The most intimate experience I'd had with the genre prior to last month's Folk Alliance International was volunteering at my hometown's Calgary Folk Music Festival, but that was 13 years ago. As fun as that was, it was nothing compared to the sheer scale and ambition of this conference.

Back in town for the first time in six years, Folk Alliance was held at the downtown Sheraton from Feb. 19 to 23. I decided to go check it out on Friday night to see what it was all about. I'd interviewed FAI's executive director Jennifer Roe prior to the event, but I needed to see how it all went down in practice.

What I saw exceeded any expectations I could've had. The expansive hotel environment made the whole experience overwhelming by default, but that was in addition to being surrounded by people, many of them from around the world, some of them playing guitars or pianos, sometimes with folks forming crowds around them.

The real festival magic happened between the 7th and 10th floors, where basically every room had a late-night private showcase going on, starting around 10:30 p.m. Yes — the FAI conference literally takes over a hotel and puts on little shows where guests would've otherwise been staying. Pretty cool, eh?

Of course, this means either enduring an agonizing wait in line for the elevator (public showcases took place on floors below those ones) or making that character-building journey up the stairs to the seventh floor. Two people greeted me on two separate occasions saying, "Feel the burn!" upon them noticing I was out of breath. At least they understood the struggle!

I eventually bumped into two industry pals — shoutout to Jérémy Spellanzon and J-P Sauvé — and basically let them lead the way while I followed. The entire experience was full-on sensory overload, and in the best kind of way if you love this kind of music.

Over two nights, I watched bits and pieces of sets from Lisa LeBlanc (whom I'd watched play an official showcase the night before), the Lemon Bucket Orchestra, Tennyson

King, R.O. Shapiro, Maya Killtron and Geneviève Racette as I was rapidly moving from room to room (and floor to floor). Refreshments and snacks were given out in many rooms, including a "sober room" with strictly non-alcoholic drinks, and the Ontario & Friends Room on the same floor offering beer (they had to resort to Asahi after running out of Ontario-brewed stuff).

Another element I really loved was the "musical chairs" event that took place in room 908. Four artists, each with their chosen instrument (usually an acoustic guitar), take turns playing one of their songs one by one. It's an intimate and communal experience both for the artists and those watching them, and even Ron Sexsmith was among the participants on Saturday night.

The conference was also great for networking, so long as you didn't mind yelling from time to time given the noise and commotion around you. Meeting Basia Bulat and Lisa LeBlanc was a nice ribbon on top of an already thrilling experience — one I enjoyed so much that I didn't let my claustrophobia deter me from going for a second straight night. It was a super fun experience, and one I sincerely hope doesn't take another six years to come back.

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:hammer of the mods

BY JOHNSON CUMMINS

The shows are finally starting to stack up, signifying that our days of unbearably cold temps are now numbered. Having made it through the post-holidays drought, it's time to plug in again and start putting the sweat back on the walls of our hallowed watering holes.

Before we get going here, you should know that the March 18 Montreal appearance by Helmet, who will play their classic record *Betty* in its entirety, is sold the fug out. Bummer, but the silver lining here is at least we won't be missing a performance of *In the Meantime* — 'cause that jammer kicks Betty's butt.

March 5

A true legend of proto-punk and early proponent of being a potty-mouth on vinyl — Jonathan Richman — returns to town for two shows with drummer Tommy Larkins in tow. Though the show on March 4 is unfortunately long sold out, fear not, my furry friends, as a second show has been added the following night. If you're swift enough, you might be

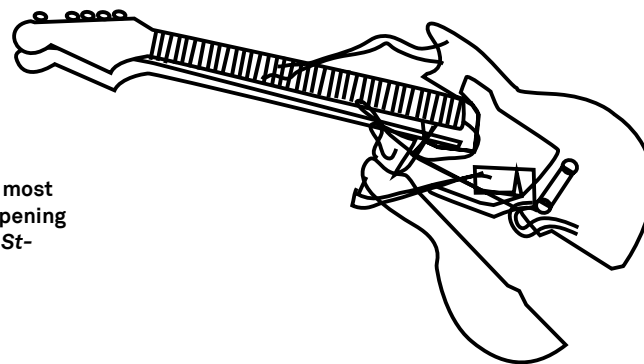
able to grab some tickets right now — this show is most likely going to sell out as well. Both shows are happening in the perfect venue setting of la Sala Rossa. 4848 St-Laurent, showtime 8 p.m., \$26.09

March 22

Long before Deafheaven had black metal gatekeepers' keyboards clacking with disgust over adding elements of blasphemous shoegaze to their done to death tremolo-picking, France's Alcest had already been pissing that crowd off for years. Alcest is a true master of adding dashes of psych, shoegaze and (dare I say) pop to doom and gloom — and they've been often imitated and never duplicated. Yeppers, this is my big pick of the month, and if that wasn't enough, Japanese post-rockers Mono will set their phaser pedals on stunning in the middle slot. Kælan Mikla opens the night up at Théâtre Beanfield. 2490 Notre-Dame W., showtime 7:30 p.m., available \$134–\$159 at press time

March 23

All of the psychonauts who like their eggs freaky-side up will definitely want to make it down to l'Esco to catch Slovenly Recordings jammers Acid Baby Jesus. Creepy organ and vocals surfing on a tsunami of reverb? Sign me up! If that wasn't rad enough, the self-proclaimed "best band in the city," Priors, will give the Greeky geeks something to think about while posi punkers Positive ID take up the sweat act. Better grab tix now cause this will fill up fast. 4461 St-Denis, showtime 8 p.m., \$24.56



March 24

Can't decide over a sprinkling of doom melancholy, oozing slocore, heady psych, '90s indie, dense shoegaze and an undercurrent of country twang? Well, Cloakroom is your new favourite band and, as luck would have it, they just happen to be pulling into town. To get your crossed-arms and head-swish move on, just make it down to Le Ritz early to catch openers Autre Part and Empress of Nothing. 179 Jean-Talon W., showtime 8 p.m., \$28.41

March 25

When I saw Mayhem at Club Soda many moons ago, I was super bummed as it was really, really, uh... goofy. It remains one of the quietest shows I have ever seen. I mean their first record is a true classic black metal banger, but it at that particular show they could barely muster a whimper instead of ripping my spine out, which is what I was expecting. I don't know, maybe I was just grumpy. You can catch them with fellow second wave black metal legend Mortii, Imperial Triumphant and New Skeletal Faces at Théâtre Beanfield. 2490 Notre-Dame W., showtime 6:30 p.m., \$60.75

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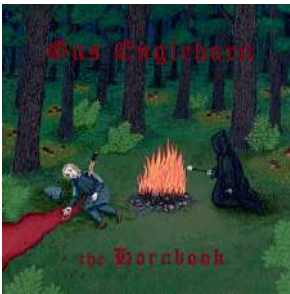


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Album reviews



Gus Englehorn, *The Hornbook* (Secret City)

The myth and legend of Gus Englehorn lives on, further etched in time with this new batch of songs. Each of these songs feels like it's been plucked out of a whimsical grimoire buried in the hard, dusty ground until it was unearthed by a weary traveler — the surrealist garage rock equivalent of Pandora's Box.

Under a bed of warm acoustic guitar, bubbling synths, a few grungy axe fuzz lines and Estée Preda's hypnotic drumming/backing vocals, characters like "Roderick of the Vale," "One Eyed Jack" and a "wicked stew of spiny fish" take root. "A Song With Arms and Legs" sounds and feels like an acid trip with no escape, as the piano, played by Montreal's Frisco Lee, has been drinking whisky in the background. No one does it quite like Gus — one of the most ingenious songwriters around today. 9/10 Trial Track "Roderick of the Vale" (Stephan Boissonneault)



Motherhood, *Thunder Perfect Mind* (Forward Music)

From the opening line, "I saw a man jump over a bridge," backed up by an angular buzzing guitar chord, Motherhood's *Thunder Perfect Mind* promises a weird sonic feast. This band from Fredericton, NB, has never been happy with convention, stemming from an insatiable appetite

for everything under the umbrella of "art rock." *Thunder Perfect Mind* refines Motherhood's brand of weirdness — and it's glorious. We have some psych rock à la Osees, a poppy synth flute ditty, a dark western instrumental, post-hardcore at break-neck speeds and plenty of batshit vibes. This sonic sci-fi journey all feeds into lyrical insanity about the Necronomicon and a cloud stealing people from the Earth. 8/10 Trial Track "Dry Heave" (Stephan Boissonneault)

Waahti, *Se7en Bubbles* (self-released)

At only seven tracks but north of 25 minutes, Waahti knows how to make the most of a short runtime. His newest album, *Se7en Bubbles*, is further proof of that, while also seeing the trilingual local rapper/singer sound more confident and relaxed than ever. One of the themes here is impermanence, which is the title of its Nicholas Craven-produced fifth track — one that touches on grief in painfully vivid fashion. Going from celebratory ("Vendredi") to thoughtful ("Impermanence," the Nujabes-esque "Who We Are") in English, French and/or Créole with equal gusto, those two emotions basically form separate halves of this album. His hooks sound stronger and punchier, the production is excellent throughout, and I'd love to see what more Waahti could do with this musical direction on a lengthier body of work. 8/10 Trial Track: "Impermanence" (Dave MacIntyre)



Declan EC, *15* (self-released)

Declan Evans-Cargnello's career begins from an excellent foundation. The son of longtime local troubadour Paul Cargnello, the teenage Declan's debut album *15* shows he's picked up some cues from his old man (who is heavily involved with production and mixing and even plays drums on most

tracks), but with a musical identity distinctly his own. Perhaps the most immediate style comparison is Elvis Costello (he's a Declan too, after all), but there's also traces of the White Stripes ("End of Year Blues"), the Strokes ("Fade Out"), funk (the instrumental "Right Place, Right Time") and late '70s post-punk packed within 22 minutes. Lyrically, his phrasing can feel a bit awkward, but he knows his way around a punchy pop melody, as evidenced on tracks like "Déjà vu" and "Halfway to Thirty." Declan EC is still very raw, but the potential is there — and songwriting chops clearly run in the family. 7/10 Trial Track: "Déjà vu" (Dave MacIntyre)

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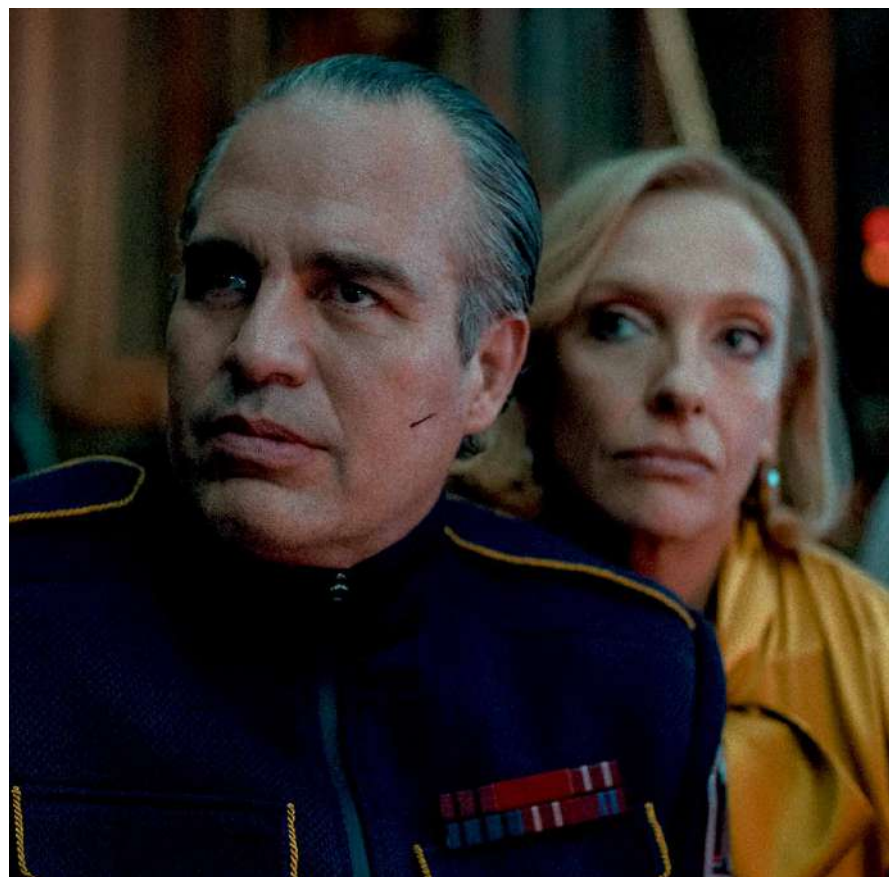
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Sparking revolution



Photos courtesy of Warner Bros. Pictures

BY CHICO PERES SMITH

Set in a distant future where humanity struggles to survive, Bong Joon-ho's latest film *Mickey 17* follows Mickey (played by Robert Pattinson), a disposable "expendable" clone sent on a treacherous mission. Through his connections with those around him (human and alien), he inadvertently sparks a revolutionary movement far greater than anyone could have imagined.

The film co-stars Naomi Ackie as an inspiring revolutionary character and Toni Collette, who steps into the shoes of a delightfully eccentric villain. In an interview on Zoom, the duo offered a glimpse into the film's themes, their characters and the creative process behind bringing director Bong's first film since his Oscar-winning *Parasite* to the big screen.

For Ackie, the heart of *Mickey 17* lies in its exploration of the value of life — human, animal and even alien. "When I read the script, that was what really shone out to me," she says. "This idea of the value in all beings, things that we don't know and aren't aware of. That message was strong." Her character, Nasha, begins her journey with a simple connection to Mickey, but it quickly grows into something much larger. "For her, it starts with Mickey, and it doesn't seem like a big deal," Ackie explains. "She's like, 'Yeah, that's my guy,' and she wants to defend

that. From that grows this thing of wanting to defend everything else."

What makes Nasha so compelling, Ackie notes, is her unintentional evolution into a revolutionary figure. "It wasn't intended," she says with a laugh. "But I think that's how it starts." Ackie's portrayal of Nasha is both inspiring and relatable, offering a blueprint for how small acts of connection can lead to larger movements. "Mickey isn't necessarily the hero you think he would be by the end of the film," she says. "But it's like, everyone can do that. We're not all going to be out here saving the world, but how can you save your community? How can you save your family? How can you activate yourself, as a normal human being, to do something?"

On the other end of the spectrum is Toni Collette's character Gwen Johansen, the wife of Mark Ruffalo's Kenneth Marshall. An eccentric villain with a quirky obsession with sauces, Gwen adds a fascinating layer of menace and dark humour to the story. "That was the joy of it," Collette says. "There's so much to play with. Everything comes with a smile, but there's a lot of prickly energy underneath, ulterior motives, the need to control and manipulate." The sauce obsession, she explains, represents an "inane kind of priority" that reflects her character's detachment from reality. "Given the circumstances of their living on the ship, they've got their own little luxurious bubble that has nothing to do with reality," Collette says. "And I think that's how she lives generally, actually."

Collette's ability to balance the quirky and the menacing is once again a testament to her skill as an actor, and her character serves as a dark counterpoint to Ackie's hopeful revolutionary. Naomi's character embodies a kind of resistance to the commodified self, offering a glimpse of how younger generations might break free from the pervasive logic of the status quo (capitalism) and reclaim a new sense of authenticity. In contrast, Collette's character becomes a cautionary figure, her traits revealing the

dangers of internalizing capitalist values, where identity is reduced to a consumable product, and life itself is stripped of any value, depth and meaning, distilled into nothing more than experimental, molecular-gastronomy-style sauces for the elite's indulgence. Together, they illustrate the tension between human exploitation, alienation and the possibility of revolutionary connection.

At its core, *Mickey 17* is a story about survival and morality, but it's also a call to action. Both Ackie and Collette emphasize the importance of community and personal power in a world that often feels divided. "People aren't encouraged to nurture their own sense of personal power," Collette says. "In these times, when everybody's so individualistic, having stories that indulge the community sense and looking out for others is very important." Ackie echoes this sentiment, adding, "It's about building connections and letting that grow into something really special. That's how change happens."

It's clear that *Mickey 17* is more than just another Hollywood sci-fi spectacle. It's a reflection of the capitalist world we live in, a world where mere survival often feels like the only option, and connection is a radical act. Through its exploration of revolution, the fragility of life and the transformative power of community, the film challenges us to question the systems that reduce us to mere commodities and imagine what it might mean to truly live as a community, rather than simply endure as an individual.

With Naomi Ackie and Toni Collette delivering performances that are as nuanced as they are captivating, *Mickey 17* doesn't just entertain — it lingers, inviting us to consider how small acts of resistance and solidarity can spark profound change. Long after the credits roll, the film's questions remain: What are we willing to fight for, and who do we become when we dare to care?

→ *Mickey 17* opens in Montreal theatres on Friday, March 7

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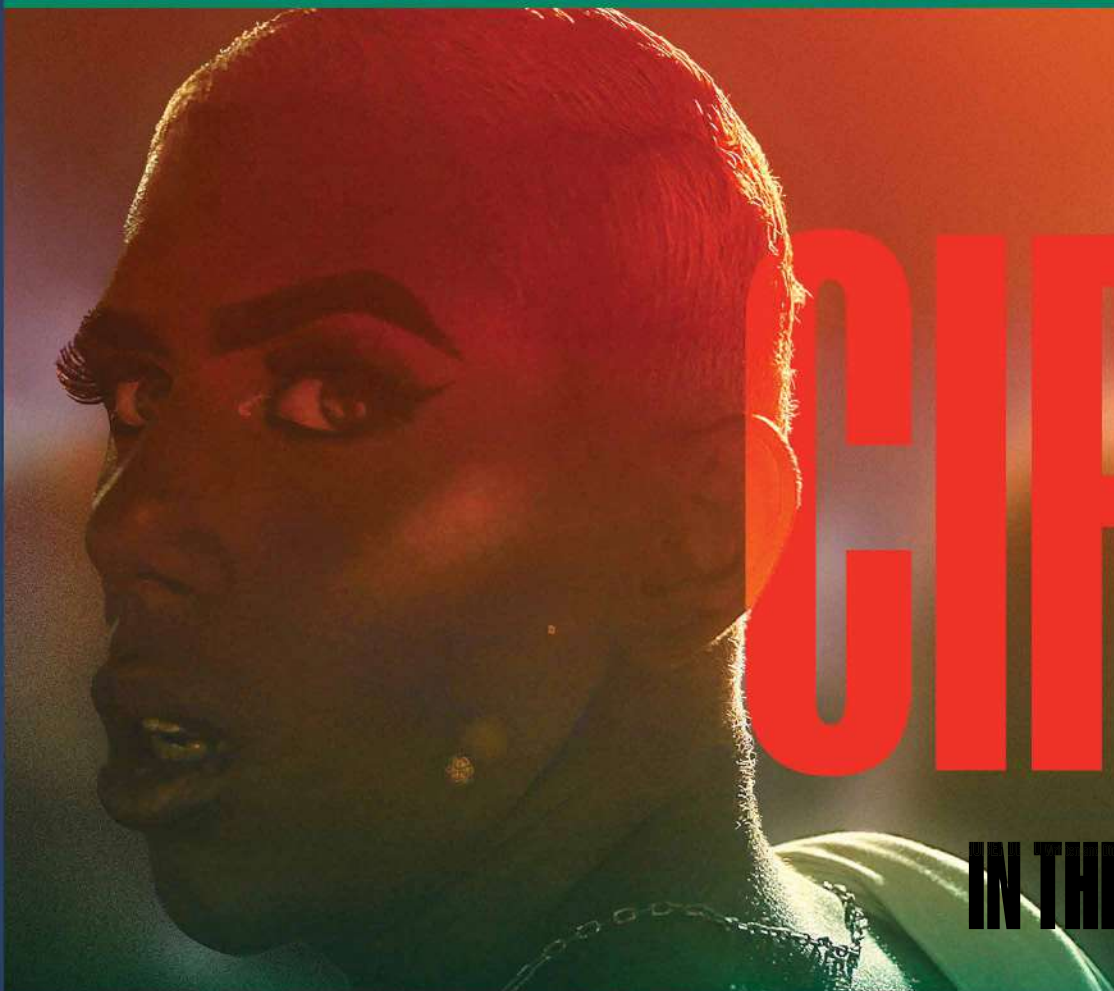
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Justice can't sleep forever



BY YANNICK BELZIL

Daredevil nears 61 years of four-coloured existence, but beyond the pages of Marvel Comics, Charlie Cox's blind vigilante has fought crime through three seasons of live-action TV and multiple cameos across crossover series, blockbuster movies and all-ages cartoons.

In the upcoming series *Daredevil: Born Again*, masked brawler/lawyer Matt Murdock and his nemesis, crime kingpin Wilson Fisk (Vincent D'Onofrio) have put their former lives and darker halves behind them, but violent circumstances put them on a collision course yet again.

How will this new Disney + iteration renew characters who already have multiple seasons of TV and numerous cameos across media? Executive producer Sana Amanat tells us that part of the key is looking back at the wellspring of original material: the printed pages of comics publishing.

"I mean, mirroring the things that get us excited about the comics is very, very important to us. And Dario knows I bother him all the time. I'm like, 'This was in the comics. Can we do it?' And I show him images and frames and panels from the actual comics to get cool moves for Daredevil, and make fun moments with our cameos. I think that's what keeps audiences engaged and comics readers engaged."

Daredevil: Born Again shares its name with the memorable storyline written by Frank Miller and renowned illustrator David Mazzucchelli. While it doesn't share the hard-boiled plotline of the 1986 classic, series lead Charlie Cox offers that it retains the spirit of many Daredevil tales of rebirth and redemption.

"Yeah, it's important we're not doing the 'born again' story. The name of the show is really just a reference to coming back after so many years and of course, an homage to Frank Miller, an icon. Obviously, we're trying to find the best version of the best Murdock, aka Daredevil. But in finding the best version, we also seek out the worst version."

Showrunner Dario Scarpadane adds: "Daredevil is a character that has been picked up and worked on by an

endless number of really fantastic writers and directors and actors. In this case, we're really trying to take that tradition and extend the runway of what we can do with the character."

On the surface, Daredevil exists in the shadow of Spider-Man and Batman: a grim urban avenger with acrobatic powers. But the Hell's Kitchen lawyer's real superpower is tragedy. Matt Murdock will always suffer great losses and calamities, something that the bigger icons in the comic book world avoid.

"I mean, one of the things that's so fun about this particular character is that you want to knock him down because it's so fun to see him get up. And that's kind of been the energy with Matt Murdock in *Daredevil*," says Scarpadane. "Particularly in this season and next season, we're looking at ways to create that rising from the ashes that's always so satisfying. And, you know, the reason I think that people relate to Murdoch and Daredevil is there's a vulnerability there that a lot of superheroes don't have."

→ *Daredevil: Born Again* premiered on March 4, with new episodes coming to Disney + on Tuesdays

MARCH 8TH

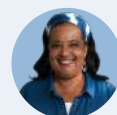
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Ahuntsic · 514 872-6814
nathalie.goulet@montreal.ca



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De Lorimier · 514 872-6814
laurence.parent@montreal.ca



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Saint-Sulpice · 514 872-6814
julie.roy@montreal.ca



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City councillor
Mile-End · 514 872-6814
marie.plourde@montreal.ca



GRACIA KASOKI KATAHWA

Borough mayor
Côte-des-Neiges-Notre-Dame-de-Grâce
514 872-6814
gracia.kasoki.katahwa@montreal.ca



MAEVA VILAIN

Borough councillor
Jeanne-Mance · 514 872-6814
maeva.vilain@montreal.ca



MAGDA POPEANU

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514 872-6814
magda.popeanu@montreal.ca



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City councillor
De Lorimier · 514 872-6814
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514-341-1151



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José Caldeira

BY SAVANNAH STEWART

How are shared identities created, and what role does dance play?

In *CARCAÇA*, choreographer Marco da Silva Ferreira explores the place of dance in contemporary society and in our understanding of the communities that we're a part of.

Known for his background in urban and club dancing, the self-taught Portuguese artist blends street dance forms of Afro-American heritage like voguing and house dance with the rhythmic traditions of Portuguese folklore. Performed by 10 dancers and 2 musicians — a percussionist and an electronic musician — *CARCAÇA* is a high-energy performance that reclaims local symbols and challenges the erasure of cultural specificity in an increasingly globalized world.

Ferreira and company are bringing *CARCAÇA* to Montreal audiences for four performances (April 30 to May 3) at Théâtre Maisonneuve, made possible by Danse Danse. So what can audiences expect?

With this piece, “I try to think of the place of dance nowadays but also this construction of collective identity,” Ferreira explained in an interview with Sadler’s Wells, a London-based theatre and dance organization. Last year, Sadler’s Wells shortlisted Ferreira for its Rose Prize, a biennial award recognizing international choreographers for excellence in their craft. “How do we build culture? How do we accept the symbols that are identities of a certain region or nation? What’s the meaning of tradition or heritage? What do I do with this?”

In creating a piece firmly rooted in the local specificity of Portugal, using traditional folk dances from the region, Ferreira ends up capturing elements of the country’s political history, too, from its colonization of parts of Africa to its movements of popular resistance under a 50-year dictatorship that devastated the local economy in the 20th century. The highly percussive music reflects the cultural fusion of today’s Portugal, with prominent African influences.

The dancers move in costumes that are bright, colourful and slightly androgynous — garments that evoke the

underground club scene while blurring the lines between traditional and contemporary, masculine and feminine. The wardrobe amplifies the work’s fluidity, reinforcing its themes of multiculturalism, identity and transformation. As the audience will see, the costumes are also a prop in and of themselves, assisting in creating a blurring of bodies by hiding the distinctive features of the faces.

Footwork plays a dominant role in the choreography, channeling the fast-paced, claustrophobic movements of clubbing culture, evoking the explosive energy of a tightly packed dancefloor. Here, the body becomes a political statement, a vessel for memory and a means of forging a shared sense of cultural identity.

“Caracaça” is Portuguese for “carcass,” reflecting the focus on the body and the stories it can channel through movement. In *CARCAÇA*, dance is more than just movement — it is a dialogue between the past and present, a reclamation of collective roots in an era of homogenization.

→ *CARCAÇA* is on at Place des Arts’s Théâtre Maisonneuve (175 Ste-Catherine W.) from April 30 to May 4.

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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.

Stag Dance by Torrey Peters

Weird Era's very first guest, Torrey Peters, returns to the pod to discuss her collection of short stories (and one novella) exploring gender and sexuality. One story follows a group of lumberjacks working in a remote forest who decide to throw a party to break up their grim routine. As part of the fun, they suggest one male volunteer attend dressed as a woman — a princess bride to long for. This sparks a whirlwind of hidden desires and personal revelations among the crew. Another story takes a dystopian twist, imagining a gender apocalypse. All the stories — especially the final one, "The Masker" — delve into relationships with trans elders. Peters challenges readers to confront their fears about queer identities and the darker parts of ourselves. In this episode, we discuss being "too woke," *Baby Girl* and moments of remorse. (SI)

No Fault by Haley Mlotek

I've been eagerly awaiting this book for years. Mlotek, co-editor of Feeld's *A Fucking Magazine*, is one of my favorite essayists, and has always written with introspection, delicacy and a romantic lens on her experiences as a young woman. This book focuses on the very specific experience of divorce. While her relationship with her partner lasted years longer than her eventual marriage, Mlotek grapples not only with the end of a love but with the nagging question of whether it was the institution of marriage that ended it in the first place? What is marriage, really? How can one party (an event she confirms she loved) and two rings completely transform a relationship? Mlotek dives deep into this question, blending personal reflection with historical research on marriage, and offering insights into the films that helped shape her understanding of it. While she cautiously maintains her privacy, there are the occasional moments when Mlotek reveals an intimate thought: her wedding shoes, her ex and her parents' marriage. In this conversation, I ask her: would she ever get married again? (SI)

The Wickedest by Caleb Femi

Told over the course of one evening, Caleb Femi's latest poetry collection showcases the longest-

running house party in the South London "shoob" scene (slang for groove/ party/ bashment). "You better hope you have the address," as the description reads, "this is for locals only." Femi allows his readers to glimpse into the lives of these party-goers: DJs, lovers, exes and promoters prowl the dancefloor, sharing vignettes of their innermost secrets, desires and histories. Told in Femi's signature multimodal style, there are text-based poems, yes, but also images, posters, dance tutorials and, in one of the most memorable pieces, a police report for a noise complaint that is poetry in itself. An unforgettable and tender collection for anyone who doesn't want the party to end. (AN)

Something Rotten by Andrew Lipstein

A provocative story on the nature of truth, politics and masculinity. It's 2026 and Reuben and Cecile (who tell the story in alternating chapters) flee New York City to Cecile's hometown in the suburbs of Copenhagen for a summer vacation with their newborn son. Something is rotten in the state of Denmark, however. When they arrive, they're immediately thrust into an urgent medical situation with Cecile's first love, Jonas, and her old circle of friends — the worst of whom, Mikkel, being the only person Jonas will listen to in regards to his life-threatening diagnosis. As Reuben and Mikkel unexpectedly grow closer, their blossoming friendship offers a new model of masculinity for Reuben... one that threatens to unravel them both. This is a deeply intelligent, crackling novel full of wit and dark humour. Put this one on your must-reads for 2025. (AN)

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



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