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COMING ATTRACTIONS

IN A WORLD WHERE thousands of films are instantly available for download or streaming wherever there’s WiFi, why do we still insist upon going to the movies? Maybe, as a subject of one of the stories in our Film Issue suggests, “[It’s] the place for people to get a little break from reality, and that’s what movies are—you want to get a little taste of something outside your life.”

Once you could find it hanging out in a video store in Ashburn watching selections from one of the greatest collections of kung fu movies that the midwest has ever seen. You can still find it in a university auditorium watching beloved old flickers on 35 mm.

Or maybe the movies are a way to a better world: where the story on the screen actually reflects the experiences of people you know, where you’re viewed as a complete human being instead of defined by the one thing that makes you different, or where everyone is treated with courtesy and respect and entitled to pleasure.

Or maybe movies are a way to connect with strangers, across space, time, or Twitter. (Just ask Whitey, the Music Box Theatre’s resident ghost.) After all, even movie characters ride strangers, across space, time, or Twitter. (Just ask Whitey, the Music Box Theatre’s resident ghost.) After all, even movie characters ride

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THE FILM ISSUE
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In any movie set in our city, from the 1973 Paul Newman and Robert Redford caper *The Sting* to last year’s Steve McQueen-directed heist film *Widows*, the elevated tracks, subways, and buses of the Chicago Transit Authority are likely to play a starring role.

“The el system is just so beautiful and picturesque,” local tour guide and history lecturer Michael Corcoran told me last week. “The Loop elevated is especially cool—it’s like this little monorail through the city. It’s this iconic piece of infrastructure that just says ‘Chicago.’”


Corcoran walked me through some of his favorite flicks that showcase the CTA. He got the inside scoop on several of the movies from Bob Janz, a retired transit worker who spent 17 years, from the late 70s to the early 90s, orchestrating the use of CTA rolling stock and facilities for numerous film and TV productions.

**The Hunter (1980)**

Corcoran says this thriller, the last actor Steve McQueen made before dying of cancer a few months after its release, isn’t one of his best. But it’s well known in Chicago for a scene where the dangerous criminal that McQueen, a bounty hunter, is pursuing drives through a guardrail of the Marina City parking garage and plunges into the Chicago River.

But that’s only the grand finale to a dramatic chase that starts with McQueen running after the fugitive through the streets of Uptown and onto a Red Line train at the Wilson station.

McQueen, doing his own stunt, winds up on the roof of a railcar with the bad guy shooting at him as the train heads downtown and into the subway. Janz spent six weeks working with the film crew on the scene, which involved placing a camera truck on a flatbed car and running it alongside the train.
The Blues Brothers (1980)
When Jake Blues (John Belushi) arrives at his brother’s room in the old Stag Hotel SRO on Van Buren Street, right next to the Loop elevated tracks, he asks, “How often does the train go by?” “So often that you won’t notice it,” Elwood (Dan Aykroyd) replies, and then, absurdly, trains rumble by every few seconds. Corcoran said the film crew rented two el railcars and just ran the same cars back and forth in front of the window like a toy train set. If you look closely next time, you’ll notice that there are no passengers in the cars.

Risky Business (1983)
This coming-of-age comedy features what may be the hottest love scene ever filmed on public transportation, between Rebecca De Mornay and then-off-screen-boyfriend Tom Cruise. I asked Corcoran whether this racy sequence raised any concerns from CTA brass about inspiring copycat Metro-sexuals. “The upper-echelon folks didn’t really care,” he said. “The biggest thing the CTA is concerned with is that people don’t get the impression that they’re allowing Hollywood to do anything unsafe.”

However, Janz told Corcoran the scene was “a huge pain in the butt” because it used a large portion of the CTA’s elevated and subway system. This included a shot where the lovers’ train passes through a tunnel at a climactic moment.

Code of Silence (1985)
Corcoran noted that this Chuck Norris action vehicle has a theme of bad Chicago cops protecting each other, which could easily be ripped from today’s headlines. As in The Hunter, there’s a scene where the hero ends up on the roof of a moving el train, this time on the Brown Line.

“Chuck’s starting to lay an ass-whoopin’ on the bad guy when the guy tries to escape by jumping into the river as the train crosses the Wells Street bridge, and Chuck dives in after him,” Corcoran said. Janz did such a good job of smoothly driving the train during the filming of this tricky fight scene that afterwards one of the stuntmen hugged him and cried, “You’ve got golden fingers.”

Running Scared (1986)
This cop buddy film featured the most complicated CTA scene that Janz worked on. Detectives Gregory Hines and Billy Crystal are in a taxi chasing drug dealer Jimmy Smits in his limousine when the limo driver veers onto the Yellow Line tracks in Skokie and the cab follows. Incongruously, the chase suddenly switches to the Loop elevated tracks, ending with the limo smashing into an oncoming train and flipping over.

The film crew had purchased the two railcars at the front of the train and gutted them, and Janz operated the train from the third car, relying on a cue from the director since he couldn’t see in front of him. The limo and cab, which had been lifted onto the elevated tracks with a crane, were actually driven right on the tracks with no special gear under the chassis.

The Fugitive (1993)
This thriller from Code of Silence director and Chicago native Andrew Davis has two key CTA-related scenes. In one scene, FBI agents are trying to determine the location of Dr. Richard Kimble (Harrison Ford), based on the elevated train sound in the background of his pay phone call to his lawyer. The announcement “Next stop, Merchandise Mart” reveals to the feds that Kimble is in Chicago, but that doesn’t actually make sense, because CTA stop announcements are only audible within the railcars.

In another scene, Ford’s Kimble subdues the murderous one-armed man inside a Red Line car and handcuffs him to a pole. We hear an announcement that the next stop is the (fictional) Balbo station. The voiceover was done by Working author Studs Terkel. Corcoran noted, “That was a little Chicago in-joke by Davis.”
Let’s make a deal
Why corporate Chicago should drop the fight against Pritzker’s Fair Tax

By Ben Joravsky

First the good news, captured in a headline on a recent article in Crain’s—Chicago’s not stupid anymore.

Well, that’s more or less the point of the headline.

The actual headline reads: “Developer pitches TIF-free plan for South Loop megaproject.”

The subhead tells the rest of the story: “Since city tax-increment financing has become politically radioactive…”

Okay, let’s break it down. Robert Dunn, a big-time developer from Madison, Wisconsin, has a vision.

His company—Landmark Development—wants to build One Central, a massive high-rise community of apartments, condos, office space, and hotel rooms above the train tracks just west of Soldier Field.

The total project will cost at least $20 billion and consume 34 acres. It’s got members of the Tribune editorial board—who never saw a taxpayer handout to developers they didn’t love—so excited they’re hyperventilating.

As a big believer in innovation, prosperity, and growth—what, you didn’t know I was a big believer in these things?—I say, right on, Robert Dunn!

But here’s the rub. Dunn needs a platform over those train tracks upon which to build his skyscrapers.

Clearly, he doesn’t want to build that platform with his own money because—what the hell, man, just because he comes from Wisconsin doesn’t mean he’s dumb enough to fully pay for his own projects.

Instead, he’s come up with a creative way to get the suckers—I mean, taxpayers—to pay for it.

Don’t think of it as a platform upon which he will build his skyscrapers. No, think of it as a Transit Center that will connect Amtrak, Metra, and the CTA.

What’s that you say? Didn’t know you needed a Transit Center? Well, now you do. So shut up and pay for it!

The estimated cost of the Transit Center is $3.8 billion—credit cards accepted.

In any event, from here on out the talking point will be Transit Center for south loop, not platform for Wisconsin developer.

Pretty clever—for a cheesehead.

Think of this as a post-Lincoln Yards development deal. In the old days—before Lincoln Yards, that is—developers seeking a handout would line up the mayor. (Daley, Emanuel, really what’s the difference?)

The mayor would then twist aldermanic arms and, presto, the developer got his TIF handout and taxpayers got higher property taxes.

But that was then.

In the post-Lincoln Yards era, TIFs have—to quote Crain’s—become politically radioactive.

Apparently, Chicagoans aren’t quite as gullible as they used to be about TIFs. Those three letters (T-I-F) might as well be B-A-D—at least among ordinary Chicagoans. They might not know exactly what TIF stands for, or how it works, but they know it’s a scam. Which makes them more enlightened than, say, the folks who write those we-love-handouts editorials in the Trib.

At this point, I’d like to say thanks to the mavericks, malcontents, and gadflies who opposed the Lincoln Yards deal.

They couldn’t stop a majority of aldermen from voting to approve that boondoggle.

But they raised such a ruckus that Mayor-elect Lori Lightfoot felt compelled to declare that the days of free-and-easy approval for TIF handouts are over. We shall see if Lightfoot stays true to her word.

But apparently Dunn got the message and so he’s turning to the state to help pay the $3.8 billion for his platform—I mean, Transit Center.

If this were a traditional TIF deal, I’d probably be against it on the grounds that we have so many other pressing obligations—pensions, schools, police, etc.

Plus, my property tax bill just keeps going up, up, up.

But because Dunn is looking for state money, it lightens the load. Yes, I still pay state taxes. But, well—consider this.

So often when I write columns criticizing TIF-funded boondoggles, I’ll get comments from people who live outside of Chicago, asking me “Why you gotta be such a Debbie Downer, man? Don’t you want growth and development?”

Isn’t that funny how much someone in, say, Highland Park, loves development in Chicago, so long as he doesn’t have to pay for it?

But with Dunn turning to the state (and the feds, for that matter) to fund his platform, folks in Highland Park get to kick in a little, too. Join the party, Highland Parkers.

And that brings me to Governor Pritzker’s Fair Tax initiative.

At the moment, Illinois has a flat income tax—no matter how much you make, you pay the same 4.5 percent.

To his credit, Pritzker has signed on to a progressive tax—the wealthier you are, the higher your rate.

The business community’s waging holy war against this progressive tax. They’ve put together Ideas Illinois, a dark-money outfit that’s financing a campaign intended to turn the middle class against the Fair Tax.

I can’t say for certain who’s funding Ideas Illinois and all their TV commercials—as I said, it’s a dark-money group, meaning they don’t have to list their donors.

But I’ll bet you some of their backers are the same people jumping for joy over One Central.

Just because they don’t like paying taxes doesn’t mean they don’t like to feed from the trough.

The front man for Ideas Illinois is Greg Baise, a Republican political strategist who got his start in the 70s as an aide to then-Governor James Thompson.

Thompson was one of those old-school Republicans who loved cutting deals with Democrats.

So, c’mon, Greg Baise, let’s cut a deal. You drop your opposition to Pritzker’s Fair Tax. And I’ll sign on to Dunn’s platform, I mean, Transit Center.

Sounds like a win-win proposition to me.

@joravben
RESTAURANT REVIEW

Flat & Point isn’t your Pawpaw’s barbecue
A Spiaggia vet is smoking something good in Logan Square.

By MIKE SULA

The barbecue gods are cruel.
On the day Brian Bruns’s 2,800-pound, 500-gallon, custom-built smoker arrived, he couldn’t locate the owners of the cars blocking its path into his new restaurant. “It’s four guys and they had this massive forklift,” he says. “They lifted it over a VW. It was just hanging over the car wobbling and I was about to have a panic attack.”

The smoker, a 15-foot beast made from repurposed propane tanks, made it safely to the sidewalk, but just on the edge of the coming polar vortex, Bruns’s contractor still had to knock out a 8-foot-by-15-foot hole in the brick wall because it wouldn’t fit through the front door.

The chef had the assurances of his lawyer, architect, and contractor that once it was finally installed in the back of the dining room, alongside a live-fire Argentine grill, there wouldn’t be any problems. But two days before opening in late March, the final city inspector took a look at the rig and all its potential firepower and said no way.

No one knows better the Sisyphean challenges of making good barbecue than Bruns. Twice a week for two summers, the Tru and Spiaggia vet and his wife Taylor trudged across the North Avenue Bridge to the beach, pushing wheelbarrows and dragging wagons full of produce from Green City Market to a small kiosk owned by the Park District, equidistant between Fullerton and North Avenues. They also brought their own oak wood and decorated it with their own stuff, including Bruns’s cookbooks and an oddly illustrated Charlie Trotter poster he was awarded after a summer peeling asparagus and pitting cherries in the great chef’s kitchen when he was 11.

After adding some extra fire-suppression systems and committing to a monthly hood cleaning program, Flat & Point received an all-clear by the fire department and opened seven months after the harrowing smoker delivery. Flat & Point’s initial counter service ordering model was in line with standard barbecue joint protocol (there’s table service now). But what Bruns is doing with the gently billowing oak smoke his rig produces is not. You still can’t order six pounds of brisket on butcher paper, but you can have a thick slab of Snake River Farm Wagyu brisket, usually a bit of the relatively meatier flat and a bit of the more marbled point, the entire piece laced with buttery intramuscular fat rendered clear and jiggly and suffused with gentle smoke flavor.

Bruns knows that this sublime piece of beef requires no barbecue sauce, and he doesn’t serve it with one. But you will get a side of potatoes and a vegetable. When I ate it, it was an artful potato gratin, topped with spinach creamed with smoked garlic and onion puree.

Apart from the beef, Bruns brings in whole pastured animals—pigs, chickens, and sausages in a spot where there are no other options. (Yes, Bruns stored a sausage grinder in a deep freezer on-site.)

The latter group proved encouraging enough that the chef began looking for a proper restaurant space so he could flex the muscles he’d developed over the years on an increasingly larger series of smokers on his third-floor patio, on days and over nights when he wasn’t working at Spiaggia.

The couple looked at over 200 spaces around town, most of which couldn’t accommodate the firepower he was dreaming about: a custom-built FatStack smoker, built in the style of the reverse-flow smoker used at Austin’s perpetually mobbed Franklin Barbecue. Bruns was about to give up and take a restaurant job in California when they found their spot on Fullerton—a Dominican restaurant that never got off the ground. It still needed a bit of work, but at least it was affordable. He and his father built all the booths and tables and decorated it with their own stuff, including Bruns’s cookbooks and an oddly illustrated Charlie Trotter poster he was awarded after a summer peeling asparagus and pitting cherries in the great chef’s kitchen when he was 11.

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sometimes lamb, many from downstate’s Slagel Family Farm—and he’s shopping according to the season. For now he’s sticking with an unconventional porchetta: whole pork bellies split and rolled around housemade sausage, sliced in a thick slab and served, in my case, on a bed of creamy polenta, dressed with spring pea shoots, purple sauerkraut, and gently sweet apple butter.

Bruns is doing an intensely beefy brisket burger ground from trim and dry-aged sirloin, and pulled chicken with ramp chimichurri and smoked black bean puree too, but the menu will change a lot (the latter will involve sweet corn come August). When I first ate there just after Easter, Bruns was taking advantage of the extra lamb he’d smoked for brunch to run a terrine special, wrapped in ramp leaves and served with pickled mustard seed. Drawing on his pasta skills, he’d rolled out fresh cannelloni and rolled it around pulled pork whipped with smoked garlic, pecorino, parmesan, and fermented ramps, topped with a smoked mushroom duxelle folded with pork jus and smoked carrot puree.

These remain on the menu, but Bruns will probably move on to something else before long. I’m guessing his potatoes will stay on forever. He gently confits Kennebec wedges in rendered brisket fat, until they look like pieces of dark chocolate, with a fragile crispness armoring a creamy interior. I’d dumbly push these into my face on their own merits, but they’re served with a truffled parmesan cream that’s just as worthy of their greatness.

Yes, the barbecue gods are cruel, but no one’s nastier than petty Yelpers. Bruns continues to catch grief from people expecting cheap, traditional barbecue. To be fair, so much dreck has been passed off among the glut of new barbecue restaurants that have opened in recent years that people have cause to be suspicious.

But Flat & Point’s pricing is quite reasonable relative to the high-performance, quality-sourced, and confidently creative food he’s putting out. Here’s a tip: Don’t come expecting barbecue as you know it. Think of it as a gift from the gods.

Voluspa and Nest Fragrances brand candles are 20% off (these lines can rarely be found on sale)

All Rugs - 30% off (in-store, and new orders through June 1)
All Floor Sample Furniture - 30%-50% off
Antique Furniture Pieces - 40-50% off
Pillows/Picture Frames - 40%
Jewelry - 40-50% off
Mirrors and Wall Art - 30-50% off
Home Decor and Accessories - 20-60% off
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FOOD & DRINK
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Limited Engagement

West Side Story
Cinema paradiso
Doc Films lures movie lovers to Hyde Park with beloved classics and rarities.
By Quinn Myers

It’s one of the funniest scenes in Singin’ in the Rain. Gene Kelly and Jean Hagen are a pair of 1920s movie stars at an advance screening of their first sound picture—their first “talkie”—when there’s a problem: the sound is messed up. Onscreen, Kelly’s clothes squeak like rubber boots, Hagen’s pearls clink, and her shrill voice comes in, then fades out, then comes in again. In their seats, Kelly and Hagen shift anxiously as the audience laughs and cheers and heckles like it’s watching a slapstick comedy instead of a drab costume drama. The sound falls out of sync, it slows down and distorts, and then it cuts out completely. But this time, it’s for real.

The audience—the actual audience here in the Max Palevsky Cinema at the University of Chicago—laughs and cheers too. The musical is officially put on hold, but the mood remains festive, even though it’s a Thursday night in January. Chatter echoes as people look around at each other, and then up to the back of the theater, trying to see into the windows of the projection booth.

That’s where Martin Awano, the evening’s projectionist, is sitting.

“The theater that had [the film] before us had wound two of the reels top to top, so for two reels the soundcheck was on the wrong side,” Awano explains a few months later. “I should have caught that but I didn’t. But it’s moments like that where you have a relationship with the object, where you’re thinking, ‘I didn’t take care of this correctly,’ and you feel a little guilty.”

The sound would cut out or stutter a few more times that night before the issue was resolved. But, in hindsight at least, Awano wasn’t too concerned.

“There’s a certain elegance to the mistakes that happen,” he says.

Awano, along with fellow U of C senior Nora Gonzalez, is one of the outgoing general chairs of Doc Films, the university’s student-run film society. It’s the oldest of its kind in the country, tracing its roots back to 1932, when it originally showed only documentaries (hence its name). Open to the public, the club shows movies—sometimes as many as three a day—every day of the academic school year and, whenever possible, on film. Doc attracts cinephiles and casual moviegoers from all over Chicago and has consistently eclectic offerings: recent series have included “Dinner Parties of the Idle Rich” featuring films like L’Avventura and Daisies, and “Phantom Rides: Trains and Cinema,” which showed Doctor Zhivago and Murder on the Orient Express.

One of Doc Films’ defining features is its approximately 125-person volunteer staff, made up mostly of students but also a fair number of community members, who sell tickets, program the calendar, and project the films themselves.

Many volunteers fill numerous roles; like Awano, Gonzalez also works as a projectionist. During a joint interview in March, Gonzalez says this enthusiastic, anyone-can-get-involved approach sets Doc apart from other Chicago movie venues.

“There are certain limits that come across from being all-volunteer,” she says. “But you get people who are just passionate, and just really want to do this, and just really want to see celluloid film, right here on campus.”

On its best nights, when the theater is full but not packed, when the projector is running smoothly, and the sophomore in front of you isn’t constantly checking his phone, that passion can transform the moviegoing experience from a night’s entertainment into a ritual of discovery and community-building. The magic is perhaps most present during the first week of every quarter when longtime Doc attendees and new converts alike pore over the always artfully designed Doc calendar, cooing in delight or manic excitement when they see an old favorite or a classic they’ve been trying to catch forever. That unadulterated love of movies translates into an overflow of creative enthusiasm that’s reflected in Doc’s unique programming structure: the club encourages anyone to attend regular programming meetings and propose a film series they’d like to see. Gonzalez says while attendance varies widely, the core programming committee is made up of about 30 people—half students, half not. At the end of every quarter, the proposed ideas are voted on, and the most popular make it onto an upcoming calendar.

But while film selection is in theory open to all people and points of view, that hasn’t always meant the movies chosen reflect who’s coming to see them.

Ursula Wagner, 38, is a Doc projectionist and programmer who’s been coming to screenings for the last decade. Wagner says she was drawn to Doc for the same reasons as everyone else: she loved movies and Doc was one of the only theaters near her home in Woodlawn. But after a while, Wagner says she started to “get frustrated with some of the lack of diversity in programming. I would look at these films and be like, these are really great films, but they look like they were all chosen by maybe, high school boys who had taken a film class.”

Doc Films Fest
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Predictably, Wagner says, that meant an abundance of films made by men. “I just thought it would be great if there were some different kinds of films shown. And one of my friends said, ‘You know, you can go to the programming meetings, that’s something that supposedly anybody can do.’ So, I started going to those meetings wanting to program different kinds of programming.”

But it wasn’t exactly an easy process. After proposing a series featuring contemporary female American directors in 2013, Wagner says she got resistance from some male board members, who said things along the lines of “we should show movies because they’re good, not because they happen to be directed by a woman.” The response became a recurring theme for several ideas Wagner proposed, which resulted in some tough, emotionally-charged conversations about representation and diversity across the program. Wagner says for a little while, she had to take a step back from programming.

After several years of advocating for more inclusivity, Wagner says there are still some people who “push back against the notion of changing their programming choices to bring different kinds of movies into Doc.” Overall, though, things have improved. She put together a Tilda Swinton showcase in 2016, and last quarter programmed a new lesbian cinema series. She says that, at its best, programming can be a satisfying and sometimes thrilling outlet, especially as Doc’s calendar becomes more diverse.

“For a student-run organization, Doc is a complex logistical operation. Board members oversee not just programming and publicity, but also the acquisition of screening rights and the actual movies, many of which are heavy and delicate 35-millimeter film prints. Doc regularly imports celluloid films from distributors all over the world, and between screening rights and shipping, the costs add up. Gonzalez says the organizers try to keep each series—which typically include around nine or ten films—close to $4,000 total. “If it’s below that we’re in good shape, if it’s above that we can’t have too many,” she says.

Doc has a total budget of $125,000 for the 2018-2019 school year. Part of that is fronted by the university; the rest comes from ticket sales. Individual series are also occasionally sponsored through partnerships with academic departments or local cultural organizations. Last fall, Doc raised its longtime admission fee hike was necessary to ensure esoteric and diverse programming can still find its way to Doc, and the prices remain cheaper than most of the city’s art house or indie theaters.

“We don’t make a lot of money,” she says. “[But] we don’t have to worry about making a profit like other theaters in Chicago do, so I think it gives us a little more flexibility.”

“I don’t think we exist to prove that this is the more economical thing to do,” Awano adds. “It’s just something that is going to be lost to history unless we do it . . . Doc Films is this institution where all the effort really goes to not try to advance into the new era of showing movies . . . just to preserve film and show film.”

That emphasis on preservation is felt most palpably in the Doc projection booth, a crowded space that feels like a cross between an attic and a college radio station. It’s here where Doc projectionists prep and test each film print and switch reels between the dual projectors during screenings.

As with its programming arm, Doc encourages anyone to learn this archaic, quickly-disappearing skill. Students and community members apprentice for several quarters to learn how to handle the film correctly and have to take a test before they can project on their own. Of course, there are occasional blips and errors, like the snafu during Singin’ in the Rain, that might be avoided at a professional theater. But Gonzalez says those mistakes are an essential part of the Doc Films charm.

“Even when the framing’s messed up or you see somebody repositioning, it’s like ‘Oh, I know that [a] projectionist is up there right now, they’re fixing it, they probably messed up,’” Gonzalez says. “I don’t think anybody goes in, knowing Doc Films, thinking this is going to be an absolutely perfect, seamless experience.”

At Doc, the trade-off you get for sacrificing a flawless viewing experience is a reminder that the moviegoing experience can be something more than the result of a panoptic algorithm tracking your every scroll and click. At Doc and elsewhere, the analog click and flicker of an old film print feels comfortable, a reassurance that there are humans working up in that booth.

For Chicago filmmaker Gordon Quinn, that experience—the human experience—is an essential part of watching films in the first place. “It’s very very different to see a film with a group of people, to experience them experiencing the film,” he says. “When they sigh, when they laugh, all of that is a very different kind of experience. So I really believe in public space and people coming together in those spaces to experience something, to experience a work of art.”

Quinn is the cofounder and artistic director of Kartemquin Films, a local production house that has had a hand in some of the best documentaries to come out of the midwest over the past few decades, notably 1994’s Hoop Dreams and last year’s Minding the Gap, both of which were nominated for Academy Awards.

But before all that, he was just another movie-loving undergrad at the University of Chicago in the early 60s when he discovered Doc Films. Quinn says it was one particular
documentary he saw at Doc—Happy Mother’s Day, a 1963 short about the birth of the Fischer quintuplets in South Dakota—that sparked the beginning of his filmmaking career.

“When I saw that it was like, ‘Ah, that’s what I want to do.’ I mean it was just like seeing that film was one of those life-changing experiences.”

Since he graduated, Quinn’s had an ongoing relationship with Doc. In 2011, the club held a Kartemquin retrospective, and in February of this year, Quinn screened his 1968 film Inquiring Nuns and stayed for a post-show Q and A. He’ll also be in attendance at the first-ever Doc Films Festival, a two-day event over Memorial Day weekend that’s showcasing documentaries by Chicago-area filmmakers.

Spaces like Doc, Quinn says, are more than just movie theaters: they’re vital democratic institutions.

“It’s one of the powerful ways in which ideas and politics and things are discussed. Everyone has shared an experience. They may have not seen it all the same way, but they’ve all sat there and seen it together, and that’s really important, in terms of how we create more of a sense of community, across various kinds of divisions.”

It’s a balance that Doc strikes tenderly. It’s both a community institution, centered on education and discovery, and a space for friends to just watch films together.

“The point of Doc has never been to just make as much money as we can so that we’re sustainable,” Awano says. “It’s just to have this experience with other students and community members, [to] hang out and watch movies. It’s a luxury to be able to do that.”

@rquinnmyers
Tapeheads

In the 80s and 90s, 79th Street Video had the best video collection on the south side. What happened after it shut down?

By Leor Galil

S carecrow Video is one of the largest video stores in the world, with more than 132,000 titles. It began in the confines of a small Seattle storefront back in December 1988 and only survived to see its pearl anniversary because the community around it understood the cultural value of its collection. In 2014, Scarecrow’s second-generation owners considered selling off the store’s videos following years of financial struggles—simply put, fewer people were renting from them year after year. Instead, that October, the owners donated every last VHS, DVD, and laser disc to the employees, who raised $100,000 to help turn the rental spot into a nonprofit.

Streaming contributed to Scarecrow’s decline, but also helped bolster its reputation as a cultural landmark. As video stores have teetered toward obsolescence, the few that have stuck around have become totems of cinephilia, the holdouts for fanatics who can’t be satisfied by the comparatively few options available on Netflix, Hulu, Amazon, and even Criterion’s new streaming service. In the past year, Scarecrow has been the subject of features published by SeattlePI.com, City Lab, and the New York Times; its thirtieth anniversary helped generate press, but so did its successful GoFundMe drive in April 2018, which raised another $100,000.

Even with a nationwide shortage of video-rental establishments, Chicago has helped keep two of the most remarkable hubs in the country alive. Facets, a nonprofit established in 1975, rents out and streams more than 50,000 titles and has established a national presence for its work with foreign fare; it also operates as a distributor and runs a small cinematheque out of its Lincoln Park headquarters. A short ways west and slightly south of Facets, in Bucktown, sits Odd Obsession Movies, which has rented out fringe, cult, and obscure flicks since its launch in 2004. In 2015 Tribune critic Michael Phillips reported on Odd Obsession’s change in location—it moved five doors north of its original storefront on Milwaukee Avenue and raised a little more than $13,000 on Indiegogo to sustain the shop and help expand its selection of 25,000 films.

Both Facets and Odd Obsession have earned their reputations in part by offering a catalog of hard-to-find films and in part by engendering a community of film lovers. Until five years ago, Chicago had another video rental spot with a large library of movies, though this one catered to a Black clientele on the south side: 79th Street Video. The Ashburn shop opened in 1983 and at one point held 45,000 movies (both VHS and DVD). It earned a reputation for its selection of kung fu films that were nearly impossible to find stateside until this century. During its peak in the late 1980s, it once rented out 5,000 movies on a single day. It served at least one Chicago Bears player and one untrained horror director who became a cult legend.

Besides a 2013 South Side Weekly story by onetime Reader contributor Isabel Ochoa Gold, 79th Street Video didn’t leave much of a digital fingerprint. Gold profiled the shop as its owner, Russell G. Pine Jr., prepared to close it down in March 2014 due to his failing health.

I’ve often wondered about what happened when the shop finally closed down. What happened to the tens of thousands of videos? Who felt the loss of an independent rental institution that lasted three decades? What is its legacy?

I never got to ask Russ about the shop; he died in January 2015 at age 65. But I did sit down with his younger brother, Chuck, who provided the financial support Russ needed to open the store. They co-owned and ran 79th

Chuck, Russ, and their three siblings grew up in a household that understood how business worked. “My dad opened up the second laundromat in the city of Chicago,” Chuck says. “At one point, we had 16 laundromats in the family.” The boss of Coin Laundry, Russell H. Pine, wanted Chuck to run the chain. “I hated the business, truthfully,” Chuck says. “You’re basically a mechanic—all he did was fix stuff all the time, and I hate that. Give me a screwdriver and a wrench and I’m crabby in about three minutes.”
Chuck preferred to wheel and deal. “My dad was a big stocks guy, so I was trading stocks by fifth grade,” Chuck says. During his freshman year of high school in the late 1970s, he bought 1,000 shares of Page America. “Bought it for 30 cents and sold it for $9—so I had nine grand after I sold it,” he says. By the time he graduated high school in 1981 he had made enough money through trading that he could open his own business. “I wanted to be self-employed, for sure,” Chuck says. The problem was, he didn’t have any ideas for a business. His brother Russ, 12 years Chuck’s senior, had an idea.

A couple years before they opened 79th Street Video, the brothers opened a rental spot named after its south suburban base: Midlothian Video. “We started with 650 movies,” Chuck says. “Within a year and a half we were killing it. We were making a ton of money, and always putting all the money back in the store and buying more tapes, more tapes, and more tapes.” Since not every household had adopted VHS technology, Midlothian Video sold VCRs, too, a tactic that won over at least one senior citizen who wandered into the shop dumbfounded. “He spots that we have an adult room—goes in that adult room, comes out, and literally buys a VCR,” Chuck says. “Next thing you know, him and his wife, who were both in their 70s, were all about the adult fare.”

The Midlothian location amassed about 4,000 VHS tapes by the time the Pine brothers decided to open another video store, this one at 79th and Western in Chicago. Chuck and Russ borrowed about $10,000 from their father and half the stock from Midlothian Video to open 79th Street Video. The Pine brothers oversaw both rental spots until Russ got divorced in 1989 and his ex took ownership of Midlothian Video. “I lost a half a video store in my brother’s divorce,” Chuck says. “I lost more than my brother, to be honest with you. But we just wanted to be done with that drama, and the money was coming in so quick at 79th Street.”

Chuck can’t remember why he and Russ settled on the spot in Ashburn. “We probably were targeting that city crowd,” he says. “We were right on the border of the Black and white neighborhood, I don’t know if that had anything to do with it or not, but it could have—it’s possible that that was why we picked that exact spot.” When 79th Street Video opened, Ashburn was majority Irish Catholic. According to the New York Times, the first Black families began moving to the neighborhood in the 1980s, but they were far in the minority—by 1991, Blacks made up just two percent of the neighborhood’s home buyers. Chuck and Russ, who are white, opened their shop close to Ashburn’s border with Auburn Gresham, the majority-Black neighborhood that begins a few blocks east of Western Avenue.

“We got a lot of pushback, to be honest with you, from the neighborhood, because most of our clientele was Black,” Chuck says. “All our customers, basically, were coming from the east side, cause there was no video stores over there—got a lot of pushback from the neighbors. I remember there was a couple race wars, like, right on our block.”

Chuck carried a .44 Magnum revolver around 79th Street Video. “We all carried guns,” he says. By his count, 79th Street Video got robbed three times—a low number considering its long life span and the fact that the business collected mostly small bills. “You’re leaving the video store every night with a lot of cash,” Chuck says. “It was a cash business. I don’t even know if we took Visa.”

Word of mouth helped business take off. Chuck says he never cared for advertising. They had regulars who stuck around all day, sometimes because they were waiting on a film another customer had checked out. “They would stand in the store for four or five hours a day, waiting for that tape to come back, so they didn’t miss it,” Chuck says. “They’d be standing there waiting for the tape to come back and get returned and, you know, ‘Hey, I got one.’ Like, almost being annoying to the people bringing them back.” Chuck says some customers were like family, and credits his brother for forming those bonds. “My brother literally hung out with half of these people,” he says.

Russ’s care for his customers helped give 79th Street Video its character. His son Rory, now 40, who worked intermittently at the shop beginning in 1999, recalls his father could draw in customers with stories that were only occasionally exaggerated. “He was, you know, ‘I’m trying to entertain everyone, and this was a crazy thing that happened, I’m going to tell it this way, and by the end of it everyone’s going to be laughing along with it,’” Rory says. “Those were the types of stories that pulled everyone in.” He cared for his customers, too, often asking them about their personal lives and families.

Rory also worked at Midlothian Video and noticed a dramatic difference between his mom’s spot and Russ’s store. “He had customers that would hang out there for two, three hours—they’d eventually leave with their videos, but they’d just want to sit and talk,” Rory says. “It was an interesting dynamic community at his store. And nothing like my mother’s store—you come in, get a movie, you leave, you know, a quick high. Not hanging out for two hours watching various parts of kung fu movies and comparing them—it was unique.”

It helped that Russ loved film as much as his most fervent customers. Even working at

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Chuck sold non-adult fare, too. One of his most notable sellers was also one of the most popular rentals at 79th Street Video: the horror flick *Black Devil Doll From Hell.* An aspiring local director named Chester Novell Turner made it in 1984 with a meager budget and video camera; it concerns a churchgoing woman enamored with the titular possessed doll, and features an all-Black cast. *Black Devil Doll* and Turner’s second film, *Tales From the Quadead Zone* (1987), have since helped define the era of inexpensive DIY horror filmmaking that arrived with the popularization of VHS camcorders. *Black Devil Doll* is among 3,000 exploitation and horror VHS tapes held in the basement of Yale University’s Sterling Library, and notable enough (if only by name) that YaleNews mentioned it in a 2015 story about the collection.

Before *Tales From the Quadead Zone* came out, Chuck remembers, Turner walked into 79th Street Video and played part of the movie for everyone gathered in the shop. The segment, titled “Food For,” focuses on an impoverished white family as they sit around the dinner table and wait to split up a morsel of food in front of them. “We’re like, ‘Dude, this is horrible,’” Chuck says. “I was like, ‘Dude, just make *Black Devil Doll 2.’” When I reach Turner, he says he doesn’t remember 79th Street Video. He stopped making movies after *Quadead Zone,* though after Michigan-based Massacre Video rereleased his two pictures on DVD in 2013 he started working on sequels for both. The same year his movies got reissued, the *New York Times* reported that an original VHS copy of *Quadead Zone* sold for more than $1,300.

Though Chuck sold movies to other rental shops, he did his part to make sure 79th Street Video still stocked material no other shops in town had—at least, no other rental spots he knew about, anyway. “We were the only video store in the city that had *Pink Flamingos,*” he says. “We would make people put down $200 deposits because we only had one copy. People would drive from Wisconsin to get it.”

Their other prized videos didn’t require deposits but were still difficult to find elsewhere: John Woo’s *The Young Dragons* and Jimmy Wang Yu’s *Master of the Flying Guillotine.* They had blaxploitation pictures from Fred Williamson and Rudy Ray Moore. They had every episode of the short-lived 1950s TV adaptation of *The Amos ‘n’ Andy Show,* which Chuck says was among their more popular rentals. If you wanted to see the infamous 1978 cult flick *Faces of Death,* 79th Street Video had it. Any odd karate or horror film Russ could get his hands on ended up in the shop. “He liked horror a lot,” Chuck says. “Any horror movie that came out, we had it. Even if it was a piece of crap—you know those really bad ones that are famous for being the worst movie ever? We had all that stuff.”

The place practically printed money. Chuck recalls how on one Christmas Eve in the late 80s, when the shop held a holiday special, 79th Street Video rented out 5,000 movies. By then, his interest in the business began to dwindle. “I just stood there and took money,” Chuck says. “It sounds fun, but every day? Like, my brother was in the movies, but I wasn’t. I worked a register—like a cashier, you know, making a lot of money, though, but I hated it. It was really boring.”

In the early 90s Chuck went to chef school and became a silent partner in 79th Street Video; his continued ownership of the shop provided a nice financial cushion when he apprenticed for Rick Bayless at Frontera Grill for a few years in the mid-90s. In 1998, he opened his restaurant, Chuck’s Southern Comforts Cafe, and opened a second location about seven years ago. He was out of 79th Street Video entirely by the early 2000s. Chuck wasn’t really around when the store moved to its second and final location at 8110 S. Western. He missed the transition to DVD (though it continued renting VHS tapes). He missed the dwindling rentals following the advent of streaming. He missed when Russ sold off the shop’s movies at a discounted rate as he prepared to close up in 2014.

When the store closed, Russ had about 5,000 movies left, which he stored in his home. After he died in 2015, Rory tried in vain to sell them—he brought the risqué flicks to adult stores, but none wanted them because the tapes weren’t in their original cases. His two siblings brought the rest of the videos to Springfield to try to flog them there; Rory says whatever they couldn’t sell likely ended up in a dumpster.

The real tragedy for Rory, though, was that the community that had congregated at 79th Street Video was gone. The shop’s collection was remarkable, yes, but Rory believes the most important thing his father did was provide a space for the people who loved those movies to congregate. “It was the place for people to get a little break from reality, and that’s what movies are—you want to get a little taste of something outside your life,” Rory says. “It made a lot of people happy, and also brought my dad a lot of happiness.”

Rory caught the martial arts bug from his dad. Around 2001 he bought his first DVD, *Five Deadly Venoms.* “It’s arguably one of the most classic old-school movies of all kung fu,” he says. When 79th Street Video closed, Russ offered him a deal. “He was getting rid of everything, so he said, ‘If you want anything for free, just grab it,’” Rory says. He took home about three or four movies, including *Iron Monkey* and *Blade of Fury.*

Rory has about 50 or 60 kung fu movies now—he keeps the collection small to appease his wife, but he’s picky too. In a small way, Rory’s collection functions as a tribute to his dad’s legacy. He got all the DVDs from 79th Street Video, and bought every movie from his father. “Yeah,” Rory says. “And he always gave me a real good deal.”

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A video store didn’t satiate his desire to watch movies. “He enjoyed his time after a long day at work—10:30 at night, just finished a 12-hour shift, and he’d knock out one or two movies,” Rory says. “He never seemed to need a ton of sleep. That was his way to unwind—and then, the next day, be like, ‘I just watched this *Iron Monkey* movie, and you won’t believe how long that one choreographed fight can go.’ And we’d all talk about it. We’d throw it on, watch it, and compare it to other ones.”

Russ’s voracious appetite for martial arts films and Chuck’s affinity for wheeling and dealing helped 79th Street Video amass an unmatched collection of kung fu flicks. “I found a company in New York that was doing some importing from China,” Chuck says. “We weren’t a thousand percent positive that this stuff was legal—you know, licensed in the States. We were like, ‘You got that and you’re willing to sell it to us, and it’s on VHS and it’s got a label?’ I’m not going to ask a ton of questions, I’m just like, ‘Oh, you got it. Well, everybody wants to see it, and as far as I know it’s legit.’”

The shop’s reputation as a hub for hard-to-find martial arts movies stuck through the years. “One time, a massive man came in and I’m like, ‘I know who that is,’” Rory says. “It was Alonzo Spellman from the Chicago Bears. He heard about my dad’s video store, and he heard about the kung fu collection. He shows up and he’s got an entourage of, like, four or five buddies with him, and they buy like $400 worth of kung fu movies.”

The Pine brothers sold as well as rented movies—selling would help get old, lesser-loved stock off the shelves. And Chuck’s dealings expanded to selling videos outside the store. Within a couple years of opening 79th Street Video, he launched Discount Video, a VHS distribution service he ran out of a conversion van. “A lot of my customers were the small video stores on the east side,” he says. “But, truthfully, almost every store in the city of Chicago bought something from me. I really cornered the market.” Chuck even sold videos to one of his sisters, who opened her own video rental spot on 51st Street called Warehouse Video.

Chuck mostly distributed adult films. Since 79th Street Video also had a remarkably large trove of porn tapes, he knew how quickly those VHS tapes could fall out of vogue. So he also designed signs advertising sales on old adult stock—four tapes for $19.95, deep discounts on VHS titles with specific stickers on them—and distributed them to video rental outposts that wanted to get rid of old stock (and, in turn, buy the latest tapes from Chuck). He’d order videos out of catalogs from companies based in California, buying tapes for roughly $3 or $4 each and selling them for about twice as much. He delivered in bulk. “Guys would buy 100 tapes at a time from me, that’s $400 profit,” Chuck says. “All’s I would do is drop ‘em off.”

Chuck loved stock off the shelves. And Chuck’s deal—four tapes for $19.95, deep discounts of kung fu movies.”
Willing and A.B.L.E.

An ensemble of performers with Down syndrome creates entertainment for stage and screen.

By Andrea Gronvall

Like the earliest practitioners of film, the men and women who made silent pictures, today’s writers, directors, producers, and actors often come to moviemaking through other disciplines. Film is a collaborative medium; except for some rarified experimental efforts, it requires a team. But you don’t have to go to Hollywood to realize your vision, whether it’s for mass distribution or a niche audience. Two recent Chicago independent productions, The Curse of the Tempest Jewel (2015), a film noir-style caper, and The Spy Who Knew Me (2017), a riff on James Bond, are narrative features modest in scale but big on ambition, starring a local ensemble of young performers with Down syndrome.

At the helm are writer-director Lawrence Kern and executive artistic director Katie Yohe, husband-and-wife leaders of the non-profit organization A.B.L.E. (Artists Breaking Limits & Expectations). Their cast is comprised of longtime workshop participants who perform annually in A.B.L.E.’s live plays and revues; the movies are an outgrowth of these shows. A.B.L.E.’s mission is to create performance experiences for individuals with developmental differences, providing programming that encourages creative growth and self-actualization. Another equally important goal is joy, which is evident while watching the two movies, both accessible on Vimeo.

Petite, vivacious, and highly focused, Yohe, 34, grew up in Pennsylvania. She graduated magna cum laude with a BFA in drama from Syracuse University, where she was part of a theater program, now called All Star C.A.S.T., that introduces typically developed undergrads to community actors with a range of developmental disabilities. “Finally, I felt a reason to be in the room,” she recalls.

For a time she was a working actor in the UK at Shakespeare’s Globe and the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. After she moved to Chicago in 2007, she gravitated to GiGi’s Playhouse, a chain of “achievement centers” that offer therapeutic and education programs for people with Down syndrome. “They do a lot of advocacy,” she says, “They do literacy, job training, and occupational therapy, and offer different programs. My friend Mallory Alcala and I started this weekly drama club as volunteers [in 2010], and that morphed into what A.B.L.E. has become.” When not teaching pilots to help pay the bills, Yohe works, in her husband’s words, “nonstop” on A.B.L.E.; the only hiatus she’s taken was to earn her master’s degree in applied theatre at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama at the University of London.

The outgoing, athletic Kern, 40, was born in Austin and got the acting bug at eight, through Shakespeare at Winedale at the University of Texas. After graduation from Southwestern University in Georgetown, Texas, he became a stage actor, shuttling between UT and London until he took a two-year break to look after his ailing mother. He moved to Chicago for an MFA from the Chicago College of Performing Arts at Roosevelt University. There he met the late casting director Jane Alderman, who inspired, she says, “by one of our newer actors, who’s on the autism spectrum, and has an encyclopedic brain for movies.” Short films starring the cast will punctuate the live performance.

Chief among the techniques created to shoot the feature films is one also used on stage, called dropping in. Yohe explains, “We might have some actors who may not be that literate, or who aren’t reading their scripts, or maybe have short-term memory issues. So we’ll have one of our teaching artists or facilitators on stage literally right behind an actor, or if we’re filming, then we’ll be under the table, or off camera elsewhere, and we’ll feed the line. Then the actor repeats it back, with whatever flourish is intrinsic to them in terms of their personalities and what they’ve chosen to do with their characters. Then in the edit we take out the neurotypical adults’ voices.”

Another technique that Kern has found useful in directing his young film stars is doing the master shot first, not just to have an establishing shot, but to help the actors feel centered through the close-ups and cutaways that follow. It’s also helpful to have a monitor on set so that after a take the performers can view it (they love to watch themselves) and work on any adjustments that might need to be made. “They are so hungry for any chance to show what they can do every day,” Kern says. “In most movies and TV shows, if there’s a character with developmental differences, that’s how he/she is defined. Our films are about our characters’ [and actors’] desires and wishes—for jobs, for relationships, for fun. We’re making a statement by not making a statement. This is a film universe where Down syndrome isn’t even a thing.”

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The new pornographers

Inside the world of “beautifully shot, ethically made, and sexy smut”

By S. Nicole Lane

The answer to bad porn isn’t no porn,” the feminist sexologist, editor, and porn actress Annie Sprinkle once said. “It’s to try and make porn better.” Pornography is now a $97 billion global industry—the Pornhub website averages 92 million visitors daily. Much of what appears on popular porn sites is stolen content or films that were produced in unhygienic, unethical, and unsafe circumstances. But there’s also better porn out there.

Feminist and ethical adult-film production houses want to provide porn that’s professional, empowering, political, and consensual, and disrupts the usual representation of heteronormative sex in adult films. Ethical porn means fair wages, fair labor practices, no sex trafficking, no pressure, and safe sex for everyone. Feminist porn pushes these ideas further by including the representation of diversity in bodies, gender identity, ability, race, and sexual interests. Power in pleasure is at its core.

Eden Newmar, a Chicago-based pro domme, porn actor, and occasional escort, came into the adult film industry when they were 18 and homeless. “Safe porn is oriented towards depicting sexual acts where all parties are giving enthusiastic consent the entire time,” they explain. “It recognizes the validity of the labor of the people who act in and produce the films/photos/etc.” Newmar works with the Lust Garden, a Minneapolis-based independent project that, in the words of its website, aims to produce and distribute “beautifully shot, ethically made, and sexy smut.”

Run by performer Rococo Royalle, the collective uses contracts that are negotiable (either through up-front payment, royalties, or content-sharing options) and charges its viewers on a sliding scale (between $6 and $10 for 30 minutes) in order to make porn more accessible; people of color, LGBTQI folks, people with disabilities, and sex workers can pay what they can afford. Newmar and other performers have the chance to approve both the footage and ad copy and request edits. Other websites such as XConfessions, the Crash Pad Series, Bellesa, Indie Porn Revolution, and Lady Cheeky offer DVDs, subscriptions, Patreon support, or online tips. Feminist porn is still a niche market, though, and many smaller production companies are only breaking even.

But the loss of income is worth escaping the exploitation that’s common on mainstream porn sets. Many actors have horror stories of being forced to perform sexual acts that they found uncomfortable or painful; this is a disturbing reality of the adult film industry. Newmar finds that mainstream porn has created a great divide between content creators and consumers. “It is compulsory heterosexuality at its worst,” Newmar says, “even when the scenes are lesbian or cuckold scenes.” The goal of the Lust Garden and other producers of ethical and feminist films is to depict realistic and consensual safe sex.

Renowned feminist porn directors such as Erika Lust and Tristan Taormino get to know their performers and foster relationships between scene partners in order to capture genuine sexual desire on camera. This approach is revolutionary in the sense that the actors’ pleasure is integral to the film. A common goal for many feminist porn production houses is to dismantle the male gaze, a term coined by Laura Mulvey in the 1970s that describes women, or femme-identifying people, being put on display solely for male pleasure. In mainstream porn, the cis male climax is king, and the cum shot is the moneymaker. In feminist pornography, the antiquated idea of cis male pleasure is being abandoned to depict more genuine and authentic femme orgasms, pleasure, and control.

The filmmakers also aim to create films with intersectional and body-positive imagery that portrays wide spectrums of sexuality and identity. There’s an emphasis on natural body
types: body hair, the application of lube, and plus-sized performers are all depicted and celebrated.

That respect for performers extends off camera. Many directors allow actors to negotiate their pay rates and support them choosing their own partners for a scene. Many are also women who want to create a more inviting environment on set and pay attention to food and hygiene: basic human needs, basic human rights.

Feminist pornography isn’t a new concept, by any means; it's been around since 1984 when retired porn actress Candida Vadala (also known as Candida Royalle) founded Femme Productions. She went on to create movies with fulfilling plots, elaborate sets, and what she called “positive sexual role modeling.” (Of course, feminist pornography has also had its opposition. Anti-porn activist Gail Dines told the Daily Beast in 2012 that “anyone willing to feed off women's bodies and use them as raw materials to make a profit has no right to call themselves feminists.” More recently, a three-day queer and feminist porn festival in London was forced to relocate after protests.)

There is no denying that porn plays a significant role in shaping our cultural values as well as cultural trends. Many feminist porn producers seek to create content that will positively impact viewers, to give them something more artfully libidinous than your average smut.

“I really want to focus on sex and power,” says Alejandra Guerrero, a Colombian-born fetish and erotic artist who has experience in the mainstream adult industry. After working closely with actors in the adult film industry in LA, she understands the significance of having a woman behind the camera. “A lot of people who contact me like that I am a woman. It makes them more comfortable. I don’t want to objectify women, I want to make the subject feel at ease.” Though she’s no longer in film, she stages elaborate fetish parties around the city where she has projected some of her moving-image work.

Multidisciplinary artist Chelsea Ross, like Guerrero and many other ethical porn directors, seeks to eradicate exploitation. Her first independent erotic film, Spin, premiered at this year’s Hump! Film Festival, Dan Savage’s touring fest of dirty shorts. It exemplifies the kind of work she and other feminist and ethical porn directors are trying to create.

Spin begins with a scene of a trans man scrolling through his phone. He picks up a vibrator and begins to masturbate. Then the film takes us into his fantasy: a group of people of various body types and identities dressed in glitter, bondage gear, and lingerie playing a game of spin the bottle that evolves into group sex. “Consent and communication are key,” is the first line of dialogue we hear from one character; this person has a purple mustache, pink eyeglasses, and glitter scattered across their chest and cheekbones.

Using split screens, Ross interjects scenes of various characters engaging in a variety of acts that range from oral sex to simply kissing in an experimental way. Eventually, the music slows, the lights dim, and a plethora of strap-ons, harnesses, and chokers come out. We see the main character having sex on the couch with a partner who is wearing a strap-on. He closes his eyes, and when he opens them again, he’s back on his bed. The film ends with a shot of a small smile crossing his face—an affirmation of satisfaction.

Ross met several times with her actors before shooting began in order to discuss consent, dislikes, desires, and boundaries so that the actual sex scenes would be lightly directed. “We also made sure there was space and time for aftercare,” she says. (The scene before the credits shows the actors kissing and caressing one another.) Unlike the director of a mainstream video, who would conclude with an explosive and dramatic orgasm, Ross cuts the film before the money shot. She understands that a facial isn’t the happy ending all of us are seeking when watching porn.

Performers find their own happy ending. Premier African dominatrix Mistress Velvet, who requires her clients to read Black feminist theory, has starred in a few Lust Garden films. Her experience, she says, was a “healing alternative to the mainstream pornography that I often don’t feel connected to.” She says that the safety factors included in her experience with the independent production house were “absolutely refreshing.”

Mistress Velvet has built her community online and in Chicago. Because she finds her white male clients exhausting, feminist literature serves as her “rule book to pass on to them.” She says, “It’s been really cathartic to build these kinds of teachable moments into power play. It’s my big ‘fuck you, I ain’t the one!’ to the lazy, racist, traumatic interpersonal dynamics that make up most of my experiences with white men.” Her video work provides a similar catharsis.

For many actors and sex workers, creating their own content provides a way to have full agency over their bodies and sexual partners—and their own visions and fantasies. “Sex work can be a microcosm of larger problematic societal structures,” explains Mistress Velvet. The violence that occurs outside of work has the dismal potential to be replicated within a sex worker’s community. “Creating indie content with other queer workers and artists of color is a deliberate choice,” says Mistress Velvet. “It provides me with safety, community, and agency.”

“I wish porn would be treated with the same respect we give our coffee—which incidentally costs about the same as a clip,” says Newmar. “We should want to know and pay for porn that is ethically made and sourced, fairly compensated, done with passion, and focused on an enjoyable experience for providers as well as consumers.”

Real sex is full of fumbling, condoms, body hair, and laughing at mistakes. It’s gooeey and messy. It isn’t all of the glamour and glitz we see coming out of production houses in LA or NYC. Feminist porn shows sex that two (or more) people are reveling in together, not just another notch on a cis male belt. More importantly, alternative porn introduces options to the mainstream that are easily accessible. As Chelsea Ross says, “Consumers can make informed choices that align with their values, and also their libidos.”

@snicolelane
The first time Eugene Sun Park saw himself represented in a film, he was 25.

The film was Justin Lin’s Better Luck Tomorrow, a 2002 drama about a group of studious Asian American teenagers who engage in petty crime to cut loose from their responsibilities. While the film still fed into stereotypes, it was the first time Park was exposed to an almost-entirely Asian American cast.

“I spent most of my youth never seeing someone onscreen who reflected my identity or experience,” Park says. “The only times I would see an Asian American, particularly an Asian American male, the character was the subject of ridicule or seen as a joke. He was either a foreign exchange student with broken English or was a martial arts person.”

Park cites this lifelong frustration with a lack of dynamic and intersectional representations in media as the driving force behind Full Spectrum Features, a four-year-old 501(c)(3) nonprofit film production house and distributor based in Lakeview.

Its mission, as the name suggests, is to diversify Chicago’s independent film scene by amplifying the work of women, queer people, and filmmakers of color. Of the films in Full Spectrum’s current catalog (eight completed, seven in development or production), 91 percent are directed by women and 55 percent showcase queer people in prominent speaking roles. (By contrast, according to Full Spectrum’s website, just 7 percent of Hollywood films are directed by women and less than 1 percent feature queer people in prominent speaking roles.)

Park never studied filmmaking or film theory in a classroom, but he did get a pretty good picture of the Hollywood film industry by working at various assistant jobs at talent agencies and production companies in Los Angeles.

It wasn’t a picture he particularly liked.

“I was extremely frustrated by the industry and how unrepresentative they were to stories about people of color in particular,” Park says. “Frustrating is an understatement.”

Park was so frustrated, in fact, that he left the industry altogether to study philosophy for almost a decade.

Five years into his PhD program, in 2012, he dropped out and moved to Chicago. During his time in academia, he’d noticed the dramatic changes in the film industry. No longer was filmmaking something only for an elite few with vast resources and industry connections. It was now open to anybody with a laptop and a digital camera.

“I saw friends who I had gone to college with who were making incredible films that were going to Sundance and SXSW and I was shocked to see that they were making these films on their laptops with a camera they bought at Best Buy,” Park says.

He realized that if Hollywood wasn’t making the types of films he wanted to see, he could make them himself.

His first project was The Orange Story (2016), a narrative short film he produced and cowrote (Erika Street directed) about a Japanese American man preparing to leave for an incarceration camp during World War II. Jason Matsumoto, a director of pricing at the Chicago Mercantile Exchange and director of the Japanese drum ensemble Ho Etsu Taiko, joined the team as a producer, focusing on securing grants and establishing connections with the local Japanese American community. Park and Matsumoto found that there were a large number of filmmaking grants available only to nonprofit organizations. This became the catalyst for them to start Full Spectrum and broaden the accessibility of filmmaking.

Both Park and Matsumoto wanted to support not just their own work at Full Spectrum, but also the work of filmmakers who wouldn’t be easily supported by Hollywood—those exploring different identities, different stories, and different ways of telling them.

“For me it has always been less about I need to be the writer or director of this piece and more of I really want this story to be out there in the world and I want people to hear it,” Park says.

Those stories include, among others, Make Out Party (2018), a queer candy-coated comedy of errors by Emily Esperanza; Signature Move (2017), a lesbian wrestling romantic comedy by Jennifer Reeder; Holy Trinity (currently in postproduction), an experimental portrait of a dominatrix-turned-medium by Molly Hewitt; and The T, a web series about the lives of fictional LGBTQ Chicagoans by Bea Cordelia and Daniel Kyri.

“People who are here and are making films in Chicago, in some ways they are doing that almost defiantly,” Park says. “There’s a certain type of person who’s thinking about filmmaking in a different way that’s going to be here and make work here. There’s a unique kind of openness to creativity among the filmmaking community here.”

Full Spectrum aims to correct the representation of marginalized people not just through representation in film, but by changing the structure of what might be an old-fashioned method of filmmaking to begin with.

“If we just take a broad range of identities and try to tell stories using the techniques and tropes of Hollywood, I’m not sure that we’ve done much to truly accomplish or support diversity in storytelling,” Park says.

The catalog of styles and storytellers Full Spectrum is able to support is due to the diversity of Chicago and the filmmakers who live here, Park says. Chicago’s film scene also feels comparatively less demanding and rigid than those in LA or New York, which can make it easier for an unconventional idea like Make Out Party to turn into a reality.

“People who are here and are making films in Chicago, in some ways they are doing that almost defiantly,” Park says. “There’s a certain kind of openness to creativity among the filmmaking community here.”
The Music Box Theatre was built in 1929 and it feels the way many older, well-preserved buildings feel: beautiful, a little mysterious, and deeply, deeply haunted. It’s the exact sort of place one would expect to see a ghost.

On a busy night, it’s easy to be distracted by other things—the glowing red neon light from the marquee, the smell of the popcorn machine. But being there alone, late at night, that’s a different story. And it was on one of those nights not too long ago (OK, 2009) that Lindsey Jacobs saw Whitey, the ghost of the Music Box.

Whitey was a manager at the Music Box for 30 or 40 years, and died in 1977. As with many ghost stories, the details are vague. There was a rumor that Whitey had died in the theater: he lay down for a nap on one of the benches and never woke up. The bench is still there, in the theater lounge, though Jacobs says that it has since been reupholstered.

Jacobs, now a technical manager for the film side of the company, was a projectionist when she first came to the theater ten years ago. “The Music Box is just super creepy in general, and it’s especially creepy when you’re one of the last people there,” she says. “And as the projectionist, you’re shutting down every night.”

Back then, the theater still showed movies on 35 mm film. This meant that Jacobs was responsible for changing over one reel of film to the next in both booths. The process is fairly straightforward: “You watch the little window for that cigarette burn,” she explains, “and then you have to [switch] the audio and the picture at the same time. So you go down [to the projection booth] a few minutes early, and you just sit, and stare, and wait.”

One night Jacobs was in the downstairs booth in Theater 2 waiting for the changeover. The room was small and she knew she was alone, but she felt like someone was watching her. “Finally I was like, ‘I know I have at least 30 seconds, I can [check].’” She turned around, and there was a man standing there, staring at her.

He wasn’t exactly transparent, but he wasn’t a tangible human being, either. He was kind of like the ghosts on the Haunted Mansion ride at Disney World, she explains: tall with a solemn face, wearing an old suit. He didn’t say anything to her, and she didn’t say anything to him.

But then it was time for the changeover. “[I] turn around, do my changeover, turn back around, and there’s nothing there,” she says. “And I stood in the booth for a few minutes and I was like, ‘What the fuck just happened?’”

Years later, another Music Box employee showed Jacobs a picture of Whitey from his managerial days. She’d never seen a picture of him before, but she recognized him immediately. “This is the best part,” she says. “Dude was wearing that suit. It was the same suit!”

That night in the projection booth was the only time Jacobs saw Whitey and the only time she has ever seen a ghost. But she’s not the only one who has felt Whitey’s presence at the theater. Manager Ernestina “Ernie” Garcia says she’s felt someone standing behind her several times, and even heard a voice calling her name in the lobby after hours. But she is quick to say that Whitey isn’t scary. “I like to say he keeps an eye out,” she says.

And Jacobs agrees. She thinks Whitey was checking up on her that night, “making sure I was making that changeover, making sure the masking was correct. I mean, I made the changeover, it was perfect. So he was doing his job there.”
Sliding into @MusicBoxTheatre’s DMs

An investigation into the best movie theater Twitter in town.

By Brianna Wellen

I think the Music Box Theatre Twitter is flirting with me! one of my cinephile friends told me a few years ago after an exchange of several responsive, charming tweets about movies. Alas, upon further investigation of the social media feed, we discovered the true love of whoever was running it was only movies, and they were eager to engage with any and everyone who shared that passion. But still the question remained: who was the person behind the 90-year-old movie house’s feed?

Since 2015, about a year before my friend fell in love, it’s been Buck LePard, the Music Box’s senior operations manager (who has a pretty solid Twitter feed himself). Recently I slid into the Music Box Theatre’s DMs to chat with him about the power of social media and the movies. This conversation has been edited for clarity.

@BriannaWellen: Did you jump right in with the voice and style you use now or did it take a while to find what worked best for you and your followers?

@MusicBoxTheatre: I kept up what has really worked for us, while also adding my own style and ideas. And over time, the type of material on the feed has expanded, it started off as very cut-and-dried movie and event listings.

Can you think of a turning point when things like GIFs and more interactions with followers became part of the mix?

Film is a visual medium, so sharing GIFs, film clips, trailers, screenshots, closeups of 35 mm and 70 mm filmstrips, etc. became second nature as the best way to represent the Music Box. And I love talking about movies, so getting into conversations with folks is typically very fun. It’s not always them coming to us. I’ve had a lot of interactions where I’ll see a person post a GIF or something from a movie like Heathers, and I’ll tell them, “Hey that’s playing at the Music Box in two weeks,” and they’ll get excited and come to the movie.

Do you find that’s helpful in getting the word out that the Music Box screens films that some people might not expect?

It’s helpful for getting the word out, and it’s also helped us decide what screenings might be worth doing in the future, since the things I’m posting might not always have to do with screenings that are currently on our schedule. For instance, last year I posted a random tweet about Drop Dead Gorgeous, and folks got pretty excited about the possibility of us playing it. Off of that, we scheduled it for midnight screenings and we had over 300 people show up each night. Having social media as an easy way to connect and alert our followers has increased what we’re capable of, since it’s such easy and immediate access.

Have you fulfilled a lot of wishes for screenings through Twitter?

Definitely. We’ll have folks make suggestions or requests, and I keep track of them.

A couple years ago, before Baby Driver came out, we were doing an Edgar Wright retrospective of his previous films. It was going to include all his movies except for one, a comedy-western he made when he was 20 called A Fistful of Fingers. It had only played once in the U.S. and it’s impossible to book. He’s been to the Music Box before and follows us, and when he found out about the series, he reached out on Twitter about getting the film to us. He sent us the film, pre-show clips, and a special intro, and that probably wouldn’t have happened if we didn’t have the Twitter relationship.

Are there any especially memorable or strange Twitter interactions that stand out in your mind? Especially when taking into consideration that the person on the other end is talking to a movie theater?

Haha, well I do take into account that our tweets are coming from a movie theater instead of a person, and I never want us to cross the line into “Crass Corporate Account.” I did end up very busy last election night, because I promised that if people sent us a picture of their “I Voted” wristband or sticker, I’d send them a picture of Kevin Kline (a personal favorite performer of mine).

It does seem like the Music Box Twitter often becomes a Kevin Kline fan account. And I make no apologies for that.

@BriannaWellen
Film festivals and special events
Extra movie love from now through November

By Patrick Friel

FESTIVALS

Chicago Critics Film Festival
Presented by the Chicago Film Critics Association, 9/17-9/23, Music Box Theatre, 3733 N. Southport, 773-877-6604, chicago-criticsfilmfestival.com, $8-$18, $150 festival pass.

Juggernaut Film Festival
Science fiction and fantasy films presented by the Otherworld Theatre Company, 6/26-6/29, Music Box Theatre, 3733 N. Southport, 815-277-7855, juggernautfilmfestival.com, $20, $50 per day, $80-$190 weekend pass.

Chicago Underground Film Festival
The longest-running underground film festival returns, 6/5-6/7, Logan Theatre, 2846 N. Milwaukee, 773-998-1022, cuff.org, $100-$250 festival pass.

Cinepocalypse

Injustice for All Film Festival
Films about the criminal justice system, 10/10-10/12, Various venues, 773-922-5361, injusticeforallff.com.

Barbara Hammer Retrospective
Two programs of restored prints by queer experimental film pioneer Barbara Hammer, 5/23-5/24, 7 PM, Block Cinema, 40 Arts Circle Dr., Evanston, 847-491-4000, blockmuseum.northwestern.edu/film.

Doc Films Festival
Two days of new and retrospective screenings and live music, 5/25-5/26, 10 AM, Max Palevsky Cinema, 1121 E. 60th St., 773-702-8536, docfilms.uchicago.edu, $9-$24 one-day pass, $14-$39 two-day pass.

50th Anniversary of the Jazz Institute of Chicago Film Festival
The longest-running film festival presents a series of jazz-focused films in tribute, May-December, various venues, 773-850-0434, jazzinchicago.org, $7-$11.

Northwestern Summer Film Series
The City of Chicago’s outdoor screening series, 6/8-8/20, 6:30 PM, Jay Pritzker Pavilion, 201 E. Randolph St., chicago.gov/FEST.

A Tribute to Bill Siegel
Kartemquin Films presents this double feature of The Weather Underground and The Trials of Muhammad Ali, directed by Chicago documentary maker Bill Siegel, who passed away in December. 6/5-7 PM, Music Box Theatre, 3733 N. Southport, 773-877-6604, musicboxtheatre.com, $12.

Millennium Park Summer Film Series
The City of Chicago’s outdoor screening series, 6/8-8/20, 6:30 PM, Jay Pritzker Pavilion, 201 E. Randolph St., chicago.gov/FEST.

Two days of new and retrospective screenings and live music, 5/25-5/26, 10 AM, Max Palevsky Cinema, 1121 E. 60th St., 773-702-8536, docfilms.uchicago.edu, $9-$24 one-day pass, $14-$39 two-day pass.

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Remembering Todd
A memorial screening for local filmmaker and former Chicago Filmmakers program director Bill Lilethun, who passed away last fall. 7/20, Chicago Filmmakers, 5720 N. Ridge, 773-293-1447, chicagofilmakers.org, $12.

Music Box Theatre 90th Anniversary
A week of special events for the iconic theater’s birthday. 8/22-8/29, Music Box Theatre, 3733 N. Southport, 773-877-6604, musicboxtheatre.com.

Chicago Onscreen Local Film Showcase

Abbas Kiarostami Retrospective
Films by the late Iranian master director, September-October, Gene Siskel Film Center, 164 N. State, 312-846-2800, siskelfilmcenter.org, $12.

Music Box of Horrors
24-hour honor film marathon, 10/19-10/20, Music Box Theatre, 3733 N. Southport Ave., 773-877-6604, musicboxtheatre.com.

NEW YORK INTERNATIONAL SHORT FILM FESTIVAL
Now in its 28th year, the NEW YORK INTERNATIONAL SHORT FILM FESTIVAL (NYISFF) presents 60 minutes of innovative, experimental and avant-garde film, video and digital works by filmmakers from around the world. The festival will be held from May 23-27 at ATHENAEUM THEATRE. The RUSSIAN FIVE (featuring Q&A with Darren McCarty, Josh Riehl, and Jenny Feterovich) will be screened on May 23 at 7:30 PM. For tickets and more information, visit kickstandproductions.net.
Out of thin air

In *Days and Nights in the Forest* Satyajit Ray conjures truth and insight through the most ordinary of interactions.

**By Ben Sachs**

To explain why *Days and Nights in the Forest* (1970), playing this Wednesday in Doc Films's valuable Satyajit Ray retrospective, is a masterpiece is a bit like explaining why flowers are beautiful: the film's glories are so natural and self-evident that describing them feels redundant. One of the airiest of great movies, *Days and Nights* seems lightweight and plotless—yet it reveals countless insights into its characters, setting, and theme. Along with *Aparajito* (1956), *Charulata* (1964), and *The Home and the World* (1984), it represents the epitome of Ray's talents—his ability to divine universal meaning from observations of local behavior, his nuanced approach to character, the way he makes time's passing seem mellifluous—yet it displays these talents so modestly that you may not recognize them at first. The closest Western equivalent may be Jean Renoir's *The Rules of the Game* in that it's an ensemble comedy-drama about romance and class relations that requires multiple viewings to reveal its true mastery. Ray's screenplay (a free adaptation of a novel by Sunil Gangopadhyay) is, up until its climax, a carefully plotted collection of nonevents, and his direction focuses on character and setting. The insights seem offhanded and casual despite being profound.

The insights of *Days and Nights* emerge from a series of contrasts—between urban and rural life, men and women, innocence and corruption, love and lust—that Ray organizes symphonically. Ray biographer Andrew Robinson has likened the achievement to Mozart's music in its “unobtrusive patterning of motifs, wonderful range of voices, and capacity to be serious by being humorous.” The film's most musical quality, however, may be its harmoniousness. Ray looks at a group of characters throughout—there's no single hero, but rather several subjects whose development we're meant to consider in tandem. Frequently filming in medium shot, Ray encourages viewers to look at the characters collectively; this visual approach works hand-in-hand with Ray's understated storytelling. The complexities, both visual and thematic, emerge from interactions between the characters and between the characters and their environment.

Sometimes *Days and Nights* doesn't even feel like a narrative, but rather a sociological survey of 20-something professionals from Kolkata at the end of the 1960s. The film begins as four men drive through the northeast Indian countryside, bickering about the plans for the trip they're taking there. These men are Ashim (Soumitra Chattopadhyay), Sanjoy (Subhendu Chattopadhyay), Shekhar (Robi Ghosh), and Hari (Shamit Bhanja). Back in Kolkata all are overworked and unlucky in love, but Ray doesn't reveal these details just yet. The opening scenes emphasize the landscape, the men's camaraderie, and their manner of conversation (note how these educated folk freely intersperse English words into their Bengali).

Ray interrupts the laid-back vibe with a short, shocking flashback of Hari having a violent argument with his girlfriend; this hints at subsequent disruptions to the cheerful tone. The next occurs only a few minutes later when the men, stopping in a village, talk down to the naive local, Lakha, whom they recruit to take them to a bungalow in the Palamu forest. One senses the arrogance of the urbanites, even if they don't. They're more self-aware, though, when they arrive at the bungalow and bribe their way into a room after they admit they don't have permission from the local government to stay there. “Thank God for corruption,” Ashim cynically quips after the groundskeeper accepts his bribe.

This scene reflects the pervasiveness of corruption among the Kolkata business class, though less in the fact of the bribe than in Ashim’s nonchalant view of it. Ray subtly condemns the corruption of his group of heroes in subsequent scenes that show the men getting drunk at the village bar and making fools of themselves in front of the locals. (Their lofty behavior in front of the people who serve them at the bungalow is revealing as well.) Yet these men never come across as caricatures or even bad people. Ray seldom puts villains in his films because, as a great humanist, he saw the best in almost everyone. Such is the case with the men of *Days and Nights*—their sensitivity and good humor shine through even when they act boorishly. When the two beautiful women staying at the summer home next door arrive, the heroes prove themselves gracious and chivalrous as well.

Ray's women were generally wiser than his male characters, and in *Days and Nights*, Aparna (Sharmila Tagore) and Jaya (Kaberi Basu) demonstrate good manners and common sense in their interactions with the villagers as well as the heroes, whom they generally view with bemusement. The film's second half dramatizes the growing familiarity between the men and women, and the developments unfold casually, allowing the chemistry between the six characters to reverberate and the tensions between them to simmer. Ray doesn't depict anything spectacular (the interactions consist of some strolls through the forest, a game of badminton, and the like), yet his subtle manipulation of pacing and visual composition are constantly fascinating. The film reaches its zenith during an afternoon picnic on the men's third day in the forest. Sitting under a tree, the women teach the men a memory game where the players sit in a circle and take turns adding to a list of famous people's names. Ray stages and edits the game dynamically; each turn reveals some fundamental quality of the person speaking. (The director often referred to the sequence as one of his crowning achievements.)

Ray expands on the polyphony of the memory game scene in the crosscutting of the film's final half-hour, when the characters split up after the picnic and wander around a local carnival. Shekhar gambles; Hari propositions a local woman for sex; Ashim goes for a walk with Aparna, and Sanjoy has an intimate conversation with Jaya. Two of these subplots end to the male characters' satisfaction, while two do not, and in cutting between them all, Ray manages to evoke the complexity of life itself. The emotional revelations of this section transcend the characters' class and educational backgrounds and speak to universal truths about sex, power, and romantic longing. What makes *Days and Nights* such a magical experience is that these truths seem to materialize out of thin air.
Chicken with Vinegar

One of the more flagrant injustices of foreign Film distribution has been the near total eclipse of Claude Chabrol in this country. This delightful, acidic 1985 mystery—set in a corrupt small town rife with land spec- ulation, murder, and diverse other intrigues—was a big enough hit in France to prompt a sequel the following year (Inspector Lavardin), but American audiences weren't allowed so much as a peek at it. Adapted by Dominique Roulet and Chabrol from Roulet's novel Une mort en trop, this sexy and adroit intrigue starring Jean Poirot, Stephane Audran, and Michel Bouquet is one of Chabrol's best efforts in his lighter vein, and proves that the classic French cinema has never been quite as dead as U.S. release policies have suggested. In French with subtitles. —JONATHAN ROSENBAUM 110 min. Mon 5/13, 7 PM. Univ. of Chicago Doc Films

Double Indemnity

James M. Cain's pulp classic (1943), as adapted by Ray- mond Chandler and directed by Billy Wilder. Barbara Stanwyck is perfectly cast as a Los Angeles dragon lady burdened with too much time, too much money, and a dull husband, Fred MacMurray (less effective) is the fly-by-night insurance salesman who hopes to relieve her of all three. Wilder trades Cain's sun-dot imagery for conventional film noir stylings, but the atmosphere of sexual entrapment survives. With Edward G. Robinson. —DAVE KEHR 107 min. Tue 5/14, 7 PM. Univ. of Chicago Doc Films

Dragat Girl

This silent gangster picture by Yasujiro Ozu (1933), about a typist determined to make her criminal boyfriend go straight, is one of the most striking of Ozu's American-style silents. It stars the great Kinuyo Tanaka, who later played the title role in Mizoguchi's The Life of Oharu and subsequently became a director herself (the first Japanese woman to do so). In Japanese with subtitles. —JONATHAN ROSENBAUM 100 min. 35mm. Coupler performs a live electronic score. Wed 5/15, 7 PM. Music Box

Eureka

Shinji Aoyama's 218-minute wide-screen film (2000) offers a moving reflection on the devastating effects of senseless violence and the fragmented life of contem- porary Japan. The inexplicable hijacking of a city bus ends with six dead and only three survivors—a brother and sister in middle school and their bus driver (pow- erfully played by Kaji Yakusho). The bus driver moves in with the children, and they cruise around the island of Kyushu trying to recover from the trauma, accompanied by the children's lively cousins. The characters' wander- ings take place against a landscape of utility poles and parking lots, volcano craters and scattered buildings, and the compositions and camera movement are both precise and elegant. There are also some impressive long takes, including one near the end, a stunning essay in shifting perspectives, that reveals the identity of a serial killer. Aoyama says he was influenced by The Searchers as well as two hypnotic pop albums, Sonic Youth's Daydream Nation and Jim O'Rourke's Eureka. In Japanese with subtitles. —FRED CAMPER 218 min. 35mm. Sun 5/12, 6 PM. Univ. of Chicago Doc Films

Everybody Knows

Perhaps the most internationally recognized Iranian film- maker presently working, Asghar Farhadi has now made two movies in countries other than Iran, The Past (2013) and Everybody Knows (2018). The first of these was shot in France but focused on an Iranian character, the protagonist, somewhat alienated from French customs despite being married to a Frenchwoman, poignantly re- flected Farhadi's own emotional distance from the setting. The more recent film, shot in Spain, contains no Iranian characters—or, for that matter, any character who might be perceived as an outsider. Farhadi has decided to look at people who could conceivably exist anywhere, and unfortunately this ends up working to the movie's detriment. The film's observations don't feel universal, but simply generic. —BEN SACHS 133 min. Fri 5/10, 2 PM; Sat 5/11, 5:45 PM; Sun 5/12, 3 PM; Mon 5/13, 6 PM; Tue 5/14, 8 PM; Wed 5/15, 6 PM; and Thu 5/16, 6 PM. Gene Siskel Film Center

Germany Pale Mother

Reliable sources maintain that this 1980 film by Helma Sanders-Brahms was one of the finest to emerge from the new German cinema of that period. Eva Mattes stars as a young woman left alone with her daughter when her husband is called to the front in 1939 in order to survive the mounting devastation, she must make her way across the war-torn country, and by the time she's reunited with her husband she's outgrown him. In Ger- man with subtitles. —DAVE KEHR 125 min. The 149-minute director's cut is screening Tue 5/14, 7 PM. Music Box

Grain

The influence of Andrei Tarkovsky's Stalker (1979) looms large over this English-language sci-fi drama from Tur- key, which achieves passages of genuine visual beauty in spite of its derivativeness. Set in a dystopian future, it centers on a biologist (Jean-Marc Barr) who's devel- oping synthetic grains to help remedy a global food shortage. He believes another scientist who's gone missing can provide crucial information for the project, and so the hero sets off for the wilderness to find him. (As in Stalker, the character must first break out of a tightly guarded, decaying urban environment before he can trek through an equally grim natural one.) Writer- director Semih Kaplanoglu presents the scientist's jour- ney with lots of slow, extended camera movements that show him traversing visually striking landscapes and which generate a certain meditative fascination. This lacks Tarkovsky's mystical vision and serious ruminations on faith, though what it suggests about the dire state of the planet is certainly potent. —BEN SACHS 128 min. Sun 5/12, 5 PM and Tue 5/14, 8 PM. Gene Siskel Film Center

He Ran All the Way

Shortly before he was driven into exile by the Hollywood blacklist, the talented and neglected John Garfield made this 1951 film, the last of John Garfield,
**Ishtar**, or catchy ABBA tunes sweetening the dumb story like most aggressive chick flick, with a score of irresistibly *Mamma Mia!* Visit amctheaters.com for showtimes.

My colleague Scout Tafoya has likened performances (the cast also features Tang Wei and a desire to be part of this family circle. Enhanced this to a Disney theme park attraction based on the films *Sylvia Chang*). My colleague Scout Tafoya has likened performances (the cast also features Tang Wei and a desire to be part of this family circle. Enhanced this to a Disney theme park attraction based on the films *Sylvia Chang*).

**Ishfar**

Treated as a debate upon release, partially as payback for producer-star Warren Beatty’s high-handed treatment of the press, this Elaine May comedy was the most underappreciated commercial movie of 1987. It isn’t quite as good as May’s previous features, but it’s still a very funny work by one of this country’s greatest comic talents. Beatty and Dustin Hoffman, both cast against type, play inept songwriters who score a club date in North Africa and accidentally get caught up in various international intrigues. Misleadingly pegged as an imitative Road to Morocco, the film is better read as a light comic variation on May’s masterpiece *Mickey and Nicky* as well as a prescient send-up of blundering American idiocy in the Middle East. Among the highlights: Charles Grodin’s impersonation of a CIA operative, a blind camel, Isabelle Adjani, Jack Weston, Vittorio Storaro’s cinematography, and a delightful series of deliberately awful songs, most of them by Paul Williams. —**JONATHAN ROSENBAUM**

**Meeting Gorbachev**

German director and intellectual provocateur Werner Herzog finds someone smarter in the room than he is with this laudatory profile of retired head of state Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev, who from 1985 to 1992, first as general secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and then as the U.S.S.R.’s president, ushered Russia and Europe’s socialist republics through perestroika, reforms so seismic they altered the map of almost 15 percent of the global landmass. When Gorbachev came to power Russia was fraying, its industries in disrepair and its economy flailing; with widespread suffering and shortages, rapid fundamental change was urgently needed, especially after the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear plant disaster that revealed a previously hidden level of systemic incompetence. Gorbachev chose the path of openness, or glasnost, first by visiting Soviet Hungary to learn from its economic model of surplus. He also improved relationships with western European leaders; explored the possibilities of democratization; and reduced Cold War tensions at the Reykjavik Summit on nuclear disarmament with U.S. President Ronald Reagan. Toward the end of Gorbachev’s tenure, while the still-committed socialist was vacationing in the Crimea, the Soviet empire was dissolved in a coup detat, although the demise of the Iron Curtain was widely celebrated, the doors of the Kremlin were now open to self-serving bureaucrats and oligarchs. If his documentary approaches hagiography, Herzog can be forgiven for his hero worship of the statesman so instrumental in the reunification of Germany, a politician who was born to rural peasants and never forgot that the people come first. Andre Singer codirected; with Lech Walesa and former U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz. In English and subtitled Russian, German, and Polish. —**ANDREA GRONYVALL**

**Penguin Highway**

In this irresistible Japanese anime, a solemn fourth-grade science whiz with an intense curiosity about the world in general—and his bustling dental hygienist in particular—is thrown together with her over the summer when large flocks of cute penguins suddenly invade his quiet inland town. The mystery of their appearance deepens when he learns it’s who’s summoning them, although she can’t explain how. Making his feature debut, 30-year-old director Hiroyasu Ishida confidently adapts Tomihiko Morimi’s bestselling coming-of-age novel, gracefully segueing from the hero’s prepubescent urges to reflections on nature and impermanence, and illustrating brief digressions on the space-time continuum and Einstein’s general theory of relativity with panache. It’s a heady brew, gorgeous to behold, and wise about children and the places in their hearts. In Japanese with subtitles. —**ANDREA GRONYVALL**

**Purple Butterfly**

Dark and challenging, this 2003 suspense film from Chinese director Lou Ye (Suzhou River) unfolds against the Sino-Japanese tensions of the 1930s and ’50s. The story of romance and espionage recalls Hitchcock’s wartime thrillers; the violent, chaotic set pieces, with their kinetic handheld camera and rapid cutting, evoke contemporary news coverage of terrorist crises. Zhang Ziyi (House of Flying Daggers) stars as a young woman in Manchuria whose romance with a visiting Japanese student (Toru Nakamura) is interrupted when he returns home and her brother, a political journalist, is killed by a Japanese assassin. Radicalized, she joins an anti-Japanese resistance group, and years later, when her old flame arrives in Shanghai as an intelligence agent for the Japanese government, she’s ordered to get close to him again. A subplot in which another young couple is swept into the violence only adds to the puzzle box of deadly vendettas, until Ye concludes with a daring flashback that seals the heroine’s fate. In Mandarin, Japanese, and Vietnamese with subtitles. —**J.R. JONES**

**What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?**

Grand Guignol runs head-on into 40s film noir and the result is this chilling, hysterical 1962 movie by the master of the bleak (black) vision, Robert Aldrich (The Dirty Dozen, Ulzana’s Raid, Emperor of the North, Kiss Me Deadly). Bette Davis, garish and loony, is a former child star who passes the time torturing her crippled sister Joan Crawford. Aldrich’s direction and dynamite performances from the two old trouper make this film an experience. —**DON DRUKER**

**Purple Butterfly**

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**Long Day’s Journey Into Night**

Gorgeously designed and formally audacious, Bi Gan’s second feature (after *Kaili Blues*) is constructed around a plot about a detective (Huang Jue) who died of a heart attack at 39 (many believe in part because of pressures related to his own blacklisting). It’s a fitting and powerful testament to the actor’s poignancy and power as a working-class punk. Here he plays a hoodlum fleeing a bungled robbery, falling for a young woman (Shelley Winters), and desperately holding her family hostage while oscillating wildly between mistrust and a desire to be part of this family circle. Enhanced by an effective script (Guy Endore and Hugh Butler adapted a Sam Ross novel), superb cinematography by James Wong Howe, and a keen sense of working-class manners, this is a highly affecting thriller that draws us relentlessly into its plightful moral tensions, with Wall-lace Ford, Selena Royale, Gladys George, and Norman Lloyd. —**JONATHAN ROSENBAUM**

**Pokémon Detective Pikachu**

A live-action/animated film based on the video game and cartoon franchise about a Pikachu who wants to be a detective. With Justice Smith, Kathryn Newton, Suki Waterhouse, Omar Chaparro, Chris Geere, Ken Watanabe and voice work by Ryan Reynolds. Rob Letterman directed. PG, 104 min. Block 37, ArcLight, Century 12 and Cinerama 6, Chatham 14, City North 14, Ford City, Gatewater Crossings, Harper Theater; River East 21, Showplace ICON, Webster Place 11

**Poms**

Diane Keaton, Jacki Weaver, Pam Grier, and Rhea Perlman star in this comedy about retirement home residents who form a cheerleading squad. Zara Hayes directed. PG-15, Block 37, ArcLight, Century 12 and Cinerama 6, Ford City, Gatewater Crossings, Showplace ICON, Webster Place 11

**Roll Red Roll**

Nancy Schwartzman directed this documentary about the 2012 rape case involving high school students in Steubenville, Ohio. 80 min. Fri 5/10, 7 and 9 PM. Sat 5/11, 1 and 3 PM. Sun 5/12, 3, 5, and 7 PM. Mon 5/13-Thu 5/16, 7 and 9 PM. Facets Cinematheque

**Still Human**

Oliver Chen directed this Hong Kong comedy-drama about a disabled construction worker and his Filipina caregiver. In English and subtitled Cantonese. 110 min. Introduced by series curator Adam Sanderberg. Sat 5/11, 7 PM. Filmfront

**Tolkien**

Dome Karukoski directed this biopic about the boyhood and young adult years of famed fantasy author J.R.R. Tolkien. With Nicholas Hoult, Lily Collins, Coen Meaney, and Derek Jacobi. PG-13, 112 min. ArcLight, Gatewater Crossings, Showplace ICON, Webster Place 11

**Urban Rez**

Larry T. Pourier directed this 2013 documentary about the Urban Reclamation Project, which encouraged native peoples to relocate to cities across the country in the 1950s-70s. 57 min. Showing with two shorter documentaries. Sat 5/11, 1 PM. Newberry Library
The current Lyric coproduction with Houston Grand Opera and the Glimmerglass Festival retains Robbins’s original choreography, reproduced by Julio Monge. It opens with the now-iconic whistle and finger-snapping prelude that introduces the two gangs as they chase and confront each other on a gritty city street—a foretaste of the explosive combat choreography that’s one of the show’s principal glories. The gangs are led by Bernardo, Maria’s older brother (elegantly played by Manuel Stark Santos), and Riff (Brett Thiele), Tony’s best friend. It’s Riff who explains the virtues of gang life (“From your first cigarette/To your last dyin’ day”) in an opening ear-worn of a song, and then convinces former chief Jet Tony (Corey Cott) to join the gang at a dance that evening. Tony, already sensing that “Something’s Coming,” meets Maria at the dance, setting the wheels in motion for the rumble that’ll end with the deaths of both gang leaders. It’s a poetically compressed plot (timeline: two days), richly expanded by the diverse music of its composer/lyricist dream team, from the brilliant satire of “Gee, Officer Krupke” to the sublime duet, “A Boy Like That/I Have a Love,” sung by Maria and Anita, Bernardo’s girlfriend. Which brings us to two compelling performances.

West Side Story’s creators intended it to be an ensemble work rather than a star showcase. They cast it with a group of young, mostly unknown performers. But ever since its first run, when she was played, indelibly, by Chita Riverra (Rita Moreno had the role in the film), it’s been Anita’s show. (Sondheim’s unforgettable lyrics for her big number, “America,” don’t hurt.) Amanda Castro, who plays Anita in this production, is a great dancer, with the singing and acting chops the part demands. She does it full justice.

But there’s a surprise here: this show belongs to Maria. Mikaela Bennett, cast as the sweet but usually less-than-dynamic ingenue, is a major emerging talent with a soprano voice so extraordinary, it dominates the production. If that’s a flaw, it’s an elevating one. The popularity of the Bernstein/Sondheim score, with stand-alone hits like “Maria,” “Tonight,” and “Somewhere,” along with the classic 1961 film, have made West Side Story so familiar, performances can take on a ritual aspect. But a chance to see it in a production at this operatic scale, with a 40-piece orchestra (conducted by James Lowe) is rare.

@Deannalsaacs
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with a broken wing, a clear metaphor. Latimore is outstanding and funny as the steadfast wife and friend whose sacrifices and ability to hold families together go unnoticed until she cries, “I want a Freedom Ride for me!” Gilbert exemplifies Bowzie’s rollercoaster of moods: singing and joking, yet still revealing internal struggles with explosions of frustration.

Parson balances the ebb and flow of harmony and conflict of the first half, while mitigating the main flaw in the second half, where some conversations happen through phone calls and letters. His direction emphasizes the simplicity of the story, using the elements of air and water to build a foundation for the production. Deep breaths bookend the play and water plays a central role in both quenching thirst and baptizing a character who emerges anew.

Too Heavy dips its toe into issues of racism and civil rights, but it swims more deeply in everyday issues of marital fidelity, sacrifice, responsibility to friends and family, and fulfillment of one’s own dreams. It’s delightful to see a play that is at once simple and yet produces such profound change for all its characters. With an engaging, interactive lobby display about the Freedom Riders and civil rights movement, TimeLine reminds us that there is always a battle to achieve freedom—and how important that still is 60 years later. 

Toxic glitter
The Children vividly imagines the worst-case scenario after an environmental disaster.

It’s comforting to regard the premise of Lucy Kirkwood’s eco-thriller with a smug sense of that-would-never-actually-happen. Humans would never be so stupid as to build a nuclear reactor in a flood zone, right? And even if they did, they surely wouldn’t put the backup generators in the basement. Except that’s basically the setup that led to disaster in Fukushima, Japan, in 2011.

In The Children, married nuclear scientists Hazel (Janet Ulrich Brooks) and Robin (Yasen Peyankov) are living in the wake of a Fukushima-like disaster. The power station where they once worked alongside Rose (Ora Jones) has remained a threat long after the earthquake and tsunami that Hazel describes with suffocating intensity. Kirkwood doesn’t detail what will happen if the station’s disabled reactors leak into the ocean. She doesn’t have to. The implications are clear and terrifying, a threat that hangs in the air like the “toxic glitter” Hazel says she could almost see when she visited the radiated, flooded ruins of the home she and Robin shared before the disaster.

In director Jonathan Berry’s taut, incisive staging, the inevitability of a worst-case endgame pervades the atmosphere. But it’s the offspring children—both Hazel and Robin’s and those of the world entire—who have the most to fear. Kirkwood’s needle-sharp dialogue asks what is owed these children and, implicitly, what will become of them if (when) the oceans turn toxic. She offers no solutions, just a picture of a devastated world that’s nightmarishly recognizable, culminating in a final, all-engulfinng image that will take your breath away.

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—CATEY SULLIVAN THE CHILDREN Through 6/9: Wed 2 and 7:30 PM, Thu-Fri 7:30 PM, Sat 3 and 7:30 PM, Sun 3 PM, Tue 7:30 PM; also Sun 5/12, 7:30 PM; no performances Wed 5/8, 2 PM, or Sat

@joshua_flanders
A font of imagination

Helvetica asks how seriously we should take an artist who never learned to be a human being.

A young adult novelist puzzles through fame, nostalgia, and the tedium of the everyday in Chicago playwright Will Coleman’s crisp show for Death & Pretzels Theater. Helvetica Burke has been making up stories since she was little. Now that she’s a professional author of fairy tales like death or domestic squabbling except by doing what she’s always done: retreat to the better world of Helvetica has no way to confront bristly reality, and return to the boring round of existence what she’s always done: retreat to the better world of Helvetica Burke has been making up stories since she was little: She's a young protagonist named Helvetica (she reads difficult books, understands grown-ups at a deep level, and has telekinetic powers a la Stephen King’s Carrie) is a dark, troubling work. Helvetica is a profoundly lonely child living in a cruel world and surrounded by addled adults, notably her shallow and materialistic parents and a school headmistress so selfish and sadistic she makes Miss Hannigan from the musical Annie seem kind. The show is full of moments of extreme violence and cruelty: at one point the headmistress picks up one of the children in her school, spins around, and tosses the child like a hapless rag doll hundreds of feet in the air. Yet the show is considered fit for kids.

Kelly’s book is awkward and fragmented. It’s sometimes hard to tell who the main character is—Matilda is often an observer of events in the story, not central to them—and the style of the show is so inconsistent—careening from loud, cartoonish comic scenes to somber scenes of Dickensian oppression—that it seems always on the verge of falling to pieces.

This Drury Lane production, directed and choreographed by Mitch Sebastian, feels true to the material, which is a cold comfort. The show, though, is packed with superb performances. Audrey Edwards, who shares the lead role with Natalie Gallia, is quite winning as the plucky Matilda. She is surrounded by a host of similarly gifted young actors, each a star in her or his own right. And Sean Fortunato does a bravura turn in drag as the above-mentioned headmistress. —JACK HELBIG

MATILDA Through 6/23; Wed 1:30 PM, Thu 1:30 and 8 PM, Fri 8 PM, Sat 3 and 8 PM, Sun 2 and 6 PM; also Tue 5/21, 1:30 PM, Drury Lane Theatre, 100 Drury Ln., Oakbrook Terrace, 630-550-1111, drurylanetheatre.com, $35-$70, $50 seniors (matinees only).

More than a thirst trap

We can all learn a lot about water politics from the young artists who created Parched.

According to the Pew Research Center, Gen Z—young people currently aged 14-22—are even more liberal and politically engaged than their predecessors, the millennials. With Free Street Theater’s Parched (Stories About Water, Pollution & Theft), Chicago gets a sip of this generation’s activism and a grassrootsy dramatization of water politics.

Devised over the course of ten months by Free Street’s youth ensemble, students aged 14-19, Parched is driven by vignettes drawn from interviews with researchers, activists, and community members. In that respect, it’s a combo of journalism and performance, resulting in passionate storytelling that feels informed and brave. Too young to vote and with little opportunity to steer major legislation that will impact the rest of their lives, the young actors all seem to understand that art is their best currency. The pieces are formed by facts, but they are bound by the emotional realities of being teenagers out to stop the end of the world.

But the show never forgets the importance of play. While nerves occasionally get the best of individual performers, collectively the ensemble is confident and thirst for both joy and justice (there’s one particular “thirst trap” joke that lands beautifully). Under the direction of Katrina Dion, the students also show a grasp of theatrical form, employing narrative, movement, and text throughout.

Ultimately, the play’s ambiguous forms, unhemmed edges, and calls to action seem directly inspired by El Teatro Campesino, the Chicano activist-artist theater company founded by Luis Valdez in the late 60s. Consider Parched a moment of activation—not just of a set, but of a new political generation. —KT HAWBAKER

PARCHED (STORIES ABOUT WATER, POLLUTION & THEFT) Through 5/18; Fri 8 PM, Sat 2 PM, also Thu 5/16, 7 PM, Free Street Theater, 1419 W. Blackhawk, 773-772-7248, freestreet.org, pay what you can.
Demolición makes room in the north-side scene for Latinx rock

Chicago label Dumpster Tapes books this daylong festival because segregation won’t undo itself.

By Leor Galil

In 2010, Camilo Medina and Javier Forero, natives of Colombia who grew up in Miami, moved to Chicago to attend the School of the Art Institute. They settled in Lakeview and tried to immerse themselves in the neighborhood’s music scene, but they had a hard time finding other aspiring musicians on the same wavelength—people with an interest in 50s and 60s pop, ideally who also spoke Spanish. They did manage to connect with another SAIC student, Guillermo Rodriguez, and in 2013 they started the band that would eventually become Divino Niño, with Rodriguez on guitar, Forero on bass and vocals, and Medina on guitar and vocals.

As Divino Niño took shape (they eventually added drummer Pierce Codina), their orbit remained narrow. They could’ve found like-minded folks in the punk, garage, and crusty psych bands that frequented Logan Square’s DIY spaces and bars, but they didn’t spend any time there. Because the scene Medina had gotten familiar with in Miami had been relatively small—every young musician seemed to know every other young musician—he assumed that after more than five years in Chicago, he’d seen all the city had to offer. “I thought I knew all the bands,” he says. “Me and Javier were talking about moving to LA, because I just wasn’t really connecting with the bands here and I thought that the scene in Chicago wasn’t that great.”

In spring 2016, the scene that Divino Niño had failed to find came to them instead. The band got a Facebook message from Alex Fryer, co-owner of Chicago DIY rock label Dumpster Tapes. Fryer was organizing an in-store performance for Argentinean surf-rock group Las Piñas at Avondale’s Bric-a-Brac Records, and she wanted Divino Niño to open. “As soon as I started connecting with Alex, I started going to shows in Logan Square, at Cole’s, the Empty Bottle,” Medina says. “I started discovering people my age—the same things I thought were cool, they thought it was cool too.”

By May 2016, Divino Niño had already released two album-length collections of demos. They wanted their easygoing, throwback rock to sound pristine and effortless, though, and they were constantly frustrated with their recordings. They scrapped three different versions of their first proper full-length, Foam, before settling on the one that drops next month via Wmensp (original home of hot Long Island indie-rock commodities Lemon Twigs). The band started making progress toward the sound they wanted after connecting with Dumpster Tapes. “We started building the community,” Medina says. “And that has been essential for us finishing our record and sharpening the vision of what we want to do artistically.”

With its lush weave of dream pop, yacht rock, and Laurel Canyon folk, Foam is one of the year’s most accomplished local rock releases so far. Divino Niño pulled it off with assistance from friends they made after connecting with Fryer: scene utility player Justin Vittori (Grapetooth, Knox Fortune) added percussion to a few songs and Wurlitzer to another, and pop wonder Paul Cherry helped produce one track.

Earlier this month Divino Niño played Thalia Hall with Brooklyn indie-pop group Crumb, and they’ve booked a release party for Foam at the Empty Bottle for June 21. Between those two, on Saturday, May 11, Dumpster Tapes hosts Demolición, its mostly annual festival celebrating local Latinx-fronted acts. In October 2016, Divino Niño played the first Demolición, just a few months after their first Dumpster Tapes show. They tried to work around their other commitments to play this one—Medina offered to do a solo set, but ultimately he couldn’t make it happen (it turns out he’ll be in Miami during the daylong mini-fest). “I just wanted to be part of it,”
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Vic Theatre

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USA Comet
Tour 2019
This Monday!
May 13
Vic Theatre

Passion Pit
Manners
10 Year Anniversary
May 15 • Riviera Theatre

Josh Ritter
& The Royal City Band
May 22 • Vic Theatre

This Monday!
May 13
Vic Theatre

Rodrigo y Gabriela
Mettavolution Tour
FRIDAY, MAY 24

Jim James
Uniform Distortion
THURSDAY, MAY 23
Vic Theatre

Smallpools
So Social Tour
May 29 • Park West

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SPECIAL GUEST
Hudson Taylor
because I think the Latin community longs for representation,” he says. “They want to see people who speak Spanish—they want to see a person that looks like them, that has similar roots to them, doing something artistic. And that's very important.”

Representation is a big part of what Fryer and Dumpster Tapes cofounder Ed McMenamin want to accomplish with Demolición. Fryer in particular is concerned that most of the spaces that host the label’s shows aren’t congenial to Latinx audiences. “It was a personal project for me, as a Chicana, as a brown person that looked like me that maybe didn’t feel as welcome just walking into wherever we normally held our shows.”

On the bill with Divino Niño at the first Demolición were postpunks Bruised, feminist punks Cabrona, bilingual rockers Rai, and dream-pop singer-songwriter Mia Joy. Joy says. “I was so used to the music scene being predominately white, having the scene I could build one with—there wasn’t anyone that had put a band together earlier in 2016, and Demolición was one of their first performances. She remembers getting nervous about being in those leagues, so that kicked my butt into gear, musically.”

Demolición, Fryer reached out to alumni for lineup recommendations. “I had so many names for her, which is really awesome, because I don’t think I would have had names three or four years ago,” Joy says. The third Demolición (it skipped 2018) features indie rockers Pkng, tender folkies Tenci, prog punks Perro Feo, power-pop mavens Town Criers, and indie-pop darlings Girl K.

Pkng guitarist and singer Elmer Martinez moved to Chicago from northern California in 2016, and he got acclimated to the local scene in part by attending Demolición—it was one of his first local concerts. He was on assignment for Hooligan magazine, working on his first piece for the Chicago-based outlet. “I truly felt like I was at an intimate gathering with mis primos,” he wrote in his review. “And I am eternally grateful to the people at Dumpster Tapes and all of the performers for creating such a special experience.”

Martinez has been especially influenced by meeting Fryer. “I just love her work ethic,” he says. “Dumpster Tapes, they’re always doing stuff, like showcases, shows, and different releases—that’s definitely an inspiration. I want to be in those leagues, so that kicked my butt into gear, musically.”

The two of them bonded at shows by some of the scene’s promising young garage bands, including Flesh Panthers, Gross Pointe, Son of a Gun, and the Morons. “As Ed and I started going to these shows, we came across a lot of bands that we really loved and grew close with but that didn’t have anything out on a physical format yet,” Fryer says. The label debuted in October 2013 with a split cassette that paired Son of a Gun and Gross Pointe.

“We didn’t have a five-year plan when we started,” McMenamin says. “We had about a one-month plan: ‘Let’s put this thing out on cassette. How do we figure out how to put it on a cassette?’” By 2015 they were putting out new music almost monthly, and that year they released their first vinyl (Flesh Panthers’ NGC 2632, in partnership with Tall Pat Records) and the first EP by Cut Worms, aka onetime Chicagoan and national garage-scene darling Max Clarke.

Dumpster Tapes also throws release shows for the local acts on its roster. The label found an early advocate in Logan Square dive Cole’s, but as the neighborhood’s garage and punk scene has grown and scattered, some of its acts have become too big to play there (or in the DIY spaces that nurtured them). Dumpster Tapes has remained steadfast in its support of the scene, though—it’s become a frequent presence at the Empty Bottle, and in 2017 it began booking monthly shows at the Slippery Slope.

“We tell everybody, if they agree to do a tape with us, they’re part of the family,” Fryer says. “We’ll continue to promote them and support them, whether or not we end up putting something out with them again. Or if the band only makes it a couple of years—it doesn’t matter.” And musicians often reciprocate by staying loyal to Dumpster Tapes. After Cut Worms signed to Jagajuguwar in 2017, their new label enlisted Dumpster Tapes to release a cassette version of the band’s 2018 album, Hollow Ground. And when Dumpster Tapes threw a fifth-anniversary party at the Bottle, the headliner it booked was Cafe Racer, whose front man, Michael Santana, had played in Gross Pointe. One of the garage scene’s best bands, Cafe Racer put out their 2016 self-titled
debuted through Dumpster Tapes—and they also played the second Demolición in December 2017, alongside McMenamin’s power-pop four-piece, Laverne.

Fryer and McMenamin began batting around ideas for what became Demolición early in 2016. “I was becoming more aware of the festivals that were happening in Pilsen,” Fryer says. “The lineup for Ruido Fest was really good that year, and they do a pretty good job of bringing local acts on the bill. I was like, ‘Why don’t we do something that’s got this feel for it on the north side, where we normally have our shows, and where maybe some of these bands don’t normally play?’”

White men dominate the north side’s underground rock scene, whether they mean to or not, and McMenamin’s thinking about Demolición came from the understanding that this state of affairs was likely to perpetuate itself—opportunities for musicians of color wouldn’t necessarily arise without lots of people putting in work. “There’s always a need to expose different audiences and different bands to each other,” he says. “Sometimes that doesn’t happen naturally—sometimes you kind of have to make an extra effort to make it happen.”

Demolición also motivated Dumpster Tapes to reach out to bands outside its circle. When Bruised opened for Alice Bag at a Chi-Town Futbol show in August 2016, Fryer was in the crowd—and every band on the bill had at least one Latinx member. “I think that was also maybe part of what inspired me,” she says. “That was how I heard about Bruised, and I fell in love with them after that.”

Because the first Demolición happened about a month before the 2016 presidential election, and Trump had been demonizing Latinx immigrants throughout the campaign, Fryer and McMenamin decided to donate part of the fest’s proceeds to a good cause—one they figured would piss him off if he knew about it. “That’s also what made it seem like it was important that it happened then,” Fryer says. They picked El Rescate, an initiative run by the nonprofit Puerto Rican Cultural Center that provides support for homeless youth, particularly LGBTQ+ youth of color.

Fryer and McMenamin have chosen different beneficiaries for subsequent Demoliciones—in 2017 they donated to the Hurricane Maria Community Relief & Recovery Fund, and this year they’ll support Vida Libre, a bond fund for refugees and asylum seekers that’s run by binational organization Al Otro Lado. Fryer, who’s taking the LSAT this summer, has served as an associate intern for immigration policy at Chicago nonprofit Latino Policy Forum and wants to become a lawyer for refugees and asylees.

Vida Libre’s mission resonates with Kathy Patino, front woman of Girl K, a young act with a lot of momentum in the scene. “When Alex mentioned to me that the show functioned as a fundraiser for the organization Al Otro Lado, I knew that I really had to do my best to be able to play,” she says. “I’m first-gen. My parents came from Mexico, and I know a lot of family that struggles with all the current political climate that’s going on right now—I’ve really been wanting to incorporate more activism in my being and Girl K in general, just ‘cause I think it’s really important to spread good ideals and educate people, no matter what you’re pursuing.”

Though the past two Demoliciones were in the fall, this year it’s in the spring because Fryer and McMenamin had their hands full planning Dumpster Tapes’ fifth-anniversary party at the Bottle in November. “We had a bunch of shows last fall and winter, including the birthday show—didn’t want to overextend everybody,” McMenamin says. The pair made a couple other big changes: for the first time, Demolición will happen in the afternoon and include a handful of Latinx vendors. Like all Dumpster Tapes shows, it’s cheap, though at $10 it’s one of their more expensive events. “We might’ve had—in five years—a couple of shows that were more than $10,” McMenamin says. “That’s important. I think if your art is not accessible, it’s not radical. If everyone can’t be there, then it’s meaningless to me.”

Fryer and McMenamin want Demolición to celebrate and connect Latinx musicians from across the diaspora and help them feel comfortable in Chicago’s rock scene. Town Criers singer and guitarist Andre Baptista, who grew up in Brazil, has been roommates with members of Post Animal and Twin Peaks vocalist-guitarist Cadien Lake James. “They started taking me on road trips, showing us how to book shows, put on a good show, how to sound check, and all that kind of stuff,” he says.

Baptista has gotten to know some local Latinx musicians too, and the familiarity he feels around them has sharpened his awareness of what makes his experience unique when he’s the only Latinx person in the room. “You notice little things that are just different in the way that you were brought up,” he says. “It makes sure that you don’t forget where you come from.”

@imLeor
The Artifacts Trio first convened in 2015 in response to the 50th anniversary of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians. Flutist, vocalist, and electronicist Nicole Mitchell, cellist Tomeka Reid, and drummer Mike Reed have all held leadership roles in the organization; they also have a history more than a decade long of playing in one another’s bands. Originally the group’s repertoire consisted of tunes composed by AACM members, including Leroy Jenkins, Edward Wilkerson Jr., Anthony Braxton, and Fred Anderson. On the trio’s debut CD, 2015’s Artifacts (482 Music), their rearrangements distill the pieces to their essential virtues, such as the jubilant demeanor and intricate changes of Roscoe Mitchell’s “Jo Jar” and the insistent, spiritual vibe of Amina Claudine Myers’s “Have Mercy on Us.” The AACM’s golden anniversary festivities included to instrumental hip-hop have a few monthly showcases to check out their peers, chief among them the Whistler’s Push Beats and Cafe Mustache’s Open Beats. And late in 2018, the Fresh Roasted Radius band, and it’s a real treat to hear them mature and reach new heights. —Luca Cimarusti
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continued from 32

petition that culminated with a December championship show at Sleeping Village. Producer and ETC Records founder Ramon “Radius” Norwood has helped the community prosper as a participant, promoter, and creative leader. And his new self-released LP, Embrace the Circle (his second album in roughly two months), requires you to take part in the scene if you want a copy—Radius says he won’t stream it or sell it online, so you’ve got to come to one of his gigs to buy one. A good time to do so would be his imminent record-release show at Elastic, which features appearances from several of Radius’s friends who contributed to the album. Like much of his work, Embrace the Circle demonstrates the connections that local hip-hop maintains with local dance music and jazz, and Radius applies knowledge from these subcultures to find the best way to enter a groove. The album is largely instrumental, but Thaione Davis’s rapping on the dub-heavy “Tower” gives Radius’s relaxed instrumental an electric energy. —LEOR GALIL

BTS See also Sunday, 7:30 PM, Soldier Field, 1410 S. Museum Campus, $71-$200. ⋆

Seven-member South Korean boy band BTS were already fairly successful when they nonchalantly rapped about having an uncountable amount of trophies in the 2017 Steve Aoki remix of “Mic Drop.” Two years later, that boast feels quaint. Their success is no longer measured in mere award-show wins; they’re shattering records with nearly every move. Their single “Boy With Luv” racked up 76 million views in 24 hours, and just ten hours later became the video to most quickly reach 100 million. They’ve also had three albums top the Billboard 200 in less than a year—right on the heels of their first track on 2014’s Skool Luv Affair, but trades the youthful aggression of the group’s early material for canny introspection. Lead single “Boy With Luv” nods to a title from their past. On opener “Intro: Persona” rapper and producer RM revisits a heavy guitar-riff beat from “Boy in Love,” the youthful aggression of the group’s early material is based on the theories of Carl Jung, but it’s also about a band trying to acknowledge and learn from their past. On opener “Intro: Persona” rapper and producer RM revisits a heavy guitar-riff beat from the first track on 2014’s Skool Luv Affair, but trades the youthful aggression of the group’s early material for canny introspection. Lead single “Boy With Luv” nods to a title from Skool Luv Affair (“Boy in Love”), but instead of the try-hard negging in that banger, BTS have produced a near-perfect summer love song. But the real show stealer is “Home,” a simmering mid-tempo bop full of fuzzed-out bass and hand claps that shifts effortlessly between high-energy rapping and sweetly sung melodies. It’s a song built for arena sing-alongs and long relaxed drives, and it’s a perfect showcase for the joyous vocal interplay that has come to define BTS. —Ed Blair

700 BLISS Mother Nature and Africans With Mainframes open. 9:30 PM, Hideout, 1354 W. Wabansia, $10. 21+

Philadelphia duo 700 Bliss is a perfect example of the kind of supergroup that can emerge from a combination of globally engaged conversation and access to affordable practice spaces. Camae Ayewa, aka Moor Mother, and Zubeyda Muzeyyen, aka DJ Haram, are a part of a smart, active community of artists of color in Philadelphia that nurtures cross-collaboration, and on last year’s Spa 700 (Halcyon Veil/Don Giovanni), they bring beats to the forefront of their noise-informed, rhythm-heavy music and channel the type of spiritual energy that can call up the dead. On “Cosmic Slop,” Moor Mother sings “Don’t hate, bitch / Up in here trying to code switch / over DJ Haram’s North African-infused rhythms, whose high-pitched clicking is reminiscent of the metal Gnawa castanets called krakebs. Both musicians come to the table with an arsenal of knowledge: Ayewa also creates art and does ethnographic research with the collective Black Quantum Futurism, and Muzeyyen’s zine Bros Fall Back initiated a dialogue among Philly’s underground venues about the realities of safer spaces. This music is electronic divination for warriors. “Living,” a sinister rattle like a snake about to strike in self-defense, is punctuated by the sounds of someone gasping for air and Ayewa’s analysis of the African diaspora and the transatlantic slave trade (“Since the start / Color line, bloodline, land mine / Keep us apart”). 700 Bliss use just enough melody in their songs to keep people on the dance floor, and just enough silence to remind us to create space for personal...
MUSIC

reflection. This show also includes sharp, focused local rap duo Mother Nature, whose recent self-released EP, Pressure, features energetic lyricism over radio-ready beats. —Salem Collo-Julin

SUNDAY 12

BTS See Saturday, 7:30 PM, Soldier Field, 1410 S. Museum Campus, $71-$200. 📋

MONDAY 13

WOONG! See Pick of the Week, page 32. Liam Kazar and Blush Scars open. 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle, 1035 N. Western, 21+. 🎫

TUESDAY 14

MULATU ASTATKE 7:30 PM, Garfield Park Conservatory, 300 N. Central Park, sold out. 17+

Vibraphonist Mulatu Astatke has a seamless way of fusing the music of his native Ethiopia with jazz and Latin music (and you can hear a little bit of R&B in that mix too). On paper this esoteric brew might seem like an acquired taste, but in reality it’s just one worldly step away from Lonnie Liston Smith, Atlantic-era Les McCann, or any other 70s musician who tweaked jazz to follow popular tastes without watering down their sounds. On Astatke’s 1966 debut album, Afro-Latin Soul, he blended Ethiopian melodies with Latin jazz so skillfully that an inexperienced listener would never know either genre had been altered, but Astatke was bringing a different spice to the table. He recorded that album and its follow-up, Afro-Latin Soul Vol. 2, while living in New York, but though his work at the time reflected the musical culture of his adopted city, he never forgot the sounds of his homeland—and in the early 70s, he brought his hybrid style back to Africa, becoming one of the founders of the Ethio-jazz movement.

Astatke has worked steadily through the decades, so when his music was rediscovered in the 90s by collectors of 70s jazz-funk, he was hardly a docile revival artist. He earned a new audience thanks to late-90s reissues of his work by Paris-based label Buda Musique as part of its famous Ethiopiques series, and in the 2000s he collaborated extensively with UK and U.S. bands such as the Heliocentrics and the Either/Orchestra. On his most recent album, 2015’s Sketches of Ethiopia, Astatke continues his musical evolution. —James Porter

WEDNESDAY 15

CHE APALACHE 8:30 PM, Szold Music & Dance Hall, Old Town School of Folk Music, 4545 N. Lincoln. 🎬

Argentine string band Che Apalache play “Latin-grass,” which might at first seem like a sterile hybrid, but even a few minutes of listening to this four-piece are enough to demonstrate how beautifully Latin folk and bluegrass sounds can intertwine. Multi-instrumentalist and North Carolina native Joe Troop is a music teacher in Buenos Aires, and in 2018 he explained the group’s genesis to Bluegrass Today: the Appalachian folk style wasn’t popular in his adopted city when he arrived in 2010, but the instruments used to make it were. He taught fiddle, banjo, mandolin, and guitar to many eager students—including one of the group’s banjo players, Pau Barjau. Che Apalache are a multinational affair (Barjau is from Mexico), and its members walk the line between traditional and contemporary, with a tendency to subvert expectations. Their topical song “The Wall” became a borderline viral folk hit, and 5 percent of the proceeds from an Indiegogo campaign they’ve used to fund an album with Béla Fleck producing (which is slated for release this summer) will be donated to Siembra NC, an organization based in Greensboro, North Carolina, that protects Latinx immigrants’ rights. —Monica Kendrick 🎶

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Mudmen: A Pink Floyd Experience 5/17, 9 PM, FitzGerald’s, Berwyn
Nails, Misery Index, Devourment, Outer Heaven, Hate Force 6/8, 6:30 PM, Metro, 18+
New Duncan Imperial 7/17, 8:30 PM, FitzGerald’s, Berwyn
Niko Is, Calib & Live Band, Britpicker, Pete Sayke 6/1, 9 PM, GMan Tavern
North Coast Music Festival featuring Bassnectar, Major Lazer, and 8/30, 2:30 PM, 8/31, 2:30 PM, Huntington Bank Pavilion
Nots, Olivia Neutron-John 6/4, 8 PM, Subterranean, 17+
Tim O’Brien Band 6/6, 8 PM, FitzGerald’s, Berwyn, on sale Fri 5/10, 10 AM
Paper Manual, Holloway Featuring Bad Bad Meow, Cell Phones, and more 7/14, 5 PM, Sleeping Village
Pelican (DJ set) 5/7, 9 PM, Sleeping Village
Pinc Lounds (solo set) 6/17, 7 PM, Sleeping Village
Pride in the Park Chicago with Skaeza, Steve Aoki, Tamar Braxton, Taylor Dayne, Kathy Sledge, Gia Woods, KC Ortiz 6/9, 9 PM, Butler Field, Grant Park
Ritt Momney 7/16, 8 PM, Schubas
Ruggles, Vampire 8/11, 8:30 PM, Schubas
Ray LaMontagne, Kacy & Clayton 10/6, 6:30 PM, 10/7, 8 PM, Chicago Theatre
Spencer, The Walkmen 8/16, 9 PM, Metro
Spencer, The Walkmen 5/19, 7 PM, Aragon Ballroom, on sale Fri 5/10, 10 AM
The Stone Temple Pilots, Rival Sons 9/25, 7 PM, Aragon Ballroom, on sale Fri 5/10, 10 AM, 17+
Straight No Chaser 12/14, 3 and 7:30 PM, Chicago Theatre, on sale Fri 5/10, 10 AM
Swamerin’, Mike Krol 8/1, 7:30 PM, Logan Square Auditorium, 18+
Swearin’, Mike Krol 10/25, 8 PM, Metro, 18+
Tiff Down, Grivo, Moss Jaw, Tea Leaf Green, Ruins 6/18, 8:30 PM, Metro
Tommy Wright III, Slim Guevara, Vila Secreto 5/10, 7:30 PM, Subterranean, 17+
Tropical Fuck Storm 9/14, 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle

CHICAGO SHOWS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT IN THE WEEKS TO COME

GOSSIP WOLF

A furry ear to the ground of the local music scene

BLAKE KARLSON says that when he founded the label Chicago Research late last year, he’d been thinking about building “a more cohesive platform for the current state of postpunk, electronic, and industrial music. This city is too often overlooked as a musical hub. Great things are happening right now.” This wolf couldn’t agree more—and those great things have helped Chicago Research leave the gate firing on all cylinders! Karlson describes the label as a “colleotive, with a solid group of musicians, artists, designers, and writers that all collaborate,” and its initial batch of releases includes a vinyl version of the first single from Death Valley (aka the chilly synth-wave solo project of Ariel Motto) and the plodding, hoky post-punk of Bruised, whose LP Rotten Codex includes the neck-snapping “(Beneath A) Heap of Glass.” In June, Chicago trio ProductKF drop the LP version of their April album, Songs of the Groves, which features rigorously scrambled industrial noise, murky bass, and depressive vocals.

It didn’t seem possible that Chicago Afrobeat Project’s stumping 2017 album, What Goes Up, could get any funkier, but then Latinx DJ crew Future Rootz dropped the killer full-length. What Goes Up Remixed late last month. Gossip Wolf has a feeling that these cuts—remixed by the likes of Ron Trent, Maga Bo, DJ Sound Culture, and Jose Marquez—are heating up dance floors already.

Alona’s Dream does it again! The Chicago punk label has teamed up with its venerable Bay Area counterpart Alternative Tentacles to reissue the first two seven-inch EPs from local hardcore pioneers Articles of Faith: 1982’s What We Want Is Free and 1983’s Want. Both are limited to 666 copies, so get em before the record flippers do. Alona’s Dream unveiled these beauts at the recent CHIRP Record Fair, along with a 12-inch EP by locals the Pornography Glows (aka the Porno Glows), the debut of Alona’s imprint Violent Pest—J.R. NELSON and LEOR GALIL

Got a tip? Tweet @Gossip_Wolf or e-mail gossipwolf@chicagoreader.com.
UPCOMING SHOWS

5.10 Parachute w/ Billy Raffoul
5.11 Grits & Biscuits LOW TICKET WARNING
5.12 Falling in Reverse w/ Ice Nine Kills, From Ashes To Now & New Year's Day Present by cricket wireless
5.15 BBMak
5.16 Animals As Leaders w/ The Contortionist & Buke and Gase
5.17 Gasolina Party
5.21 95.9 WILK Rock and Q Rock 100.7 Presents | Prevail w/ Issues & Justin Stone
5.22 Avatar w/ Devin Townsend, Dance With The Dead & ’68
5.23 Johnny Cash Tribute: Cash Unchained
5.24 Marianas Trench w/ Scott Helman & DJ George Thoms LOW TICKET WARNING
5.26 IML - The Victory Party 5.27 IML - The Black & Blue Ball
5.30 The Damned & X w/ The Detroit Cobras
5.31 NAV w/ Kelly LOW TICKET WARNING
6.6 NAV w/ Kelly LOW TICKET WARNING
6.7 The Prince Experience
6.8 Josh Garrels w/ the Gray Havens
6.12 Ones To Watch Presents Arizona w/ MORGXN LOW TICKET WARNING

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5.12-13 THE NILS LOFGREN BAND
5.20 JOANNE SHAW TAYLOR
5.24 RAHSAAN PATTERSON
5.28 IAN MAKSEN & ZARIA SONGS OF THE VAGABOND CELLO

5.30 ELVON BISHOP’S BIG FUN TRIO
5.31 MASON JENNINGS WITH SPECIAL GUEST RYHAN SINCLAIR
6.2 MORGAN JAMES
6.3 AL STEWART FULL BAND GREATEST HITS SHOW
6.6 CORKY SIEGEL’S CHAMBER BLUES, LYNNE JORDAN & TORONZO CANNON

UPCOMING SHOWS

5.10 GRIFFIN HOUSE
5.10 BURLESQUE NIGHT OUT 10:30 PM SHOW
5.16 HOWIE DAY
5.17 SARA EVANS & THE BARKER FAMILY BAND - BLOODLINE TOUR
5.25 BIG BAD VOODOO DADDY
5.26 DEACON BLUES TRIBUTE TO STEELY DAN
5.28 BAD ON PAPER PODCAST LIVE SHOW
6.5 SONGS & STORIES WITH ART ALEXAKIS OF EVERCLEAR, CHRIS COLLINGWOOD OF FOUNTAINS OF WAYNE, MAX COLLINS OF EVE, JOHN WOZNIAK OF MARCY PLAYGROUND
6.7 RAHEEM DEAUVAGN
6.9 CARRIE NEWCOMER
6.10 CHI-TOWN SINGS - BRITNEY VS. CHRISTINA
6.11 SIRIUS XM THE COFFEEHOUSE TOUR PRESENTS MATT COSTA, JD & THE STRAIGHT SHOT, MATT HARTKE
6.12 THE GREAT LOVE DEBATE
6.13 LINDSAY LOU
6.14 JON B.

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MAY 15
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MAY 19
JOAN OSBORNE SINGS THE SONGS OF BOB DYLAN

MAY 22
ROY AYERS

MAY 23

LIVE MUSIC IN URBAN WINE COUNTRY

CITY WINERY

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Thinking with your genitals

Advice on e-mailing an awesome kisser who ghosted

By Dan Savage

Q: I'm a 43-year-old straight woman, and I spent the majority of my 30s celibate. At 40, I realized that while I wasn't interested in dating, I was tired of my vibrator. I also realized that it was time to go forth and fuck with the body I had instead of waiting for the idealized body I was going to have someday. Over the past three years—despite being as fat as ever—I've consistently had fun, satisfying, exciting, creative, sometimes weird, occasionally scary, but mostly awesome sex. One guy I met on Craigslist was particularly great: awesome kisser, amazing dick. He came over, we fucked, it was excellent, we chatted, he left. This happened about four times. And then CL shut down the personals section.

The only contact info I have for the guy is the anonymous CL address, and it no longer works. He has my Gmail address (the one I use for dating sites), but he has not e-mailed me. I'm not a crazy stalker (I swear!), but he once told me he teaches at a university in our area, and I managed to find his photo and contact info on the school website. So I know how to reach him—but that's a spectacularly bad idea, right? Unless you think it isn't? If a dude I'd fucked a few times tracked me down at my job, I would freak out. But I keep thinking: Would it really be SUCH a bad idea to send him ONE e-mail? Should I just accept that it was great while it lasted? Or should I e-mail him and run the risk of pissing off/freaking out a nice guy?

A: Don't do it, CREEP—don't do that thing you already know you shouldn't, that thing you wouldn't want some dude to do to you, that thing you were probably hoping I'd give you permission to do.

That thing? Don't do it. You're engaged in what's called "dickful thinking" when guys do it—at least that's what I call it, CREEP. It's like wishful thinking, but with dicks. Men convince themselves of something improbable ("I bet she's one of those women who like unsolicited dick pics!") or unlikely ("Showing up at her workplace will convince her to take me back!") because it's what they want. Think of all the guys you've ever known who said, "She wants me!" when in reality he was the one who wanted her. Clitful thinking may be rarer than dickful thinking—women being less likely to think with their genitals and/or being more risk-averse due to socialization, slut-shaming, and the ever-present threat of gendered violence—but it's not unheard of for a woman to rationalize unacceptable behavior (contacting this man at work) or deploy a self-serving justification (it's just ONE e-mail) or solicit a "You go, girl!" from a sex-advice columnist when what she needs to hear is "Hell no, girl!"

Again, don't do it. This guy has your e-mail address and he knows how to reach you. And since you didn't have all that fun, satisfying, exciting, creative sex over the last few years with only him, CREEP, I shouldn't have to tell you to focus on your other options. But since your clit is doing your thinking for you right now, I must: Leave this dude alone and go fuck some other dudes.

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