



THE WAKE

fortnightly student magazine

volume 24 - issue 3



Through the Backdoor p. 7
The Dirt on the Dirt People p. 8
Sparkles and Sarcasm p. 9

{Zero; 0} p. 14
Praxis; Twos "Comfort"s p. 15
I Hope We Never Meet p. 16



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VOLUME 24, ISSUE 3

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Established in 2002, The Wake is a fortnightly independent magazine and registered student organization produced by and for students at the University of Minnesota.

The Wake was founded by Chrin Ruen & James DeLong.

Disclaimer: The purpose of The Wake is to provide a forum in which students can voice their opinions. Opinions expressed in the magazine are not representative of the publication or university as a whole. To join the conversation email eic@wakemag.org.

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The Wake Staff's Childhood Halloween Costumes



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UPCOMING EVENTS

SEP 26 - JAN 26

Campus Kiosk: The Voice of Student Groups at the U

Whether we realize it or not, student voices carry weight, shown by the attempts to silence or uplift student voices around various college campuses in the nation. Through this gallery, you can learn about how various communities have communicated their voices at the U.

Coffman Memorial Union
Free

OCT 31

Gothess Halloween Killer Party

With special guest Die Sexual (LA) and featuring DJ Q & Die Aspora (and more), a costume contest hosted by Leatherette, and performances by House of 1000 Queers, you cannot be guaranteed a more killer night out! (spooky goth club! 21 plus).

Turf Club
9 p.m.; \$15 (day of \$20)

OCT 15 - NOV 17

All the Devils Are Here: How Shakespeare Invented the Villain

This one man show is performed by Patrick Page, acclaimed actor of various villains like Hades, Scar, and the Green Goblin. Page goes beyond the heart of Shakespeare characters and into the audience's.

Guthrie Theater
Various times; \$29 to \$83

OCT 31

A Nightmare on 7th Street

Everyone will be getting in line for this 18 plus, local concert featuring artists like Gramma, she's green, WHY NOT, Psylo, and berzical! Their music will transport you to a dream-state of reality.

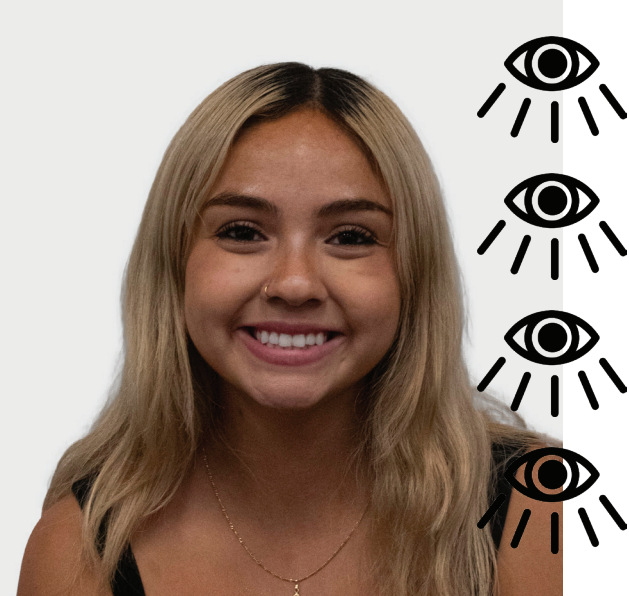
7th St Entry
Doors open at 7 p.m., show starts at 7:30 p.m.; \$15

OCT 29

Orion Sun with Cruza

Catch the feeling of grief and growth through the alternative R&B and indie rock style of Orion Sun. Performing with Cruza, the band that mixes R&B, psychedelic and alternative rock and funk, this concert will be sure to wash over you with the feeling of love for yourself and others.

Fine Line
7 p.m.; \$25-\$45



Letter from the Voices Editor

Dear Stranger,

I remember a few years back, the summer I turned 10, I sat in the grass of my home backyard, mixing cotton balls and paint, making galaxy jars.

These jars, a simple mixture of silver glitter, cotton balls, purple paint, and water inside of a mason jar were my heroin that summer. I had about five of them above my bed.

I've always liked doing things with my hands; I have always looked for things to create. I've been writing stories since I was small, drawing comics during class, and even running my own fashion company with my sister in my childhood room. It was a full-time job. I also remember writing a Christmas screenplay after getting dropped off at home from the bus in the fourth grade.

I get attached to things quite easily, yet here we are, 10 years later, no galaxy jar in sight.

I also tend to let things go, writing new stories after half-fining others, putting down a book because I found a new one at the library, and ending a movie before the final scene just because I can. Sometimes, I am fast at starting anew.

I've also been at The Wake since my freshman year of college. I graduate this spring.

It's not that I don't stick with things, that isn't true. It's just that, to stick with something, I really, really, really, have to care.

I also tend to stress about most things, whether the future is strange and unwelcoming, or whether I'll find myself in Minnesota when I'm 60. Yet the one thing I have never had to worry about is whether my love to create will ever go away. That sticks with me.

So while I haven't felt the urge to make a galaxy jar in years, I feel the urge to create every day. To read and draw, to write the same sentence over and over until it feels just right. To try really, really hard because it's not about who reads what I write, but what I write itself.

And here, within The Wake, I've been lucky enough to find people who help me write the best I can—and are willing to write the same sentence over and over too.

Sincerely,

Bianca Llerena
Voices Editor



Art by Amy Brewster

Magic, Spirituality, and Fall

Autumnal reflections on intention and intuition

BY QUINN MCCLURG

[Disclaimer: I write this article upon piles of neglected tarot cards, meditations, and visions. I bring up my magical past (self-made, esoteric-informed, unconscious-centered, and manic) only to illustrate how “far gone” I’ve been before, and its correlations with the most intense periods of my life. I’ve long equated my inherited “intuitions” with my mother’s mental illnesses. I wouldn’t say I believe in magic, but I believe those who do; I, too, have perceived things that could easily not be explained. Perhaps I still don’t want to explain them. Also, a majority of this article is generalization; follow the QR code for a more substantial product.]

Summer dies slowly, and Fall usurps its cooling mantle. As the last rays of sun grow shorter and more frigid, the veil thins, and the dead speak with tongues of dry leaves. Fall’s passing forces us to reconnect to our pasts and reconcile our old ghosts, to connect with nature and embrace her transitions, to turn to our trusted traditions and the ancient glimmers of nameless conviction living in our bones.

I speak of magic. As universal as our desire to believe in it, as old as humans drawing breath themselves, magic is that tenuous life force breathed into mankind by creator gods in almost every religion—that same life force swimming through everything else. Magic is not only a practice, but the very fact of being itself, from evolution to transduction, from stardust to sentience. Reeling from the sheer logistical impossibility of existence itself, one may assume not only that driving and guiding forces exist, but that they are meaningful.

In truth, the reconciliation and management of these unseen forces comprises the majority of modern practices of magic, not the stereotypical images of bloody sacrifice or demon-summoning. In fact, most common Western practices—general spirituality to witchcraft, Paganism to Wicca—rely

mainly on intuition and intention to guide, fulfill, or execute rituals and practices. Intuition is gleaned from previous experience or observation: channeling, listening, or connecting to some signifier (internal or external; sometimes identified as specific deities or ancestors). Intention generated by the practitioner’s conscious or unconscious desires is integrated into or answered by their practice (sometimes solidified in sigils or specific utterances). If used, relics (ie., heirlooms, curios), natural objects (ie., herbs, bones, crystals), personal objects (ie., hair, saliva, blood), and tools (ie., oracle / tarot decks, candles) can all aid in a ritual, use guided by intention, intuition, or custom.

Very rarely are rituals and practices focused on the material (money, transmutation, physical harm, etc.), but rather on encouraging positive energy, balance, reinforcement, connection, cleansing, or protection. Because these practices are so immaterial, they are far more likely to appear to alter reality than a placebo—they create and inform a rich inner life, further connecting the practitioner to themselves, others, and the world around them.

Historically, magic was respected, used for the benefit of a collective (agriculture, medicine, religion, guidance, etc). Then, with colonizers and their conditional god(s) comes “difference,” violence, and erasure. However, magic endured, even at the threat of death, carrying with it centuries of otherwise lost oral histories, ancient religions, folklores, and restorative practices. For example, from Precolonial America, various Native American practices and Brujería emerged; from Africa, Vodún and Ìsese endured post-slave-trade, adapting into Voodoo, Hoodoo, and Pan-African spirituality; from the pre-Christian Celts, Goths, Greeks, and Slavs, various Pagan practices, many of which intermingled and influence modern day Paganism and Wicca.

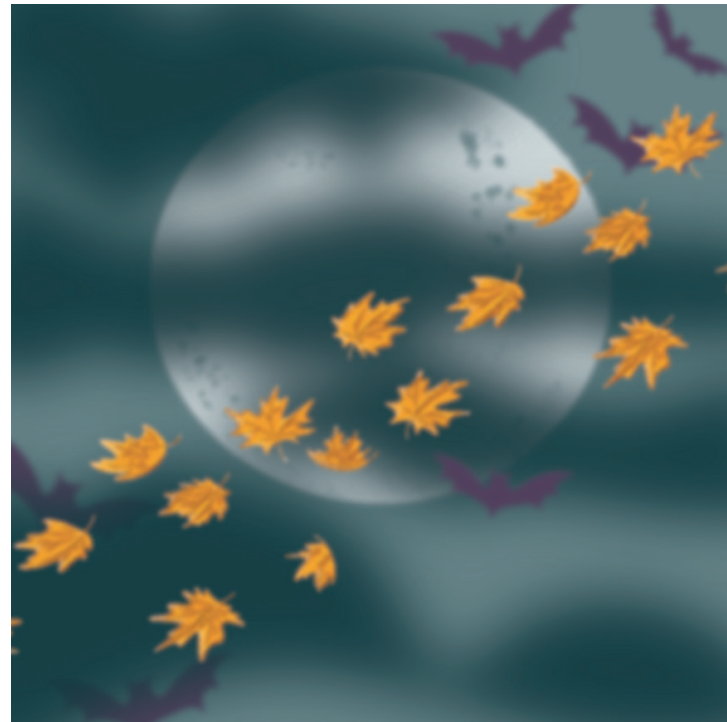
These practices, necessary for the survival of the practitioner, their culture, and soul, are often poached and made piecemeal by the rich white man for entertainment, specifically from the late 19th century to today. Seances, secret societies, and thinly-veiled sex cults mark the heights of these appropriations and fetishizations, being deeply rooted within several occult, esoteric, and even spiritual practices still.

At risk of sounding cliché, I believe magic is in the histories, preservation, and continuation of any culture at all: necromancy is as simple as reading the words of the long-dead; enchantment as simple as folklore and storytelling; empowerment as simple as connecting to the generations before and after through your practice. It is up to us to reexamine the histories, origins, and implications of our magics, thereby preserving or reinterpreting them, uprooting each shred of bigotry, appropriation, colonial violence, and dehumanization within—the infinities in us are not enabled by their judgements or limitations, but rather freedoms, paradoxes, and possible impossibilities. Your practice need not be a faith either: to re-enchant oneself is merely to live with wonder, curiosity, veneration, devotion, and love.

Bear witness. Take action. Make magic.👁️



See a full version of the article here



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Through the Backdoor

An exploration of Como Backdoor, a long-lasting and well-regarded music venue

BY JEREME BUXSEL

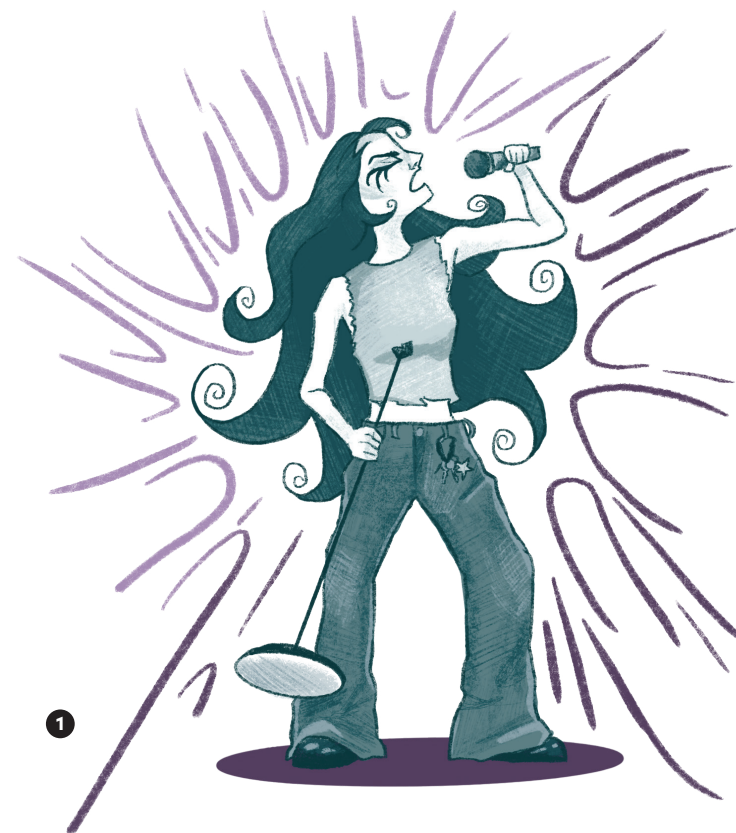
Although nobody truly knows when its first show occurred, in the time since its founding, Como Backdoor has established itself as a cornerstone of the DIY music scene in the Twin Cities area. Como Backdoor acts as a central hub for meeting new people, greeting familiar faces, and seeing great bands. However, as a newcomer to the scene, my perspective is horribly limited, so to gather more information, I—for once—left the comfort of my room to attend a show on Oct. 11 and interview each act on the bill to find out why they think Como Backdoor is so special.

Como Backdoor is a “pillar of the DIY community,” said Robert Henry, guitarist for the band I Have No Love For Men Like You, furthermore stating, “so many really, really sick-ass bands have come through here, it’s just kind of so surreal to play here.”

Dance-punk extraordinaires Bluedriver appreciates the venue’s emphasis on safety, hanging up flyers with phone numbers and having staff wear purple bandanas so attendees always know who to come to for help. As their bassist, Antonio Carvale said, “[i]t’s by far—at least [from] what we’ve played—the best basement venue.”

Finally, Griffin Bauman, guitarist for Killed By Kiwis, put it most succinctly. His favorite thing about Como Backdoor is “the cops will only get called every once in a while.”

Speaking for myself, I had a great time attending the show, and I agree with what every one of the bands had to say about Como Backdoor. The venue’s space allows for an intimate viewing experience that ensures everyone is able to see who’s playing on stage. The bands that night were incredible, with each act providing something uniquely great that set it apart from the others on the bill. Simply put, it is an amazing venue, and asking around gave me a chance to meet the many dedicated people who attend, play for, and operate it. If you enjoy music of any kind, you will most certainly find something to love about Como Backdoor. Who knows, maybe you’ll see me there. 👁️



1



3

A Passionate Prose

Milkweed Editions and Coffee House Press host Open House Prose

BY SYDNEY JACKSON

Finding my seat in a quiet, yet anticipative room waiting for the writer line up (Victoria Blanco, Jennifer Bowen, Greg Hewett, Jana Larson, Juliet Patterson, and Erin Sharkey) to speak, I scan the audience surrounding me. A mix of “literature lovers,” as Milkweed Editions, the events co-host along with Coffee House Press, called them, from all backgrounds come together to listen to accomplished writers. Quiet whispers about the event’s guest writers filled the room to the brim.

Juliet Patterson and Erin Sharkey were the two key speakers at the event. Patterson is the author and finalist for the Minnesota Book Award of the heart aching book “Sinkhole.” In 2009, after recovering from a car accident, Patterson’s father died by suicide. In this book she tells how she and her family navigated this tragic loss. Sharkey is the author of the historically rich, intriguing book “A Darker Wilderness,” a composition of personal and lyric essays about Black history and her own personal experience as a Black woman. One of the main themes of the book is about the important historic relationship between Black people and land in America, which has a deep history, starting from the inhumane shipping of slaves to now. Hearing both of these talented female writers’ prose was insightful to listen to.

As each speaker appeared on stage to speak eloquently into the microphone, we got to hear the hearts of their stories, speaking with passion at each word of their tongue. As the voices of these admirable writers were heard, Twin Cities book readers met and chatted amongst each other about these compelling stories. 👁️

The Dirt on the Dirt People

You've seen them outside of Northrop, here's the scoop

BY MARIE RONNANDER

If you've walked outside of Northrop in the past few weeks, you've likely noticed the giant dirt pit marked with caution tape. The whole thing is rather mysterious, with little context clues alluding to what the pit is actually for. There's been constant construction all around the block and the U tends to put money into strange side quests, so who knows? Maybe the University has finally decided to build a giant sand pit for some quality student enrichment time.

Then again, you may have been part of the lucky few who've walked by this pit at the exact right time, you may have noticed the group of dust-covered people rumbling and tumbling around in there. That clears a little bit of the mystery, the pit is for people to use after all. But what are they doing exactly? Is this an acrobatics class? Can we, perhaps, join in?

The answer is not an expected one. These dancers are performing research-based movements to interpret America's Forever War. Buckle in, reader.

These dancers are part of the Black Label Movement group. They've been holding these rehearsals outside of Northrop since May, for two-week sessions at a time. The latest session ran from September 23 to October 4, drawing the eyes of many students and professors throughout campus. Their gestures are rapid and risky—almost violent. They are meant to provoke urgency and perpetuate connection.

The piece they've been preparing for is titled "Battleground." The dance takes place in 10 inches of tilled soil, causing the dancer's clothes to progressively become more and more filthy. The

performance features jogging, army crawling, and what looks like wrestling. It's clearly a very athletic endeavor, yet their movements are wrought with pain and suffering. They look ragged. Covered with dirt and absolutely ragged.

In an interview with Informa, the lead choreographer, Carl Flink, explained that the dancer's convey "the way perpetual war... situates in [the] body." He's referencing the United States constant involvement in wars since World War II which has led to both ethical and physical impacts on those involved. The performer's actions are supposed to represent not only those of soldiers, but those of civilians as well. Their energy is power, but their energy is also fear. What's even more surprising about this piece is the scientific backbone supporting the dancer's volatile movements.

Flink used the naturally violent ballistics within human cells as his inspiration for this rapid, high energy dance style. He cites David Odde, a professor in the Department of Biomedical Engineering here at the University of Minnesota, as his source of knowledge on these molecular interactions. In 2009, the two catalyzed a collaboration called the Moving Cell Project in which dance is used to explore the balance between chaos and order within living systems. Together, the two developed a technique coined as "body storming" (get it? Because... brainstorming?) which rapidly prototypes a model for molecular movement: chaotic yet beautiful.

Odde researches cancer treatment, which is highly involved in understanding the dynamics within a cell. In an interview with Minnesota's All Arts, Odde

has described these molecular movements as a "catastrophe" yet they're a "normal part of cell dynamics." To Flink, "catastrophe implies a high amount of motion" with many things happening at once. When you combine the two professionals' visions, you get body storming, which is using the dancer's bodies and movements as a macro-level interpretation of cell dynamics.

Cell dynamics is, on a very basic level, the random, yet seemingly ordered transfer of energies between different components of a cell. This concept is difficult to interpret—even machines struggle to convey this type of randomness in a digestible manner. When Odde and Flink paired, however, this model became human beings responding, with their entire bodies, to the flip of a coin. Random, chaotic, and an excellent visual model of molecular movement and energy transfer.

In Battlefield, Flink further applies this idea of random, yet ordered, high-impact energy transfer to explore the interpersonal effects of decades-long wars. The addition of 10 inches of soil allows the dancers to move with even more vigor, as the physical blows they receive are cushioned by dirt. Their movements are frenzied and wild, yet ordered, almost as if they were acting under a military official.

So no, alas, we did not receive an adult sandbox as the welcome gift for the class of 2028. We did, however, get a peek into the minds of two very clever individuals: an artist and a scientist preoccupied with understanding our chaotic world. 🙄



A Hate Letter from a Biker

A Lifetime bikers reflection on biking on campus

BY ZOË MEYER

You do not need to fear, I come with only a small amount of dislike. Unless you are one of the three C's listed below, I probably won't hit you with my bike! If you are one of the following things, you are keeping this city from being a fully enjoyable bikeable city—watch out.

Cars

I do not know who gave ya'll your licenses, but they probably shouldn't have. So as a refresher, here are some things I would like to remind you of.

When we are turning, we look for bikers. If there is a biker coming, we do not turn in front of said biker. I shouldn't have to say this, but two of you guys did hit me with your cars in this exact way, so maybe I do.

The bike lane is for bikes, not parking. I do not care if you are "just here for a second", you make it 1000% less safe to bike. Stop it.

Construction

Nothing needs to be said here. Construction sucks. I have popped one too many tires on unpaved roads this summer, and had one too many close calls on streets that took away their bike lanes, I hate it.

College students (especially those on scooters)

If you are a college student, please for the love of God, stop jaywalking! The amount of times I have almost hit one of you guys because you are not looking at the lights and only looking at your phones, I am honestly worried for your safety. If you are a college student on a scooter, all the same rules apply to you as they do to bikes. Do not ride on the sidewalk and do not try to cut off bikers. Those scooters go fast and I have witnessed more than one of you try to disobey the rules and get hurt or hurt someone else. And to the guy last week on a scooter who tried to pass me on a curve even though we were going the same speed and then fell off your scooter, just know I laughed at you.

To all my fellow bikers, please be safe, wear your helmet, pump up your tires, and watch out for the three C's.

With all my love (and hate),

A lifetime biker 🙄



Sparkles and Sarcasm

An evening with Plasma

BY ASHLEY SUDETA

Almost any drag queen can be showstopping, but with Plasma, the show never seemed to stop. The theatre queen of RuPaul's Drag Race season 16 brought pints of energy and heart to campus, creating an experience that was fun for everyone, regardless of their familiarity with drag race.

Plasma took the North Star Ballroom stage at 7:00 p.m., kicking things off with a lip sync. From there, the next two and a half hours felt more like spending time with a friend than being in the presence of a drag superstar. Plasma was incredibly personable and made a room of over a hundred people feel intimate. When she posed questions, it was because she genuinely wanted a response. She asked follow-up questions too, even referring back to specific people throughout the evening. When she asked if anyone knew what the line "Drink your juice, Shelby" was from, I shot my hand up, exclaiming "Steel Magnolias!" Plasma was pleased, asked my name, and told me I had learned the right things in college.

Running jokes were established—psychology majors were asked to provide free therapy and playful taunting was directed toward someone named Ryan. Friendliness seemed to seep out of the ballroom, too—during the intermission, I met a stranger in the restroom and we struck up a conversation that continued between our separate stalls.

Plasma was more than just charming. She also incorporated a sense of mindfulness into the lighthearted event. Before bingo began, she asked if she could swear, assuring us she didn't want a single person to feel uncomfortable. She also told us about anti-drag measures that were implemented during her time at the University of Oklahoma. It was a reminder for us to appreciate the queer community here in the Twin Cities, and to protect it in the ballot box this November.

The bingo remained almost an afterthought throughout the event, but I don't think anyone minded. Plasma graced the UMN community with beauty and banter—that alone was worth the trek to the St Paul campus. 🙄

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Gun Violence Across America and In Our Own Communities

BY ALESSANDRA BENETIZ AND JOSHUA KLOSS

We are almost done with 2024, and while much has changed from last year, much remains the same. Unfortunately, gun violence is just as prevalent as ever in the United States. There are many ways to count cases of gun violence, so let's consider three different types: school shootings, mass shootings, and incidents involving gun-related deaths.

Unfortunately, shootings occurring in schools are nothing new to our country's history. The first one to make national headlines was in 1999 at Columbine High School in Colorado. Since then, school shootings have only grown more common. A study published in the scientific journal *Advances in Neurodevelopmental Disorders* in 2022 described school shootings as being "at their highest recorded levels" at the time the research was published. Despite school shootings facing a sharp decline in 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, results indicated that rates of school shootings "rose again sharply in 2021," as that is when students were returning to in-person classroom instruction. One could argue, then, that the pandemic has done more to reduce school shootings than any currently standing political representative. The researchers described school shootings as "relatively commonplace," in the U.S., as "there were more in 2021 than in any year since 1999." CNN reported, as of Sept. 19, there had been at least 50 school shootings in the U.S., 13 of which occurred on college campuses and an alarming 37 occurred on K-12 school grounds. At the same time of year in 2022, there had been 47 school shootings, and at the same time of year in 2022, there had been 37. Evidently, the trends seem to change directions often. Nonetheless, these rates are higher than any other country on the planet.

Mass shootings in the U.S. have seen an upward trend for a while now; according to the same report from *Adv. in Neurodevelopmental Disorders*, mass shootings numbered 269 in 2013, while 2020

saw 611 total mass shootings. The term "mass shooting" is defined by the nonprofit Gun Violence Archive as "incidents in which four or more people are injured." Further analysis of the Gun Violence Archive's statistics shows that, from 2020-2024, mass shootings numbered over 600. Per. Each. Year. While mass shootings declined from 2021 to 2022, they rose again in 2023. And regardless of small changes in the direction of mass shooting trends, there has been approximately 2 per day for every single day for the last four years, a rather alarming way of interpreting the statistics.

Looking at incidents of gun violence alone, there were over 19,000 gun murders in the year 2020 alone, according to the Gun Violence Archive. Yet, in 2023, the number of firearm deaths was at just below 19,000, indicating a decline from earlier years. 2021 saw the most gun deaths on record, which includes murders, accidental shootings, and homicides, according to the Gun Violence Archive. This number dropped in 2022 and again in 2023.

When we take into account all the instances in which "small" or accidental shootings occur in the U.S., the numbers become almost too much to conceptualize. Minnesota has suffered through multiple mass shootings, like the Red Lake shootings of 2005 in which Jeff Weise killed his grandfather and then drove to Red Lake Senior High School where he shot and killed seven people. Yet, there are constant instances of gun violence in the state that go unnoticed and fail to make national headlines. For example, just a few weeks ago a shooting downtown left two dead and three injured. Despite the U being in Minneapolis, there seems to be a disconnect between the students and their knowledge of the issues that plague the Twin Cities community on a daily basis, a big one being gun violence.

An Interview with Babarba Frey



To learn more about gun violence, its roots, and how to best combat it, I had a conversation with Barbara Frey, who has worked in multiple organizations that defend human rights around the globe. In 2006 she served as a special rapporteur to the U.N. sub-commission on the issue of preventing human rights abuses committed with small arms and light weapons.

While discussing gun violence around the nation and Minneapolis specifically, Frey emphasized the U.S. is behind most countries regarding gun regulations. There are also different levels of safety when it comes to access to firearms. A lot of the focus tends to be on school shootings and mass shootings, yet many more people die from gun violence in underprivileged neighborhoods. Frey also discussed how the COVID-19 pandemic developed opportunities for people to take out their frustrations and impotence with guns and violence. In fact, violent crime rates rose sharply from 2019 to 2022 in Minnesota, and although this rate has gone down it has yet to return to pre-pandemic levels.

While conversing with Frey about what regulations

she thinks could help reduce instances of gun violence in the U.S., she emphasized it must be a mix of cultural and legislative changes. Essentially, it is important that communities come together to implement common-sense registration policies, especially safe storage requirements, which means locking up guns and ammunition separately. Furthermore, making it a requirement to register with a proven reason for purchasing such guns would help reduce the percentage of irresponsible gun owners, according to Frey.

How Do Students Feel?

Unlike high schools, colleges generally don't have monthly shooting drills, so how do students act if this kind of violence occurs on campus? Students want to know they'll be safe on their own campuses, something that becomes increasingly hard when school shootings seem to happen every month.

Now, I've read and seen many social media posts about Dr. Rebecca Cunningham, the new president of this University, but what I have not heard are her plans for making our campus safer. According to the 2024 crime statistics report released by the U, aggravated assaults and robberies maintained a steady rate from 2022 to 2023 while vehicle thefts went up. No statistics have been released for 2024, but the UMPD keeps a daily log of any criminal activity around campus which is 60 pages long... so far. I'll say that lately, it feels as though I get more and more SAFE-U alerts every weekend. Not to mention the 'mysterious package' left at Walter at the beginning of this semester.

A poll conducted by The Wake found that while

most students describe feeling "moderately safe" while on campus, the general consensus drops in the face of news of shootings at other college campuses. Not to mention that while firearms are mostly banned on campus, there are some exceptions, like attaining presidential approval. To read more about firearms on campus, take a look at the Board of Regents policy on possession and carrying of weapons.

While gun violence remains a threat in our communities and to our campus, students seem to have other worries at the forefront of their mind when it comes to security on and off-campus; the biggest of which is an increase in robberies in recent years. A majority of poll-takers, about 84%, indicated they live off-campus; as such, concerns ranged from walking alone at night to getting mugged or having something stolen from their car.

The University has taken some proactive steps in regard to general campus safety. For example, most university-owned buildings are now locked at certain times of the day and require a U-card to open. Yet, with the statistics of mass shootings being what they are, it is evident that there is a long way to go when tackling gun violence and making Gophers feel safe on-campus or on streets off-campus. From gaining student engagement to actively informing the public about how to stay safe, we all have a responsibility to strive for a stronger and safer community.

If gun violence is an issue that you're personally

concerned about and would like to take action, might I suggest interacting with Everytown for Gun Safety or March For Our Lives on their social media accounts. They frequently circulate petitions for legal and policy action, statistics regarding gun violence, and information on where political candidates (like Tim Walz vs. JD Vance, and Kamala Harris vs. Donald Trump) stand on gun control.

And when it comes to stepping up in our own communities, it could be helpful to consider fighting for proactive community policing and support, which work to address community problems and tackle them before the need for retroactive, traditional policing, which merely responds to crimes after they occur. It has been said before that the communities with the least amount of resources see the most amount of crime, a result consistent with several studies, ranging from one published by the CDC to a study from the University of California-Davis. While we might be scared of certain crimes in our own communities, it is important to remember we are in fact a part of our communities, which is both a simple fact easy to overlook and also a reminder to support one another. Safety can start with us, so consider how you might get involved if that is an issue near to your heart.



{Zero; 0}

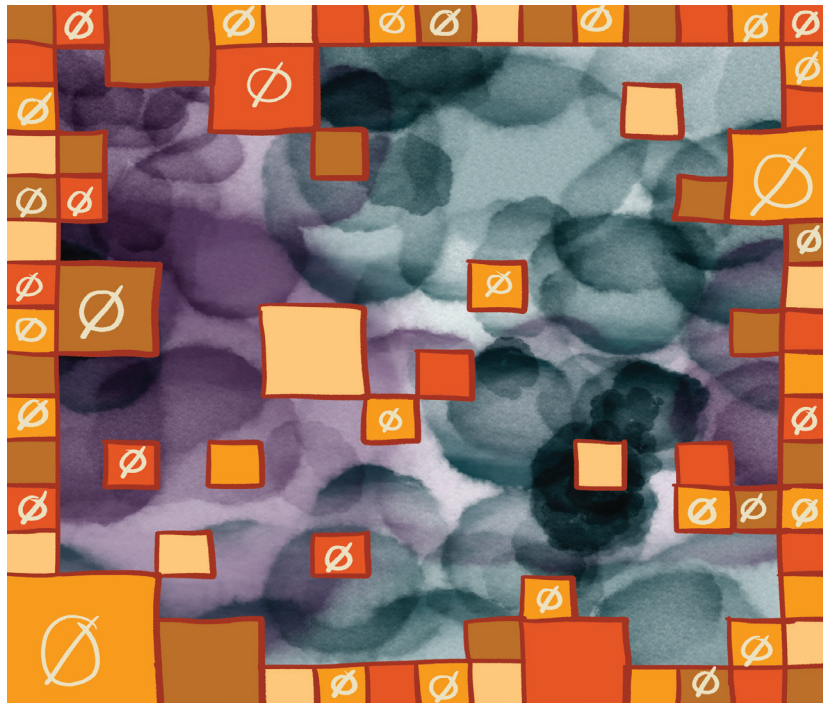
[extant; expectation; encountered; ex nihilo]

BY EMERY CARLSON

My encounters with Zero have been long & fruitful but rarely conclusive. In the first instance, the question becomes (or became, it is difficult to ascertain who first admitted puzzlement): around what absence do we convene? From hence, an elaborate detour around several campfires, some of which were well-tended and cordial—burning only what had served its purpose, or faded into quiet obscurity & others which took on an excess of life, became impetuous, by which I mean excessively symbolic. Of course, I wish only to broach another capricious dissipation: true mark of the sign. So it was that I became obsessed with Zero as a kind of animus which takes in the marrow of life (those lonely nights, nostalgic sighs, forgotten initiations & poorly reconstructed memories) & produces that most aspirated of phenomena: significance—which must, of course, be overcome but for now let us relinquish our words to fire and smoke. To be sure, I insinuate nothing but a dance. Zero then asks (& maybe you as well), what of resonance? Fear not, for patience may be rewarded. After all, we must not forget: nihil ex alia. But I digress. For all of the adventures we went on, Zero was coy. The first face which they allowed me to glimpse (& recall that it has been proclaimed, on high, that from absence and (in) addition (which is to say, AND and NOT) alone all that can be said follows suit) was an additive identity. Forgive the jargon—do not mistake this for a mathematical game. In all honesty, it was Zero who first permitted me (along

the faultlines of a broken mirror) to see the ways in which my identity, like my diaphragm in so many choruses, expands and contracts according to its own strange geology (awaits eruption). Have I strayed from Zero's instruction? Certainly. But this was only another tantalizing paradox—& we have not even begun yet. Naturally (& here the tracks are firm, believe me, we left no stone unturned) we hit upon another rule: ex contradictione... Although... wishes are not to be shared idly. Anyways, I refuse to complete the formula—or to close the question. Bear in mind the lessons of algebra: we are always permitted to add Zero. So I hope you will forgive my bringing nothing to the table; I will not let my thoughts be dissected. Around what absence(s) do we convene? Here (& this was always going to be the tertiary step) we begin to crave the Real Zero—the origin who sits on a golden throne, having purged all emptiness & extracted from it an eternal unity, a supremely arbitrary mark, the essential jewel-set-in-stars guiding us on journeys through sundry infinities (& before us is Cantor like a modern Vergil). Do I seem evasive? Zero would have it so. I am only repaying a debt, which brings me to my next irrevocable (irrelevant) Truth: that Zero is the auger of emptiness, or what, in the final instance, will free us from its own clutches. Yet, through all of this impeccable reasoning, I sense a ghost. Have I betrayed my friend by trotting out such winged platitudes, such fanged noumena? To be clear, Zero was only ever an office (ante rem, obviously) & now

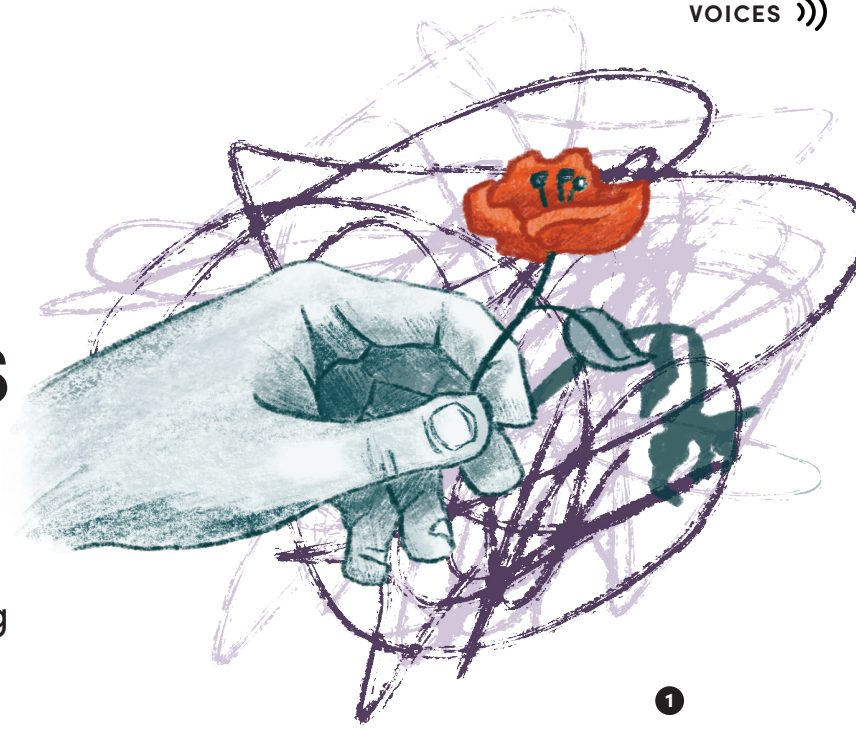
I myself must fill it, for a new face looms, displaces the Zero whom I thought I knew, and announces a new signature: Grief. The logs for the fire have become heavy with moisture & will no longer ignite so easily. I used to imagine that I could read our conversations in the ashes of fires from nights past; reflections on mortality seemed to congregate around flames like lost souls to the Styx. And Zero, once conceived as a lack, now stands as concrete as lime and soda, tautological bearing echoes of Tartarus, that one-less-than-one whole life which spells catastrophe to anyandall dialectic. Every convenience, a word stretched to bursting as it stands, points to it. It was clear from the beginning that Zero was never the end & maybe at some point the raft must be abandoned & every designation stands as dead as lilac buds in errant April's frost. All that/are remains (it seems to me) is/to/& ask (of myself that is —whether you are still here or not being immaterial): when will you learn to encounter Failure with as much love as you do Zero? ☹️



Praxis; Twos “Comfort”s

Perseverance; purging the cynic; taking myself too seriously

BY QUINN MCCLURG



Microcosm: bearing witness to the endless hellstorm of current events is my duty as a journalist and individual; however, for the sake of my own worsening mental health, I must temporarily avert my gaze and recuperate. Learning is praxis, as is taking time to heal; however, anyone can overstay their welcomes and drown in either. I hate this comfort, that I have a choice—that I am not immune to drowning myself.

Informed or not, how can anyone anywhere live a life with meaning during a genocide? Every new human rights violation draws more attention to how arbitrary the constructs governing our lives are, how regularly their cruelties are required. Take a store-bought, plastic-boxed salad: how many people were killed for the land and resources, poisoned by runoff and waste, or enslaved to farm and produce it? There is no ethical consumption under capitalism; your resulting comfort while consuming depends on how aware you are of this country's enduring cores of suffering (prison-industrial / military-industrial complexes, outsourced slavery / production, union busting / lobbying, drawing borders, etc.). Compared to similar historical periods (the Long Sixties, the Cold War, Iraq and Occupy Wall Street, etc.) where have the activists gone? The rioters, revolutionaries, and everymen doggedly crowding the streets? Aside from some, they're all inside: some are unaware, sedated, or unwilling to sacrifice their time and comfort; few others are recuperating or merely surviving until they can continue their radical actions again. I define “comfort” in terms of the infinite forms of empty stimulation, placation, consumption, and sedation ever-available at our fingertips—any activity that may not benefit us in any way, that champions our isolation, estrangement, ignorance, bigotry, self-

interest, or disempowerment over our connection, disruption, liberation, or decolonization (mundane substance use, consumerism, screentime, etc.). Of course, everyone needs these “comforts” to live; however, these comforts should be supplemented with praxis, forward-thinking and -movement, lest we waste our resources or consume another's.

I want to define the fruits of praxis as the radical, yet tenuous “Comfort”—the affirmation, community, and catharsis won when defying (i.e. risking oneself against) an oppressive authority, conception, or status quo. Of course, the most marginalized deserve the most comfort, as merely surviving day-to-day in an oppressive country may be enough—it's radical, risky, and potentially Comforting itself.

The less marginalized should be obligated to more action before indulging in their own comforts, especially since Authority is less likely to respond with violent force. However, Comfort is not equal, and may be as conditional as the spaces granting it.

Post-encampment (May), my partner and I were pushed out of almost all of our organizations and friend groups (all rooted in autonomy, anarchy, mutual aid, and decolonization) due to racism and misogyny pointed directly at my partner. Having previously given multiple people chances to do better, my partner did not hesitate to leave, and, as their white partner, I was obligated to follow behind them. Since then, we've lost our most immediate means of social change: praxis, community, and Comfort; it wasn't my partner's first time either, given their long organizational history. For intersectional organizers like them, Comfort comes at the cost of enduring real harm that is trivial or invisible to the more privileged and powerful organizers. We spent the next several months isolating ourselves and hurting together.

Today, my partner continues to live comfortably in a manner that hadn't been possible for them at any other point in their life, and I continue to grit my teeth through my remainder of University while working three jobs. While working, I attempt to keep my body and principles from being destroyed; however, the weight of lacking Comfort is suffocating—I often find myself slipping into comfort more than I should (any is detrimental to work / school). I find myself thinking: Does my radical survival outweigh my obligation to action? At whose cost does my comfort and inaction come? Exhausted organizers? Unsheltered unhoused folks dying of exposure? Hundreds of child slaves in cobalt mines? Thousands of wrongfully convicted, enslaved prisoners? Hundreds of thousands killed by our own country's bombs?

It's unfair to pin these atrocities on one inactive person, but one person can make a remarkable difference, especially in local mutual aid and organizing (Southside Food Share / Harm Reduction, Supply Depot, encampment defense, East Phillips Urban Farm, etc.). Additionally, action can be as simple as boycotting, supporting local businesses / artists, contributing as little as possible to the economy, being as kind as possible to the environment, and educating others on social injustice. I am constantly working, but I still have time for all of these methods, and they do provide some Comfort; mere cents on a boycotted item can become blisters on a prisoner's hand, screws on a warhead, or bullets in a bootlicker's gun.

Needless to say, we must resist while we are living. If you must indulge now to deliver radical action another day, your mere survival is justified. Seek to know evil, and live enabling as little evil as possible. ☹️

I Hope We Never Meet

It's easier to dance with you from afar

BY YVE SPENGLER

4



"You've changed," he told me, looking into my eyes as if for the first time. I watched the bridge of what we'd built collapse into rubble. His words carried a sting—but even then I couldn't feel hurt the way he wanted me to. I knew the foundation of who I was had not changed. If anything, time had allowed him to see who I was more clearly, and it was the shattered mirage of who he thought I was that left the air thick with its debris.

We started out sharing the deepest parts of ourselves with each other, sheltered in the warm air of his car. We said "I love you" on the plastic playground in his backyard, and I felt certain it was love because of the way I adored every detail about him, like how after basketball games the hair on the back of his neck curled, or how I always knew he was stressed because he'd go to bed early. Somewhere along the way, I stopped noticing when reality faded in lieu of the collective vision we thought we shared.

"You're in my English class, right?" Summer began the same time we ended, and I had spent its long sunny days in unescapable grief. By the time September arrived, I finally felt ready to meet new faces. She asked me about our Shakespeare class as we filed into the dining hall. I couldn't help but crave the way her eyes looked directly into mine. It wasn't a gaze of love, but of really seeing who I was despite the flaws she'd encounter. Worried that I wasn't someone worth seeing, I looked nervously to the fluorescent lights in the ceiling before timidly returning her gaze. Semi-blinded

from the light, I asked, "do you want to sit with us?"

I was allured to an existence outside of the boundaries of who someone thought I was. Subconsciously, I began to create my own definition of who she was to me—safety. We danced. I believed if I closed my eyes to the dizzying music, she would still be there to lead me through the steps. We got close but as my heavy lids fell, the song came abruptly to a stop. I widened my eyes, determined to resolutely meet her gaze this time. But she was already untangling away from me—as if, to her, our meeting was accidental. It turned out I had wanted more from her than she could bear. I was left dancing alone.

Maybe it's happened to you—the first time you meet someone and everything just clicks. You were made to make sense to each other. The Universe had been holding out on your crossing until the perfect moment, until your lives could finally unfold in tandem. You envision a future where you hold hands in the brisk autumn air, the stars shining approvingly upon you. Without a doubt, you are each other's people. You decide to choose each other day in and day out for the rest of your lives.

This dream only lasts as long as the sun doesn't rise to shed its light on the harsh actuality that this person is not the one for you. You can spend years together until everything changes the moment they realize you aren't a fit anymore. Maybe, you never were. You had once been inseparable, but now you do anything to get away from the

haunting idea of what once was—of what will never be.

You hold onto the fantasy of past and future love even after it fades, like a lifeboat in the most turbulent of storms. The smallest, most unforeseen current knocks this love out of your hands, forcing you to confront the truth. This whole time, the lifeboat was only a piece of driftwood. So you dream again, gathering more wood, thinking the next raft will be fashioned better. This time, you have more knowledge to create with because you know what to look for.

But you are still drowning. You cannot make a boat out of a few stray pieces of wood. The expectations we turn to for comfort will perpetually leave us gasping for air. So I hope we never meet, because at a distance the horizon mirrors an infinite future where we sail safely to the other side. I hope we never meet, because up close, I'm afraid your image of me will shatter and the music will stop. I hope we never meet, because I'm starting to get good at dancing alone.

Academia: Preserving the Magic

BY DEVNA PANDA

I will be the first to admit the deep-seated sense of dread I feel when I consider the mounting pile of homework on my to-do list. Classes I had initially been inspired by when I become aspects of an increasingly busy lifestyle, one in which I can hardly stop and experience the moment without feeling like I am wasting time. Although I am always excited to engage in coursework and activities suited to my interests when starting the semester semester, the all too common reality of taking on far more than I can manage soon takes center stage. While the beginning of September is marked by a magic-infused air, the prospect of new adventures and gaining new knowledge stirring excitement in my heart, I soon begin cramming my days so far full with homework and extracurriculars that they begin to feel like obligations rather than sources of joy.

In moments like this, I have to slow myself down and remember why I am pursuing my goals in the first place. I am reminded of who I was when I was younger: an individual who sat in Phys 1401 realizing how principles in physics were so visibly applicable to daily life or whose AP Literature teacher inspired her to no end. An individual who genuinely loved to learn. As in most programs, my degree has built on itself. Courses I am taking now employ content I have been learning since freshman year. I feel a sense of accomplishment when I consider how, even a year ago, I would not be able to understand and apply concepts I know now. College students are busy; with so many spheres of life to balance, this reality is probably unavoidable. Yet, I urge you to stop in moments where you feel as if time is passing you by and consider how far you have come in what you have learned. Don't let the magic fade just because you are too preoccupied to notice it.



You Think You Failed Yourself, But Try Again

Just trying to be without self-comparison.

BY ILKE GUNAY

It was only a few weeks ago when I seriously sat down and started doing research about transferring to schools back home. The reason I considered packing my entire existence (and vanishing as if I'd never set foot on this continent) was because of not having lived up to the expectations I'd built for myself in the past few years.

I've always aimed to compete with myself in order to be successful in life. I'd thought not comparing yourself or your success to others would be easier at college, since who really is there to compare yourself to in a 200 person lecture? Yet, it has now come to the point where I can compare myself to these ghosts of people who are always more successful and happier than me to be here.

I live a life where I'm always inferior to myself. I'm the mastermind when it comes to self-sabotage. I've been feeling like an impostor who doesn't ever deserve to be among all these people, and for what? Because I forget or simply disregard the past and focus on my future from the most inaccurate and deceptive lens. Attempting to evaluate my success by comparing it to what other people's futures might look like.

After my extensive research on giving up on what was once my biggest dream, I've come to the conclusion that even if I left this all, I would still have the power to find an excuse to escape achieving anything. In the end, the best aspect of attending a very large lecture is that those flawless beings of illusion will not be able to detect my poor grades, accomplishments, or insecurities; nor will they care if I dropped out of school or not. If I'm the one who makes myself suffer all of these self-manipulations, I can also be the one to give myself another try without owing this privilege to anyone.


SIX
REVIEWS**The Substance**

Coralie Fargeat

BY MADELYN VALENTO

October is undoubtedly the perfect time to sit down to watch a spooky movie. However, with hundreds of films to choose from, some obnoxiously cheesy and others brutally grotesque (somehow, this film was both), pressing play can be a risk that doesn't always result in a reward.

"The Substance" is a satirical body horror film about Elizabeth (Demi Moore), a fading television star. When a new treatment, *The Substance*, offers her a chance to be young and successful again, she takes it. Enter Sue (Margaret Qualley), born—diverged?—from Elizabeth's body. The catch? Only one of them can be up and walking around at a time: one week on, one week off. And they must follow the steps of taking *The Substance*, which include a consistent 'feeding' of their other unconscious self, and daily injections of a stabilizer—Elizabeth's spinal fluid—to maintain the switch.

Though it's meant to be Elizabeth's consciousness in Sue's body, Sue starts to develop a mind of her own, and a battle of greed and jealousy ensues. This film, above all else, aims to make viewers uncomfortable with a series of wide angle shots, static shots, and unpleasant close-ups, to a point where you'd think director Coralie Fargeat was discovering them for the first time. Besides making you uncomfortable, I'm not sure this film does much else. It attempts to make a statement on aging: you should allow this natural process to happen, don't mess with it. Instead, I feel like the film depicted aging not as a spectrum, but one or the other. It's young or old, good or bad, beautiful or useless, which culminates in an ending too dependent on the shock factor of a woman's naked body and how many ways it can be distorted and destroyed. 


**Heartstopper
Season 3**

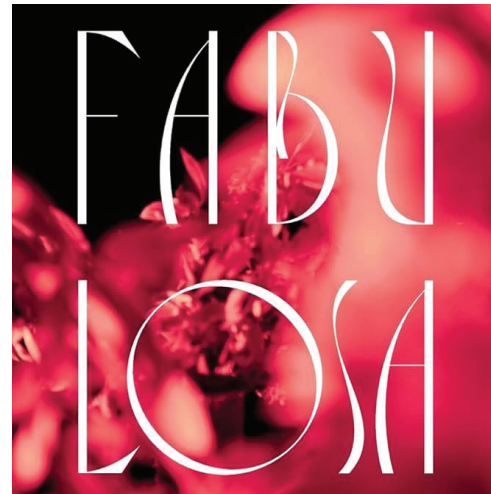
Andy Newbery

BY AMINA AHMED

Oct. 3 was an anticipated date for many this year, and not because of Mean Girls Day, but because of the third season of Netflix's "Heartstopper."

We start out at the beach with our beloved Paris trip group and see the beginning repercussions of Charlie's eating disorder. Simultaneously, Nick and the others are gearing up for university, an anticipatory yet stressful era. Many of our background characters gain complexity this season: Isaac and Imogen discuss their sexuality, Tori explores her feelings of loneliness, and the list goes on. This season, adapted from the comic of the same name by Alice Oseman, certainly didn't disappoint the die-hard fandom—at least according to Instagram and Twitter. Fan edits with the most fitting songs and stills from the eight episode series already plague the internet; this is to say that this season of "Heartstopper" touched its audience in a spectacular way.

Narratively, the season tackles difficult themes and messages: eating disorders and body image, mental health management in intimate relationships, different variations of what love and life look like, and infinitely many more. The beauty and uniqueness of Oseman's work derives from the pure innocence, naivety, and love of the characters within *Heartstopper*—they are simply young teenagers who value their friendships and love one another. And it is specifically this aspect that shines through in this season, despite its darkness and weight. We see young and loving people tackle complex issues of adulthood in a manner that speaks to the respect and kindness they hold for one another—an aspect I believe is a rare sight in reality. 

**Fabulosa**

Karen Rigby


BY QUINN MCCLURG

"The future pivots—all of us witness— / a magician's wife home from the void / mouthing it's nothing, nothing."

More than 10 years after her first award-winning release, UMN alumni Karen Rigby returns with "Fabulosa," a poetry book bound in a lick of fire, and strangled in a bouquet of silk. Within, deadly glamor and art history race headlong into a crash course, colliding masterfully with floral imagery and gently with quiet personal details.

Rigby's keel is even, each poem certain and directed, always established and confident. Within the first poem, "Why My Poems Arrive Wearing Black Gloves," the names of the book's three sections and their trajectories are revealed: "Noir & Glitz," the dramatic and femme-fatale-focused; "Wolf Behind the Saint," the land-centric and sanctified; and "In the Director's Cut," a dark and revelatory autobiography.


By creating intrigue, this structure becomes increasingly gratifying as the book progresses. The cultural contexts, inhabited locations, and personal circumstances underlying the previous poems are revealed and elaborated upon in good time, just like when earning the trust of a new friend.

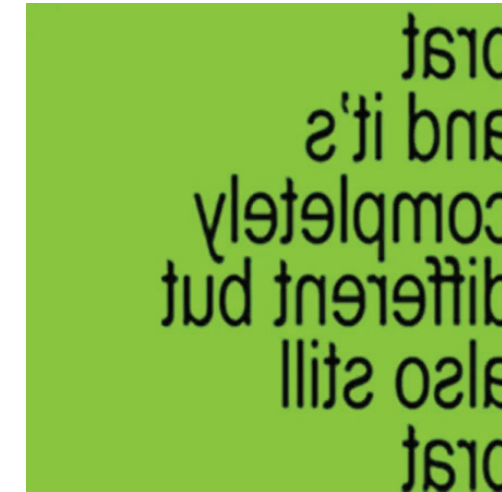
Additionally, each referenced artwork is easy to understand without background knowledge. Each source is exposed and explained, avoiding the presumptuous pitfalls that other ekphrastic poets so often fall into. Though at times some poems may feel a little too tangential, stream-of-consciousness, or focused on literal interpretations of an art piece, Rigby continuously revitalizes each piece with her surprisingly distinct diction, using images like "the painting is fabling / a crosswind in the trees," "the beast sings a / river to bones," or even "nipples / rivets on a gunwale." The best poems within this collection include "The Roses," "Tangelo," "Young Lady With Gloves," "To My Chinese Emigrant Mother Who Asks How Much Do You Weigh Now Every Time She Calls," and "Welcome to Our Learning Farm..." 

**Down the Witches
Road****BY ANISSE BOSU**

The greatly successful and as-of-late controversial Marvel studios has begun to release its newest television addition to the Marvel Comics Universe, "Agatha All Along." The show stars Wandavision's antagonist Agatha Harkness (Kathryn Hahn) as she embarks on the witches' road along with a reluctant coven of mismatched witches and witchcraft-obsessed Teen (Joe Locke). Each episode is full of endearing character interaction, fantastic costuming, and the most immaculate witchy vibes.

I adore the characters; they have so many amazing lines and interactions that really make the show. Agatha specifically has such deep relationships with each of the characters, showcased fantastically in Hahn's acting. Watching her interact with the rest of the cast, most notably Joe Locke and Aubrey Plaza (playing the mysterious green witch Rio), creates a level of empathy for an otherwise dastardly character. Each of the scenes with the pairs left me wanting more and longing for answers about their pasts.

Greatly differing from many of Marvel's other projects, the show has a more creepy feel that is amplified by its stunning production design. Not only does each character have their own distinct look, but they also get a costume change in nearly every episode themed after each trial of the road. The trials themselves are pretty basic but allow for fun allusions for those with other witchy knowledge. Though far from perfect and not necessarily Marvel's best, it's fun to watch and hits the mark when it comes to shows for the spooky season. It's really exciting to see such a diverse cast playing all these fun characters and I can't wait to see where the next half of the season takes us. 


The Wake**Brat and it's
completely
different but also
still brat**

Charli XCX

BY JOSHUA KLOSS

Just when you thought Brat summer was over, Charli XCX has come back with yet another version of the album that had everyone talking back when the initial version was released early in the summer of 2024. The remix album released on Thursday Oct. 10, under the title "Brat and it's completely different but also still brat." Though the track list released only a couple of days before the album's drop, fans and listeners were both unpleasantly and pleasantly surprised at the features and remixes.

Overall, Charli XCX stacks her album with a diverse and exciting range of artists to spice up the original "365" track list. Among such are alternative voices like Bon Iver on "I think about it all the time" and The Japanese House on "Apple," and pop stars like Ariana Grande on "Sympathy is a knife" and Billie Eilish on "Guess."

After my initial listen, I was most drawn to tracks like "365" featuring Shygirl and "Club classics" featuring BB trickz, both of which sampled parts of the original "365" with energized, fresh beats, suggesting that the tracks were involved in more conversation with one another than on the original "Brat." No matter how you feel about the lyrics of the features or the interpolated club beats, the remix album is one that will have you tapping your foot to the beat at the very least, if not full-on dancing. It's sassy, it's loud, and it's brat — made for those who want to keep dancing with the energy of Brat summer all year long. 

**Saturday Night:
Better Live?**


Jason Reitman

BY ARIANA NGUYEN

"Saturday Night Live" has embedded itself into American culture with iconic sketches and guest appearances. Those unfamiliar with the show may be familiar with its many successful alumni such as Tina Fey, Will Ferrell, Bill Murray, and many more. But 50 years ago, the cast and crew of "SNL" did not know if the show would make it to air.

Jason Reitman's film, "Saturday Night," recreates the precious 90 minutes before "SNL's" first show. The movie maintains the humorous spirit of sketch comedy while spotlighting a special kind of chaos that creates a show like "SNL." There is never a dull moment in the theater as dynamic camerawork takes us backstage to meet an array of characters and eavesdrop on their conversations. The music is stunning, and the star-studded cast does not disappoint with their performances.

But for those unfamiliar with the lore of "SNL," "Saturday Night" falls flat. The film is packed to the brim with characters, but their conflicts feel underdeveloped and inconsequential. Reitman makes the assumption that we can "fill in the blanks," using our own knowledge of "SNL" to ascribe significance to the movie. As a result, "Saturday Night" feels more like a collection of easter eggs for "SNL's" most avid fans rather than an impactful narrative.

Just like the real "SNL," "Saturday Night" is a mishmash of concepts and a hit or miss for the audience. 



French Cassettes

Indie-pop trio from San Francisco

BY AMINA AHMED

I had the pleasure of interviewing Scott Huerta, French Cassettes' singer-songwriter, to discuss the San Francisco trio's latest work. Their album, "Benzene," was released this past summer: the perfect season for their record of classic indie-pop songs meant to be blasted out of car windows. The album is a testament to their creativity and skills in several music forms and genres. Songs like "White Noise," "Normal Day," and many others push the realms of music in one way or another—melodically, lyrically, or within its production.

Q: Tell me about the lore of French Cassettes—how did you meet, and how did the band form?

Scott Huerta: Mackenzie and I met in high school when we were maybe 16. I'd been wanting to write music with a band, but Ripon, California, where we grew up, was a small town, so you'd be lucky to find enough people to make a band. For a while, it was me and my brother making songs and uploading them to MySpace. But a classmate of mine invited me to his house to "jam" one day, and I don't really "jam" very well, so I almost said no, but I said why not and went. Turned out it was at Mackenzie's house, and that's when I learned he played guitar and liked The Strokes, so I invited myself to keep coming over to write music together and asked if he wanted to be in a band. At least I think I asked—might've forgotten to ask first.

Then after we moved to San Francisco in 2008 or 2009, we met Rob and Andrew through the music scene. They had their own music projects that

we just loved. We'd often play shows with Rob's groups and go to his jazz gigs, and I remember being very impressed with Andrew's songwriting as his project, Andrew St. James, and after a while we started all playing as French Cassettes.

As for wanting to make music a career, it was mostly seeing music portrayed in movies and TV that did it for me when I was really young. Namely, Kirk Douglas performing "Whale of a Tale" on 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea, "Let's Get Together" from The Parent Trap (1961), Robert Downey Jr. singing "Every Breath You Take" on Ally McBeal, and that episode of Family Matters where Carl Winslow and the Darnells sing "Do You Love Me?"

Q: How would you define your music style? Has it ever changed over the course of your career?

A: Oh man, yes, it has changed. I think when we started in high school, we were listening to

a very healthy dose of Mars Volta and some of my favorite local bands were doing prog rock kinda stuff, and honestly, none of that was really what I listened to, but it was just interesting and fun to write and stood out to me I guess. There's a photo that got printed in the paper during that time of me on the floor shredding a solo at a show, and it looks cool, but I remember seeing it and thinking "...we don't have any songs where I'm supposed to play a solo?" so it was maybe a little too chaotic admittedly, and we dialed it back shortly after that. Tried doing more indie pop but with a horn section. That worked great, but eventually we stopped using horns, and now I'd say we're indie rock/pop.

Q: Describe your writing process—what inspires you to write? Is the process collaborative or individual?

A: For me I'm most inspired by small one- to two-second moments in songs rather than the whole tune. Obviously if I like the song, the whole thing is inspiring, but it's the small moments that come and go before you know it and leave an impression or make your brain light up for a sec, those bits in the song that get you excited without warning that make me want to write a song. Those are the best. Almost all the songs I've written are because I heard something like that and tried to stretch that feeling across an entire song.

We used to live together in a house in San Francisco, and we would get together every week to write songs all in the same room together, start to finish—that was so great. Now it's more like someone will make a demo for a song idea they have, and we'll all listen and get together to work it out, which is also great. I've developed a bad habit of starting song ideas and not finishing them, so what I'll do is set aside a whole night to just go hard-drive-hunting and rummage [to] find unfinished ideas to share with the guys, and they're always really good at figuring out how to finish it.

Q: Who are some musical artists that you look up to or heavily influence your music?

A: For me it's The Magnetic Fields, E.L.O., CAKE, Pixies, David Bazan (Pedro the Lion), Brian Wilson, Paul McCartney. For guitar work I really idolize Elliott Smith a lot. Truthfully, I don't listen to music



very often—I have to be in a very specific mood to put it on. But if I'm doing chores around the house, it's almost guaranteed I'm putting on Jeff Tweedy or The National.

Q: Tell me about the backstory and inspiration of "Benzene," your latest album

A: Well, it was a little bit of that hard-drive-hunting and a little of having an odd spark of inspiration from being in a weird place mentally for me personally. Before we knew it, we had maybe 30 song ideas to work on. Some were just small fragments of ideas, and some you could kinda picture the whole thing. Mackenzie engineered the album, so we had a ton of fun just spending days and days in his studio seeing which ideas would make it on the album. It felt amazing seeing "Benzene" actually be made, because some of those songs were ideas that sat for years that I loved, but I thought would never be finished.

Q: When your audience listens to this album, what do you hope they gain from it? How do you hope they feel?

A: I'm not picky. We've been told that the music helped someone through something, or was the soundtrack for this trip or that thing, and that's already above and beyond what I'd hope for. Still blows me away—I'm obviously very honored when I hear that. I guess if our music makes anyone's life any easier in any way, that's pretty great. When I uploaded one of the first songs I ever wrote to MySpace in high school, I remember being at a party and

it came on out of nowhere—it was pretty much a Bright Eyes rip-off and didn't fit the mood whatsoever, but I heard someone across the room stop and say, "oh I love this song," and that pretty much set me for life.

Q: "Benzene" is often admired for its lyricism, more specifically its hidden references or quotes—what is a hidden meaning that your fans may not have gotten on the first listen?

A: Someone at a show recently brought up this line to me because they liked it, which made me happy; it's one of my favorites too, because it's about my grandma Carolyn. The line is from our song "Up2You" and it goes, "My mother's mother talks in comic sans, I will never not love her, I wish there were more emails to read." She used to email me when we lived in the same house, using the same desktop computer—always only in comic sans font, and always with an accurate subject line. The topics were just whatever she had on her mind, or she'd have numbered questions about my life she was curious about. I would literally be with her all day sometimes and then log on and get excited to see an email from her and immediately reply. So yeah, not so encrypted of a lyric, but that's what I'm talking about when I say that.

Q: How has the tour been and what can we expect in the future? Is more music already in the works?

A: Tour has been fantastic. I mean touring in the fall? Come on—you're kidding me. And yes, we've already started work on new music that we'd like to get out early-ish next year. I've spent a lot of this tour secretly listening to the Dropbox folder with all the rough demos in the back of the Suburban. So, I'm clearly excited about it.



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