

# *The* Pitch

DECEMBER 2024 | FREE | THEPITCHKC.COM

REBEL SONG ACADEMY  
BY BETH LIPOFF

NAUGHTY NARRATIVES  
BY KAYLYNN MULLINS

HOLIDAY SELF-GIFT GUIDE  
BY EVERYONE

## GREEN DIRT ON OAK

SERVING THE SHORTEST PATH  
FROM FARM-TO-TABLE  
BY JORDAN BARANOWSKI



# The Pitch

## CRAFT COCKTAIL WEEK

DEC. 9-15

## HALF PRICE COCKTAILS ALL WEEK!



IN THE LOWEST FERNS



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#### KANSAS LOCATIONS

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Monday, Dec. 23: 5 and 7 pm  
Tuesday, Dec. 24:  
10+ am, 3, 5, 7, 9\* and 11\* pm

##### West (Olathe):

Monday, Dec. 23: 5 pm  
Tuesday, Dec. 24: 10+ am, 3, 5 and 7 pm

##### Overland Park:

Tuesday, Dec. 24: 10+ am, 3, 5 and 7 pm

##### Spring Hill:

Tuesday, Dec. 24: 3 and 5 pm

\*Children's Interactive Service

\*Childcare for 4 and under will not be offered at our later services

For Location Directions  
and more information visit:

**RESURRECTION.CHURCH/CHRISTMAS**

#### MISSOURI LOCATIONS

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Tuesday, Dec. 24: 10+ am, 3, 5 and 7 pm

##### Brookside:

Monday, Dec. 23: 5 pm  
Tuesday, Dec. 24: 10+ am, 3 and 5 pm

##### Blue Springs:

Tuesday, Dec. 24: 10+ am, 3 and 5 pm

##### Liberty:

Tuesday, Dec. 24: 5 pm

#### ONLINE AND TV

##### Join us Online:

Monday, Dec. 23:  
5 and 7 pm  
Tuesday, Dec. 24:  
10 am 3, 5, 7, 9 and 11 pm

##### Join us on Television:

Tuesday, Dec. 24  
CBS – 6 pm  
KMCI – 7 pm  
FOX – 10:30 pm  
NBC – 10:35 pm



**Resurrection**  
A UNITED METHODIST CHURCH





CHECK IT OUT ONLINE [thepitchkc.com](https://thepitchkc.com)

Photo by Sandy Morris/HBO



**Season 3 of *Somebody, Somewhere* embraces laughter, tears, and all things Manhattan, KS**

For a low-key comedy, actress Bridget Everett sure does a lot of crying in the third season of HBO's award-winning series *Somebody, Somewhere*. The show—set in Manhattan, Kansas—has seen Everett's alter-ish ego character, Sam, tackle plenty of personal highs and lows over the past two seasons. Now, in its final season, Sam's emotional arcs quietly peak... crater... and everything in between. Scan the QR code to take a glimpse at some of the highs and lows that season three of *Somebody, Somewhere* brought to the big screen as we wave farewell to a short-lived fan favorite.



Art by Keegan Hudspeth



microbusiness licenses. But, as this year's microbusiness winners have been announced, there have been many claims of malicious, predatory practices taking place. Scan the QR code to find out more about the complexity of the microbusiness license program in MO.



**Our Food Editor's KC gifting picks for the foodies on your list**

Showing up with a bottle of wine around the holidays is a standard for a reason. But now, with fewer people drinking and more people wanting to support local businesses, it's time to step up your gifting game. Our Food & Drink Editor Sarah Sipple has compiled a list of goodies that are tried and true in her kitchen, bar cart, and gifting roster. From a whimsical Missouri-grown garnish to a one-of-a-kind dessert delivery, all under \$40, you may end up making Santa jealous. Plus, you can gift these without worry that you're burdening your loved one with a "thing" that will be headed to the thrift store when spring cleaning begins. Scan the QR code for a sweeter (& spicier) holiday.



Photo by Sarah Sipple

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Cover Photo by Anna Petrow  
Design by Keegan Hudspeth





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Photo by Chris Ortiz. Art by Cassandra Jones

## Our December 2024 Events Calendar showcases Justin Timberlake, The Allman Betts Band, and holiday season happenings

With the overflowing amount of joy and cheer that our 2024 Gift Guide has filled within the pages, we have set aside our December 2024 Events Calendar to run strictly on ThePitchKC.com. But that doesn't mean that a ticket to a night of musical pleasure or comedic entertainment won't make for a perfect gift for that special someone this year. We all have that *one* friend who is obsessed with Justin Timberlake—Consider treating them to a trip to T-Mobile on Dec. 20. Or, if your vibe is more low-key artists, King Buffalo is set to strut through recordBar, and Better Lovers will be in LFK with the remaining college students during the winter break. Heck, even the kids can get in on the fun heading to see Blippi at Cable Dahmer Arena on the 12th. Scan the QR code to make your plans for the holiday season.



## Letter from the Editor

RETURN THE GIFT  
By Brock Wilbur

**Welcome, dearest reader. This is the December 2024 print issue of *The Pitch*, dispatched regularly from your home hub here in KC.**

Due to time constraints for the turnaround on getting these issues through the printing press, today's 'Letter from the Editor' has been typed up too close to the election to possibly unpack all the important, bizarre, and confounding moments around it. By the time this is in your hands, I'm sure you can find thousands and thousands of words over on ThePitchKC.com, where smarter people than myself are already putting together what the future of our country looks like.

Did Missouri voters rush the ballot box to preserve the right to reproductive healthcare while also re-electing Josh Hawley and other politicians who have vowed to undo this work? Yep. That's a thing that happened. Can I explain why? You're going to have to give me a few weeks—and some significant hangover recovery time for the rest of the political staff in editorial.

I've written the introduction for a December issue for five years now. In reviewing them, I do spend a good chunk of each explaining why this is a moment to be spent renewing connections to family, setting aside differences, and—in increasingly disparate realities—finding some common ground before embarking on the wide open potential of the year ahead.

We aren't doing that this year. Unbridled love and forgiveness are not our reason for the season. No one reading this needs to tap dance around the cataclysm that we're headed for, and the time for turning down

the volume dial on all the noise is not on the schedule. This is a goddamned mess, and to brush this aside in the name of unity and family is a form of surrender that simply has not been earned.

But no one is asking you to raise an angry mob, either. In fact, this is probably the only holiday-themed publication that is going to insist that you forget about everyone else. December is a big chunk of time, and our staff is in agreement: It belongs to you and you alone.

The average *Pitch* reader did not spend the last year remaining politically inactive; No one touching this page just watched an election season ebb and flow in front of them—blissfully uncommitted to trying to turn the tide of an administration that has promised a campaign of revenge, retribution, and retaliation against their personal enemies. No one holding these glossy pages is ready to pretend this all away.

But this isn't the copy of the magazine where we say to get pissed, hit the ground running, and throw yourself into the work of protecting the people in our lives that will depend upon us showing up to do the hard shit. It would be irresponsible to dive head-first into all that lies ahead until you've recharged your batteries. This December is all about putting on your own oxygen mask before helping secure those around you. It's the only way to keep yourself safe, and it's the only way the work gets done.

So, our traditional Holiday Gift Guide is in this issue. We've made a hard pivot at the last minute. Rather than just being a collection of nifty trinkets from local vendors—a list of baubles and merch that would make fine stocking stuffers—we've asked KC folks from all walks of life to tell us one thing: "Name a few purchases that fundamentally made your year better."

This is not a rote list of quirky shops and manufacturers where you buy "I Heart KC" knick-knacks to send to that cousin you never talk to. Fuck that cousin. Nuke



anyone from your list that isn't you and you alone. This is the Self-Care Gift Guide. This is advice for everything from apps to music to tools to books to spas to mantras to concepts even further outside the box... all from the folks who swear by them. Folks who said "This will help."

We're already assembling our January issue, and our plans for how to highlight the changemakers in KC—as well as how we're mobilizing and fundamentally changing how we cover politics here at *The Pitch*—well, you need to be ready for it. You need to be rested up and ready to dive in and get your hands dirty, to prove your humanity and to prove that better worlds than this are possible.

So mourn what must be mourned. Focus on you, and do anything and everything it takes to have your brain chemistry back in place, your wits about you, and the people you truly care about at your side.

'Tis the season for emotional treason.

Keep your teeth sharp and many, and your hearts dark and true.

*Pitch in and we'll make it through,*

*Brock Wilbur*

P

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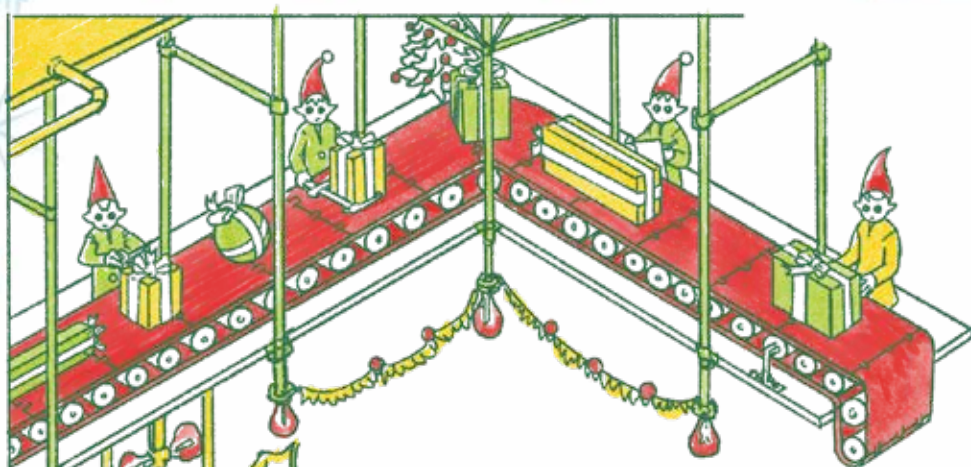
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# 2024 GIFT GUIDE



## BRYAN BUSBY

KMBC 9 Meteorologist

The book, *You are a badass*, by Jen Sincero. It is a self-help book like no other, using very directed, frank wording. With a title like that, you can only imagine the language she uses to motivate you. I have given friends and my protégés this book as a holiday gift for years.

**Laundry Sauce**—a detergent drop-in pod. My favorite scent is French Saffron. The scent lasts long in my clothes and especially in my sheets and towels.

Rather than pop, tea, or coffee, we are all instructed to drink more water.

This is just a portion of the full self-gift guide. To see expanded lists from many, many KC folks (and Pitch writers) check out the online version here:



But pure water can be bland. I cannot tell you how much more water I drink now, thanks to the **Cirkul** flavor cartridges. I drink down at least three or four 32 oz bottles daily! You can adjust how much flavor you can infuse in each sip. And, if you need some extra sparkle, I add one can of bubbly to the tumbler as an extra treat. With so many flavors in both skews, the combinations are endless.

I didn't get a chance to visit all my usual favorites. But, if you plan to dine around town besides our amazing BBQ places, some of my picks include **PotPie**, **Succotash**, **Jasper's**, **La Bodega**, and **Mesob**. Plus, thanks to a buddy of mine, **The Antler Room** is now a definite go-to for me.

There are so many wonderful locally-owned restaurants to support. On special occasions, when I like to splurge on a nice steak, I head to **Gordon Ramsay Steak at Harrah's Casino**. Sometimes, the best gift is time spent with those whose company you enjoy. And what better way is there than hanging out over a meal and drinks?

## ELLIE WHEELER

Professional Soccer Player for the Kansas City Current

We obviously have to start out with my second home, CPKC Stadium! It is truly such a special place, filled with the best fans in the world. I couldn't imagine being anywhere else. I HIGHLY recommend getting tickets to experience a KC Current game there; It is absolutely unreal! What would be a better gift than getting to come see the KC Current play?

Coming in second on my list is **Paletas Tropicana**. I come here an unhealthy amount, but it is so worth it! If you love paletas or mangoneadas, this is the place to go! My favorite is the Double Mangoneada with strawberry and lime sorbet. SO GOOD!

Finally, if you're an accessory and jewelry person like me, I definitely recommend taking a look inside **Rowan's** shop! I have gotten a ton of my earrings from here since being in KC, and love them! They are great quality and have such cute designs as well! One of my favorite pairs is these cute pink heart earrings I wear in my helix piercing! These would be a great gift for a close friend, partner, or family member!



## CHRIS GOODE

Owner of Ruby Jean's Juicery

Art from **Reabbie Art**, or Remy Wharry, has enhanced my year both personally and at Ruby Jean's, where we have a few of her works on the walls. She has a refreshing take on Black culture, and I appreciate how much she involves her daughter as she chases her dreams.

A day at **The Laya Center** is a top recommendation for anyone. A full day of services like massage, cryotherapy, a facial, and sustenance from their Herban Tea Bar does the soul and body good.

Lastly, two more local favorites have to be the **canned palomas** from **Mean Mule** (I first tried it at Buffalo State Pizza) and **cologne** from **Ulah**. One of Ulah's signature scents—**Prairie**—is my favorite, and it has a coordinating candle, too.



## JILLIAN CARROLL LETRINKO

Kansas City Current Broadcast Host

No matter the occasion, from a Chiefs game to a baby shower or even a last-minute trip, the **styling services and selection at Scoobie** in the Shops at Prairie Village always have me looking and feeling my best! Sarah provides personal styling and the entire team is so helpful. They truly work to understand individual styles while keeping clients on trend!

**Custom sunnies** that sparkle are always a must! Abby at **Goldie Sun** hand-makes custom sunnies and accessories. These make amazing gifts—I had cus-





tom sunnies made for all five of my nieces and nephews, and they are just darling! Also, Abby worked with me to design a stadium-approved sparkly Kansas City purse, and it has been a lifesaver this season!

How about an **ugly Christmas sweater that doubles as a donation?! Zuzu's Petals** is a local nonprofit that works to help families who have experienced financial hardship ensure their children have a magical Christmas! The nonprofit purchases gifts for the children, provides a free Christmas dinner, and even gives the family a beautiful Christmas wreath! Their annual fundraiser this year features a locally designed Ugly Christmas Sweater, and it is SO cute! I bought one for myself and my husband and I will definitely be rocking it to a few different Ugly Christmas Sweater Parties this holiday season!



## HAYLEY LEWIS

### Sports Reporter

If you're a gameday girlie like me, I'm sure you're always on the hunt for the latest Chiefs gear! One of my favorite finds this season has been **Gameday Couture!** Not only do they offer a wide variety of fan-favorite trends, but their styles are ever-changing and keep any sports lover up to date! When football and fashion collide, I'm in heaven.

Another great find this year was **Rochester Brewing and Roasting Company.** This coffee shop located in downtown Kansas City in Crossroads has been one of my favorite finds for WFH days or late-night study sessions. Enjoy a coffee or espresso martini while knocking out your work! Whatever floats your boat! A gift card to this local spot would be ideal for anyone. They also host trivia nights, thirsty Thursdays, and local parties. It's a HUGE space, so grab a spot in a quiet cozy corner, or chat it up in the mess hall.

One thing I know I'll be gifting this

season are **Cleaning Maids In & Out's services.**

This year I discovered how it feels to delegate part of my to do list and hiring a local, women-owned cleaning service was something I should have done years ago! Not only can you gift your friends/family a clean space, but you give them time and I'm sure some much-needed freedom from chores.

Lastly, you can't put a price on a once-in-a-lifetime experience. CPKC Stadium is breaking barriers in the world of Women's Sports, and its historic stadium hosts some of the most electric **KC Current games.** Tickets to watch these ladies are a must for any sports lover!



## GEORGE W. GATES II

### Owner of Gates Bar-B-Q

Let me start off with my all-time favorite gift! Of course, you know it would be a **gift certificate from Gates Bar-B-Q,** and with five locations, there's always one nearby.

I'm that person who never puts all their eggs into one, two, or even three baskets! I feel the same way about holiday gift giving. Because of my wife, every day is a holiday in our house! We enjoy the simple but peaceful things in life! We give family and friends our favorite **Meyers Clean Day Lavender Candles.** This scent is soothing, incredibly refreshing, and can be purchased easily.

You can never go wrong with any spa treatments! Our favorite location would be **The Spa At Briarcliff.** My wife happens to enjoy a full-body massage after the free yoga classes. Now that's something to consider!

Last but not least, there's always a great time to be had with a couple of **tickets to Jazzoo!** There's food from an array of local restaurants as well as live music from some of Kansas City's finest Musicians!



## MICHELLE COOPER

### Professional Soccer Player for the Kansas City Current

I have gone to **Driftwood Ceramics** multiple times, and it is so much fun. The people who work there are extremely knowledgeable and make the experience of throwing pottery so enjoyable. All levels of pottery experience can go, and I highly recommend it!

My dog Moodie—I rescued him from **Lucky 13,** and he is my rock. On off days, we often go on trails here

around Kansas City. If we aren't on trails, we are at home cuddling or trying out some new food spots in the area!

**Pitchside Coffee**—my teammates! You have to catch them while they're out on an off day because it's not too often! They are constantly working to grow their business and watching it is so exciting. Stay tuned to see what's coming up next from them!

**CPKC Stadium**—Being a part of history and inspiring future generations is absolutely priceless. Being able to call this stadium home is a feeling like no other. **Kata Nori**—The BEST sushi in Kansas City. The owners are so incredible and have such a passion for their restaurant. They truly care about their customers and make every visit an enjoyable one.

## DÁNIEL SALLÓI

### Professional Soccer Player for Sporting Kansas City

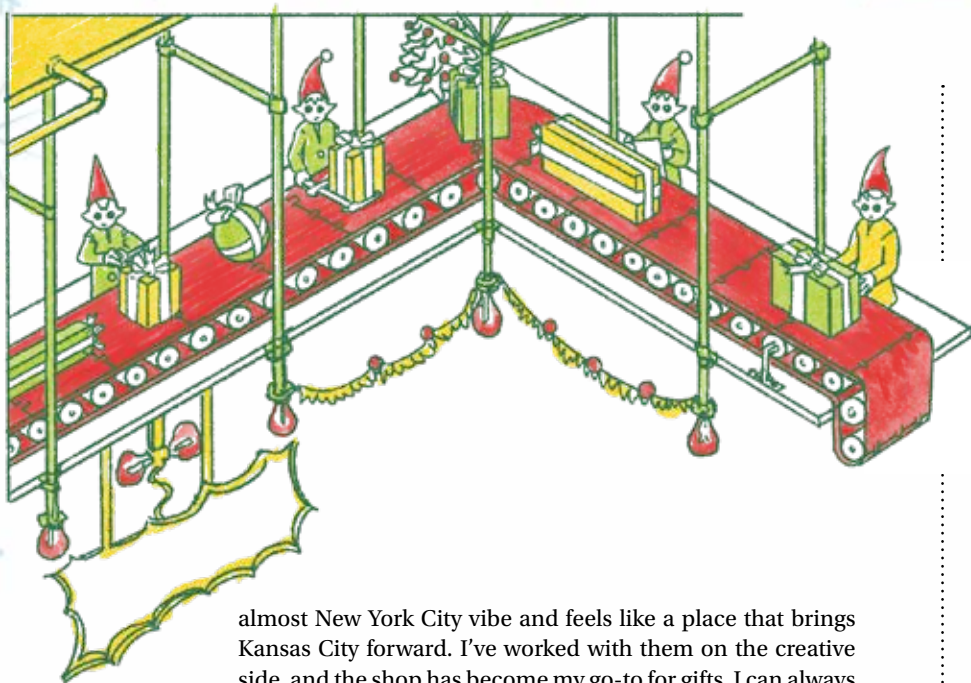
After trying padel for the first time this year, I am hooked—So much so that we invested in bringing it to KC: **La Casa**

**del Padel.** As an athlete, I enjoy trying new sports, but this game [padel] is great for anyone who enjoys tennis or pickleball—It's a dynamic and social game. It's worth a try and adding to your weekly rotation.

**Mergers and Acquisitions** has a really cool business model. With its retail side and then creative studio, it has this







almost New York City vibe and feels like a place that brings Kansas City forward. I've worked with them on the creative side, and the shop has become my go-to for gifts. I can always find something for my mom, sister, and girlfriend there.

**Varsity Club**—The River Market spot has a perfect combo of drinks and food for any situation. I followed Disco Burger pop-ups for a while and am glad they have a more permanent spot. It has a good vibe, great burgers and cocktails, and is run by very nice people.

**Billie's Grocery** is in my constant rotation. I can count on it for a healthy, high-quality meal as an athlete. Once I find a trustworthy spot like this one, it takes a lot to convince me to try something else. For breakfast, brunch, coffee, everything—Billie's is my first pick when I need to feel good. A gift card to Billie's will help pass on that good feeling.

## TAD O'HAD

**Kansas City Mavericks Head Coach**

**Legacy** by James Kerr allows readers to take into perspective what the rugby club, The All Blacks, can teach us about the business of life. It's an incredible book gifted to me by our starting goaltender Jack LaFontaine during our 2024 Kelly Cup Finals run. He and I share books, and this has a huge impact on my coaching.

**A Liga Privada number 9 cigar from Kansas City's La Cultura Cigar & Social**—"Liga Privada" means "private blend." It is the perfect name, as this cigar was originally crafted not for resale, but for their own personal humidors. Dozens of intricate blends were created, but number 9 was flawless in both flavor and character. Rich, complex, and full-bodied without being harsh, this amazing vitola is best described in one word: satisfying. This gift is perfect for any man in your life looking to unwind and enjoy a cigar. My favorite activity after a Mavericks win is enjoying a cigar.

From my home state and shipped from Seattle—Home of the KC Mavericks affiliate Seattle Kraken—the best **"Copper River Sockeye Salmon"** directly from Pike Place market in downtown Seattle. It's one of my favorite gifts to send close friends for the holidays. The flavors and taste are amazing. It brings me back to the Pacific Northwest.

**Tickets to the Kansas City Mavericks game.** Live hockey is the best with its fast-paced and hard-hitting. Cable Dahmer Arena has a great fan experience, fun family atmosphere, and free parking. Come out and support Kansas City's professional hockey team.



## PAULINA OTERO

**Artist**

The first product or service that has really impacted my life this year has been my **Power Life membership**. Practicing yoga and exercising constantly has really helped my productivity and mental health. It has also allowed me to share buddy passes with friends who want to exercise together and create a better routine for myself.

When I feel like treating myself or someone else, I book a **massage at Haven Wellness + Spa**. They have a great variety of massage options and such a relaxing vibe in their space that automatically makes you feel at peace. They also have the cutest gift shop that you can browse before or after your service.

In terms of enjoying food and celebrating special moments, my go-to is **Fox and Pearl**. It is such a special restaurant that brings a new farm-to-table menu every season. The staff is amazing, and the place has such an inviting atmosphere.



## STEPHONNE SINGLETON

**Musician**

Our minds get so busy making up pictures. I mean, especially now. My partner took me to an **ADHDY Craft** night in August. The gift of a canvas and paint put what stirs my mind and soul on a surface. Visual art has never been more part of my life and mission since that day. The gifts of paint, brushes, and space from my partner that day (and days since), Peter Warren, and the materials I've brought myself have revealed new and tangible ways to bring form to pain, healing, joy, and truth. We must expand our creative capacities and not just dream, but do and make. Paint has been a gift and a key to hope.

**New ink!**—Keith Haring is MY GUY! I'm pretty sure we dated in the '80s before my reincarnation. For my birthday, I got together with Mikey Wheeler of Windhorse Tattoo to pay tribute to my former baby daddy and reclaim my body from abuse and fetishizing. This EPIC thigh sleeve has not only transformed my body, but it has also given me opportunities to trust fully, breathe more deeply than ever before, move past discomfort to a fully realized vision, and take it easy and heal!

**A long goodbye**—In May, I said goodbye to Maverick, my dog of 17 years. It may not seem like a gift, but to love him for that long and for him to love me, he just wouldn't let go on his own. He was truly my best friend and the best boy. I couldn't watch him suffer, and in trying to hold on, it was denying us both freedom. Dr Locke at Union Hill Animal Hospital was great. There, with my partner and ex, that dog got to say bye to all three of his dads, and in giving him peace, Maverick gave me peace, too. He also helped me learn to let go—to never forget, but to keep in love and go on loving better because of him, my greatest love yet.

I used to be a proud proclaimer of not being much of a reader, but boy, has that changed! About to quit my three-ish year stint in Missouri cannabis, finishing writing for the new album, and feeling an unexplainable urge, I rushed to Prosperos and Half Price Books in August, and I can't put down books since. Some recommendations: **The Philosophy of Andy Warhol** by Andy Warhol, **Early Jazz** by Gunther Schuller, **The History of Nature** by C.F. Von Weizsäcker, and **The Untethered Soul** by Michael A. Singer. You. Betta. READ.







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## ANGELA PRITCHETT

Communications Manager at  
Lead to Read KC

The cooking classes at Hemma Hemma will fuel your creativity, feed your soul, and fill up your fridge. My daughter Grace and I did the Summer Tomato class in September, and I have dreams about the tomato toast we made.

At the Greater KC PRSA's February Happy Hour hosted at Vine Street Brewing, I found my new favorite local beer, the Maris. We learned all about the beer goddess honored in this pale ale and her ties to the first African women brewers. She's their logo, so you can catch her eye every time you order a beer.

Made in KC has a monthly VIP program that supports local makers and introduces you to new products. I love getting the email announcing that month's free featured item and the reminder to go get my two free beverages at their cafes and bars.

## BRYAN TRUTA

Senior Director of Radio Operations at 90.9 The Bridge

Music! From Taylor to Billie to Waxahatchee, the year has been full of amazing music. Or—since I might be a bit biased—for less than the price of a streaming service, you could gift yourself music AND community with a monthly membership to 90.9 The Bridge! Your gift funds new music discovery, support of community partners like the KC Current, and, of course, local working artists and musicians!

I have to attribute this to our Music Director, Sarah Bradshaw, who opened me up to the world of Tous les Jours Bakery in Overland Park. Get a macaron, a Danish, or a cream-filled pastry. Heck, everything is amazing at TLJ!

*The Spy Who* podcast. Okay, I didn't buy it, per se, but I did find some escapism this summer by immersing myself in stories of World War II, the Cold War, and The Troubles. With a succinct five to six episodes per season, the six available seasons will get you through a number of commutes, all while making you wonder, *Has that blue car been tailing me since I got off the highway?*



## BARB SHELLY

Pitch Politics Reporter

A bike—doesn't matter if it's new, old, electrical, or whatever. Freedom is just two wheels away. My new road bike and the friends that I meet on the road are 90% of my physical and mental health plan.

I walked around for weeks with a blur in front of my left eye because the optical shop where I purchased my glasses wanted an exorbitant price to replace a scratched lens. Costco Optical did it for a third of the cost, and I will never purchase glasses anywhere else.

Shelf-stable gnocchi is having a moment. Turns out, this simple Italian staple is great fun to brown in a frying pan and serve with just about anything. Gnocchi recipes are suddenly everywhere, so check them out.

Enjoy Pure Food + Drink in Leawood has a drink called "hug in a mug." With steamed milk, maple syrup, vanilla, turmeric, and more spices, it lives up to its billing. Sip it on the sunny patio and I guarantee you will feel restored. ☑



## ABBY OLCESE

Pitch Film Editor

*Under the Cover*—If you're shopping for self-care, you want something that'll entertain you and make you feel good. Leave it to a romance bookstore to cater to ALL of those needs. The store's books are organized by subgenre, and the employees are so knowledgeable that, no matter your interest, level of romance knowledge, or spice comfort, they can help you find something you'll love. Extra special bonus: By shopping local, you're sticking it to Jeff Bezos. Self-care AND resistance!

*Criterion Channel*—One of the more reasonably priced streaming services out there, with outstanding selections. Every month, the channel puts up new collections of films to help guide your viewing. My favorite last year was a collection dedicated

to movies with synth scores, which included classics like *A Clockwork Orange*, deep cuts like the Australian horror film *Next of Kin*, and the British haunted house movie *The Legend of Hell House*. Subscribe to be the friend who hosts the weirdest and best movie nights in 2025.

*Idles' Tangk*—My favorite album of the last year, by my favorite band of the last decade—cathartic punk rock about dismantling systems, calling out bull, loving yourself, and standing up for others. If I ever end up in a fight, I want Joe Talbot standing next to me.



This is just a portion of the full self-gift guide. To see expanded lists from many, many KC folks (and Pitch writers) check out the online version here:

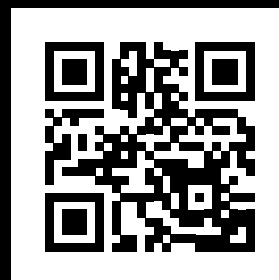




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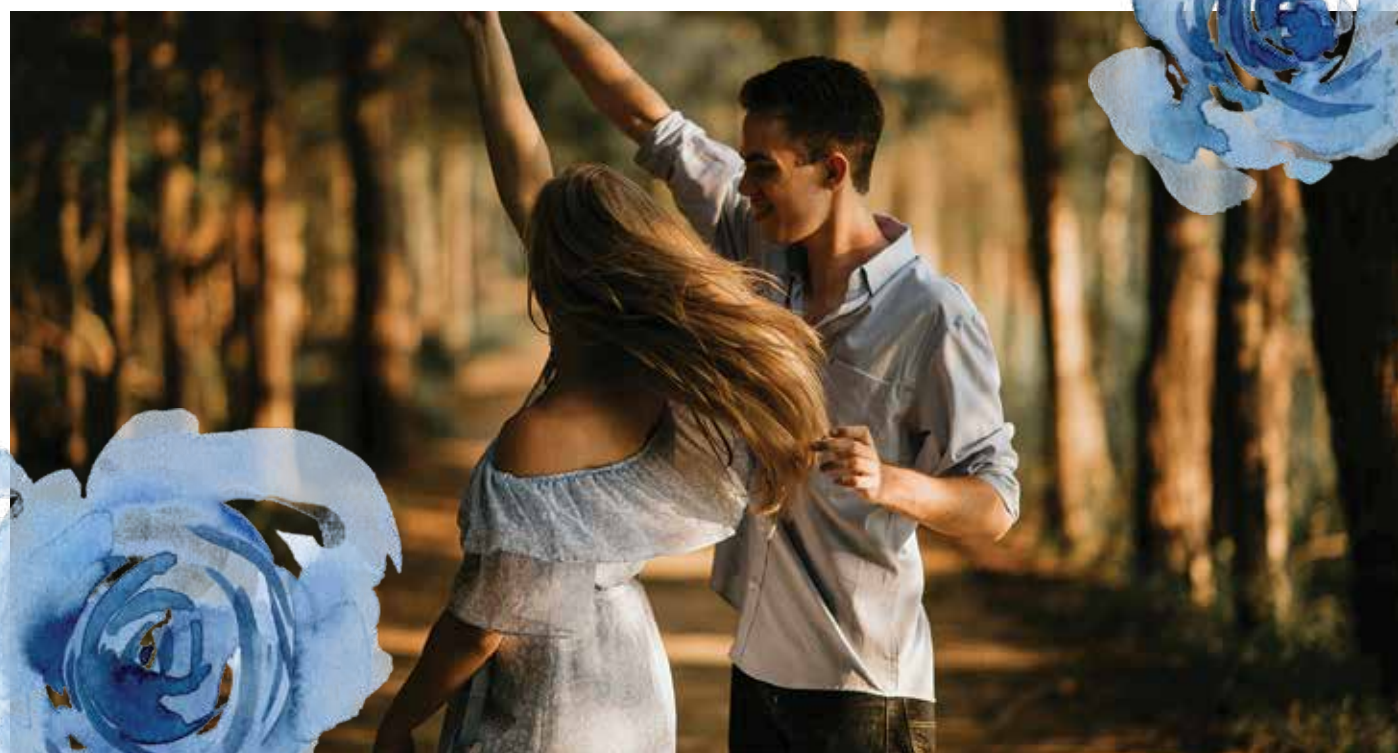
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# Smut Smitten

NAUGHTY NARRATIVES PUTS KC'S  
SPICIEST AUTHORS ON TOP  
By Kaylynn Mullins

**Ladies, we don't have to pretend anymore.** We all know that the romance novel you're devouring isn't a Hallmark movie meet-cute; It's 400 pages of smut. We're finally embracing our degeneracy in the novel department, and the demand for our sexy stories is being met right here in Kansas City.

On Nov. 2, Karma Community Market in Blue Springs hosted "Naughty Narratives"—a romance book fair featuring local authors. With cheeky decor, discount lingerie, a vibrator table, and wall-to-wall flirty fiction, it was essentially a spicy reader's heaven.

Lexie Scott—one of the many writers present—explained the emergence of smutty books into the mainstream; "I think TikTok probably helped a lot. Everyone's just being more open and real about it. It takes just one person to open up and realize you're not alone and that there's no shame in it."

Scott pens "paranormal/why choose" novels, which essentially means supernatural reverse harems. Perfect for those who were both team Edward and Jacob. "There's no jealousy or love triangles. All the men choose her and don't make her choose between them," Scott says.

Her largest series—nine-part *The Sorcerer's Society*—brings the leading lady magic, turmoil, and five boyfriends. These gals got *very creative* on these pages, writing love stories about werewolves, shapeshift-

ers, and even aliens. Titles varied from the sweet and heartwarming to the steamiest scenarios, leaving no reader without a new addition to their goodreads shelf.

For those new to romance novels, they're a trope-centric genre. Some crave the tension and build-up of "slow burns," some look for provocative "enemies to lovers," and others for scandalous office affairs. Maybe it's the pre-teen AO3 and Wattpad phase, but categorizing the books makes finding exactly what excites you seamless. And KC writers have delivered anything your risqué heart could desire.

Author of the *Vampire's Melody* series, Sophie Stern, brought a much-needed queer voice to the smut scene. Her series follows a human, Melody, who stumbles upon a vampire's den and joins their undead polycule. "I'm a queer author, so I really loved the chance to write a queer vampire romance," Stern say. "A lot of time when I come across vampire books, it's all male/female relationships. So I wrote what I wanted to read."

The popularity of fantasy romance con-

tinues to rise after the widely loved *A Court of Thorns and Roses* series by Sarah J. Mass hit mainstream bookshelves. For those awaiting the next *ACOTAR* installment, look local for your next fae fable.

M.A. Kilpatrick's fae novels combine Kansas City, Ireland, and the Fae home world. The three-part *Dúbailte Chronicles* details forbidden elemental magic, fated pairings, and found family. "The fae can do all of the things we wish we could do," says Kilpatrick. "They can heal themselves, and they can fly. So, being able to immerse yourself in a world that's much less anxiety-inducing as our own is definitely the appeal."

When Kansas City-born Keegan dismisses the eerie prophecy and visits the fae homeland in a desperate attempt to help her sick mother, she meets fellow fae Calder. While they both conceal major secrets, they team up and, of course, fall in love. The three-part series seems to be the perfect cozy read to get you through another harsh Midwest winter.

The real magic, however, is the amount of heart poured into these independent authors' works. Just about every table had character art, custom stickers, candles that smell like the fae home, and other goodies that invite readers into their worlds. Kilpatrick even has a tea blend and lamb stew recipe in her book box, showcasing just how passionate they are about their stories and sharing them with their readers.

Kilpatrick isn't working alone, however. Her daughter, Morgana Black, had a stand just down the hall. "She printed all these stickers for me and helped with the magnetic bookmarks. She has done a lot to help me get started," Kilpatrick says.

Black also dipped her pen into the fantasy ink, but her work has a much darker twist. Her Hamlet-inspired "The Sorrow of Shadows" combines the classic with a scandalous enemies-to-lovers story. The main character's only hope is to join forces with a man she loathes, but could this tension be

caused by something a little more alluring? "There's a bit of a taboo, forbidden romance between them... he's actually engaged to her mother," says Black.

With the help of another local author, E.C. Garrett, Black sells character candles and even tarot cards inspired by her debut novel—another example of the wonderful community local writers have formed around their work.

Though most stories presented at the fair leaned more into the supernatural, there were still options for those wanting an earthly love story. "Bathe in the Moonlight" by Stacia Kaywood takes place in World War II when a hiding German woman finds a wounded American soldier stumbling into her home. The story not only details the strong connection between the main characters but also delves into rebuilding themselves post-war.

As endearing and emotionally impactful as this Kaywood tale is, her alternative pen name offers a different type of passion. Under Kat Cummings, her series of erotic



office romance books are full of escapades between an HR director and the head of marketing. I can only imagine the water cooler talks their co-workers have during lunch.

So, if your girlfriend always has her nose buried in a book, or your friend's Barnes and Noble addiction has left them pacing the aisles for a title they don't already own, consider one of these homegrown romances as the perfect gift this holiday season. Not only will you give them something that BookTok hasn't recommended yet, but you'd be supporting local artists, which is extremely sexy.

Visit these author's websites, Barnes and Noble, Amazon, or KC's romance bookstore—Under the Cover—to find all your spicy book needs. And who knows? Maybe you and one of these books will even share the same bed at the overbooked inn together. Only for warmth, of course. **P**





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Photos by Anna Petrow



# Money Grows on Cheese

**GREEN DIRT ON OAK SERVES UP THE SHORTEST PATH FROM FARM-TO-TABLE**  
By Jordan Baranowski

**Kansas City has no shortage of restaurants that showcase local products like meats, cheeses, produce, and beer. However, only a select few live on both sides of the “farm-to-table” equation.**

That’s where Green Dirt on Oak steps to the table. On the longer-standing half of the family, you have the meats and cheeses of Weston’s Green Dirt Farm—a sheep dairy farm that has been operating for over two decades. The other half is the beautiful Green Dirt on Oak restaurant and market in the Crossroads Art District. The rustic, multistory spot has put together a menu that’s perfect for showing off the best that its sister farm—and other local producers—has to offer.

Green Dirt on Oak uses as many local, small-batch farmers as they can. Nearly all

their proteins come from their own farm, Mac’s Farms, or Buttonwood Farms, and their produce almost exclusively comes from local sources as well.

Green Dirt Farms Owner and Founder Sarah Hoffmann—who uses the incredibly clever title of “Big Cheese” in our correspondence—says that every ingredient included on their menu is scrutinized. “If we aren’t sourcing locally, the next test is whether or not a producer is in the running for a Good Food Award,” she says. “The Good Food Foundation tests for quality, but they also have strict sustainability standards for all their categories. If a product wins a Good Food Award, it shows that there’s purpose behind it. Those are the types of producers that we want to support at Green Dirt on Oak.”

Hoffmann’s mentality is shared by the entire team, from Executive Chef Austin Suedmeyer to Director of Restaurants Oscar Arévalo and beyond. It also ties together the different ways you can enjoy Green Dirt on Oak.

On the first floor of their building, located on 16th and Oak Street, you’ll find a daytime cafe that serves lunch and brunch items, along with a small market of prepared items like to-go cheese and char-

cuterie. Move up a floor, and you’ll be in the dinner space, where shareable plates reign supreme, and Green Dirt Farm cheeses are included in nearly every dish. Marching to the top floor, you’ll find a rooftop patio—When I went to visit Green Dirt on Oak, we could only order items and then take them up with us. In the near future, they’ll have a limited menu on the rooftop so you can take in the view while someone else brings you all the cheese and cocktails your heart desires.

There are even bigger plans in store for the rooftop space. Once they have their set “Cheese Hour” menu (instead of Happy Hour, naturally) in place, they plan on also utilizing the top story of the building for live events, like ticketed music events and private dining. Hoffmann is also excited to be able to allocate different areas of the restaurant for private events, as the ample space has several areas that can be easily kept separated.

Of course, all these fun details don’t mean much if the food on offer isn’t worth it. In our experience, that’s not something to worry about. We started with some lamb tartare that easily ranks as some of the best tartare we’ve ever sampled. Veggie-centric dishes came next: root veggies with sunflower oil and a tart, tasty (and surprisingly large) salad were just what we needed to cleanse our palates after the richness of the tartare.

For entrées, we ordered the Mac’s Farm Heritage Pork and the Green Dirt Farms Lamburger. The pork was the perfect combination of textures and flavors—A beautiful sear on the outside of the pork and a few chicharrones lent a luxurious crunch to the dish, and a fruit chutney helped cut through the rich flavor, keeping the profile from being too one-note. The lamburger was also delicious, with a markedly different texture than what you’d find in a standard beef burger. It was perfectly cooked and seasoned, and, after the first few bites, it was quickly scarfed down. Dessert was a cheesecake that—despite being stuffed—we absolutely inhaled. Cheesecake from a sheep dairy farm? No notes.

The nature of the menu is constantly evolving. Hoffmann says they try to keep the menu the same every few days, but certain things do have to be altered based on the ingredients they can order. “We don’t want someone to order something on a Wednesday and tell their friends about it, only for them to come a few days later and not be able to find it,” she says. “That said, when you’re ordering local, small-batch items, you can’t always get the same things week-to-week. We’re grateful to have such a talented, creative team who can compose and thrive under a demanding setup.”

Beyond the food, there are many elements to enjoy at Green Dirt on Oak. The space, service, and drinks were all on point as well—a special shoutout needs to be made for the succinct but impressive wine

list—and it’s a location that seems just as suited for cocktails and snacks at the bar as it is for a special occasion meal.

Hoffmann says that was all part of the process of bringing Green Dirt on Oak to life. “We’ve wanted to bring a version of our cafe to Kansas City since the farm opened,” she says. “We just knew we’d have to find the right vibe for the city. We found this location in 2021 and really decided it was go-time, starting construction in January 2022. Every step along the way, we’ve tried to be deliberate about why we were designing or creating certain elements, and we can’t wait to see how things continue to evolve.” The restaurant finally opened for business on April 3 of this year.

Whether you’re a cheese connoisseur or you’re just starting out, Green Dirt on Oak is a great way to taste what local farms have to offer. Even if you aren’t hungry, you can always just un-rind with a glass of Nebbiolo on the rooftop patio. Just get the cheesecake to take home with you.

Green Dirt on Oak is located at 1601 Oak Street, Kansas City, MO 64108 in the Crossroads Art District. The cheese and coffee shop is open Wednesday through Sunday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m, with their brunch menu available Thursday through Sunday until 2 p.m. They are open for dinner Wednesday through Sunday from 5 p.m. to 10 p.m. **P**



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# EAT THIS NOW:



Photo by Sarah Sipple

## TORTILLA SOUP AT IXTAPA FINE MEXICAN CUISINE

7103 NW Barry Rd, Kansas City, MO 64153,  
and 7305 W 95th St, Overland Park, KS  
66212. • By Sarah Sipple

### Ixtapa is one of those restaurants that I stumbled upon one day in the Northland.

After a simple dinner, I was ready to tell everyone I knew about it. Then, I exited through the breezeway and noticed what was on the wall—Plaques and framed headlines covered the entryway, touting “Best of KC” wins spanning decades. No friends needed to be told. I was the one missing out.

I’ve thoroughly enjoyed a variety of dishes here, such as the tacos camellitos, taquitos, and definitely the salsa—Though it

is very thin. But nothing stands out like the tortilla soup. There’s an ironic twist to this tortilla soup. There are no tortillas involved. I have ordered it three times, and never has it been served with tortilla strips. It does, however, contain large chunks of chicken that look and taste as fresh as if it came straight from a coop out back. Yet chicken is not listed in the menu description.

This dish fits into my made-up category of “healing soups.” The warmth is comforting; The broth is soothing and savory without overt saltiness. Vegetables add pops of color and nutrients. Chunks of avocado fit easily into a spoonful and add a decadent texture. Last, but not least, the chicken adds protein with large, tender pieces of light and dark meat. Those are the first to be devoured.

Keep this soup in mind when your insides (or maybe your soul) need to warm up a bit this winter.

# DRINK THIS NOW:



Photo by  
Tiffany  
Watts

## VALTRES AT INCLINE ON 9TH

1414 W 9th St, Kansas City, MO 64101 • By  
Tiffany Watts

### Kansas City’s West Bottoms has a new addition that’s making waves, not just for its food but for its creative cocktails.

Tucked into a historic building with an ambiance that’s equal parts industrial chic and cozy lounge, Incline on 9th has the area buzzing.

I recently had the pleasure of visiting on a date night with my girlfriend, and while we were eager to dive into the menu, it was the cocktail selection that caught us by surprise. Enter the Valtrex—a cocktail that completely stole the show.

Made with tequila reposado and a smoky hint of mezcal, it’s layered with

bright citrus and balanced by a touch of honey. This drink delivers everything I love in a cocktail: complexity, a hint of sweetness, and that smoky, savory edge from the mezcal that makes you savor each sip.

What made our experience even more memorable is that my girlfriend has never been a fan of mezcal, often finding its smoky profile a bit too overpowering. But the Valtrex managed to win her over, thanks to its deliciously balanced flavors. The subtle smokiness of the mezcal didn’t dominate but rather harmonized with the tequila and honey.

Out of all the cocktails we tried that evening, the Valtrex stood out as our number one—a drink we both loved and would definitely go back for. 🍸

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# Mise en Place

## WHAT MAKES AIYANA "NANA" FUIAVA KC'S FAVORITE RESTAURANT SERVER

By Sarah Sipple

*Aiyana "Nana" Fuiava embodies the famous Cajun phrase that Jazz—A Louisiana Kitchen is built upon: Laissez les bons temps rouler. Her skill in helping guests keep the good times rollin' led to her achieving the title of Best Restaurant Server in The Pitch's Best of KC voting this year.*

*Her warmth and energy is infectious when she's "on," which happens to be six days a week. Starting with an opening shift at Waldo Cafe and ending the day at Jazz on 39th, Nana draws on experience at all levels of the restaurant industry to provide diners with a memorable experience. Oh, and after that, she may go work a pop-up with her brother at their food truck.*

*Nana's secret to making it all work? Treating customers like family, having serious relaxation strategies, and being a good teammate.*

### The Pitch: Tell us about yourself.

**Aiyana "Nana" Fuiava:** I definitely come from a big family. I am six of nine, known as the oldest of the younger kids. I moved here from California in 2016, and, all of a sudden, all my sisters who were here worked at the same restaurant, Chubby's on Broadway, before they closed in 2018. I started there as a busser and worked my way up within three months. I've done every position in every restaurant I've ever worked at. I still work for their sister restaurant, Waldo Cafe, in the mornings. During COVID, my brother and I opened up a food truck which is still running today: UCE Kitchen.

### Congratulations on winning Best Restaurant Server. Were you surprised?

I have a lot of regulars. I know the days that they come in, I know their order. But hearing that really got me juiced. Like damn, I'm really doing something out here. When we found out I was nominated, my favorite band happened to be playing. My boss told them, and three times that night, they mentioned it on the mics. I got nervous. I'm a talkative, personable person, but put me on a stage or in the spotlight, and I shut down. I said, "Why would you do that? I just lost the seven tops order in my head!"

### What's the best part of your job?

Here, and



at my other job, is my co-workers. Knowing who I work with, I can go on any shift and the vibes are amazing. When I found out I was nominated, everyone's like, "Wow, you did great." But I said, "No, we all did this. We all won this because I can't do anything without others."

### What do you think you do differently from other servers that makes you stand out so much to be nominated and win?

I feel like I go the extra mile. I do get a little fresh with my tables, especially if you're a regular client. I have tables that have been with me for the past three, four years, still coming in on their Wednesdays, every other Friday, etc. "Damn, you're ordering the same thing again," you know? So, I get personal. Especially when I have big tops, I treat it the way I'm treating my family. I always pick that

## JAZZ - A LOUISIANA KITCHEN

1823 W 39th St  
Kansas City, MO 64111

Photo by Sarah Sipple




Mise En Place is a series of questions, answers, recommendations, and culinary wisdom from the food and drink masters that push KC flavor further. The following answers have been edited for length and clarity.

one person that everyone's already picking on more as the leader for my focus. It's usually an uncle or something. And that brings you the relationship with new customers. Now they're like, I'm coming back to you.

### Most places have good food, but it's those memorable or personal experiences that make a difference.

You want people to come back—These people are paying your bills, especially as a server. Treat everyone how you want to be treated when you're going to a restaurant.

### Where are some places that you like to eat and drink in Kansas City?

When I leave here, I'm either going to El Pueblitos for some tacos and margaritas, or I'm going to The Quaff for some wings and good talks. Or, I'm going to Charlie Hooper's. 





# HUNTER & THE PREY

**LFK'S LAVENDER BRIDE CULMINATES COLLEGE  
COLLABS WITH UPCOMING LP**

By Lane Rozin

**Three years ago, Regan Virnoche moved to Lawrence with a dream to create and share music with others. Before the end of her freshman year, Virnoche and a few new instrumentalist friends had formed Lavender Bride.**

Lavender Bride, also known as “LB,” is an indie-pop group that fuses elements of jazz and alternative music into their sound. Throughout the past three years, LB has welcomed in a total of 15 members—eight of which have since moved, graduated, or parted ways.

The group now consists of seven musicians, most of which are in college: Vocalist and lyricist Regan Virnoche, Spencer Addis on saxophone, guitarists Daniel “Danny” Zoller and Cole Seifert, keyboardist Hannah Bacud, drummer Huck Langford, and bass-

Virnoche’s hometown of Madison, WI, and more.

“When I wrote those first few songs, I knew that I couldn’t just play them at a coffee shop; I wanted a band to play them too,” says Vircouche. “My roommate at the time—and best friend in the whole world—played bass, and from there, we were looking for others to join.”

In the fall of 2022, Virnoche and several bandmates created a joint Tinder account in an attempt to gain a new bass player to add to the group. This resulted in Carter Crosby contributing to LB until they moved away in August 2023.

“We were looking for a queer, femme bassist at the time, and we knew we wanted to find someone that fit that,” says Virnoche. “We wanted to continue bringing opportunities to other artists in the queer community, and, ironically, Tinder was what worked at the time.”

Between members graduating and moving away, Lavender Bride has given a variety of artists an opportunity to showcase their work within the band. Matthews joined as the group’s new bass player three months ago and has since been able to perform more frequently around

LFK.

“I love getting the opportunity to perform because I belong on that damn stage,” Matthews says. “We’re about to play at The Bottleneck, plus some DIY shows, and that’s all I ever wanted to do growing up. I never cared about playing at bars; I want to go play in a stinky, dirty basement.”

Lavender Bride’s music can be heard live at venues like Replay Lounge, The Bottleneck, Lucia, DIY venues and more across LFK and KC. The band also has live demos of songs such as “pbr,” “archie,” “hunter & the prey,” and “Eastern Goodbye,” available on all music platforms.

Last year, Lavender Bride eagerly recorded their first album in room 114 in Murphy Hall at the University of Kansas. Now, songs in the upcoming record range from fan favorites and new songs such as “adonis,” “killing me,” “lose sleep,” “casualties of war,” and more. The album has been a year in the making and Lavender Bride is looking forward to the full release.

“I hope listeners see the vision that Regan is trying to project with our music,

and I hope that they think our instrumental additions match that,” Addis says. “I want to produce something with my best friends that I’m proud of, and I hope that the people listening can resonate with it.”

In the next two months, Lavender Bride plans to spend a week in a cabin in Wisconsin to record their second, if not also their third album. Virnoche says the goal of the next two projects is to create an acoustic sound similar to their live demos and performances.

“We’re planning to lock ourselves in a cabin in Northern Wisconsin, and the goal



Photos Courtesy of Lavender Bride and Lane Rozin

is to bang it out in one week,” Virnoche says. “Breakfast, lunch, and dinner—We are recording music. That’s what we are feeding our souls on. That’s what we’re nourishing ourselves with.”



ist Scout Matthews.

“I love having the space to be vulnerable, authentic, safe, and uplifted by the band,” says Virnoche. “I feel that a lot with this crew, it’s a family feeling. I’m able to be myself and show up 100%, and they do the same. We accept each other for where we’re at, and I’m grateful for it.”

Lavender Bride started out as a Midwest emo band inspired by groups like Pinegrove. Through additions like the saxophone and keyboard, LB has allowed its music to change and expand over the years into the sound it has today.

“Even our originals and long-time favorites are constantly evolving. We’re still changing up every now and then to keep them fresh and keep us on our toes,” Addis says. “I’m glad that I’m a part of it. I love the lyrics Regan writes and how all of us come together to make music we love.”

For the first year and a half, LB often rehearsed in an attic, eventually moving to various basements and living rooms around town. The group has since performed in venues across Lawrence, Kansas City,





Photos Courtesy of KU School of Music



# CARRYING THE TORCH

**KU'S VESPERS TRADITION REIGNS ON 30 YEARS AFTER THE LONG-STANDING HERITAGE NEARLY WENT UP IN FLAMES**

By Nick Spacek

In the winter of 1923, Donald Swarthout—in his first year as Dean of Fine Arts at the University of Kansas—began a Vespers tradition that is ongoing today. Taking place in old Fraser Hall's 700-seat theater—what was then known as Christmas Vespers—would gradually become an event that would draw in enough people to fill the campus' Hoch Auditorium, capable of seating 5,500 attendees.

Now taking place each December in the Lied Center—fitting a capacity just shy of 2000—it continues to be an annual event that draws in just as many attendees from the surrounding Lawrence community as it does from the university itself, and this year's installment is the 100th anniversary.

KU's Vespers has two performances—one in the afternoon and another in the evening—another tradition that dates back decades. According to the university, by 1936 some people were driving 200 miles to attend—so they began having both afternoon and evening performances, featuring the orchestra, multiple choruses, and candlelight processions.

For the vast majority of its existence,

KU Vespers took place in Hoch, until June 15, 1991, when the 64 year-old building was struck by lightning and burned to the ground, leaving little but its iconic facade. 1991 and 1992 Vespers were thus a little rough, explains Laura McCorkill—events coordinator at the KU School of Music.

"There were already plans to move it to the Lied Center once construction was complete," McCorkill says. "Unfortunately, construction took two more years to complete on Lied Center, so there were two of them that were held in Allen Fieldhouse."

As with many of the people who have strong attachments to KU Vespers, McCorkill's connection dates back to when she was a child, as her parents collected the offering.

"It used to be a free admission, and we took a free will offering, and that supported the Vesper scholarship," McCorkill recalls. "My mom worked for endowment and they literally collected the money. My dad would stand in the lobby of Hoch and we'd all run in with our baskets and dump them in his Santa bag."

After the performance began, KU police would escort McCorkill's father to the

car to put it in the trunk, and he'd go watch the rest of the performance.

"We would go home, count money, and we'd do it between performances," McCorkill says. Some of that has changed—The Lied Center sells tickets, although, in some years, various donors have underwritten the cost of Vespers in order to make it free to the public. There is also the occasional Jazz Vespers, which has done the likes of Duke Ellington's take on *The Nutcracker*, as well as having saved the beloved tradition.

During peak COVID in 2020, Vespers were nearly canceled, but thanks to a live streamed performance by Jazz Ensemble 1 on the stage of the Lied Center in the midst of the pandemic, it's never missed a year.

Vespers has also changed and expanded over the years in other ways, with the scope and the subject matter having expanded to be more inclusive.

"Very necessarily," says McCorkill, noting that the tradition has recently focused more on inclusivity. "We do generally include something in Hebrew—Sometimes it's Hanukkah related, sometimes it's not, but something in Hebrew or tied to Hanukkah. Something tied to Kwanzaa. There could be other seasonal things—"Winter" from Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*, or *Nutcracker* or something like that that's more secular in nature, but seasonal, and sometimes some really cool stuff that's not necessarily tied to any holiday."

One of the cool things about the 100th KU Vespers, in addition to the fact that it's an enormous anniversary, is that the performances will feature a family with three generations all taking part in the event. Susan Ralston, wife of Dr. James S. Ralston, former Chair of the Department of Ensembles and the Director of the Choral Division at The University of Kansas, will be singing with the alumni choir being assembled with the event, as will her two daughters.

As if that wasn't enough, her granddaughter is a member of the Lawrence Children's Choir, which is also part of Vespers. Given that Dr. Ralston directed KU Vespers for 30 years and was a student of Clayton Krehbiel, who was the previous choir director, it's quite a connection to the past in more ways than one, because the sole surviving KU choir robe from the Hoch fire exists only because of Dr. Ralston.

"We have it because the robe storage was up behind the top balcony in Hoch Auditorium," McCorkill explains. "And, at the end of the second performance of Vespers each year, he just did not want to walk up all those stairs, so he would take it home and hang it in his closet. That's why it survived."

Susan Ralston says she is beyond excited to be a part of Vespers again, along with also having another two generations of her

family performing with her.

"It's just like a special gift to my husband," Ralston says. "He loved Vespers. And what a way to honor him, to know that the legacy goes on. Vespers is a time where the whole community comes together to something at KU and it's not the music people that usually come to the concerts. This is a whole city-wide thing, and it's nice to share music that's not always so stuffy."

The fun part about Vespers, continues Ralston, is that you can have stuffy music, but because it's seasonal, she thinks it's music that most folks know. One could argue that *The Nutcracker* is stuffy, but it's also appealing to the masses, along with a lot of choral pieces done by the choirs. She recalls a time in the '60s when the Voices of Jimmy Joyce released an album entitled *This Is Christmas: A Complete Collection of the Alfred S. Burt Carols*.

"They were kind of a fresh look. Jim would feature these carols and that would come from the balcony choir," Ralston says of the contrasting styles during concerts at Hoch. "They would do some grandiose piece, and then, here would come this delightful carol from the balcony. It was just a stunning effect."



The last special note for the 100th KU Vespers is that Forrest Pierce—Professor of Composition at the KU School of Music—has composed a new piece that will premiere at this year's celebration. Entitled "I Only Want to Say: Blessing for the New Year," it sets a text by American poet and writer Elias Amidon on the subject of changing to music for large chorus and piano.

"There's a lot of beautiful imagery of water flowing to the sea, of letting go of our attachment to being right, of our enthusiasm for convincing people of our opinions, and looking to where it is that we all end up, which is, after all, in the same place," Pierce says.

The KU School of Music's 100th Vespers takes place at the Lied Center of Kansas on Sunday, Dec. 8, with performances at 2:30 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. [P](#)

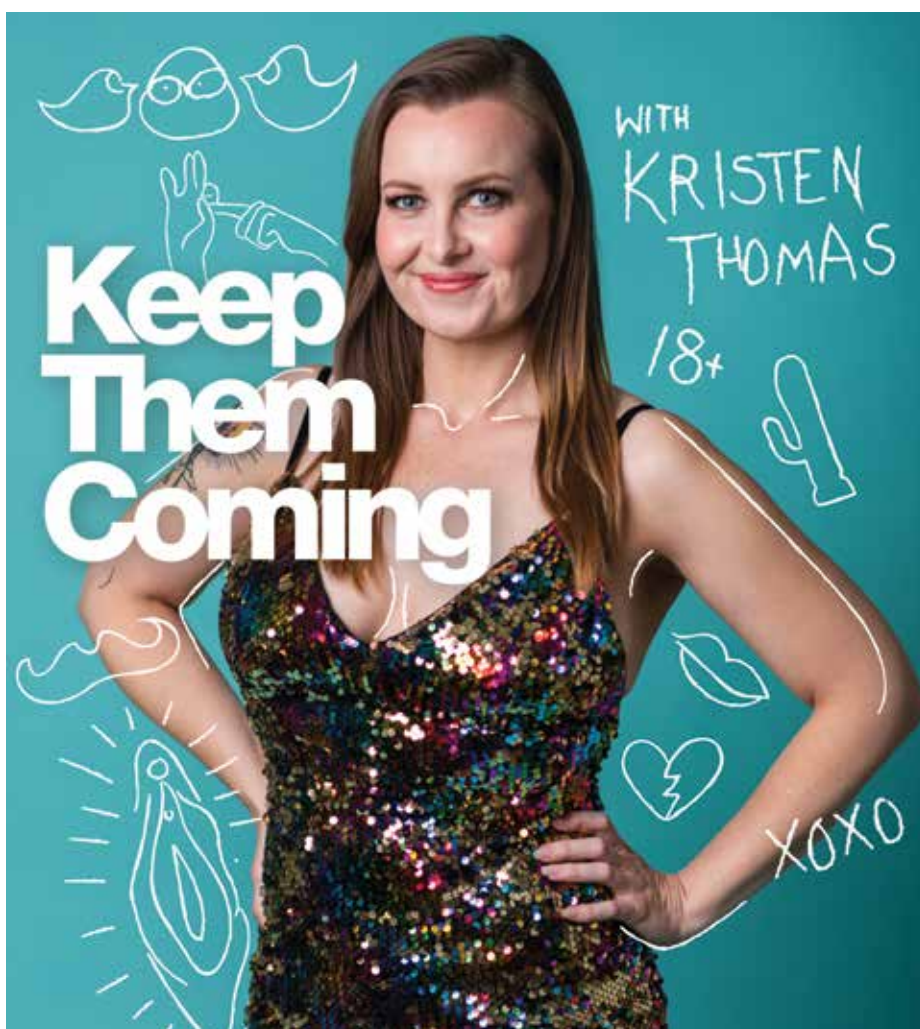


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Photo by Nicole Bissey. Illustrations by Shelby Phelps



## PLEASURE BY DESIGN: Sex furniture can unlock new avenues of erotic pleasure this holiday season

As a friend daydreamed aloud during our walk, she said, “I would love to have a St. Andrew’s cross, but we can’t have that in our room with the kids around.” She trailed off disappointed, her bottom lip jutting out in a pout. “Why not?” I asked without hesitation, since challenging people’s notions is second nature to me.

“Well, I don’t know exactly,” she said. We discussed options, from changing their room into an adults-only boudoir befitting an episode of *How To Build A Sex Room* to

finding ways to implement bondage without a cross, and even looking online at collapsible crosses until she had enough information to take home to discuss with her partner.

Sex furniture often came into being as modifications and customizations to existing furniture to assist with making fantasies come true. For instance, King Edward VII’s famous sex chair was kept at the luxurious Parisian brothel Le Chabanaise for his use when he was in town. He was known to be an insatiable fellow with many lovers, and

this custom chair/lounger/gynecological exam table enabled him to have a standing ménage à trois.

These days, there’s everything from the subtle to “you’re gonna need a sex room for that.”

Some sex furniture was created for accessibility and comfort. We all age, and some of us have disabilities. Guess what? If you are a sexual person, you should be having and enjoying sex until the day you die—Even if you’re old, infirm, or disabled.

There are acts and positions that can be challenging if you have a bad knee or are missing a limb. Remember that before you judge some sex furniture as frivolous or unnecessary. If comfort, ease, and stability

***These days, there’s everything from the subtle to “you’re gonna need a sex room for that.”***

help you have better sex, get whatever you need to make that happen.

Perhaps you’re a parent, a kink novice, or in this economy, a budget-conscious person who doesn’t want to sell your houseplant collection to fit or afford some sex furniture—Start with multi-purpose furniture and accessories. These items can blend discreetly into existing decor. Prices can start from \$50-\$300 for basics like wedges, chairs, and swings.

Pillows and wedges come in foam or inflatable versions. Some pillows are designed to allow for hands-free use of sex toys. Most of these can be used to also sit up in bed to read a book, elevate your feet, or relax on the floor. If not, they take up very little room in a closet or under a bed. Can confirm—A two-piece wedge set fits in an IKEA under-bed drawer.

Some pieces convert, fold, or stow away, making discretion and storage no problem. More often than not, sex benches have sleek designs and are marketed as yoga benches. For the space-savers, there are also inflatable versions of this design.

A bounce stool—like the Whipsmart Bounce Squatter Stool—has handles and cushioned seating to allow the top partner to ride and explore positions they never thought their legs had the strength to handle. Plus, this model is rated for up to 400lbs—When I say everyone deserves great sex, I mean it. But this item looks like nothing much more than a stool if it was sitting in the corner or hiding in the closet.

Bondage doesn’t have to be on a St. Andrew’s cross. Using under-bed restraints, over-the-door sex slings, or spreader bar sets for the feet and wrists offers the ability to restrain a partner without large, very obvious pieces of gear. A workaround for a spanking bench is a workout bench that may be gathering dust in your garage or basement.

Mid-range furniture is \$500-\$1,500 for benches and crosses. A sturdy cross has multiple restraint points and feels stable when leaned upon. Chairs, chaises, and benches designed specifically for sex or BDSM have safety built in mind. You get what you pay for, and, at this price, you are paying for something that is not going to break or collapse in the middle of playtime.

For instance, a sex chaise or yoga bench is very low to the ground or on the ground. They are designed to be well balanced to not topple over, but if it has feet, it may move during pounding depending on the floor surface. Take measures to secure your furniture in place, if necessary.


Items in this price range often look like regular, but bulky, pieces of leather furniture. Others are super obvious like the Steed Spanking Bench. Many of these require not only the space for the furniture, but the activities you will do to the person, such as spanking, flogging, or whipping. Plan on having enough space for all the above. Are we getting into custom sex room territory yet?

The materials make a clear difference in the investment. Take, for example, the Liberator chaises or Tantra Chair—The Liberator brand makes a wide array of sex furniture and accessories, and their chairs and chaise lounges have become so ubiquitous that even Brookstone sells them in the \$500 range. Tantra Chair is a brand that offers custom leather colors to match your decor—two loungers, same basic design, fluid-resistant cloth vs leather, and a \$1,000 price difference.

Speaking of fluids, you may not consider this a piece of furniture, but the Liberator Fascinator throw is the must-have item to prevent late-night sheet changes. This velvety soft, completely waterproof blanket is durable, comfortable, and does not sound like you’re rolling around on plastic—No judgment if you’re into that kind of thing. Five years later, mine still looks brand new—a fabulous \$150 investment!

High-end luxury or custom sex furniture can be upwards of \$2,000, including bondage or dungeon bed frames, cages, and custom or locally built hardwood or steel furniture. The most expensive, top-of-the-line items are amazing, well-built, and often have a return policy of up to 60 days if from a manufacturer.

You do not have to buy the priciest item to get quality and durability this holiday season, but, the cheapest items are hardly ever worth the purchase. No sense in sending your gift to yourself or your partner to the trash after one or two uses. Read the ratings, buy from a reputable site or brand, and enjoy your sex furniture for years to come.

You can find Kristen @Open-TheDoorsKC on Instagram or [openthedoorscoaching.com](https://openthedoorscoaching.com). Check out her podcast *Keep Them Coming*. 





Photos Courtesy of Rebel Song Academy



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# RHYME & REASON

REBEL SONG ACADEMY IS STREAMLINING STUDENTS TO THE CENTER STAGE

By Beth Lipoff

**Writing a song and performing it yourself in front of an audience can seem daunting, but the kids in Art as Mentorship's Rebel Song Academy have plenty of stepping stones to help them strut to the stage.**

In the academy, it doesn't matter if you're 9 or 19—You're getting guidance on the process of writing a song all the way through laying down tracks in a recording studio at the InterUrban ArtHouse.

"The main idea of Rebel Song Academy and what we try to do is give a snapshot of what it is to be an artist and kind of show the whole lifecycle," Art as Mentorship Program Director Brandon Yangmi says.

That means deciding on the message you want to send with your song and also getting into the musical realities of chord structures, building melodies, and writing lyrics.

There are a few ways students can take part in the Rebel Song Academy—One is when Art as Mentorship brings it into their schools. Participating schools have

included Synergy Services' Youth Resiliency Center, Wyandotte High School, Alfred Fairfax Academy, and Mill Creek Alternative School. Some schools have them for a few days, some for 12 weeks, and no music experience is required to be part of the program.

Another way is signing up for either their summer camp or a day-long program that typically takes place in the fall. Perhaps the most extensive option is Art as Mentorship's year-long fellowship that combines the weeks of the Rebel Song Academy with a more in-depth exploration of songwriting, recording, and production—They're currently taking applications for the program at [artasmentorship.org/rsa](http://artasmentorship.org/rsa). This past year, about 450 students participated in the program.

For Yangmi and other instructors, there's a mental health component to it all that comes through "seeing them using music as a vehicle to have self-expression, talk about their emotions, open that door and that conversation, and get into some topics that they don't feel comfortable talking about in everyday life," he says.

In fact, they wrote their curriculum with the help of an art therapist.

"It's not something we strongly try to push on the students, like, 'Hey, this is all about mental health, and this is what you have to do.' It's just something that naturally happens in the programming, and we're mindful of it as it is happening," he says.

Sometimes that self-expression can get into some heavy topics.

"One of the students pulled me aside and said, 'Hey, I wrote this poem. I want to share this poem with you.' And the poem was written while they were sitting in a jail cell and had recently heard about their friend committing suicide, and they said, 'This is what I want to write my song about,'"

Yangmi says.

He helped the high school student develop a song over several weeks.

"It was a beautiful moment to see them get in front of all their friends, family, and teachers and perform that song, sharing that experience in their life. A very, very vulnerable moment. And to see that room cheer them on and celebrate that person and their vulnerability—That was a very, very beautiful moment for me to witness and be a small part of," Yangmi says.

He claims that the biggest impact the program has is building a community for the students.

"There are a lot of students that have graduated that I still see hanging out in bands, playing around town and are still really tapped into the community and people they met through the program. It makes me really, really excited," Yangmi says.



Some, like Malek Looney, have turned around and become teachers and mentors for the program.

"It's very easy for me to speak to some of these students in a different way than some of our other instructors because I'm speaking from the point of being in the program, understanding what it's like being a young artist who is looking for community, looking for people to believe in what you do," Looney says.

The program taught him a lot about having an artistic vision and how to make and fulfill goals to realize it. He currently performs with a band, but the first time he ever performed was during one of the program's student showcases at recordBar.

"Being in the organization put me around a lot of veterans in this community and the music industry," Looney says. "I think, without being around them and their knowledge, being able to pick up on how to navigate being an artist and business person—Without their guidance, I would have very much had a harder time."

For more information on how to get involved with the Rebel Song Academy, visit [artasmentorship.org/rsa](http://artasmentorship.org/rsa).



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