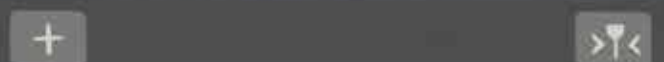




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Heart's Nancy Wilson



Diego Chi



Eyegore's Curiosities



B.B.'s Lawnside



Cheatin Snakes



National Anthem



Rudy Love & The Encore



Keep Them Coming



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Photo Courtesy of DJ Stewart



Live like you're living: DJ Stewart's journey battling brain cancer continues to inspire KC community

DJ Stewart isn't your average local skateboarder: He is the definition of what it means to fall and get back up stronger than ever. After he was diagnosed with brain cancer in 2019, he was given an estimated 11-18 months to live. His normal day-to-day was thrown out the window. He knew that his two favorite pastimes—riding motorcycles and skateboarding—weren't something that he was willing to give up. Instead, he overcame the obstacles that faced him and carried on with his life. Now, he works with Head for the Cure—a local nonprofit that focuses on spreading brain cancer awareness and raising money for research through events and community outreach. He continues to inspire communities across the nation, giving people hope through his personal story.



Photo Courtesy of NBC



KC Native Greg Justice proves age is no limit in American Ninja Warrior debut

Fan favorite TV show "American Ninja Warrior" is currently airing its 17th season. Hundreds of individuals compete for a shot at the show's million-dollar prize. But before they can grab the million, they must battle the program's classic obstacles such as the Quad Steps, the Spin Cycle, the Lunatic Ledges, and, of course, the Warped Wall. 64-year-old KC local Greg Justice decided to prove that age is just a number, taking his stab at the course in episode three of season 17, which aired on June 16. While he may not have conquered the course, Justice did complete the first two obstacles that the show threw at him.



Photo by Sarah Sipple



Nhung Hoang champions the immigrant experience at Cội Nguồn: Origin Coffee

After losing her brother to a heart attack in 2023, Nhung Hoang decided that his final words of advice would guide her next steps. He noticed her passion and talent for coffee-making and encouraged her to step away from the books and open a coffee shop. Dropping her computer science studies, Hoang landed in Gladstone and opened up Cội Nguồn: Origin Coffee. Born in Đà Nong, Vietnam, she wanted to create a third space for the Vietnamese community. Her coffeehouse had its grand opening on June 1 and is located at 7711 N Oak Trafficway Suite A, Kansas City, MO 64118.



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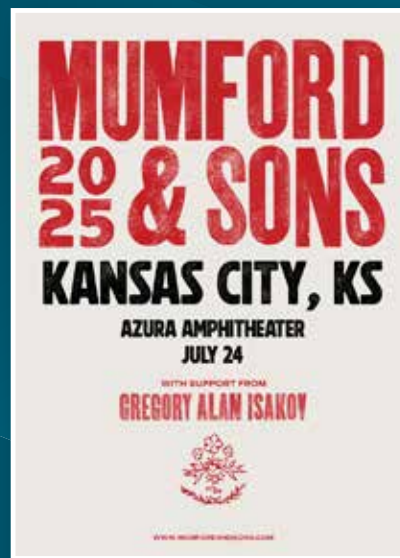


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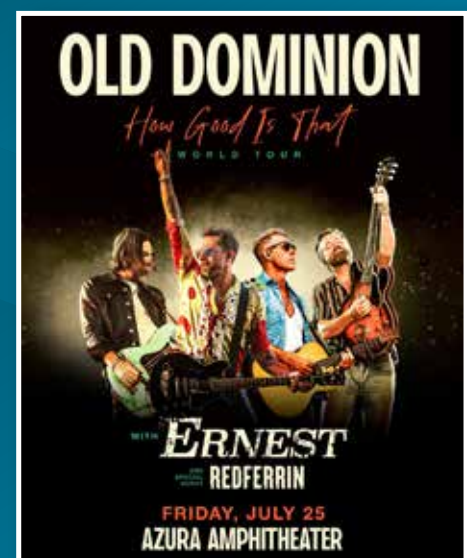
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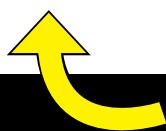
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Letter from the Editor

ON CLEANLINESS, PATRIOTISM, AND SETTLING SCORES

By Brock Wilbur

Greetings, dearest readers, and welcome to the annual Music Issue of *The Pitch*—homegrown right here in Kansas City, U.S.A.

2025 has been a year for pure, unmitigated chaos, and the music scene has been no exception. I'm not unaware that, since 2020, many of my Letter from the Editor scrawls have had to acknowledge *these unprecedented times* and, sure, at some point perhaps an unending tsunami of stupid problems should redefine the concept of *precedented times*—the water the frog is boiling within isn't chilling out any time soon. Art at least thrives in a garden of chaos, and the first half of a bizarre, often distressing summer has already delivered some once-in-a-lifetime creative highs across the metro.

I'm finding a lot of joy in unexpected places. I'm clinging to that joy when I find it, and then using it to fuel the fights we face elsewhere.

For this issue, our music editor Nick Spacek and our team of intrepid reporters have scoured for some of the lesser-known tales of triumph in the arts for this year's big round-up. We have a bit of everything, from powerful acts putting out life-changing material to those who find collaboration in unexpected places. Kaylynn Mullins profiles a local fashion designer who currently finds himself on tour, running the visual experience for one of the biggest rock stars on the planet. Orrin Grey found an extremely haunted hovel which, while not technically rock 'n' roll, is exceptionally rock 'n' roll. Also, in an oddly patriotic but delightful turn, Jake Louraine pledged his allegiance to the folks who sing the "Star-Spangled Banner" and other anthems ahead of sporting events—including the process by which you audition for the honor.

I'm a little jealous that Spacek beat me to the coverage of Warehouse on Broadway. If you haven't been yet, Westport has an absolutely sizzling new mid-sized venue with an opening summer/fall lineup of artists *uniquely* suited to sell out a space with this specific capacity. Santigold will be there on my birthday, which puts me in a difficult situation considering the Deftones show the same night. [Ed note: At the time of writing this, Santigold added a second date, proving that words can solve real-world problems.]

Anyhowdy, my first show at Warehouse

was—I feared—a trap. Back in March, Omaha's The Faint were swinging through, and I bought tickets to drag a portion of my friend group out to delight in cocaine-synthpunk from one of my all-time favorite groups. Ahead of the show, I kept checking Warehouse's social media to get a glimpse at the room layout for a venue I hadn't attended yet. There weren't photos. There were fliers for shows and DJ nights, but not a single image of the space. Was this an elaborate trick? Would there be any cocaine-synthpunk at all, or would I find myself in some type of *Jigsaw* trap?

Night of the show, we got there early, and something was "off" about Warehouse on Broadway. We couldn't put our finger on it, as a group, until we literally put our finger on it.

"This is too clean," my wife said. "I'm touching the counter and the seats and looking around, and it's too clean. There isn't a scratch anywhere. Nothing is sticky."

Sure enough, when I ventured to the men's room, it was so immaculately spotless that I felt certain I was the first human being to ever use the commode. It felt disorientingly unsullied, a CBS sitcom's version of what a "concert venue" might look like.

We were, at the time, unaware that this was the first official event in the space, at least since its brief run as a live-band jukebox experience. It's a tremendous venue, and I've been back three times in the months since, having found a space that has no bad view of the stage and where—more importantly—there's a gigantic electric light in a "W" shape that I can lean against in the back corner, thereby avoiding blocking anyone's view but also giving off a vibe that I own the place.

I adore my "W" corner, and I adore the night we spent with The Faint. My highest recommendation is that you check their concert calendar *right now* to see if someone you love (Panda Bear? Low Cut Connie? Tripping Daisy!?) is swinging through in '25.

Before diving into everyone else's stories for this issue, I'd just like to briefly mention Diego Chi's recent adventures. You might remember our cover story for the Music Issue from two years back, where our band of the year was local talent gone rock superstars Making Movies. Chi was one of the two brothers who started and fronted that electric Latino juggernaut. But he isn't playing with them now. In fact, he's been out for a while. The reason is nothing as dire as you might imagine.

A few weeks back, Chi posted a video on Instagram of him alone in a studio space, layering lush chords on a synthesizer. The post's text explained that he'd been longing to stretch his creative muscles in spaces outside of the collaborative nature of the



Photo Courtesy of Diego Chi

band and its genre confines. This was the official announcement that Chi was taking some time off from touring with his brother and their multi-decade investment in the Making Movies empire, and sinking his teeth into solo work for soundtracks.

It's not uncommon to see people on social media announce that they're embarking on a new creative venture. [This column is regularly a chance for me to talk about a new band I'm playing with, and you've almost never seen me bring my guitar to stage in five years, lol.] What was shocking was that Chi's announcement came... a year after he'd already made this change. He'd already been off the road and back at home with his partner and children. He'd already made solo adventures to the woods to find his new sound. Most impressively, he's already composed the entire score for a new video game from the folks behind the massively successful *Helldivers II*.

There are so many posts from people I follow about how they're "changing directions" or "finding themselves" where the follow-up never arrives. I'm not sure I've ever seen one where a creative I adore announces that not only are they pursuing something new, but they've already hit a grand slam that veterans in their field would die for.

I've got a longer deep-dive interview with Diego Chi on *The Pitch* website right now, and I hope you'll follow along as his new era unfolds, but without further ado we simply gotta get into all the great creative victories for KC folks in the print issue of *The Pitch* you hold in your hands.

Pitch in and we'll make it through,

Brock Wilbur

P

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Photo by Elijah LaFollette



TWINE AND TERROR

CAWKER CITY, KANSAS IS HOME TO A COUPLE OF THE WORLD'S MOST UNIQUE PHENOMENA

By Orrin Grey

When we arrive in Cawker City, Kansas—home of the world's largest ball of twine—we have been driving for several hours, so our first stop is the town's small public library, where we ask to use the facilities. The librarian kindly allows us to do so, while also explaining that they aren't technically available to the public, and that there are restrooms at the park about a block away.

While we're there, she asks where we're from and what has brought us to Cawker City—In a town of only around 450 souls, strangers must be fairly conspicuous. We tell her that we're there to see the monster museum, and she explains that it's closed. We assure her that we have an appointment, which she grudgingly accepts while cautioning us not to "bother" the nice lady who runs the place, as she recently lost her husband. "I'm a little protective of her," the librarian explains.

She then asks if we're going to see the ball of twine, which we say we'll do after visiting the museum. Before we know it, she's on the phone with "Linda," who is apparently in charge of the twine, ensuring that she will be there to tell us about it and let us add a piece of twine to the ball.

While the ball may be what put Cawker City on the map, it isn't the primary reason for our visit. That stands on an adjacent corner, in a garish but otherwise unassuming storefront that was once a bank.

Eyegore's Curiosities & Monster Museum is located at 732 Wisconsin St., on Cawker City's main drag, where it has been since Matt Alford spotted the building for sale when he was visiting the ball of twine. "When I met Matt, all this stuff was just in his house," Julie Alford, the shop's "Master of Monster Management," informs us. "My friends told me to run."

She obviously didn't and, in 2020, they bought the

building that would become Eyegore's Curiosities and moved halfway across the country from Virginia to Cawker City, where they got married in front of the ball of twine and lived in an apartment above the shop itself.

When we reach Eyegore's Curiosities, we are greeted by an array of bizarre objects, beginning before we ever step through the front door. The mat outside welcomes "UFOs and Crews," while the sidewalk out front is home to gargoyles, a statue of Bigfoot, a giant monster hand, and a Tin Man riding a bicycle, to name a few.

The interior is even more packed to the gills. Though the space is not large, every time you feel like you have seen everything, something new catches your eye, as oddities of various sorts are jammed everywhere from floor to ceiling. The contents range from the absurd to the genuinely macabre. There's a wall of taxidermied animal butts, an entire human skeleton, old monster toys, a Fiji mermaid, parts of a real human brain, signs from sideshow attractions, and so much more.

Genuine articles from the modern equivalent of a cabinet of curiosities jockey for position with *Star Wars* toys and fakes concocted by Matt Alford himself. "He was always building stuff," Julie recalls. Among his creations are a "mummified juvenile sasquatch," made from a store-bought plastic Halloween skeleton, hair extensions, and papier mache, as well as "Count Cluckula, the World's Only Vampire Chicken," which is accompanied by an admonition not to remove the stake piercing its chest.

In what was once the bank's vault, there is now a "baby alien" in a tank, labeled "Alien Specimen #3, Roswell Army Air Field, 8 July 1947." Other exhibits include a "haunted ventriloquist dummy," cases of real bones and fossils, a replica of the skull of the Elephant Man, the "third largest ball of twine in Cawker City, KS," and others.

Those that weren't manufactured by Matt Alford, the "Wizard of Odd," were acquired in his various travels—or sometimes donated by visitors, as is the case with "Ky's tonsils," which are located in a display of various medical ephemera and were apparently donated by a local child after having her tonsils removed. "She said, 'I thought you would want these,'" Julie tells us.

While there, we also get to meet Larry, a local cat who is lounging on the outside windowsill of Eyegore's Curiosities. Larry apparently ran for mayor of Cawker City—one of his campaign posters is behind the counter of the shop—but was beaten out for the position by the city's current human mayor, Doug Bader.

Unfortunately, while Cawker City left its mark on Matt Alford and he left his on the town, he wasn't able to enjoy Eyegore's Curiosities for very long. The unusual shop opened its doors in 2021, and Matt was diagnosed with stage 4 metastatic pancreatic cancer in 2022 and passed away on October 16, 2024. In an update on Caringbridge.org, Julie Alford wrote, "When he told me he wanted to move here, and asked if I would come, I was scared to leave what was comfortable, but I found my next home, and we built a life here that I love."

It's obvious from even the handful of other people that we talk to in Cawker City that the town loves them, too.

When asked about the future of Eyegore's, Julie says that she doesn't know. "This was Matt's dream, not mine," she says, sharing that while she loved running the attraction with him, she isn't sure what the future holds for the unique destination.

For now, Eyegore's Curiosities is open by appointment, but Julie says that she hopes to have it open more often, at least in the summer, when as many as 200 people a day come to visit the ball of twine just half a block from the shop's front door.

When we leave the monster museum, we are, of course, duty-bound to also visit the ball of twine. After all, the librarian phoned ahead and, sure enough, Linda Clover is there waiting for us. The "Belle of the Ball" is a diminutive woman who can't stand much over four feet, and when we first see her, she is holding a piece of PVC pipe with a reel of twine around it and a pair of scissors stuck in one end, so that we can add a piece to the ball.

"We just have fun here," Linda tells us, as she explains the history of the ball of twine, which was started by farmer Frank Stoeber in 1953, using pieces of twine left over from feeding bales of hay to his cows. Today, the ball, which is about the size of a van, weighs some 27,017 pounds and counting.

"I know how many feet are on the reel and how much it weighs," Linda informs us, "so I know what to add to the total when it runs out."


As befits a tourist attraction that is the town's claim to fame, drawing thousands of visitors every year from all over the world, the ball of twine has its own roofed shelter, and you can even stay across the street from it, in a retro gas station that has been restored and converted into a kind of one-room AirBnB.

The town hosts various events throughout the year, including its annual Twine-a-Thon, which is held on the third weekend in August. During a recent art walk, a local artist painted some fifty reproductions of

famous paintings, all incorporating balls of twine, and hung them in various local businesses—a version of Van Gogh's "Starry Night" can be seen in the window of Eyegore's Curiosities.

Dutifully, we take our turns adding a length of twine to the ball, while Linda explains that sometimes visitors add their own bits of rope or string that she has to come by later and remove—After all, it's not the world's biggest ball of sisal twine if there's other stuff in there.

She also regales us with various bits about the town's history, including how four men played a game of cards for the right to name the town after themselves. "Guess the name of the fourth man," she says, after rattling off the first three. The poker game is one of several pieces of local lore immortalized in a mural next to the ball of twine.

"I'm going home," Linda says, as we leave the ball of twine and Cawker City behind. "I've already seen lots of folks today." If you want to visit Cawker City, however, and add a bit of twine to the ball, there are links to call and email Linda on the town's website (<https://www.cawkercitykansas.com/ball-of-twine>), while you can set up an appointment to visit Eyegore's Curiosities & Monster Museum by calling or texting Julie Alford from the shop's own website at eyegores.com. 



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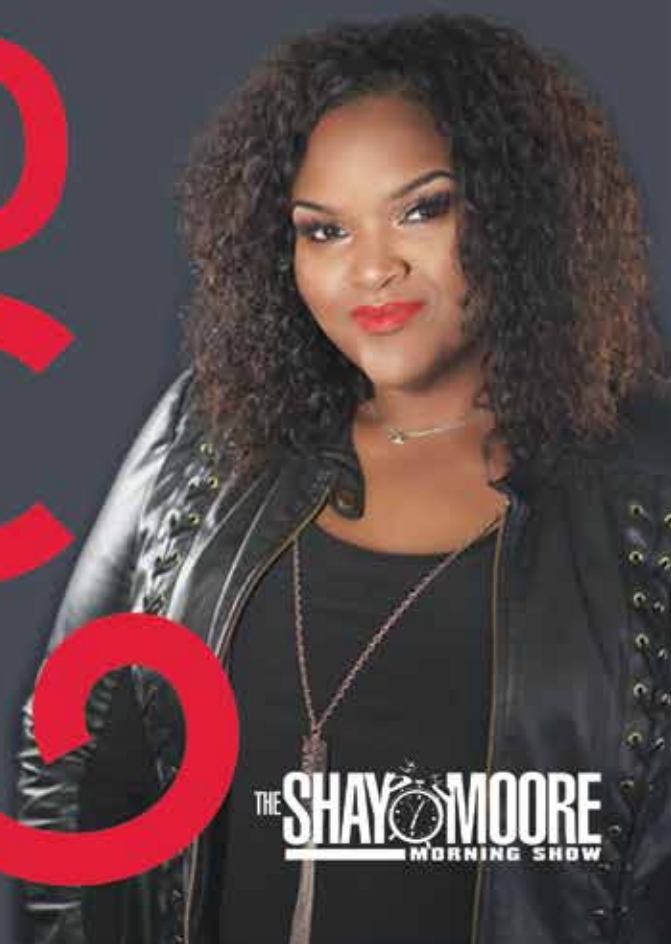
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DINNER AND A SHOW

B.B.'S LAWN-SIDE BLUES & BBQ CONTINUES TO SERVE SAUCE AND SOUNDS TO SOUTH KC

By Jordan Baranowski

Blues and barbecue both have tremendous legacies woven into the cultural fabric of Kansas City. The historic jazz district of 18th and Vine has showcased some of the biggest names in jazz and blues history, including Count Basie and Kansas City native Charlie Parker, and discussing the KC food scene without debate over the best BBQ spots in town is practically impossible. For Jimmy Nickle, Owner and GM of B.B.'s Lawnside Blues & BBQ, paying homage to those dual legacies is the name of the game—and one of his favorite parts of the gig.

"I started working at B.B.'s in 1992, just a couple of years after it opened," Nickle says. "The husband-wife duo of Lindsay and Jo Shannon opened B.B.'s just a few years earlier, and they originally envisioned a standard, old-school barbecue joint."

Lindsay helped make B.B.'s into what it is today when he added another passion into the mix: live music. Lindsay was a founding member of the Kansas City Blues Society, and he hosted the long-running "Kansas City Blues Show" on 101 The Fox for decades. It wasn't long before B.B.'s became one of the go-to spots in town for live blues music.

It also wasn't long until Jimmy started learning the ropes, both in the kitchen and behind the scenes. "Me and my brothers, Mike and Kenneth, started at B.B.'s at the same time, and we fell in love with the restaurant. We dove all in to learn as much as we could," he says. "Jo Shannon ran the kitchen, and my brother Mike wanted to learn everything he could from her about barbecue techniques. I learned from Lindsay how to book bands and run a restaurant. We made quite the team."

In fact, the brothers took their skills on the road and started the NICKLEBOYSBBQ competition team. Competing in barbecue competitions not only improved their techniques back at the restaurant but also pushed them creatively and helped them develop new recipes. There were some bumps in the road—especially considering they were teenagers when they started—but the brothers found plenty of success in their



Photos Courtesy of B.B.'s Lawnside Blues & BBQ

decade-plus competing.

Jo Shannon passed away in 2021, and Lindsay sold the restaurant soon after to the Nickle brothers. They promised to maintain the Shannons' legacy of blues and 'cue. Mike put all that competitive spirit to work as B.B.'s pitmaster and frequently popped up on television to spread the KC BBQ gospel on shows like Anthony Bourdain's *No Reservations*, the PBS feature *Burnt Legend* and Guy Fieri's *Diners, Drive-ins, and Dives*.

Sadly, Mike passed away earlier this year after over three decades at B.B.'s, the only job he ever held. His brother's legacy is yet another on the long list that Jimmy continues to honor.

Mike's legacy lives on through a number of dishes at B.B.'s and through their new pitmaster, Reggie Davis. B.B.'s barbecue pit is made of granite stone and is built into the side of the building. Jimmy describes his relationship with B.B.'s pit as a love-hate relationship.

"It takes a lot of work and experience to get our pit to work its magic. Once you get it hot, it's amazing what you can do with it, and it imparts a unique flavor that you're not going to find at the other pits in town. We typically set up big cuts of meat overnight before we close down. Reggie comes in the morning and adjusts things as needed. The temperatures fluctuate and evolve, and you never quite know what things are going to look like when you arrive. Our pitmaster has to have a deep knowledge and intrinsic ability to adjust things as needed to maintain our quality standards."

B.B.'s is open for lunch and dinner six days a week, so there's a lot of meat to be

prepped before the doors can open. The classic order is the B.B.'s King Combo with burnt ends added on. It is a massive amount of food, with several different barbecue meats and sides, including whole pork spare ribs and B.B.'s signature side: battered fries. These giant potato wedges are made almost like chicken tenders, hand-dredged and fried to order. They're extremely labor-intensive and messy to make—Jimmy says making the battered fries is one person's sole job in the kitchen—but they're popular enough to make it worth it.

B.B.'s doesn't just do classic BBQ meats, either. Daily rotating specials consist of everything from classics, like Rib Tips, which are only available on Tuesday and always sell out, to experimental recipes that have the chance to graduate onto the menu if they're popular enough. Recent successful specials include the BBQ Street Tacos, made with chopped brisket and topped with crushed Cool Ranch Doritos, and the BBQ Brisket Philly, filled with a half pound of chopped brisket, chili cheese dip, fried peppers, and onions. Another signature dish that always turns heads is the Bar-B-Q Sundae: a mason jar filled with layers of smoked pit beans, creamy coleslaw, and pulled pork, topped with BBQ sauce and a pickle spear.

When it comes to B.B.'s, the barbecue is just one side of the coin. Staying true to his word, Jimmy Nickle still books bands for every night B.B.'s is open. "We're lucky to have such a thriving local music scene," he says. "I would guess about 75% of our acts are locally-based—They're still touring bands a lot of the time, but they just happen to call



Kansas City home."

Music typically starts at 7:00 p.m. with a \$5 to \$10 cover per person. There's no cover for Mama Ray's Weekly Open Jam on Saturdays from 2:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m., and there's never a Sunday cover unless there's a special event. Musicians always set up inside, but there are garage doors and a large, covered patio to help expand the seating and keep the tunes going—rain or shine. Head to B.B.'s website and check out their calendar for a monthly list of all the acts coming through. If you're interested in getting your band booked, you can also contact Jimmy through B.B.'s website.

If you're looking to kick back with classic Kansas City traditions, all while honoring the spirit of some KC legends, B.B.'s Lawnside Blues & BBQ hits all the right notes. Pull up a seat, tuck your napkin in, and call for the encore.

B.B.'s Lawnside Blues & BBQ is located at 1205 E 85th Street, Kansas City, Missouri 64131. It is open from 11:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. Tuesday through Thursday, 11:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. Friday and Saturday, and 11:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Sunday. The restaurant keeps its doors shut on Mondays. **P**



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FRIED EGG BLT AT OURHOUSEKC

By Sarah Sipple

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Photo by
Sarah
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If we had to award a perennial sandwich of the summer here in the Midwest, many would agree on the BLT. July is when locally-grown tomatoes are first ready for harvest, providing a fresh and juicy complement to salty bacon and crisp lettuce.

When I saw the Fried Egg BLT on the menu at OurHouseKC, my eyes stopped reading. (Which saved me a lot of time—Have you seen how extensive the menu is?!) Yes, I'll add avocado. Yes, I'll add a side of onion rings... and gooey butter cake with vanilla ice cream for dessert. A fabulous and filling summer meal really came together.

I was intimidated by the size of the sandwich but did my darndest to get my mouth around it. Worth it! Between two toasted slices of multigrain bread rested two fried eggs, fabulous bacon strips, fresh avocado, lettuce, tomato, and just the perfect amount of mayo to help hold it together without dripping out. That was the role of

the slightly runny egg yolk.

This BLT was simply a pure summer sammie. No notes. The portions of the entire meal were generous, so much so that an after-meal digestion walk around the neighborhood felt great.

OurHouseKC takes up only a little space on W. 39th Street, but packs a big punch when it comes to its extensive menu and enthusiastic service. In addition to the music-themed table markers and art, the restaurant features a live musician each Saturday night from 6 to 9 p.m. AKA, a perfect time to take a load off at OurHouseKC. **P**

DRINK
THIS
NOW

KIN SELTZER

By Sarah Sipple

Six-packs available at Border Brewing Company, Good Karma Coffee, Made in KC, and more.



Photo by Shea McGraw

If you say seltzer, I'll come running. Combine that with a dancefloor, and I've found my happy place.

That party paradise is what Joshua Lewis had in mind when he launched the first Black-owned canned seltzer in the U.S. in 2023. He saw a gap in the market and partnered with Eric Martens of Border Brewing Company to concoct a new beverage that would fit in on a pulsing nightclub dancefloor just as well as at a casual backyard barbecue.

It's an easy sipper to hold in one hand while dancing or a light mixer for your amateur bartender friend to experiment with. This isn't a sugary drink, nor is it powerfully strong at just 4% ABV. Fruit takes center stage, but it does so gently. I think it's best when served from a glass but thoroughly chilled so there's no need for ice.

Ambrosia Kin, or mango lemonade, is my favorite. The tropical fruit salad was a staple at big family dinners and any cook-out, so the name alone elicits a tug of nostalgia. However, mango really shines here, and our room-temperature Kansas fruit salads certainly didn't have mango.

The Pressure flavor, or strawberry lemonade, has the most incredible scent of any drink I've ever brought to my nose. And with a job like mine, you best bet I'm sniffing everything. Your nose may think the can is full of fresh, juicy summer strawberries.

For those out and about, Kin can be found behind the bar where one may go to shake some ass, whether that be to a DJ or a band—such as recordBar, Aura, Mosaic, The Levee, Block 15 Tavern & Exchange, Society, and more. **P**

Mise en Place

CHEF RYAN BRAZEAL TELLS STORIES THROUGH FOOD AT NOVEL
By Alexander Omorodion

Communication lies at the root of the human experience. Chef and owner Ryan Brazeal shares his voice not in a recording studio or at a lectern, but through the dining experience he curates at Novel.

Over the years, Chef Ryan has assembled an array of food industry experiences, especially in Asian restaurants, that have molded who he is as a person and as a chef. With each bite of his creations, Chef Ryan tells the stories of his cumulative past.

I first heard Chef Ryan's voice through the hearty Sakura Pork Rib, and that is a story that I will never forget. Since then, I have tried a few other items on Novel's menu, and thus was curious to learn more about the Chef himself.



The Pitch: Tell us about yourself.

Ryan Brazeal: I've owned Novel Restaurant for what will be 12 years in July. Before that, I graduated from the Johnson County Community College culinary program and lived in New York for about eight and a half years.

I've always wanted to be my own boss, and when I made a decision to be a chef, it seemed like an appropriate career path for me. I liked the hours, flexibility, opportunity to be creative, and the late nights.

Could you speak more about your origin in the food industry? I was working in a warehouse in the West Bottoms, living in the River Market back in the late '90s, early 2000s. I had *The Joy of Cooking* cookbook my mom had given me, and I would cook for my friends. I thought this might be something that I'd enjoy professionally.

I went to Johnson County Community College and tried to enroll. There was an instructor there named John Courtney. He asked me, "Have you ever worked in a restaurant?" I said "No," and he said, "What are you some kind of damn fool? Go get a job in a restaurant and come back to me in six months and tell me if you still want to be a cook."

I started working in the Hyatt in room service by myself. I was lousy. I didn't have a lot of guidance, and they just left me to my own devices to write specials and cook room service for a 700-room hotel. I worked there

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.



NOVEL

1927 McGee St

Kansas City, MO 64108

Photos by Alexander Omorodion

for four years, and when I graduated from school, I moved to New York.

I started at an ambitious neighborhood bistro before opening a Nobu 57 in Manhattan for Nobu Matsuhisa. After a year there, I hopped around and spent the last couple of years as a sous chef at Momofuku before I decided to move back to Kansas City in 2012 to open up my own restaurant.

What is an aspect of the Kansas City food scene that you prefer to New York? The camaraderie between the chefs. I'm really close with a lot of the other chef-owners and chefs in Kansas City, where in New York it was a little more cutthroat.

From whom or what do you draw inspiration? I had worked for so many great chefs, and I felt like I had a whole arsenal of techniques, ingredients, and things that I wanted to do when I first opened, and I did. But now, I feel like it's not so much inspiration as it is knowing what works, and constantly trying to improve. I don't try to reinvent the wheel every time.

With small children, I don't have the opportunity to travel like I used to. We used to travel a lot and go to other restaurants, and that was how I was inspired, but now it's more the little things and honing my distinct style. Now I feel like I have a voice.

Tell me more about that—your style, your voice. It's all based on places that I've worked in and things that I've done over the years. I've worked at a number of Asian restaurants, from Nobu to Momofuku and Bucha, so I had some ingredients and techniques in my quiver that people hadn't really seen in Kansas City when we opened.

The menu now is in a really great place. From top to bottom, it works together and hopefully has something for everyone.

Being that this is our music issue, I have to ask: What's your favorite music venue in KC, and why? I don't get out as much as I used to, but when I do, it's usually up to the record-Bar. I'm an old punk rocker. I love going up there and seeing the old punk bands. 🎸

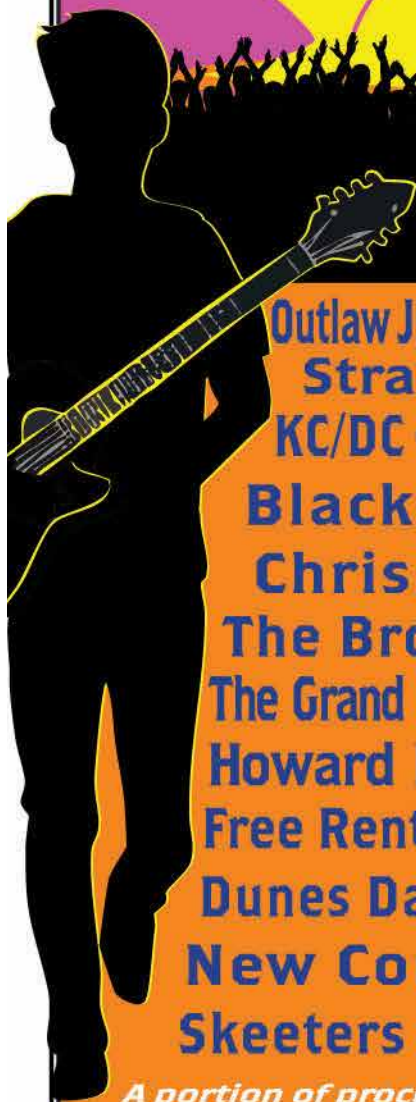
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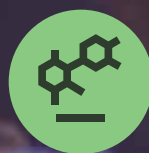


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HICK IN YOUR HEART

DESIGNER GRANT KRATZER ADDS MIDWESTERN FLAIR TO POST MALONE'S WORLD TOUR

By Kaylynn Mullins

Grant Kratzer's clothing brand Cheatin Snakes and its small downtown Kansas City storefront have somehow led him to becoming the creative director for Post Malone's *Big Ass Stadium Tour*. It's a leap that seems impossible, but when you hear how it came together, it's easy to see how the merge was inescapable.

It all began when Post Malone's stylist bought the star one of Cheatin Snake's bootleg wrestling shirts, which ultimately led to Kratzer becoming connected with the Posty Co—Malone's apparel line for which Kratzer would soon design the primary logo.

Beginning with smaller collaborations, Kratzer designed shirts for Malone's Australian tour, and then the creative team would eventually call him in to do bigger projects, such as designing the Posty's Truck Shop—a merch stand at Coachella that mirrors a fireworks/carnival stand that would blend in perfectly just outside of KC.

"I think that was the biggest pressure moment probably of my career, when I did like three shirts. It wasn't significant, but it felt monumental at the time," says Kratzer.

As creative director on the *Big Ass Stadium Tour*, Kratzer now plays a major role in just about everything you see.

"I did anything 'visual.' I did the posters and the merch, all of the signs on the stage. I made the Posty Co. logo, which is like the huge icon on the top of the stage for this tour," says Kratzer.

Throughout the tour—which includes fellow country rap star Jelly Roll—Post Malone hosted a traveling tailgate, which was completely free and open to the public. There were arcade games, live local music, raffles, beer, exclusive goodies, and more. Of course, everything was curated by Kratzer.

His Posty Truck Shop merch stand, which Kratzer initially designed for Coachella, mirrors a fireworks/carnival stand that would blend in perfectly just outside of KC.

Situated alongside a towering Post Malone inflatable and accompanied by multiple monster trucks, it lends the event a certain county fair feel—one that only a true resident of the plains can genuinely capture.

"I really want people to have the best time of their lives. That's always the goal," says Kratzer. "And who is better equipped to throw a party if not Post Malone and his crew?"

With experience in animation, music, woodworking, painting, graphic design, and fashion, Kratzer's vision and confidence have opened many doors for the KC native.

"If I could hire someone to do something or just figure out how to do it myself, nine times out of 10, I'm just going to figure it out," says Kratzer. "I think a lot of that skill set is from surrounding myself with people that help facilitate doing those things rather than, 'Oh, it's not going to work. Just hire someone to do it.' I'm always as hands-on as possible."

Kratzer's unstoppable drive generated a reputation that has bagged him several star-studded gigs—posters and merch for Blink-182, Red Hot Chili Peppers, and Pierce The Veil among others.

Aesthetically, Post Malone and Cheatin Snakes' paths seemed destined to meet—fishing iconography and hunter orange meet '90s skater fashion in a sweet y'allternative combination. "I think I have a special relationship with Post," says Kratzer. "I think that's kind of my value within the team is we're very similar. We like the same things."

No big deal, just the trusted originator for an 18-time Grammy-nominated artist.

"It feels surreal to have all this trust. It's essentially just me making these decisions," says Kratzer. "I get a lot of those opportunities to make the stage, and that's my dream."

Post Malone's music and visuals have changed drastically from his *Beer Bongs and Bentley's* days, shifting from collaborations with the likes of 21 Savage and Nicki Minaj



Photo Courtesy of Cheatin Snakes

to a feature on Beyoncé's *Cowboy Carter* and multiple songs with Morgan Wallen.

"I wanted to make a new lane for Post. I came on right when we were making that transition into country," says Kratzer. "Everything was so corny with cowboy hats and cactuses that I was like, 'There's gotta be a different way to do this.'" Kratzer's vision of country wasn't based on Spaghetti Westerns or Marty Robbins—The art was pulled from the reality of small towns in Midwestern America.

"We wanted to feel Midwest country, not Southern Texas country. So I think there is a definite genre being built outside of the classic look," says Kratzer.

The Midwest is often overlooked in terms of cultural significance, even in the rural sphere. Most automatically turn to the mountain and desert-dwelling cowboys instead of the Americana of the plains. We

trade in pageantry for a more raw, roughened image, which can be found in Kratzer's work for Post Malone and Cheatin Snakes.

"I love like white trash stuff in the most unironic way. There's something that feels good to me about that. It's comforting, and it isn't pretentious," says Kratzer. "That's kind of what I wanted to put forward because I feel like white trash is always kind of grouped with being ignorant, being racist, and all that shit. That's not where I'm coming from."

Kratzer strives to reclaim middle-American upbringings as something to be proud of, rather than trying to hide the hick in our hearts. An affinity for cheap beer, believe it or not, doesn't dictate one's moral compass. In theory and in practice, who could have guessed the results would look so good? **P**



Photo Courtesy of The Real Flower Pots

THE REAL DEAL

LOCAL COMPOSERS PATRICK MEAGHER AND JOHNNY MARIE COMBINE THEIR UNFINISHED WORK INTO AN UNFORGETTABLE PROJECT

By Nick Spacek

Although they've been working together musically since 2000 in projects like *Girl for Samson* and *Lonesome Petunia*, Kansas City composers Patrick Meagher and Johnny Marie formed *The Real Flower Pots* just last year, when the pair were talking about an abundance of partially completed songs they each had. They each shared a dozen incomplete tunes with the other and began a process they describe as "finishing each other's sentences without any genre limitations, rules, guidelines or interference from the other composer," resulting in the album, *Here Come The Real Flower Pots*.

The idea came about after the fifth *Girl for Samson* album, *Blend All the Seasons*, saw Meagher and Marie trying something different.

"We jammed every week to drum loops and then culled the jams for inspiring bits for songs," explains Marie. "I mention this to show that we were starting to think outside of what was normal for us."

The discussion which led to sharing these unfinished songs was the result of two things, says Marie.

"I had loads of demos/notions and I knew that he did, too," the composer recalls. "In late 2023, I thought of the band name

The Real Flower Pots and felt it was worthy of building something around. I mentioned this in an offhand way to Patrick and he was in!"

From there, they each began by trading a roughly even pile of songs and then getting to work. The bulk of the album is Marie fleshing out Meagher's ideas with the exception of two tracks, "Saturnine" and "Pigeon Falls." There weren't any occurrences where one of Marie's songs completed one of Meagher's or vice versa. *Here Come The Real Flower Pots* is entirely new material being added to extant works, although there wasn't a manifesto or mission statement, they say.

"Once I sent him something back that I had built up, we would often trade it back and forth a few more times," continues Marie. "Generally speaking, we never smashed two existing bits together. There was the original notion and then new ideas. 'Pigeon Falls' was the only song that we built from the ground up in real-time."

"God's Horn" was the first completed song and when it was finished, the duo knew that they had something special with this idea and were both enamored with it.

"It was Patrick's demo and was originally synth with that great chord pattern,"

Marie explains. "I replaced most of the parts with real instruments. We had an unspoken rule from that point on that we would use natural instruments as much as possible."

While that held up for about the first six songs and includes cello, viola, recorders, lap steel, mandolin, banjo, lyre, xylophone, and natural hand percussion, Marie and Meagher now just do whatever best serves the composition. Sadly, while *Here Come The Real Flower Pots* is a wildly wonderful album that is baroque and folky, just like *Girl for Samson*, this is strictly a recording project because it

would be unwieldy to do live.

"The Girls did a single live performance a long time ago and decided afterward that rehearsing took too much time away from recording," Marie says. When they first started the album, the pair began trading vocal duty on verses and choruses. "As the album progressed, we actually began to sing portions of lines. A line may start with Patrick's voice and finish with mine. This would also make performance awkward!"

You can find *The Real Flower Pots* album, *Here Come The Real Flower Pots*, online at therealflowerpots.bandcamp.com.

OH SAY CAN YOU SING

WHAT IT TAKES TO MAKE THE 81-GAME NATIONAL ANTHEM ROSTER AT THE K

By Jake Louraine

Before any given Kansas City Royals home game, tens of thousands of fans file into Kauffman Stadium. Friends and families alike take their seats to enjoy America's favorite pastime.

Fans enjoy a classic hotdog or bag of popcorn, a beer to take the edge off, maybe the "Z Man" from Joe's KC BBQ, or any other high calorie concoction that their hearts desire.

When catching a contest at The K, the options are close to endless. However, there's one thing everyone experiences on gameday: the national anthem.

Taking the field before the Major League Baseball players, a singer performs "The Star-Spangled Banner" with the pressure of thousands of eyes on their shoulders. As a notoriously difficult song to sing with remarkable range between high and low notes, one slip up could be mortifying.

But for Cyndy Mangan, that's just Tuesday.

"Love baseball, love singing, why not combine them?" Mangan says. "Seemed like a pretty easy fit to me."

With 81 home games during the 2025 season, there are 162 performances of the national anthem or "God Bless America." Since 2013, Mangan, 56, has sung both at least once per season.

Having attended Royals games at Kauffman for over five decades, singing at games was more of a means to an end for Mangan.

"I wanted to be able to see the games because I'm such a baseball fan," Mangan says. "I've been going to baseball games at that stadium since I was five years old. My dad's company had tickets on the third base

side, so I would root and cheer and yell at George Brett all the time."

When the Royals began showing life in the early 2010s, Mangan, a wife and mother of two, sought to get out to more games. At every game she sings, the Royals offer four tickets and a parking pass.

"I started doing this because we were not at a place where we could afford tickets, parking, concessions, to take four people," Mangan says. "The start of the impetus for me even auditioning was just to be able to afford to take my family."

Aside from singing at her church, Mangan didn't have much experience in front of live audiences, especially none comparable to Kauffman. Auditioning would be a challenge, but she was eager to face it.

Every February, the Royals send out a call for singers to submit applications for a shot at singing during the upcoming season. The first step includes a video submission where applicants must sing "The Star-Spangled Banner" or "God Bless America" in less than 90 seconds. Singing in less than 90 seconds is required to fit within the schedule of the game.

"I usually shoot for 1:26 to 1:28 to prove that you can definitely do it underneath," Mangan says. "They won't even look at it if it's over 1:30."

After her video submission, Mangan was called in for a live audition—the second step of the application process—and performed in front of a panel of five judges. In her very first season applying, she was approved, earning the chance to sing for the team she grew up loving.

A few days before her first perfor-



Illustration by Teddy Rosen

mance, Mangan visited the stadium for a sound check where she was introduced with a new challenge: the reverb.

When a performer sings at The K, the sound goes outward only to bounce right back to its source. As Mangan describes, it's like hearing an echo of yourself, or as if someone's talking in your ear as you're trying to sing.

"That reverb is seriously the hardest element," Mangan says. "Other than an individual's self doubt or fear, the reverb is hands down the hardest part of singing out there."

What often happens is that new national anthem performers will wait for the reverb to die down before singing again, but that tends to ruin the timing of the song, so it's important to power through.

Although the Royals Gameday crew provides earbuds to block the reverb, Mangan opts to use swimmers putty to block her ears more efficiently. The other solution is a larger audience. With more people in attendance, there's more bodies to absorb the sound. The fewer the people, the more intense the reverb.

"I always wanted to have maximum people," Mangan says. "If we could sell out, that's so much better for the performance. Yes it's scarier, but you're not looking at the crowd, you're looking at the flag, or you're looking at the fountains."

Fear, however, has never been a major factor for Mangan. She approaches every performance with a simple and logical deduction.

"It's just part of the experience," Mangan says. "I know that if I'm going to sing, then there's going to be people there. Isn't

that the goal? So to be afraid of the very thing that is actually your goal doesn't make sense.

"If you love to do something, then why would you ever be afraid of it?" Mangan says.

The variety of singers and performances the Royals present keep each game interesting. Whether it's a solo singer, a group, or even instrumentalists, the application is the same. While Mangan has been singing for the team for 12 years, they're always introducing new singers and groups to honor the nation.

And there's even opportunities for some of the youngest, most inexperienced musicians around Missouri and Kansas to get involved.

On May 28, before Kansas City bested the Cincinnati Reds in a 3-2 victory, Jefferson West High School's Lakeside Singers took the field in front of a home crowd of 15,430. For choir teacher Mitch Dziewor and his students, it was an experience unlike any they'd had before.

"Our biggest crowds are like high school football games or basketball games," Dziewor says. "I think that was probably the biggest thing that we've ever done, and (the students) were ready for it and super excited about it."

From Meridian, Kansas—a population of 744 according to the 2020 census—the group of 12 high schoolers performed in front of a crowd nearly 21 times larger than their hometown's population.

To prepare the teenagers for the biggest audience they've ever seen, Dziewor introduced a new tactic in the weeks leading up to the game.

After starting practices normally and working through the national anthem, Dziewor had his Lakeside Singers run laps around the room and do jumping jacks, burpees, whatever they could to get their heart rates moving and lose their breath before singing again.

"I mean, you're going to be in front of 10,000 people, so yeah, it's gonna be pumping," Dziewor says. "They know that song like the back of their hand, though, so I wasn't really worried too much about it."

Unlike Mangan, Dziewor's group did not do a sound check prior to the game, so they discovered the reverb the hard way.

"As soon as we started going and I heard the reverb, I looked at them, and I could see the panic on their faces," Dziewor says. "I mouthed to them, 'Just stay with me, just stay with me.' It wasn't something I was entirely prepared for, but luckily their dedication and their hard work throughout the year on all of the pieces that we've sung really helped us."

Also unlike solo performers, the Lakeside Singers were required to sell 200 discounted tickets to the Royals game in order to perform. In a town of less than 800, this was no small task.

Aware of the challenge ahead of him, Dziewor didn't reveal to his students that the Royals had selected them until after they devised a plan to reach the ticket goal.

"We ended up making posters and posting on our Facebook, and it was in the announcements, it was at the middle school and all that stuff," Dziewor says. "We ended

up selling, I think 250."

When gametime finally came, Dziewor couldn't make it far at Kauffman without seeing a familiar face.

"A whole bunch of people from home ended up showing up," Dziewor says. "We had quite a good turnout for our little community, which was really something special."

What Mangan and Dziewor and likely all singers share in their experiences are the Royals' Gameday crew who work behind the scenes to ensure a smooth performance.

"The gameday experience crew, I have nothing but high praise for them," Mangan says. "I've never had a negative experience with the crew that's welcoming you. I would love for them to get some of the praise."

Moments away from singing in front of tens of thousands of fans, the singers have enough on their minds, so the crew makes sure to guide the performers through every step.

"I was just very impressed with the professionalism and intricate timing that they were able to pull off, especially with a group of 12 excited high schoolers," Dziewor says.

There's a quiet choreography to it all—the kind that immortalizes the anthem's impact. Whether it's in front of a sell-out crowd or a modest midweek game, the "Star-Spangled Banner" binds fans, players, and performers in its shared moment of unity.

It's not just a pregame ritual, but a stage where a personal passion can take the form of something bigger and join one of sport's greatest traditions. **B**

WHOLE LOTTA HEART

CHART-TOPPING HEART IS SET TO RETURN TO KANSAS CITY FOR THE ROYAL FLUSH TOUR AT T-MOBILE

By Michael Mackie

Rock royalty is about to make a triumphant return to Kansas City.

After an eight-month postponement, Heart is back on tour—louder, fiercer, and more harmonious than ever. The iconic, sister-driven band behind anthems like "Barracuda" and "Alone" will bring their *Royal Flush* Tour to the T-Mobile Center on August 21 alongside Todd Rundgren, who's opening the raucous affair.

Co-Founder Nancy Wilson says not only are she and Ann ready to turn the volume up to 11, but crowds have never been more receptive to their music. "We're going all year—probably a total of 60-plus shows this year," says Wilson. "People are showing up. Young people are showing up. And it's

been very fun, rewarding, and cool."

During our interview, Wilson quips on her favorite memorabilia over the years, performing for rock legends Led Zeppelin, and how she achieved that epic, behemoth '80s hair. (There may or may not have been a complete tutorial involved.)

The Pitch: I just went back and rewatched your Kennedy Center Honors performance of "Stairway to Heaven". It has 41 million views on YouTube. I think two million of those views are mine. What do you remember most about that magical night?

Nancy Wilson: Top to bottom, the whole entire thing. From





Photo by Jeremy Danger



the minute we heard we were offered that opportunity to be able to go and honor Zeppelin, who, of course, we're lifetime fans of. *Super fans*. And we moved Heaven and Earth to change our dates around enough so that we could actually get there to Washington, D.C. right around Christmas time. We had one rehearsal because we had a show the previous day, so we didn't have time to really dig into the actual performance aspect of it.

But the Kennedy Center themselves were so amazingly together with all of the incredible work that they did on that song. It is kind of a holy relic of a rock song and you don't just take that song lightly. They had everything so well planned. We slotted straight in. We were already warmed up from being on tour.

But it was so cold. The one rehearsal that we had, my fingers had been frozen outside waiting for the volunteer car services. And so, I walked into rehearsal with frozen fingers—and I messed up the beginning of “Stairway to Heaven.” I start by myself in front of God and everybody—like all the ensemble choirs, the small ensemble, the horns, the strings, the woodwinds, and the rock band in attendance. And they were like, ‘Oh!’ And I was like, ‘No, no, no, no. Just give me a chance because my fingers are frozen to the core.’

And they're like, ‘We can shadow you. We can play behind and not show that we're playing.’ I was like, ‘No, you don't understand. I know how to do this. It's just right this particular moment, my hands can't do it.’ But it turned out just fine, and I put my fingers in my husband Jeff's armpits right before we walked out—my hand warmers. It worked out really beautifully.

And we didn't know how emotionally hard-hitting it was until we saw it a couple

weeks later when it was edited together and it was airing on television. We watched it and it was like, ‘Oh my God, now I'm crying.’ It was a wonderful life moment, a life experience never to be forgotten. For somebody in a band that used to be called Little Led Zeppelin, those guys were just completely humble and cool and appreciative. They came up and thanked us afterward and complimented us individually after the show. And it was just like, ‘Okay, Jimmy Page told me I did a good job on the guitar part. I can't believe it.’

And Robert Plant went to Ann, ‘You guys, I used to hate this song because people murder this song but thank you for doing it right.’ So, it was just one spectacular blessing that we got to do that.

On this latest tour, what song is getting the biggest crowd reaction? Or does it change every night?

A lot of times, it's pretty similar. It's so cute to see every age group out there—really young kids are showing up, college people are showing up, and our original older fans who are closer to our age are all there.

And then there's, like, old dudes with their wives in the back who go, ‘Dogggg aaand Butterfflyyy.’ They're singing along. It's the sweetest thing because the songs themselves are like the soundtrack to, ‘Okay, maybe I danced at the prom with my lady to that song in 1978.’ It's really sweet the way the songs translate through the eras.

“Mistral Wind” is one of the ones that really captures the room every time. “Alone,” of course, is amazingly emotional and personal. It could have been written in any era of history, like someone with a French beret and a cigarette in World War I in a cafe singing “Alone” during the Occupation. It translates through the ages. And good songs do that.

And “Dog & Butterfly” is an emotional moment for a lot of people. You see people kind of cry sometimes. And we do “Going to California,” which is a Zeppelin song that we know how to do really well and is amazing to do.

Sometimes the clippier songs get more people dancing, and other times it's the sad, emotional songs, the romance, that gets them. But with Heart, it's kind of a variety show because we're very diverse in the types of songs that we do.

Do you have a favorite piece of Heart memorabilia or maybe a fan gift? I spied a Heart lunchbox or Bento box on Amazon.

Well, there was a music box that had *Dog & Butterfly* cover art on it. You opened it up and there was a little crank that would play a music box, and it would play part of the “Mistral Wind” theme song. Those are very rare and hard to find. It was a record company exec piece of merchandise, with the posters and swag that came with the album when we were trying to make a big splash with it.

But I think maybe *my* memorabilia really leans on my guitars because they are such dear friends of mine. Recently,

we got a thing working with the Hard Rock people who started the Hard Rock Café. And they've got a warehouse in Miami full of memorabilia, including a couple of my guitars now. The Blue Ovation Carbon Top from 1976 or 1977—with all the hippie filigree all over the front.

And one of my original “Barracuda” Gibson SG guitars with the Marine Corps sticker on the back. They had so many amazing things in there. They have Jimi Hendrix's upside-down, backward guitar that I got to hold and play. So, they're putting this amazing experience together for collectibles, of which now I am part.

Finally, I'm sure you've played KC countless times, but what are you looking forward to during your visit? Can we please feed you all the things?

Well, Kansas City barbecue! *Hello!* But Kansas City is always such a cool music town. And you always have to think of Paul McCartney going, ‘AaaAhh, Kansas City!’ You have to sing it in your head every time you walk through that town. There's a historic part which I always admire because a lot of towns sort of blend together. Kansas City has its own real character, *still intact*. **P**

WAREHOUSE ON BROADWAY

IN A FRESH VARIATION, THE VENUE MAKES ITS RETURN AS AN INCLUSIVE SPACE FOR UNFAMILIAR FACES TO MEET IN WESTPORT

By Nick Spacek

Kansas City's newest venue, **Warehouse on Broadway**, might also be the hippest thing to hit Westport in years. Partners Neill Smith and J.C. Cirese soft opened the 650-capacity venue on St. Patrick's Day of this year, and while there were a few shows scattered in the following weeks, the official opening weekend saw local metal legends The Esoteric reunite for their first show in over a decade on Friday, April 4. The very next night brought a double headline bill of dance rockers Hembree and your favorite boyband Post Sex Nachos, with both nights absolutely packed.

“The room was full—not just with fans, but with people who had clearly never met before, dancing, talking, and connecting,” recalls Smith. “That energy, that sense of shared experience—That's exactly what we wanted Warehouse On Broadway to be about. It clicked at that moment that this place had already started becoming what we hoped it could be.”

Located off 39th and Broadway, the space is just across the street and a block

north from the neighborhood's former live music headquarters of the Riot Room, which is somewhat kismet, since Smith got his start booking shows there in his twenties.

“Kind of by accident,” Smith admits. “I found a real passion for it because what I really love about it is the part where I'm on Facebook 15 years later and some dude that DJ'd on the patio is like, ‘I need a plumber. Is anybody a plumber?’ And some dude that was in a metal band was like, ‘I'm a plumber. I got you, man.’”

What the Riot Room could do, booking-wise, resulted in the sort of nights where intergalactic surf rock band Man (or Astro-Man?) was on the inside stage and hip hop duo the Ying Yang Twins was outside, mixing and mingling people who would have never met otherwise. As Smith puts it, he missed that bridge between two disparate worlds when he found himself working for AEG: “I'm like, ‘Would've never met you if you hadn't played a metal show and wandered out to the patio afterwards.’”

Smith honestly admits that he didn't plan to get into all of this, and this was an opportunity that came across unexpectedly. He and Cirese both said to each other, "Do you want to get back into [KC]? Well, let's do it."

Both partners felt that, when the Riot Room closed during the pandemic, it left a big hole in this market. The mix of hip hop, EDM, metal, and indie shows worked because it was so different, Smith says, and that's really the void they thought that they could fill: a venue that's not huge, but not tiny, and capable of feeling like there's a solid crowd even when not sold out.

A big part of that is the venue's design. Rather than the standard shotgun setup with a stage located at one end, the venue horseshoes around the stage with bars elevated on either side. The end result is a venue that is wider than it is deep, and there's not a bad seat in the whole place. Grab a drink at the bar, turn around, and you're level with the stage itself.

All of that said, Smith wants to make it clear he's not competing with the likes of The Madrid, The Granada, or The Truman.

"I'm just competing against Netflix and YouTube and I'm competing against shows that just haven't made their way here," the co-owner emphasizes. "I'm competing against trying to pull a show that would probably end up in Minneapolis."

Looking at tour routing over the last few years, Smith's point stands pretty well. Many tours have stopped using the I-70 corridor quite as much as they once did, with bands making their way from Denver to Minneapolis, and maybe stopping in Oma-

with money to spend on concerts are typically in their late 20s, 30s, and beyond, so there are seats available. The ledges near the bars have stools. Their restaurant concept at the back of the venue, Sound Bite, opened in June and features a full kitchen

and watch the show," offers Smith. "There's flexibility to it. It's got more facets to it in the sense that it's not just event-based. You can come here and hang out without a show going on."

Having a fluid identity is one part, with the other big part being community involvement. Smith enthuses over what Frank Hicks has managed to do with Knuckleheads.

"That dude literally has figured out how to pull so many different groups of people into his venue and have something kind of for everybody in that realm," Smith marvels, pointing to the fact that Hicks has capitalized on an underserved concertgoer, offering ample seating, food, and other different options folks like to have in an event space. Once you're there for the show, there's no need to go anywhere else, nor would you want to, thanks to the open and welcoming environment, and it looks like Warehouse on Broadway is well on its way to being that kind of space for Westport.

"One of the biggest surprises has been how quickly the local community embraced the venue—not just as a place to see live music, but as a gathering space," reflects Smith. "We expected some traction, but we didn't anticipate how many people would treat Warehouse on Broadway like a second home."

Part of that is likely due to the fact that



Photo by Maggie Gulling

ha, rather than KC or Lawrence.

"There's so many different things that I think you'll see start to pop back up in here, or things that have just never been here because of the size," Smith says.

He has cannily realized that the folks

and items like the Warehouse burger, a pork belly BLT, fried bologna, roasted eggplant sandwiches, and more.

"So it's like, 'Alright, I'm gonna go back here, sit down and have a drink or order some food, and then I can go out, stand,

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Smith, Cirese, and everyone else at Warehouse have quickly learned the importance of flexibility. Whether it's last-minute artist changes or reconfiguring the space for different vibes, they've learned to think on their feet.

"We've really focused on listening to artists, to guests, and to our staff," Smith continues, saying that's helped them quickly identify what's working and where they need to pivot. For example, he says, they've fine-tuned their sound system and stage layout based on feedback to better suit different types of performances and have also made small but meaningful adjustments to their bar flow and ticketing process to make the entire experience smoother.

"The goal has been to stay responsive and treat this first phase as a collaborative process with our audience," says Smith, offering that everyone at Warehouse on Broadway has tried to create a space that feels authentic, intimate, inclusive, and artist-centered.

While they've put a lot of thought into every detail, from acoustics to lighting to making sure people feel welcome the moment they walk through the door, Smith thinks that, more than anything, people respond to the intention behind the venue.

"It's not just about putting on shows," Smith concludes. "It's about fostering a creative culture and giving both performers and audiences something real to connect with."


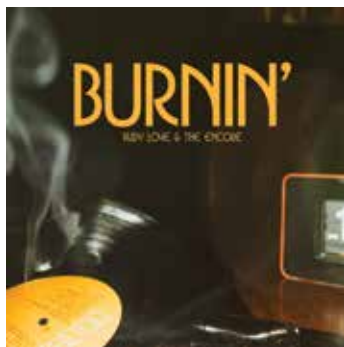
Warehouse on Broadway is located at 3951 Broadway Blvd. in Kansas City, Missouri, and can be found online at warehouseonbroadway.com. 



Photo Courtesy of Midtopia



RUDY LOVE & THE ENCORE

NEW SOUNDS WITH OLD SOUL

By Nick Spacek

Wichita's Rudy Love & The Encore's new album, 11, is—as the title implies—11 striking songs of soul, funk, R&B, and hip hop sure to make you move, groove, and utterly lose your mind. As anyone who's seen this six-piece band live can attest, they are a group that acknowledges its history, while also being rooted in forward thinking. As to the former, the very name of the band pays homage to frontman Rudy Love Jr.'s father, the legendary Rudy Love Sr., and as to the latter, this new album is being released via Buy Before You Stream—an initiative

that gives fans access to purchase exclusive vinyls directly from artists before released on streaming platforms.

This means that, rather than waiting on that copy of a record you as a fan want to hold in your hands because you know that buying physical media sees far more money going into the pockets of an artist than the pittance they'll receive from streaming, you not only get to support them, but you get to hear this music before the rest of the world. While it's not the first album in Rudy Love & The Encore's 12-year history, there's

something about it that makes it different, says Love.

"This one's really special in that it's really a tribute to this band, specifically" Love explains. There have been many different iterations of this group, he says, calling it more of a collective than it is a band, but this particular lineup at this point in time has taken songs that have heretofore only been live and committed them to recordings for the first time.

"It's new and old music so, if it feels like it has an old soul, it's because it does," continues the frontman.

At the moment, Rudy Love & The Encore is comprised of Rudy Love Jr. on vocals and keys, Marrque Nunley on drums, Rachel Love on percussion, Mariel Jacoda on vocals, Sherdeill (DJ) Breathett on bass, and Willy Simms on guitar. And while each member gets a chance to shine on this album, Love also sees *11* as an introduction to Jacoda as co-lead vocalist.

When you see Rudy Love & The Encore, you'll see Jacoda sing back up for the first few songs. When she steps up and takes lead, jaws hit the floor. Jacoda had been with the band when they were in Los Angeles, and Love jokes that he "somehow tricked her into moving into Kansas" to be with the group. With her back as part of The Encore, it now feels like the band is complete.

"This is the beginning of something really special, the music we're working on now," Love says. "It really puts me more in the background because we're all taking leads at the same time and it's gonna be something really special."

A surprising addition to the six member Rudy Love & The Encore lineup is Los Angeles rapper D Smoke on "Flex." Love met the rapper as part of a gathering of the

Inglewood collective known as Woodworks and it led to Love keeping an eye on that group for the next decade. So, when Midtopia put on last year's Elsewhere Festival in Wichita, Love reached out and asked the rapper if he'd like to be part of it.

While they didn't perform together, when "Flex" was performed live on the stage at Wave, Love sent it out to D Smoke a couple of months later saying, "Hey, it would be so cool if you could jump on this, but again, I know it's a long shot."

"He just was like, 'Yeah, I'm down,'" marvels Love. "He asked me a couple questions about the song—said, 'What is this about to you? What does this mean to you?' Then, he sent a rough copy of it with the lyrics, and I couldn't believe it."

Love had left a space open for a little bit of an instrumental piece right before Smoke's verse was supposed to come in, and he decided to just rap over the whole thing. It's an amazing guest spot, and it feels like D Smoke is part of everything, rather than just a visitor, and demonstrates that each step Rudy Love & The Encore take is just a little further than before. Love jokes that while it can feel more tripping forward sometimes than actual steps, it always feels like there's momentum.

"The Encore is a small part of something that feels so much bigger to us," Love reflects. "It feels like our entire world or our entire city is shifting into this beautiful space where creatives are creating more and being more bold."

Part of that is Midtopia, the organization behind Buy Before You Stream. Midtopia is a "multidisciplinary collaboration" that "seeks to establish sustainable and equitable opportunities for in-



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 7/19 Father John Misty
 8/1 Buena Vista Social Club
 8/17 We Came As Romans
 8/21 Gary Allan
 9/4 Turnpike Troubadours
 9/5 Pure Prairie League
 9/6 Yacht Rock Revue
 9/10 Noel Miller
 9/12 Shoreline Mafia
 9/13 Here Come the Mummies
 9/14 Jerry Cantrell
 9/16 UB40
 9/20 RuPaul's Drag Race
 9/29 AJ Croce
 10/5 Young the Giant
 10/12 X & Los Lobos
 10/13 Quinn XCII
 10/14 Kublai Khan TX
 10/18 Evil Dead In Concert
 10/23 Russell Dickerson
 10/30 An Evening with Patty Griffin and Rickie Lee Jones
 11/2 Dylan Gossett
 11/11 Fit for A King
 11/22 Kathleen Madigan
 12/2 Mammoth WVH
 12/10 Trivium
 12/19 Ancient Aliens Live



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 8/8 Joe Fenti
 8/9 The Aquabats
 9/23 Colony House
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 10/4 Noah Reid
 10/7 Choir!Choir!Choir!
 10/11 Molly Tuttle
 10/16 Murder By Death
 10/25 Welcome to Night Vale



7/13 Slightly Stoopid
 8/9 Cyndi Lauper
 8/21 Aven Brothers
 9/25 Three Dog Night/Little River Band
 9/26 Kansas & 38 Special
 9/29 Halestorm & Lindsey Stirling

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7/16 200 Stab Wounds
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 7/16 St. Paul & The Broken Bones + The Wood Brothers
 7/18 Railroad Earth / Daniel Donato / Yonder Mountain String Band
 7/26 Michael Franti & Spearhead
 8/2 Toad The Wet Sprocket
 8/4 Dropkick Murphys & Bad Religion
 8/27 David Lee Roth
 9/27 Charles Wesley Godwin
 10/1 That Mexican OT
 10/4 Ziggy Marley
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dependent artists and music workers via concepts for contributive partnerships and alternative business models that

harness the connected, collaborative power of interdependence." Think of it as DIY, but on a grander scale than hand-screened t-shirts and shows in a basement.

"Midtopia—It's just a bunch of really creative thinkers," Love reflects, pointing to Midtopia COO Adam Hartke as a long-time friend who truly believed in Love at the beginning when not many people did, and also the brains behind Buy Before You Stream.

Hartke explains that Buy Before You Stream was conceived by Midtopia staff and artists about two years ago as a way to establish better, more direct pathways of access for fans and artists they love.

The push is not to necessarily say, "Hey, streaming is evil and we want to go away from streaming," says the Midtopia COO, but more a way of releasing music that fits with the rest of the Midtopia ethos.

"It is one additional pathway helping artists chip away at the overall goal of creating sustainable careers as artists," Hartke explains. "It leverages direct fan connections so artists can have more control over their communications and their artistic endeavors. Everything we do is focused on removing barriers and empowering artists—this is one step in that direction."

Hartke's biggest hope for this new way of releasing music is that artists are able to have direct access to the people who love their music, without gatekeepers, without the need to spend tons of money on ads that go into the ether with little tangible results.

"Social media is virtually useless these days, so it's a very grassroots effort, employing a lot of old school tactics, but that's what it takes to build the community of support we seek," says Hartke. That said, he continues on to say the overall challenges for independent artists and music workers are monumental and never-ending in this current industry.

"In the grand scheme of things, most music fans who buy vinyl and merchandise 'get it,' so the challenge with this strategy is relatively low compared to the mountain that lies ahead," concludes Hartke, and Love agrees.

"It's more that it's something special for fans who care enough to say, 'I want something physical to hold onto from this band, and in doing so, I get to support that band,'" Love continues. "I loved the idea and said we would love to be one of the first people to be a part of it. Fast forward—here we are."

Love says that now, it seems like the only way he ever wants to release music because it seems more in line with the traditions he had as a kid, watching his family drop tracks.

"This is just so much more fun to pick up a physical copy." **P**

PUPPET PROPOSAL

QUINTRON AND MISS PUSSYCAT'S UNCANNY JOURNEY TO THEIR 30TH ANNIVERSARY TOUR

By Nick Spacek

The idea of musical artists touring in celebration of an anniversary is nothing new, but there's something extra special about the upcoming 30th Anniversary Tour of garage rock, experimental, puppet show duo Quintron & Miss Pussycat's 2025 series of tours. Not only are they celebrating three decades of performance, they are celebrating being married for the same amount of time.

And, let it never be said that a musical act that combines the Drum Buddy—a mechanically rotating, five-oscillator, light-activated drum machine—and a puppet show during the same set ever did anything traditionally.

"We got married in Las Vegas after a show at Benway Bop! record store," recalls Miss Pussycat. "We had just met. We didn't really know each other very well."

Quintron proposed using a ring pop sucker. Miss Pussycat did not know Quintron's last name. It was the third show of their first tour. On the marriage certificate, Quintron's father was listed as Don Bolles and Miss Pussycat's was Danny Doll Rod.

"And then we went to Chapel of The Bells and we got married and the puppets were the witnesses," Miss Pussycat continues.

"We had some human witnesses—a Vegas dancer, Catherine Delish was one," interjects Quintron. "One of the other ones was from the chapel."

After the wedding, they discovered that the lead singer for Kool & The Gang had just gotten married there, and then the chapel was hit by a truck and the sign fell off.

"Then we went to Circus Circus and

we went on a pink rollercoaster ride," Miss Pussycat says. "Then we went to the MGM Grand and there's this huge buffet, so that was our wedding dinner, and then we went to a magic show in the Emerald Forest at the MGM Grand."

From there, the inaugural Quintron & Miss Pussycat tour continued on to Burning Man. Keep in mind, this was 30 years ago when the festival was very much in its early stages, and few outside its community knew what to expect, least of all two musicians from New Orleans.

"It was the first or second one," Quintron says. "We didn't know what it was. I thought it was just a music festival."

"Our friends in California have been telling us for a while, 'This is the coolest thing,'" Miss Pussycat says. "So we show up and we're like, 'Oh my God.' There's naked people rolling around in the mud. We didn't have a tent. We didn't have water or food, and we were completely unprepared."

Long story short, they spent the night in a nitrous oxide tent, their van got stuck in the mud, and the naked people pulled it out the next day. They then met up with the Demolition Doll Rods and toured the West Coast.

Touring has gotten easier since then, the couple says, although it's not without its challenges.

"I think if we were just a band and the puppet show wasn't part of it, it would be easier," Quintron explains. "It's really difficult to figure out logistically how to do that in clubs that vary in sizes and load-in times and all that kind of stuff. But I know that this wouldn't have lasted as long had



Photo by Caitlyn Ridenour

we not forced the square peg and the round hole together and made it the quadrangle and rolled it down the hill of America and beyond."

While the tour kicks off in Kansas City to celebrate 30 years, Quintron says it's so they can go attend the Puppeteers of America festival in Verona, Wisconsin, take a vacation in Wisconsin Dells, see the Circus Museum in Baraboo, and visit House on the Rock. It might not be traditional tour routing, but goodness, it sounds like a fun time.

"We started doing this thing when we started touring again after COVID," Quintron explains of how he and Miss Pussycat defy the logical way to do it where you tour in a loop to one major spot such as a festival and then you tour your way back home. "We

started just routing to where we wanted to go, picking where we want to end, and then just hang out there and drive home."

As they put it, in the end, it takes two days, four tanks of gas, and some cheap hotels to get back home after a tour that ends in a fun spot, and it's absolutely worth it.

"It actually works out spiritually better," Quintron says. "And, financially, it's not that big of a blow because a lot of times the way home is a lot of weird Monday nights in Champaign-Urbana. And we've done that."

Quintron & Miss Pussycat's 30th Anniversary Tour stops in Kansas City on Sunday, July 20, with support from Still Animals and Wayne Pain & The Shit Stains, at the Grand Avenue Temple. **P**

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Sound Off: Why Some People Prefer Silence Over a Sexy Playlist

While many folks enjoy a moody playlist to set the tone, listening to music during sex isn't a universal turn-on.

The erotic power of silence can be highly underrated. It allows using breathy gasps, whispered words, and skin gliding against the sheets as your soundtrack. It's an organic symphony when our bodies are in motion together. It's often less about total silence or the absence of music, but rather about tuning in to the erotic sounds that just happen through the course of the exchange.

Eliminating background music during sex could intensify your presence in the moment, reducing pressure to be performative. Without lyrics to interpret or beats to match, you can fully experience the sounds of intimacy: their moans, the rhythm of a shared gasp, or a soft request for 'more.' For some, the absence of music allows space to drop deeply into their bodies, removing the need to match a tempo or "sound sexy" in time with the track.

Silence isn't just the absence of sound—It's a sensory tool in its own right. In kink and BDSM circles, sound deprivation is often used to intensify power dynamics and focus. Without sound, the submissive becomes acutely attuned to every

other stimulus: the temperature change when a body shifts closer, the brush of a hand, the sharp inhale before impact.

Even in non-kinky dynamics, silence can deepen erotic attention. It strips away distractions, giving way to anticipation. When partnered sex is framed as a co-created experience, not a performance, the quietness can feel like a shared secret.

One Dominant, Electra, says she regularly uses sensory deprivation to heighten eroticism in her sessions with her submissives. "Putting them in noise-canceling headphones and a blindfold is pretty common. I will alternate between silence and ambient sounds to mask my movements. I like when they don't really know what's coming next," she says. "Without sight or sound cues, every touch becomes a surprise."

In her case, music wasn't the mood—It was a distraction or a tool. A low, atmospheric playlist became camouflage for the soft jingle of a Wartenberg wheel or the scrape of a paddle as she picked it up, making every sensation hit harder.

What the Brain Hears During Arousal

Science backs up what these sensory explorers already know: The brain responds

Photo by Nicole Bissey. Illustrations by Shelby Phelps

intensely to sound, but not always in a way that enhances eroticism. Arousal engages multiple brain regions, including the insula (which processes interoceptive awareness, like heartbeat and breath), the orbitofrontal cortex (your reward and emotional processing center), and the somatosensory cortex (responsible for touch).

These systems overlap with how we interpret sound. That means if you're tuning into lyrics, identifying instruments, or mentally critiquing the playlist, rather than focusing on how *fucking hot* this experience you are having is, then your brain might di-

don't just soften the atmosphere; They can block out external noise like roommates, city traffic, or a snoring dog. This allows partners to stay present in the moment and forget about potential distractions.

Apps like Endel, Noisli, or Calm offer ambient audio environments designed to support focus, rest, or even intimacy. Unlike traditional sex playlists, these soundscapes don't require editing, taste-matching, or timing. They just hold the space.

Try swapping the DJ hat for a sensory experiment. If you're curious about your own or a partner's auditory preferences,

"Without sight or sound cues, every touch becomes a surprise."

vert attention away from your body's sensations. And when the goal is embodiment, not distraction, that split focus can actually dull the experience.

There are perfectly good reasons why someone might love music during sex, and this is not advice to never use a playlist that includes your favorite artist. A solid beat can help partners sync their movements, support sustained rhythm, or calm performance anxiety with a familiar structure. In long-term partnerships, music can function as a kind of soundtrack to your love life—one that subtly guides tempo or helps one partner match the other's pace and headspace. But this has to be a collaborative effort.

My husband, for instance, is not into my sexy playlist with TLC and Sade that I created after last year's column *Hot and Bothered Harmonies*. He explained that songs with words hijack his attention. "If I know the lyrics, I might start thinking of them in my head. If I don't, I'm trying to figure them out. Either way, I'm not exactly focused on you." So, we took time to collaborate on a lyric-free version, but typically it's only used on occasion. He likes those sexy noises, just not when Salt-N-Pepa is singing about them.

This isn't uncommon. For those with neurodivergent brains or high auditory sensitivity, words in music can be overstimulating or even disorienting during sensual moments. A rhythm-forward playlist can enhance arousal. A poetic slow jam might derail it. A song that reminds them of an ex-lover is a vibe-ruiner.

Ambient Sound: A Middle Ground

Still, for those who feel awkward in total silence, ambient sound can offer a satisfying compromise. White noise, rainfall, ocean waves, or instrumental textures provide a sensual background without demanding too much cognitive attention. These sounds

consider doing a little field research. Set up a few sound experiments over a week or two: Try an erotic session with no soundtrack and another with only ambient noise. Next time, play a playlist with no lyrics, then one with suggestive or sexy lyrics. Experiment with music that builds gradually vs music that maintains a steady tempo. Each partner can take a turn choosing the auditory vibe, and then compare experiences.

Noticing which sounds turn your brain off, which ones turn your body on, and which seem to have no effect can be illuminating. Be honest if you seem to be of the polar opposite opinion. While you don't want to yuck their yum, don't yuck your own yum by being inauthentic. Sooner or later, you'll either grow frustrated or they will read through your pretending to hide your distaste.

If you and your partner have different preferences, don't panic. You don't need a shared Spotify/Tidal history to have blissfully connected sex. Taking turns, whether with playlists, positions, or who gets the noise-canceling headphones, can make exploration playful rather than competitive. Some nights, the rhythm of a bass line might move your bodies in tandem. Other nights, the only sound you need might be the softest exhale they make when you touch them just right. The right soundtrack isn't always curated—it's cultivated, moment by moment, and touch by touch.

So the next time you find yourself fumbling for your phone to queue up the mood, consider what might happen if you left the speaker off. You might discover that in the absence of music, your partner's body and your own have plenty to say. **Q**

You can find Kristen @coach_kristen_ on Instagram or open the doors coaching.com. Check out her podcast *Keep Them Coming*.





Labor of Love

IS A SOFTWARE DATA TECH TECHNICALLY A FARMER?
WORKER PROTECTIONS HINGE ON THE ANSWER

Employees from a local cannabis company could change the shape of national labor law. No one involved saw this coming, but now the stakes have ratcheted up to the highest levels of power—all because of one agricultural conflict.

In September 2023, 17 BeLeaf Medical employees filed a petition with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) to unionize. The employees are members of the post-harvest department at the company's cultivation facility that produces products under the Sinse Cannabis brand.

Following the employees' efforts to form a union, BeLeaf Medical contested the attempts, citing the National Labor Relations Act of 1935, which excludes agricultural workers from unionizing. The company has argued that, since the employees deal with cannabis plants, their work is considered agricultural, which would forbid their efforts to unionize.

After votes were tallied in February of 2024, BeLeaf challenged 11 of the 16 total votes from the employees. The debates have now gone on for over a year and a half as the National Labor Relations Board Regional Director Andrea Wilkes has ruled twice on the side of the employees, stating that they are not agricultural workers.

One of the 11 challenged votes is from a former employee, Todd Rick, who some involved with the case believe was fired due to his involvement in leading the unionization efforts. United Food and Commercial Workers International Union Local 655 Lead Organizer Sean Shannon, who has been at the forefront of assisting the Sinse employees, says that Rick was merely a computer Metrc specialist.

"I don't know how the company is going to navigate dealing with the pushback of when they're held accountable for their actions. They illegally fired our main union supporter, who was a computer Metrc specialist, who they tried to say was a farmer because he's on the computer all day. Dumb argument," Shannon says.

The company has since filed a request for review by the national board, but there is a standstill on the entire process. Currently, the NLRB only has two standing members—David Prouty and Marvin Kaplan. In order to proceed, the board must have three of the five total members. Once the quorum is achieved, cases will begin to be resolved, including the BeLeaf case.

"They're really just hoping that if this goes long enough, the workers will give up. That has been their goal since day one. They just want to push it out. They knew they'd lose," Shannon says.

When the decision is made, a precedent will be established for employees

"They're really just hoping that if this goes long enough, the workers will give up. That has been their goal since day one."

not only within the Missouri cannabis industry, but all legal industries within the United States. Shannon believes that the company does not "have a leg to stand on" in the case.

He says that while they do hand-trim some cannabis plants, most of their work involves operating machinery that does the process at a more efficient scale.

"The post-harvest department was made up of a packaging department that packages the bud up in the packages to be sold, which was in no way agricultural. And then, there was the trimming department, and because they did some hand-trimming with the Mobius machine, the company tried to argue that they were agricultural because of hand-trimming. The fact is, right now, there is almost zero hand-trimming," Shannon says.

Art by Keegan Hudspeth

In what Shannon claims has been an attempt to create confusion, he says that BeLeaf has shuffled employees to different departments in the Sinse facility.

"Now, what they've been doing is moving people in and out of departments and having them work—'Oh, you're in cultivation. Go help out in post-harvest.' They're trying to create a gray area so folks don't even know if they qualify," Shannon says.

The organizer says that he has seen individuals who do similar work in other states where cannabis is legal unionize, and is hopeful that the Sinse employees will reach the same outcome.

"Hand-trimmers have long been not allowed [to unionize], but machine-trimmers have been allowed in several states, and through several rulings that the NLRB has made themselves, my folks should qualify. The board even did an investigation, had a hearing with the company, where my three workers were able to show the board and the company that, no, they're not agricultural workers," Shannon says.

He and the employees continue to meet every two weeks to discuss the situation and prepare for the results. There is no set timeline on when a decision will be made, considering the board is yet to reach quorum.

"I never thought it would take over a year like it has to open the ballots," Shannon says. "I figured, at some point, somebody could see that this never should have gone through to begin with. We should

have had the election result the day of the election, and we could have been bargaining a contract by now. But instead, these workers have been denied their Weingarten rights, denied their status quo protections, denied their representation at work, and there's nothing happening to the company about it."

Once the decision is final, many involved believe that the aftermath across the nation will be significant. It will be a group of employees in a fresh Missouri cannabis industry who will alter what proper labor laws look like for individuals across all 39 current legal medicinal and recreational markets.

BeLeaf Medical did not respond to comment before time of publishing, but the online story will be updated with any responses. **P**

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RETURNING THE FAVOR

PAUL CHAPA AND FISH STRIVE TO
ASSIST VETERANS IN NEED AFTER THEIR
YEARS OF SERVING THE NATION

By Beth Lipoff

When it comes to veterans, there's not much Paul Chapa won't do to lend a helping hand. Chapa started what has become Friends in Service of Heroes (FISH) more than 15 years ago with support from friends in the food industry.

Chapa himself is not a veteran, but he feels very strongly about supporting veterans, from the World War II era to the present.

A significant part of what FISH does is provide vets with assistive devices and service animals. The idea is to do things that improve people's day-to-day lives.

"We kind of step in the gap, and these veterans that we serve never see us coming," Chapa says.

In early May, the group presented its 45th service dog to a veteran at a Royals game, naming it Fitzzy after former Royals pitcher Al Fitzmorris.

"We've had situations where a veteran and their wife sleep in separate bedrooms because of the thrashing, the violence at night, the injuries. And we've seen marriages brought back together" after the veteran gets a service dog, Chapa says.

Seeing the independence service dogs can give to vets makes Chapa feel good, even if it means they end up leaving Kansas City to pursue their dreams.

"I love when they do that. I want them to swim on their own," he says.

Still, most individuals who have received help from FISH have remained in the Midwest. Chapa considers his service area to be wider than just the metro, stretching east to west from Fort Leonard Wood near Rolla to Fort Riley near Junction City, and north to St. Joseph.

He heavily encourages all veterans to sign up with the Veterans Affairs system, though he acknowledges the system doesn't always provide everything they need.

Beyond mobility aids and service dogs, FISH also works with other groups to provide various informational talks on the third Thursday of each month. Sometimes the speakers are veterans discussing their own experiences. The talks can also be resource-based and feature things like the VA suicide prevention program.

Although some of their work is focused on the individual veterans, FISH also tries to support the families.



Photos Courtesy of FISH

FISH once provided a mobility chair to a woman who wasn't a veteran. Her father, a Vietnam veteran, is her caretaker, and having that device for her improved his quality of life as a caretaker, Chapa says.

"We always want to make sure that the family is connected in everything FISH does. If there are kids, we want the kids involved. If it's just a guy and his wife, we want the wife involved. We don't want them doing it alone," Chapa says.

At the end of June, they held a family camping weekend in northwest Missouri. During the holidays, commanders in Kansas and Missouri let FISH know which of their active duty service members may not have any money to buy presents for their kids. FISH steps in with some cash so these parents can shop for their kids.

Chapa recalls helping one veteran who had five children and needed assistance to pay her utility bills and rent after she left an abusive husband, and he took all their savings.

For such assistance, he just requires a copy of a discharge form known as a DD214 to prove identity and an honorable discharge. However, he's found that a lot of veterans are uncomfortable asking for help.

"We're trying to give them their space when they need the space but let them know that we're here for them when they need us," Chapa says.

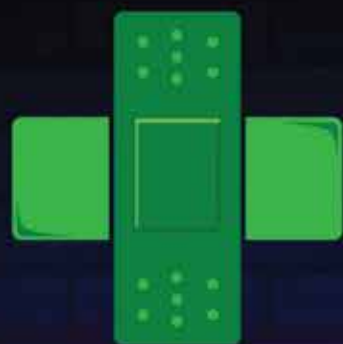
In terms of volunteers, he says he could use people to help with the website, their newsletter, and any events.

One fundraiser they put on is a golf tournament where participants, who are not necessarily veterans, wear body armor while playing a few of the holes. Chapa says it helps people put themselves into a veteran's shoes.

"You watch them on TV [and say], 'Why aren't they sprinting? If someone was shooting at me, I'd be running as fast as I could. They look like they're jogging.' Well, they're wearing 60 to 100 pounds of gear. They're going as fast as they can," he says.

For more information about Friends in Service of Heroes, visit friendsinserviceofheroes.org. **P**





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