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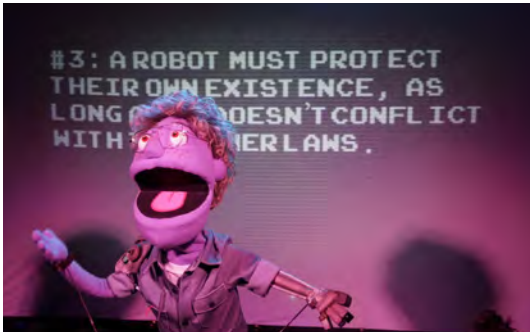
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Photo by Sheriee Rusk

Kanbe's Markets provides free produce to support local animal organizations

Kanbe's Markets serves the Kansas City area by redistributing discarded produce to groups in need—including the local animal community. With a tier system, Kanbe's volunteers sort produce into four groups based on the food's condition to determine where each piece will be donated. While tiers 1 and 2 are for human consumption and tier 4 is composted, tier 3 is for animals. Tier 3 foods aren't moldy or rotten, but may be mushy, split open, or rubbery produce that aren't dignified for humans to take. This includes about 15,000 pounds of food per month sent to animal sanctuary and rescue farm partners, like Farm to Able Animal Sanctuary, which rescues and rehabilitates animals. Most of these animal partners are non-profits, where food costs come out of pocket, so the donated produce drastically cuts costs, and supports animals' nutritional needs by introducing different foods to their diet.



Robopocalypse, Photo by Sorrell Lalune

Robopocalypse: The Musical horror puppet show goes deeper than talking appliances

If anything can rouse intense emotions, it's puppets. Oregon-based theater company Puppeteers for Fears proves this with their recent comedy horror puppet show, *Robopocalypse: The Musical!* With eccentric sets and talking appliances in true cyberpunk aesthetic, *Robopocalypse* enters uncharted territory in puppetry—and it's coming to Kansas City. Despite the horror theme, audiences can expect the show to rock their world emotionally: Playwright Josh Gross imparts deep meanings and moving plot points into his work through revolutionary cows and talking toasters. *Robopocalypse* tackles relatable family drama with a father-daughter duo fighting an evil artificial intelligence they've created looking to take over the world—all while surviving the self-driving cars and web-connected smart gadgets the A.I. sent after them.



Photo by Kylie Volavongsa

Lonnie McDonald sees pinball as a Republican path to Jackson County politics

Some months ago, we took Republican Missouri Legislature candidate Lonnie McDonald to a chain bar arcade to talk politics and pinball. McDonald is currently running for District 4 in Jackson County, Missouri's general election, but he's also a man with history: world records in the arcade game Joust, world records in pinball, and a laundry list of achievements in the world of low-moisture carpet cleaning. Not to mention, he's a sage skeptic in Gen X Facebook circles. McDonald's mission? "To fix the government, not change it." Might these be the makings of a grade-A politician? In our overview of just what kinds of people are taking positions of power in Missouri—particularly on gerrymandered turf—we'll let you make that call.



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SAVED THE DATES



Dessert Week

SEPT 14-20

HALF PRICE DESSERTS ALL WEEK

.....

This graphic features a dark background with white line art illustrations of various desserts: a stack of cakes, a chocolate bar, a baguette, a coffee cup, and a vanilla ice cream cone. The text is in a mix of pink, blue, and white fonts.



CRAFT COCKTAIL WEEK

DEC. 14-20

This graphic features a dark background with white line art illustrations of various cocktails: a martini glass, a wine glass, and a cocktail shaker. The text is in a mix of yellow and white fonts.



TACO & NACHO Week

NOVEMBER 16-22

This graphic features a yellow background with a green vertical stripe on the right. It includes illustrations of a taco and nachos. The text is in a mix of red, green, and orange fonts.

The Pitch

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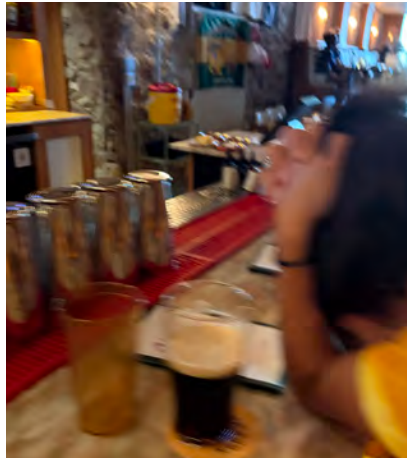


Photo by Tony Xiao

Letter from the Editor

My World Cup Runneth Over By Kylie Volavongsa

You either hid in the 'burbs, read your dinner bill's autogratuity charge in disgust or empathy, or dove headfirst into the sweaty, alcohol-muddled thick of it. But, in one way or another, you were part of the World Cup in Kansas City.

For many (particularly me), that about-a-month was one sidequest-y, culture-y, and soccer-y hell of a bender—one that we joined as it happened (leaving the sports analysis to the experts) and one that we covered in the months leading up to it.

Far in advance, both the City and FIFA Fan Fest organizing group KC2026 offered little on the logistics of road closures and bar hour extensions but shared the most minor of announcements (recall: themed weeks that had little to do with the actual Fest and a prospective dad bod contest that never came to pass). Most of the major announcements came well near the deadline [please recall: the construction of an entire premium lounge, headlining music acts, transportation passes, and outside the gates, the city council's continued indecision on bar opening hour extensions—etc.] And yet, there was a glossy sheen to how the tournament actually played out here.

KC2026 announced a high visitor

count, local and international; the Streetcarsaw record numbers in ridership; and Mayor Quinton Lucas boasted on Instagram that KC had the biggest spending surge of all the World Cup host cities. On a social level, there were beautiful connections of all kinds—like our city having the biggest Oranje march in support of the Dutch national team, and that precious, viral bond between Lawrence, Kansas and the nation of Algeria. You could've been a footy truther, a poser, or even a KC Current casual. No matter which, there was no better time to find friendship in bandwagoning.

During this World Cup bender, I did my part. No need to thank me for my service.

On a ConnectKC shuttle back from the Ecuador vs. Curacao game, I had an overpriced frozen margarita and told my fellow bus riders that it was my dream to visit America after studying English my entire life from my (family's) home country of Laos. They sang me "The Star-Spangled Banner," and our bus driver played a recording over the speakers.

In interviewing various guests at Fan Fest, I met the ever-charming Carlos Charisma and learned of his mission to save the world by the power of Charisma.

I made many friends at many bars, including a Mega Croatia Megan and a local DJ I'm quite partial to—but not after spending several minutes shit-talking one of his favorite players. In any case, an enemy of Ronaldo is my friend without introduction.

Oh, and thanks to professional esports team the KC Pioneers, I got to play Fortnite with the best of them—as a Canadian player's leg bone was tragically fractured within remote earshot.

The rest of The Pitchers were hard at work elsewhere. Photographer Tarik Sykes has been capturing local matches and open practices; his photos of that gritty Ecuador vs. Curacao match are hypnotically gnarly. Meanwhile, reporter Ava McCluer has shared some inside talks with music acts who've come from near and far to perform in honor of the tournament.

At the end of my line, for Mexico's last hurrah against England, I went 11

beers and one shot deep at the Power & Light watch party, where my delicate 5 '2 frame was flung high into the air by some strangers in cowboy hats. My hair was drenched and sticky with a cocktail of beer and more cocktails. Let me just say: something about that sequence gives the aftermath's discarded plastic cups and smashed beer cans a delightfully ephemeral glow under the purple lights. And the beautiful game becomes more beautiful than ever.

But as pretty as the end-of-the-night trash looked, we've now arrived at the time to think about the real, big-picture aftermath and our fallen World Cup soldiers.

Welcome to the Hangover Issue. Let's talk about going back to normal.

As the City touted a robust means of transit for World Cup fans and visitors, buses will have reduced frequency and a fourth of their routes cut as early as September. Local businesses outside the fold of watch-party hotspots and tourist institutions will have to make up for the numbers that didn't come as promised. Ongoing, too, are the messes of Royals stadium controversy; the 2026 primary and general elections; and the uptick of what's currently confirmed to be 30 ICE arrests from which we could avert our eyes during the tournament.

Of course, a shitshow doesn't *have* to be our normal. We've got people across the metro doing the work to make life as normal as possible for everyone—both before and after the soccer arrived. We'd love to tell you about them, too.

Our very own Kolby Brown reports on Kanbe's Markets and Harvesters' fights against food waste. Emma Goulding highlights Sheffield Place's work in empowering houseless mothers and children. Alex Omorodion's latest feature shows us that community—and how to find yours as a Grown Up—is simpler (and yummier) than you'd think.

Good luck. Happy reading. I'll see you on the other side of my non-alcoholic recovery Guinness. **P**

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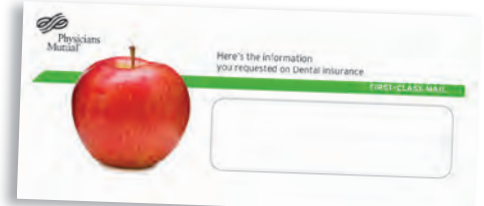
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Homes & Gardens

SHEFFIELD PLACE ISN'T A FIXED DESTINATION—IT'S A PATH FORWARD

By Emma Goulding

Since 1991, Sheffield Place has been on a mission to reduce the number of women living on the street, break generational cycles, and heal the Kansas City community one case at a time.

Located just outside of downtown and surrounded by craftsman houses, an orchard, and other greenery, Sheffield Place offers a holistic approach for mothers seeking support.

“Our niche in social services is that we serve women with very high barriers to success, women who have backgrounds of trauma, addiction, mental health, or domestic violence,” David Hanzlick, the Director of Program and Development at Sheffield Place, says. “About half of these women don’t have a high school diploma or a GED. A third of the women have felony convictions, so if you stack each of those barriers, one on top of the other, it makes it hard to climb.”

Many of the women who stay at Sheffield Place have lived most of their lives in foster care. A main goal of the facility is to help them develop self-sufficiency, which is done through a highly structured program. In the program’s Level One, according to Hanzlick, each mom has a weekly hour of individual therapy, an hour of case management, substance use disorder counseling, and 23 hours of group work. Classes also include parenting, financial literacy, digital literacy, goal setting, recovery, and processing, which is a therapy group.

Once the women pass Level One, they can move to one of the other, less structured facilities near the main building. These are primarily for women who have transitioned back into the community as part of Sheffield Place’s aftercare program. They can come back for workforce development, job skills, recovery, critical

thinking, and peer group budgeting.

Adding to the holistic program design, every staff member is directly involved with the clients, including their children. For example, Hanzlick runs a group every Friday morning, focused on helping clients find a job.

“We have this somewhat unusual setup for a social service agency, and everyone, regardless of your title, has some client responsibility,” Hanzlick says. “For most agencies, the Development Director wouldn’t be doing a group, but we like to blend the administration and the program because it gives us much more insight into what the women are doing and how they’re doing. Plus, it’s just great to know the people your efforts are benefiting.”

Families staying in the facility are given plenty of privacy. Each unit can hold a family with up to seven children and includes its own bathroom. There are shared kitchens, where every mother gets her own food to prepare. Sheffield Place also owns its laundry machines, which costs residents a dollar per washing and drying cycle. This intentionally reinforces budgeting skills.

A large part of Sheffield Place’s mission focuses on children, too, who make up about half of its client base. They learn

days of the week and months of the year in the children’s program, and plant fruits and vegetables in the garden. Uniquely, Sheffield Place takes children up to 18 years of age, and has been doing this since 2015.

In addition to gardening, Sheffield Place has other comprehensive efforts that benefit the younger children. Volunteers, for example, bring dogs for the kids to spend time with.

“Little Micah comes in, and he goes to the children’s program, and they pet him for an hour. It’s so affirming that the kids can just experience unconditional love from that dog, and they also learn how to treat animals respectfully,” Hanzlick says.

Clinical Director and licensed Clinical Therapist Shelby Hansard works closely with the children who come through Sheffield, and she speaks on a success story about one of her clients.

“We had a teen boy who came in a few years ago; his mother had a lot of very significant challenges,” Hansard explains. “Her son was exceptionally bright and driven, and he wanted to succeed. With a lot of coaching from staff here, he was able to get into the Boys Hope program. This really opened up doors for him that, being the teen boy of a mom who is currently

homeless, he wasn’t going to necessarily get to experience.”

For the staff at Sheffield Place, working with these clients is not just a job. It is their passion, something to which they have a very personal tie. Substance Abuse Counselor Tina Baker has been clean for 25 years, and she uses her experience to inspire and help others suffering from addiction in the aftercare program.

“When they come in, we work on coping skills because a lot of the time, when they first come in, they’re still under the influence of alcohol or drugs for a while. Once we get them past that first month, then we start working on routines, going to meetings, and that kind of thing,” Baker explains.

Not only does Baker meet with clients in person, but she is also available by call, text, or email—24 hours a day, seven days a week. To her, helping these women is the most rewarding thing in the world.

“I love seeing their first 30 days off drugs, because you can just see the shine and clarity,” Baker says. “For some women, it’s the only way they know, so it’s getting them to know there’s a better way and a different life. I come from a family of drug addicts and alcoholics, but you can change. I love it. I still love my job every single day.”

Sheffield Place has been helping one client with getting her children out of the state’s custody while bonding with her daughter, who currently stays with her at the facility. She works as the Resident Monitor, a volunteer position with a lot of responsibility, including meeting new moms and checking that everyone is in their rooms before curfew.

When asked what she wanted to get out of her experience at Sheffield Place, this client says, “I’m hoping to move on from here and get adequate housing, and they have a lot of resources to help with that. All the workers here are very caring and very friendly, and they interact with you and your child. It’s an amazing experience, if you’re ready for it.”

If you wish to support Sheffield Place’s work, you can donate here. They also have an immediate needs list that is regularly updated on their website. [P](#)



Illustration by Teddy Rosen





Photo by Eric Charbonneau

VICTORY LAP

ONE YEAR AFTER KC FILMING SPREE, *TED LASSO* CAST RETURNS FOR SEASON FOUR PREMIERE

By Sarah Sipple

Before season four of *Ted Lasso* premieres on Apple TV on August 5, the cast stopped by CPKC Stadium on July 11 to celebrate with fans of the show and hold a press conference.

A portion of the upcoming season was filmed in Kansas City during the summer of 2025. Those lucky enough to have been in the area for those few weeks might've caught some of the action on the Country Club Plaza, where the retail store Johnny Was had been cosmetically converted to "Dazzle Me Moi" for filming. An added surprise was the cast coming out on stage to join Mumford & Sons in concert at Azura Amphitheater on July 24, 2025, to join in performing the show's title song.

This weekend's cast visit included Jason Sudeikis ("Ted Lasso"), Juno Temple ("Keeley Jones"), Brendan Hunt ("Coach Beard"), Jeremy Swift ("Leslie Higgins"), and Abbie Hern ("Gemma"), who dished about their return to Kansas City as well

as teased themes and moments from the upcoming season.

Season four sees Ted return to Richmond to coach a second division women's football team and tackle the accompanying challenges of sexism, funding, and more with his signature sunny outlook. In addition to myriad Kansas City references that will delight locals, that cheery depth is an element that Sudeikis hopes Midwestern viewers will relate to.

"There has been, from the get-go, a spirit of openness and enthusiasm, and certainly chattiness with my character that feels unique to the places we had the opportunity to grow up," says Sudeikis. "There's a congeniality there that can sometimes be confused, even though it's kind and open, as being innocent and maybe even naive. I found that to not always be the case, and I hope folks back home will recognize that too. I think that's one of the inside jokes, along with the [Gates Bar-B-Q, KC Current,

etc] references."

From the start of the show, there wasn't a plan to film in Kansas City. In fact, the show's story was wrapped up after season three, but just in case the series did continue, a few potential segues were included.

Hunt explains that the show was always about the definition of home, to some degree, and due to the fact that "sneaky, sneaky little Wizard of Oz stuff [kept] happening," the filming of both Sudeikis and character Ted's home ended up organically coming together.

The shift to women's soccer was a practical choice for the writers, according to Hunt. He shared that the focus on a women's team was specifically important to Sudeikis, and that a shift was also needed for the show to feel authentic. "We were starting to really test the limits of suspension of disbelief in terms of some of our players like being in their 30s and never having transferred from the team. That's a little too much loyalty for a soccer team. That has allowed us the gift of not exactly starting from scratch, but at least feeling like it," says Hunt.

Temple's enthusiasm matched her beloved character's when discussing the feeling of being back in CPKC Stadium.

"It feels like the perfect moment to be talking about women's football and really representing it. We actually got to film in the first-ever stadium built solely for women's sports, in Kansas City. I had an experience walking into this stadium and through the halls here, and I was really moved; I didn't know that was possible," Temple says.

But soccer isn't the only cultural element connecting the *Ted Lasso* characters. Jeremy Swift has been pleased to have visited Kansas City twice for his work on *Ted Lasso*, as he shares his character Leslie's affinity for jazz:

"Kansas City has always been legendary because when I was in my teens, I discovered Charlie Parker, and I think he was the greatest recorded musician that has ever been. I think he's a genius. And I was lucky enough to work with Robert Altman, who was also from Kansas City, and I think he's a genius, and I think Jason Sudeikis is pretty genius... so there's something in the water here." **P**



Photo courtesy of Apple TV

SNAP JUDGMENT

POSING AND PROWLING FOR KC'S BEST PHOTOBOOTH

By Kolby Brown

Photo by Ava McCluer

Despite phones allowing people to take free pictures anywhere, anytime, and permanently save them, there's something appealing about having to pay for a strip of low-quality pictures printed from a giant booth.

There is something fun and nostalgic about sitting behind a curtain with friends to take four pictures—maybe because it reminds us of simpler times, or maybe because the Fiji villa in *Love Island* has a photobooth.

Whatever the reason, more photobooths exist around KC than most would expect, hidden in cute spots with goofy themes for those that know where to find them.

Most photobooths have the stereotypical blank backdrop, giving a clean look but no individuality and pizzazz. The true pizzazz needed behind photos is an overwhelming collage of brightly colored tropical plants.

Betty Rae's Ice Cream's River Market location photobooth has psychedelic vibes, picturing subjects among these flamboyant leaves—giving cute, unique shots unless you're wearing any kind of pattern. It's a \$7 cost including two strips, pretty average for this list, and set right within the colorful ice cream shop, near the bathrooms.

The photo strips themselves also have a unique look with a bright blue border marked with the Betty Rae's logo, a point for originality but a little bold. If you're looking for a photo strip to use in a Pinterest frame, this one is a little too quirky to match that aesthetic. Ice cream

cones do make for nice props, though the correlation between Betty Rae's and the jungle mood of the booth is unknown.

Between delicious ice cream nearby, the average price, eccentric border, and flashy background, Betty Rae's photobooth is a solid 8.5/10.

Oak Park Mall lets mallgoers simulate a Disney park experience with their character-themed photobooth selling specialized photo strips. Customers can choose from dozens of Disney-themed borders, with options from favorites like *Moana*, *Toy Story*, and *Marvel* character designs.

Located in the West side of the lower level next to Build-A-Bear, the price on this photobooth is steep: \$10 for two photo strips, plus an additional cost to have the photos emailed (which is easy to accidentally click as the machine automatically selects this, bumping the overall cost to above \$20) after going through the confusing number of selection screens.

The most intriguing part of these photos is the ability to add filters to your pictures, something not offered by any other experience on this list—pictured above is the 3-D filter, which doesn't actually work

if the viewer doesn't have 3-D glasses on hand. Photo-goers can also picture themselves in black and white or sepia.

Be warned: There is another photobooth on the upper floor near the mall Starbucks boasting videos as well as photos which will eat all of your coins. With the high price point and complicated use yet fun variety of Disney-themed options, this photobooth deserves an 8/10.

The most high-tech photobooth on this entire list is the Leafy Korean Dessert Cafe photobooth—with an extensive list of photo filter and style options and a variety of photo strip sizes to choose from. This photobooth even allows users to pick their

favorite pictures so they only have the best on their photo strips.

Leafy Korean Dessert Cafe has a whimsical inside between the brightly colored decor and fake vines covering the walls, and this photo booth adds to the ambiance. Besides the booth itself, there is a mirror to check your appearance, box of sunglasses, hats, and headpieces to wear in your photos, and a wall to leave a strip and message behind for other visitors.

This photobooth truly has

everything you could ask for—the only downside for non-bilingual folks is a lot of Korean instructions you have to bypass. Each selection screen had pictures and graphics to go with options though, so the booth was straightforward enough if you don't read Korean. This language is due to this photobooth being shipped to the cafe from Korea itself, making the experience all the cooler and more immersive for your cafe experience.

Leafy Korean Dessert Cafe photobooth gets a 10/10 for props, extensive style choices, overall vibes, and unique look. The cost of \$10 for 2 is definitely worth the price.

Boulevard Brewery's Beer Hall is a massive socializing space with a gift shop, guided tours, and drinks, and its photobooth is on the second floor just past the bar. Two photo strips are relatively cheap at only \$2 for one token—or free to customers ordering food or drinks at the bar.

These photo strips are simple and sleek, with a black border and the Boulevard Brewery logo stamped below. The accessorized camper makes for cozy looking pictures that look like subjects are on a family camping trip, complete with props if you're feeling a little extra.

Boulevard Brewery photobooth gets a 10/10. The location, vibe, and low cost are unmatched on this list.

Blip Roasters not only serves delicious coffee but also offers a retro photobooth for an aesthetic flick post espresso. The stand is in the back of the spacious space, making it less awkward for cafe-goers wanting pictures to slip behind the curtain for their photos.

Customers pay \$5.75 for two photo strips; a decent price compared to the other options on this list. What makes the Blip Roasters photobooth more unique is the lack of theme—which is actually nice, as the photos are simple, clean-looking, and give a vintage vibe.

The only downside to this photobooth is no screen to check your looks. Photo subjects have to hope and pray that the strips print cute after blindly posing for their pictures, so practice your poses in a mirror beforehand and be ready to go for the immediate photo countdown.

The inexpensive strips and retro booth at Blip Roasters gets a 9/10. 



Photo by Kolby Brown

Luxe Dynasty

DRAG ROYALTY LANA LUXE SERVES THIRD
RUN AT MISS CONTINENTAL TITLE

By Ava McCluer

Winner of *The Pitch's* Best Of 2026 for Drag Artist and Drag Show, Lana Luxe is about to hit a decade of doing drag, and she doesn't plan on slowing down. The 28-year-old Kansas City native is returning to the Miss Continental pageant for her third year in a row, and would be the first performer from KC to take the crown if she won.

Drag is her full-time job, doing 20 shows a month across five bars in the city. For her Luxe Sundays show at Missie B's, she brings new inventive themes every week, while balancing her other gigs across the city, her new role as entertainment director at Hamburger Mary's, and readying for the pageant in September.

The Pitch sat down with Luxe to discuss the competition, her recent wins, her drag family, and more.

***The Pitch:* What's it like to prepare to compete in Miss Continental?**

Lana Luxe: Hard as hell. My first year I got third alternate, and last year I got first alternate. I'm ready to get my crown. I'm currently rehearsing and looking for sponsorships, because it's such a pricey journey, especially going back year after year. I recently flew to Ohio for a gown fitting; there's also a gown being made in Vietnam. I have a whole team of dancers. It is very stressful, but I wouldn't be able to compete consecutively or at the level I do if I didn't have such a good support system here—I call it the Luxe Dynasty: My drag family, but also people who support me. It takes a whole village to compete at this level.

What's it like looking back on the past 365 days?

This last year was one of the best years of my life. I got proposed to, and my fiancé and I just closed on a house; I got promoted, and I won two *Pitch* 'Best Of' awards.

What does winning two Best Of awards mean to you?

When you're an artist or creator, we try to take our cues from somewhere. To be nominated and to win, it helps me gauge whether I'm doing what my community needs and am serving my purpose. Obviously, I do drag for me, but my shows, events, and drag persona are for the public and the community. It just feels good. It

reminds me to keep pushing and topping myself. I started so young and I plan on doing this for a while, so I want to keep breaking boundaries.

The Best Drag Show win for Luxe Sundays at Missie B's was especially validating. My castmates and I put a lot of work into it; it's a weekly show going on three years and it really is carving a place in the community as a staple. That's my biggest dream as a performer in KC.

What's your drag origin story?

I started as a waitress at Hamburger Mary's, and I had never thought of being a drag performer. I was there for a friend's birthday when I was 17, and I had just won homecoming queen at my high school, and I was the first trans woman to win. A server came up to me and asked, "You want to work here?" I started working there at 18, and it was the perfect place for a young trans, queer person. The people I was surrounded by showed me that all different types of people do drag, not just cisgender men. I always wanted to be a performer and I did show choir and theater in high school, so starting drag was like second nature, everything kind of clicked.

***The Pitch's* 'Best Of' categories are solely decided by readers' votes; do you feel the love from Kansas City?**

I do. Honestly, before I found drag when I was growing up, I was like, 'I'm gonna be a makeup artist and move to



Photo by Maggie G Photo

LA. I'm gonna get out of here.' It's crazy to think about that now, because I couldn't imagine leaving where my roots are. That's why I've worked so hard to be visible and be someone the city values. There's a quote that says a river can cut through rock not because it's powerful, but because it's persistent. Being persistent, whether with drag, social media, or advocacy, whatever it may be, it's because I'm trying to cut through the rock. I'm trying to grow with Kansas City as it grows.

With Miss Continental, I didn't win the first two times, and I could have been sad and defeated, or said they got it wrong. But instead, I'm going back for the third time because some things don't happen right away. It took me a while to transition, to save up for the gender-affirming care I needed. It took me a while to be ready to be a fiancée. Persistence is way more important than power.

KC has a lot of spaces for queer people, but this year, even with Pride, so many sponsors didn't come back because of the political climate. A lot of trans people feel

scared right now about what's to come. I ask myself, is it safe to presume as myself? Is it safe to be me? Little things like that matter and are important in protecting your identity and safety. The dolls, queer people, people of color, they're always the blueprint and the inspo, but have the most rights at risk.

What's your support system like in KC?

My drag mom, Mulan, she's been doing drag for 20 years. She's a designer; she taught me how to sew, she dressed me the past two years for Continental. I have a big drag family: Q, Cynthia Doll, Candice Marie, and then I have my drag children, Jadore Aimee, Southern Hxll, Dior and Diamond Garçon. They all helped my fiancé plan my engagement; they help me film videos, we work together, and also are close outside of work. My fiancé, he's my safe space. He lets me close the door from the craziness of drag.

What's your go-to move or trick?

Tons of hairography. I love to whip my hair, and if I'm not, I'm shaking my butt. **P**

THE PITCH ON THE PITCH

WORLD CUP 2026 IN KC AS CAPTURED BY
PHOTOGRAPHER TARIK SYKES



Photographer Tarik Sykes, always knee-deep in the KC sports world, captured everything this World Cup had to offer, from an inside look at the Argentina national team's open training to devastating tackles in the arena to all-around fan shit housery. Oh, and he made time for the Royals too.

Take a look at his author page, where you can catch just a glimpse of the thousands of photos that he's given us the pleasure of ogling. [P](#)









PEEL IT BACK

SAMPLING THIS SUMMER'S TRENDING BEVY: THE BANANA LATTE

By Ava McCluer

Banana and coffee: an unexpected combination making international waves.

The craze over the fruit itself and its joyful color came first, with the virality of Korean banana milk, Prada's flavored lip balm, and 'butter yellow' trending in the fashion world.

Now, coffee chains and brands are starting to catch on: see 7Brew's Banana Bread Mocha, or the new line of Califia Farms Banana Crème almond milk products. Kansas City is no exception to the trend. It's been deemed the it-girl beverage on TikTok, but at which coffee shop across the metro should the cool girls purchase their next latte?

The Pitch tasted three banana lattes to hunt for the city's most a-peel-ing drink.

Blip Roasters, West Bottoms:

Regardless of what you've arrived at arrived at Blip Roasters to do—homework, finishing a book, or just enjoying a drink—there's space, and seating for you. Even before you approach the counter, the options are impressive: fold out chairs

at tables long enough to fit a family reunion, bar stools for those with great posture, deep comfy chairs for the slouchers, couches for couples, and more. Blip is a space for motorcycles, too. In the same building, you can get a helmet fitting and enjoy a beverage with housemade syrups.

Blip's banana latte features a subtle sugary taste, with their mild espresso making it a palatable drink overall. For those not yet sold on this latte flavor, Blip's drink is a great place to start—its syrupy taste is like a caramelized banana.

All drinks can be made with oat or almond milk for no extra charge, and iced lids have an option for the straw user or the sipper. The back of the building has even more seating, a photobooth, a stage area, and a roasting machine.

Good Karma Coffee and Wine, Midtown:

Good Karma puts a special spin on the trend, with a banana pudding latte that adds maple and vanilla wafer flavors to the familiar fruitiness. This is consistent with their extensive, inventive menu—maple miso, ube lavender, and candied yams were other featured flavors.

The latte is milkier than others, with no taste overpowering another. The vanilla wafer profile is crucial to the creamy, pudding flavor, but the maple, which sits at the front row of the flavor profile isn't instinctually consistent with it. Perhaps a dash of cinnamon or even caramel would make more sense.

Veil Cafe, Garment District:

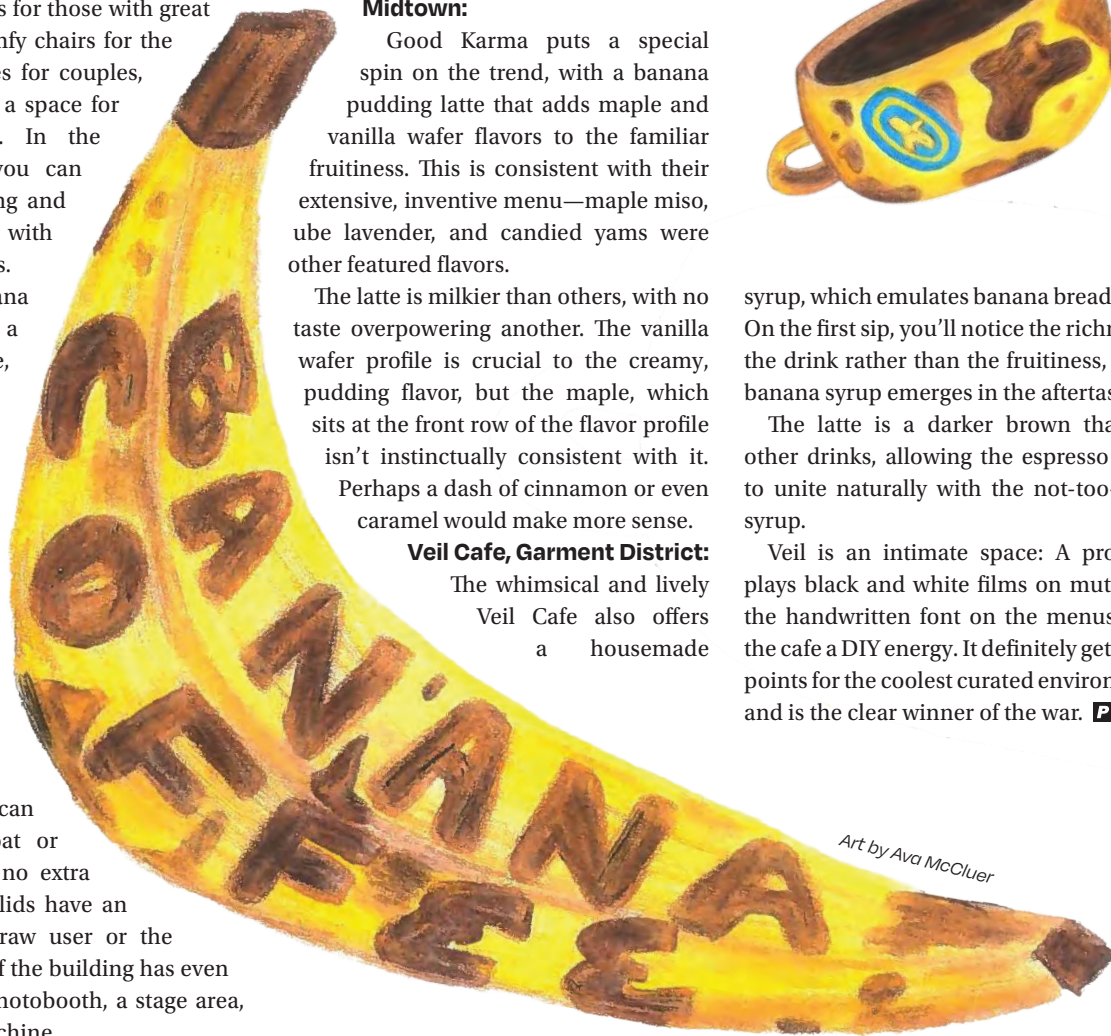
The whimsical and lively Veil Cafe also offers a housemade



syrup, which emulates banana bread more. On the first sip, you'll notice the richness of the drink rather than the fruitiness, as the banana syrup emerges in the aftertaste

The latte is a darker brown than the other drinks, allowing the espresso flavor to unite naturally with the not-too-sweet syrup.

Veil is an intimate space: A projector plays black and white films on mute, and the handwritten font on the menus gives the cafe a DIY energy. It definitely gets extra points for the coolest curated environment, and is the clear winner of the war. **P**



Art by Ava McCluer

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The In-Betweeners

DINING-OUT OR HOUSE PARTY?
IT CAN BE BOTH.

By Alexander Omorodion

From sound alone, it may as well be your typical dinner party: clinking utensils, whispers of gossip, and someone asking where to find parking—except, here, no one is hosting, and most of the guests have never met before.

Humans still crave connection, even with strangers and acquaintances. Dinner parties are a great way to satisfy that craving, especially the ones that engage guests to the point of no distraction. The food becomes a conversational lubricant: an edible filler for awkward silences and a topic of discussion in itself. Meanwhile, common dining interactions like passing plates and pouring drinks are extensions of that conversation as opposed to interruptions.

However, dinner parties like this require two things: friends or family, and a sizable living space—things taken for granted in generations past, but are not a given today.



This is where the in-betweeners come in, a term I'll use to describe new attempts to marry the intimacy of house parties with the ease and accessibility of dining out.

To build my friend group during adulthood, I've tried a variety of methods—adult soccer leagues, social mixers, and run clubs to name a few—with some being more successful than others. While I managed to build some strong relationships through soccer, I desired connections that persisted outside of the sport. As such, I explored a couple of in-betweeners focused on connecting people over the dining table.

Those would be Timeleft and Dinner Article.

I stumbled upon Timeleft in August 2024 while doomscrolling on Instagram.

It's an app that matches people in groups of four to six, based on personality tests that users take after signing up. The app also handles the logistics of booking a restaurant reservation and provides icebreaker questions to guide conversations if needed.

This led me to dinner at Brown & Loe, where I ate, laughed, and shared stories with five complete strangers. Their matching algorithm seemed to place a heavy emphasis on our personal traits and interests. That night, it felt like we were connected by our sense of adventure and outgoing personalities, and valuing experiences over material things. Even though we all came from different

backgrounds, we found commonalities in our values and humor. I left with new contacts and a sense of satisfaction from stepping outside of my comfort zone.

My next experience was with Dinner Article. Founded by Gisèle Ndifor and Crystal Adwoa, this Kansas City-based supper club operates a bit differently.

Their ticketed events are open to everyone, and there's no pre-screening or personality quiz ahead of time. Instead, Dinner Article attracts like-minded people through curated themes intended to elevate these dinners beyond surface-level discussion.

My night's theme was entitled "The Love We Don't Talk About." What followed was a two-hour prix fixe dinner where we chatted about our dating highs, lows, and outlooks on the overall scene while the hosts acted as both conversation guides and servers. Unlike Timeleft, which groups users based on age, Dinner Article's open-invite attracts a variety of ages, which added another dynamic to the discussions.

I didn't leave these dinner parties with a new lifelong best friend. I *did* leave with new acquaintances (some of whom I am still in contact with), and gratitude for the moments I was able to share with people I'd never met. It led me to reflect on what building community really means.

Yes, those unbreakable bonds in which we pour the majority of our time and energy are fundamental. But from the in-betweeners, I found that another bedrock of

a tight community is those acquaintance-level relationships, or "weak ties" as coined by sociologist Mark Granovetter, which are essential to expanding social accessibility.

Having acquaintances outside of your bubble attracts opportunities and ideas that lie outside of your purview. It's the direct path between you and the unknown—the people that you may not text every day, but get a smile and a hug out of you when you see them in passing. The people that you may not have seen for a few months, but still show up to your potluck with homemade lasagna in hand.

And if you don't have the space to host these potlucks personally, the commercial in-betweeners provide an alternative way to reap the benefits, with the logistics handled, and a low-pressure environment where you know everyone else is there to meet new people too.

I've come a long way since the day I walked into Brown & Loe, and I'm blessed to have dependable and amazing friends from various walks of life. However, a village requires villagers who show up, and I look forward to expanding my village at my next in-betweeners. **P**



Photos courtesy of Dinner Article

LOCAL ACTOR OPENS DAD'S: A BAKERY BUILT FOR COMMUNITY AND A SWEET RETURN HOME

By Kolby Brown

Dad's Bakeshop
104 E. 43rd St.,
Kansas City, MO 64111

No matter what career you've been pursuing, changing course to chase your dreams is always possible—and Dad's Bakeshop, Coffee, and Goods proves that.

Owner Shea Coffman opened his bakery this May after only a couple of years in the food industry, following two decades in the entertainment industry.

Working as an actor had been a fulfilling career, according to Coffman, but when he discovered the warm and comforting feeling of baking, he never looked back.

"I found baking later in life, which I love sharing, because people ask if I've been baking since I was a child," Coffman says. "I was just in a place in my life where I found the kitchen to be the safest place I could be, both in my body, and spirit, and mind."

Wanting to share these emotions with the people around him, Coffman decided to follow that passion in 2018 by going to pastry school.

"In pastry school we did all of these check-ins; each quarter we would meet with the chefs, and they'd ask what industry we want to go into," Coffman says. "I was like, I want to create my own space and have a sweet and safe spot that is rooted in community and love."

Thus, Dad's was born: The pieces finally came together earlier this spring when Coffman found the perfect space to build his community.

He'd spent 11 years away from Kansas City, but knew he wanted to build his bakery in the area where he grew up.

"To come back having a better understanding of what love is and what love means, to be able to share that with a town, a city that I love and a community that I love," Coffman says. "I got my start here as an actor; what better place to get my start as a bakery owner?"

The name Dad's was inspired by Coffman's feelings of warmth and comfort, something he felt as a previous dog dad.

"I was the dad of a dog; he was my soulmate. I picked out the name before he passed, like two days before I moved back to Kansas City to make all this happen," Coffman says. "The space has become a manifestation of all the love that he's shown in my life." **P**



Photo by Shea Coffman

At University Academy, Mr. Ryan Hall's 8th-grade English class was given the chance to put words to any restaurant in town using our Eat This Now format. The Pitch decided to publish the top three submissions online this summer, and selected the following for print.

EAT THIS NOW: RASTA PASTA AT WAH GWAN

By Lataya Reid

Wah Gwan
6228 Troost Ave.,
Kansas City, MO 64110

"You have to try this Taya, it will change your life, fam."

That is what my friend told me before we even walked through the doors of Wah Gwan.

The restaurant stands out on the street with its bright, colorful mural of a tropical beach, making it impossible to miss. Inside, the vibe is chill. There are old school reggae records on the walls, and the smell of spicy grilled chicken fills the air. It feels like a small, cozy hangout spot where the music is always playing just loud enough to make you want to nod your head.

If you're going to order one thing, it has to be the Rasta Pasta.

The first thing you notice is how bright it is. The bowl is packed with red, green, and yellow bell peppers that look like the colors of a flame. The pasta is covered in a thick, orange cream sauce that is incredibly smooth.

When you take a bite, you get backhanded, sucker punched, drop-kicked, smacked, prime Mike Tysoned on June 28, 1997, upper-cuttled, leg swepted, and gently laid to rest by savory jerk seasoning. You know it's going to be a little bit spicy, but the coconut milk makes it also kind of sweet. The peppers stay nice and crunchy, too, which is a great break from the soft, cheesy noodles.

This Rasta Pasta is the best fusion dish I've ever had. **P**



Photo by Sarah Sipple



AMPS TO AMPHITHEATERS

COUNTRY STAMPEDE OVERRUNS KANSAS FOR A 30TH YEAR

By Nick Spacek



Photo courtesy of Country Stampede

In its 30-year history, Kansas' country music festival, Country Stampede, has steadily moved eastward across the state. Originally located at Tuttle Creek State Park near Manhattan, it moved to Topeka's Heartland Motorsports Park for a few tumultuous years beset by weather and COVID, before finding its current home at Azura Amphitheater in Bonner Springs in 2024.

However, the 30th anniversary Country Stampede (which took place Thursday, June 25, through Saturday, June 27) was the last one at Azura, with event organizers Kustom Entertainment partnering with Gilley's Gambling Hall in Park City to host the 2027 festival.

We spoke with Kustom Entertainment CEO Stan Ross about the history of the sold-out Country Stampede and what the festival brings to country music and Kansas music fans as a whole. We began by asking about how important it is for the company he runs to maintain the legacy of this enduring festival.

"I was very fortunate to be raised in the music business," Ross says. "Matter of fact, my father gave Johnny Cash his equipment

to help him get started when he was down on his luck. So when I say I grew up in it, I grew up in it."

Ross is speaking about his father, Charles A. "Bud" Ross, whose Kustom Amps were used by everyone from Creedence Clearwater Revival's John Fogerty to the Carpenters to Diana Ross to Sheryl Crow. Because Kustom Entertainment now owns Country Stampede, Stan Ross feels a legacy obligation not only to Country Stampede's history, but to the company his father founded, as well.

The key to all of this, he says, is to continue to bring in top-quality acts while making sure that all the individuals that are showing up are having "a wonderful time," where attendees feel like they've gotten more than they paid for. At the same time, Ross says those artists performing have such a smooth transition to moving in, moving out, doing what they need to do, and an enjoyable time performing that when the musicians are asked if they want to do it again, it's a no-brainer that they agree.

"They remember how smooth it was, fun it was, and with one phone call they say,

'Heck yeah, we're in,'" Ross explains.

The lineup for this 30th-anniversary iteration featured hot up-and-comers like Zack Top and Wyatt Flores alongside established acts such as Diamond Rio and Rascal Flatts, as well as a true throwback in Tracy Lawrence, who played the inaugural Country Stampede in 1996.

Talking to Ross, one can tell that he's not just a CEO, he's a fan. He enthuses about Zack Top's throwback sound, while reveling in Treaty Oak Revival's rocking red dirt, and drops half a dozen names of folks he's proud to know on a personal level.

"They're more than artists to me," notes Ross. "They became friends and everything else. I know their eating habits, I know who's a vegan. I know who loves his Jack Daniel's, so they're friends. I've been able to always put that first and foremost, and I think I got that from my dad."

His father was generous and helpful to a lot of artists, explains Ross, while utilizing a story that explains just how he approaches the music business.

"I asked [my dad], 'How come you never introduced me to Elvis?'" relates Ross. And he goes, 'What are you talking

about?' I said, 'You and the Colonel were good buddies, and you've introduced me to everybody. How come you never introduced me to Elvis?' And he said, 'Stan, I always wondered why he didn't wanna meet me.'"

As a young man, what that said to Ross is that Elvis was no different from him. His father treated everyone the same, and Ross has tried to do that, as well.

"He always treated everybody the same as he probably treats me—just as a good friend or somebody he cares about," the CEO says. "I think that goes a long way—when people don't realize that you're just wanting them for something."

And when it comes to Country Stampede, Stan Ross just wants one thing.

"I hope that when they leave that they have had such an amazing time that they already start thinking about and putting on their calendar what they're gonna do next year," Ross concludes. "That they really had a great time and, 'Man, I can't wait to do it again, and I'm definitely coming back next year.'" 



Photos courtesy of Kirstie Lynn

Blazing Prairie Star

KIRSTIE LYNN GRAPPLES WITH BURNING UP AND BURNING OUT

By Clayton Steward

Burning up and burning out. Ephemeral moments. Cigarettes stamped out. Flashes. Shimmers.

Kirstie Lynn, like so many of us, grapples with these concepts but uses her art to understand them. As a folk singer and songwriter, she is opening the window into what burning up and burning out means to her in the modern age with her forthcoming album, *Blazing Prairie Star*.

"I wrote all these songs when I was kind of shifting from late twenties, into thirties," Lynn says over a coffee and pastry at Oddly Correct on Troost. A spring thunderstorm started showers outside. "I was going through a crisis essentially like, what am I doing? Where am I going?"

All the songs feature lyrics about flames, burning, feeling hazy, blazing in the sense of being bright but also in the sense of smoking a joint at the end of the day.

"I'm just really excited to get these songs out. I feel really proud of the lyricism in them."

The title track, "Blazing Prairie Star," is out now and weaves folksy guitar with lyrics inspired by the natural world. Lynn's voice comes in sharp and crisp over the music, the way birds rise and fall over a prairie as the summer sun begins to set.

Lynn blends observations from working on an urban prairie with reactions to the state of the world, leading to lyrics like "this administration's got me feeling pretty damn bad" and "sometimes the things you

love don't love you back." The creative act of noticing is a key component of the well from which Lynn draws inspiration.

Originally from upstate New York, Lynn has been singing her entire life. Her origin story includes singing along to a tune from *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* when she was two and being fortunate to have a kindergarten teacher who took her under her wing and had her perform her first solo at five. From there, it was choir, band, and theatre that were her formal introduction to music and performing. Then the COVID-19 pandemic hit. Lynn began writing and posting snippets of songs on Instagram while sheltering from the outside world when her friend and now other half of her duo, Galen Clark, nudged her to record an album. The album *Tears and Medicine* was released on her birthday in 2021.

The distinct sound that accompanies all of her writing is hard to describe without drawing comparisons, comparisons that flood her comment sections whenever she posts song clips on social media. Joni Mitchell and Joan Baez are the most common names, two artists that Lynn had not heard of until she was in her twenties.

"I grew up listening to a lot of early 2000s music like punk, punk pop, and musicals. There weren't really a lot of people that sounded like me," she explains. When she was recommended "Big Yellow Taxi" by Joni Mitchell on her Spotify Discover Weekly, she finally felt like she was hearing

her voice in contemporary music, and realized Counting Crows weren't the original artists behind the song.

"The first time I heard Joan Baez, I was like, 'Whoa, wait, I actually do really sound like Joan Baez,'" Lynn reflects. She is frequently asked whether she grew up idolizing Baez, but she had not heard an artist with a crystal-clear soprano range like hers until she was making the move into the genre she is in today.

Lynn has leaned into writing that focuses on the natural world and human emotions, human experiences. In recent years, she has leaned more into political writing as well.

"For centuries, folk music has been political. And I do think that out of all the genres, folk music is a loose term. I think folk music is for the people. And so you got to sing for the people," Lynn said.

The current administration gets a thumbs-down in *Blazing Prairie Star*, and some of her previous music also tackles writing for the people. Her 2025 release with Galen Clark, "Pray the Snow Melts," mentions everything from the death of the Pope to rising tariffs.

"Big fear blowing in the winds again" starts off with a hopeful confidence, weaving a story that tackles the things in the headlines through a hopeful lens on how to handle the anxieties. Nods of humor come in flashes with lyrics such as "Everyone in Greenland hates JD Vance,

and damn I hate him too."

What seems to work best when Lynn writes politically is that she isn't just singing the news. Her distinct sound and nods to the natural world create metaphors and surrogates through smart writing. To pray that the snow melts soon feels like a naturalist's way of saying "this too shall pass." Winter, and certain political moments and agendas, can't last forever.

If you have ever grappled with the concepts of being in transition, mortality, or the fact that some things that are blazing now won't be blazing forever, this album may be one for you to keep your eye on, especially if you are looking for original music from a folk musician situated under the Americana umbrella that may throw a surprise or two your way. **P**

Blazing Prairie Star is out now.



GAMING THE SYSTEM

RADKEY'S LATEST LP *BEDROOM SAND* CRYSTALLIZES SIX YEARS OF HIGH SCORES

By Emma Goulding

If you've ever needed to scream in your car, hype up a crowd, or listen to something while you're tripping out on psychedelics, rock band Radkey brings you *Bedroom Sand*.

They recorded the album in five short days at the Syracuse University Music Studio after hours. The mysterious title names and attention-grabbing lyrics, added with the clashing cymbals and guitar strumming, reminded me of rock classics and new age headbangers. To get a better feel for the record, we sat down with Dee, Isaiah, and Sol Radke to reveal the inner workings of their upcoming album that released July 14.

The Pitch: What inspired the cover art of *Bedroom Sand*?

Isaiah: My girlfriend noticed that while I was working on the "Victory" music video, I always had *Blue Velvet* on because it's a fun movie to listen to. I was thinking that the album could probably be like a color, or something simple. So, it's doing something simple, but it's like a real texture. We ordered the custom lettering blocks from this lady on Etsy.

What would you say is the central theme of the album?

Isaiah: It's sort of about paranoia and insecurities around being in a band, and also nostalgia and looking back on things that make you happy. Like "Ready To Burn," it's literally just a 90s-type song. It just feels good. Video games were also a very big theme for the record. That's why we straight-up reference a couple of games.

What has the process been like over the past six years since your last album release, and how long have you been working on *Bedroom Sand*?

Isaiah: This album's been in the works for a minute. For instance, the "Bedroom Sand" song idea came before we did "No Strange Cats." We thought it was too

similar to some of the other stuff we had already done, so we were like, we'll come back to this song, and we'll have a different perspective.

Can you talk a little about the first track, "Victory?"

Isaiah: We always used to watch the Foo Fighters documentary back and forth, and there's this part where Dave is talking about how he wanted to come up with an awesome opening set song. We've always thought we need a song specifically for opening sets. In "We Won't Get Fooled Again" by The Who, there's that big "Yeah!" in it, but in the song it's four minutes in, so we thought, what if you just made a rock song that was all "Yeah!"—just all hype. We wrote the title about the Chiefs because they kept winning, so we're hoping they'll use it someday.

In "Falling Out Of Grace," this song feels different compared to the other tracks, more lyric-heavy. What would you say was the inspiration behind the second track of *Bedroom Sand*?

Isaiah: You know, when you're rockin', you're playing in a band, you're always wondering, is this the album where we're going to start writing shitty songs? There's

always paranoia, and this song is sort of the fantasy of what your family thinks, what your fans think. Are the haters loving that you aren't as good anymore? This song is about the world where you didn't do the best.

What led to "Ready To Burn" being a single? How do you decide which songs to release as a single?

Isaiah: Sometimes you can just feel it. "Ready To Burn" is bouncy; it's nostalgic. We reference *Pokémon* and this other video game, *Pillars of Eternity*, which is a little bit deeper. It's just a nostalgic song, a 90s-type riff. And with this song, you can totally feel it. We were on tour with Living Colour, and I was messing around with the bassline, and one of the dudes from Living Colour started giggling and mouthing along to the bassline. It's easy to sing along to; it's very simple. It's easy to be like, it's time to say "I'm done, Ready To Burn" in the crowd. I always think about *Shrek* when I hear it.

"Welcome To The Backyard" is an interesting title, almost Green Day-esque, and I can hear some similarities between this song and some of Green Day's. Can you speak on that possible link a bit?

Isaiah: This is just the most Green Day *Dookie* inspired song, even the bassline. I had to do a Mike Dirnt-type slide. We even do a little breakdown that's like psychedelic punk. It's fun to just, in some ways, be another band in a song. The perspective voice changes. It's about a douchey boyfriend who thinks he's amazing because he has this band, thinks

it's better than it is, and then gets kicked out by his girlfriend.

What made you want "Bedroom Sand" to be the title track?

Isaiah: I like that we get asked this because it's literally a made-up thing. To me, "Bedroom Sand" is sand in an hourglass that has little stars and moons in it, and then you use it to have a psychedelic trip. It's just a completely made-up original thing, but I like the way it sounds because it kind of sounds like it is something. You take a Q-tip, you dip it in the bedroom sand, you stick it in your ear, and then you have a psychedelic trip.

Is there a story behind the title of "Strays?" That name is simpler than the last few tracks.

Isaiah: We have a bunch of cats, and they're all rescues. This is the definitive Radkey cat song. It's about how your family doesn't necessarily have to be blood. That's something we've learned through touring and meeting people.

Any other thoughts on the album, or on what is next for Radkey?

Isaiah: It was a lot of trust in your gut and doing the best you can, and coming out with an authentic product of what we were going through at the time. It speculates on a lot of hoping that it's good, that we're not "Falling Out Of Grace." The next album won't be as hard, but it's great that this was a cool challenge. We've got this album now, and then we're going to soon start working on the new one. **P**



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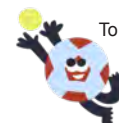
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