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Photo courtesy of The Floor

Fox's quiz competition show *The Floor* contestants hustle for hometown hero status

Earlier this year, two Kansas Citians and a former KC resident (and *Pitch* contributor) met in Ireland as contestants on the Fox game show *The Floor*. The Rob Lowe-hosted program sees players battling over trivia while racing toward a grand prize. Get the story from Abby Olcese on how Eric Melin, Meredith Host and Dave Elliott built a competitive alliance based on new friendship and shared geography—then wound up battling it out on national network TV.



Illustration by Teddy Rosen

Matcha madness: Narrowing down Kansas City's matcha lattes to five must-tries

While matcha, specifically matcha lattes, may have become trendy in U.S. coffee shops, its status as a staple in the drink world has lasted centuries. Some of us are just late to the green game. Matcha's presence in global society has expanded beyond just the drink, with implications in culture, tradition, and even politics. Resident 'Matcha Man' Alexander Omorodion selects the best of the best bevies in the metro.

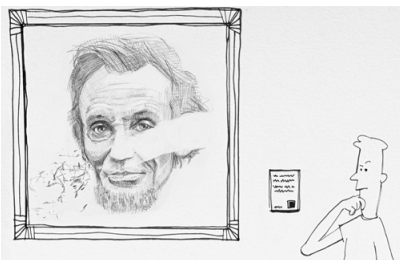


Illustration by Teddy Rosen

'Historical negationism' makes democracy a joke, with America as the punchline

The United States celebrated 250 years of independence over the summer—a monumental event that should be commemorated... for the right reasons. Unfortunately, the specter of ideological capture of the country's most prominent cultural and historical institutions goes far beyond an organizational adoption of belief accompanied by an elected president's political preferences atop the federal government. Michael McGrady Jr. dives in on how intellectual erasure makes us so much lesser—and how to fight back.

Clay Wirestone's *Opinionated* traces a personal path through the history of Kansan journalists

William Allen White famously asked, "What's the matter with Kansas?" But he was not the only local journalist raising important questions about the future of the Sunflower State and the nation. Clay Wirestone, award-winning opinion editor at *Kansas Reflector*, uses his new book to take readers on a tour of Kansas journalism from the 1920s to the 1970s, introducing us to the people who shaped public discourse in the heartland—all through a modern, personal lens. Brock Wilbur spoke editor-to-editor with Wirestone about what our deep dive heroes mean for the future of challenging power.



Photo by James Roper

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Letter from the Editor

THE MONSTERS ARE DUDES ON MAPLE STREET
By Brock Wilbur

Greetings dearest reader,

Welcome to the October print issue of *The Pitch* magazine. I'm your haunted host, Brock Wilbur, and on behalf of every spirit on staff, I'd just like to say:

loud clattering sounds, a chain rattles, something awful awakens, a door creaks open, followed by assorted shrieks and moans

Yeah, spooky season shit. Real nightmare mode hours around here.

I'm writing this just after leaving a screening of the new *Resident Evil* film. It's also my birthday. I guess I just got everything I could hope for, because—and I say this as a huge fan of everything *Resident Evil* right down to the Japanese stage-musical—finally, a good *Resident Evil*. Phew. I was gettin' worried there, those last three decades…

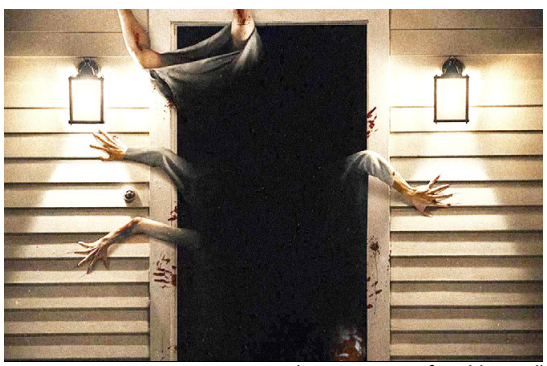
This flick rounds out a real three-peat from director Zach Cregger, who also brought us *Barbarian* and *Weapons*.

My favorite cinema-going experience from the last few years was thanks to *Weapons*—or more accurately, it was thanks to AMC Ward Parkway. The film opens with a little girl's voiceover letting the audience know that this is a true story. I am not worried about spoiling *Weapons* at this point, but dearest reader, it is *not* based on a true story. A random guy sitting next to me at AMC Ward Parkway was on the fence about this… far, far too long into the movie. It was during the final, overwhelmingly violent and chaotic scene, that he leaned over to his date and said, "This can't be a real story. It's just too many children. We would've heard about it."

I think about Mr. Weapons a lot these days. I want to watch movies next to someone who, right up until the credits roll, is still not fully convinced that *this all* isn't A Real Thing We Would've Heard About. I wish I'd gotten his number that day, because I would've gladly paid for his ticket to *Resident Evil*. I'd pay for his ticket to sit next to me in theaters for the rest of my life. I just want to watch him as he watches movies. Sir, I hope you're still out there, searching for truth in the darkness.

A neat trademark that director Zach Cregger has nailed across all of his horror films so far is a preternatural mastery of The Ominous Front Door. All three flicks prominently feature more than one sequence where a front door, once open, reveals a deep well of darkness—an infinite inky void of nothing beyond. And yet, everyone watching knows that darkness will eventually move. Moments spent fixated on the point just beyond what we can see are moments sacrificed to being defenseless against the inevitable Very Bad that's coming next.

When *The Pitch* sat down to build this month's print issue, the concept top of mind was "monsters." Definitionally, monsters can be anything from cruel to simply unknown, or maybe just unusual in size. They don't always carry the burden of evil, and sometimes a monster looks like one thing but catches you off guard with behavior that upends your expectations. That flicker of shock, that blindside, makes all the difference.


Photo courtesy of Resident Evil

Monsters live in the dark. But they invite you to join them. Monsters don't have to come to you. Maybe you'll just come to them.

That's what makes trick-or-treating so disorienting. It's what made me terrified as a kid. Not only did I not know what would be waiting for me on the other side of a front door, but I also knew that I'd knocked on the door of a Bad House—I'd chosen to be here. Despite the yard full of skeletons and the speakers playing rattling chains and shrieks, I chose to ask whatever lived inside to open the door and reward me. If anything terrible happened, well, it was my own fault. I could've left at any time. But instead, here I stand, peering into the inky blackness and hoping for the best.

Journalism feels a lot like trick-or-treating. We knock on a lot of doors, and we look into a lot of darkness. Often there are pleasant surprises. Sometimes there are monsters. And sometimes it is just fine when you find a monster, because you have trick-or-treating allies to help you drag it into the light.

Our October mag features Sarah Sipple teaching a crash course on defense against the dark arts in the service industry, River Louraine following a century of magical escape acts, Alex Omorodion devouring a monster made out of meat, Abby Olcese getting caught in a web of spider sightings, and Maisie VanSlander tracking the trial of innocent people caught up against a beast with no name. All this, and so much more…

Teddy Rosen drew our cover this month, showing a group of kids who get more than they bargained for when the door opens at their weird neighbor's house. He captured the feeling perfectly. Not just the monster that might emerge, but also the kids' sense that the situation might still be salvageable. After all, if anything was truly this bad, we would've heard about it. Right?

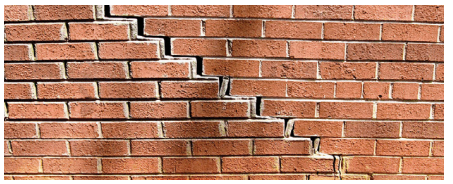
We hope you enjoy the issue, and may your own monster-hunting serve you well this October—whatever door you choose.

Pitch in and we'll make it through, P

Brock Wilbur

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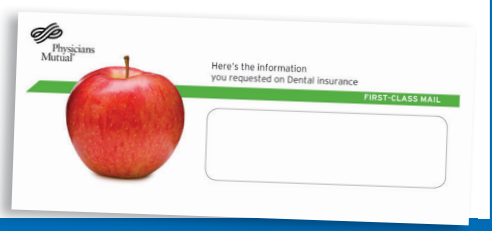
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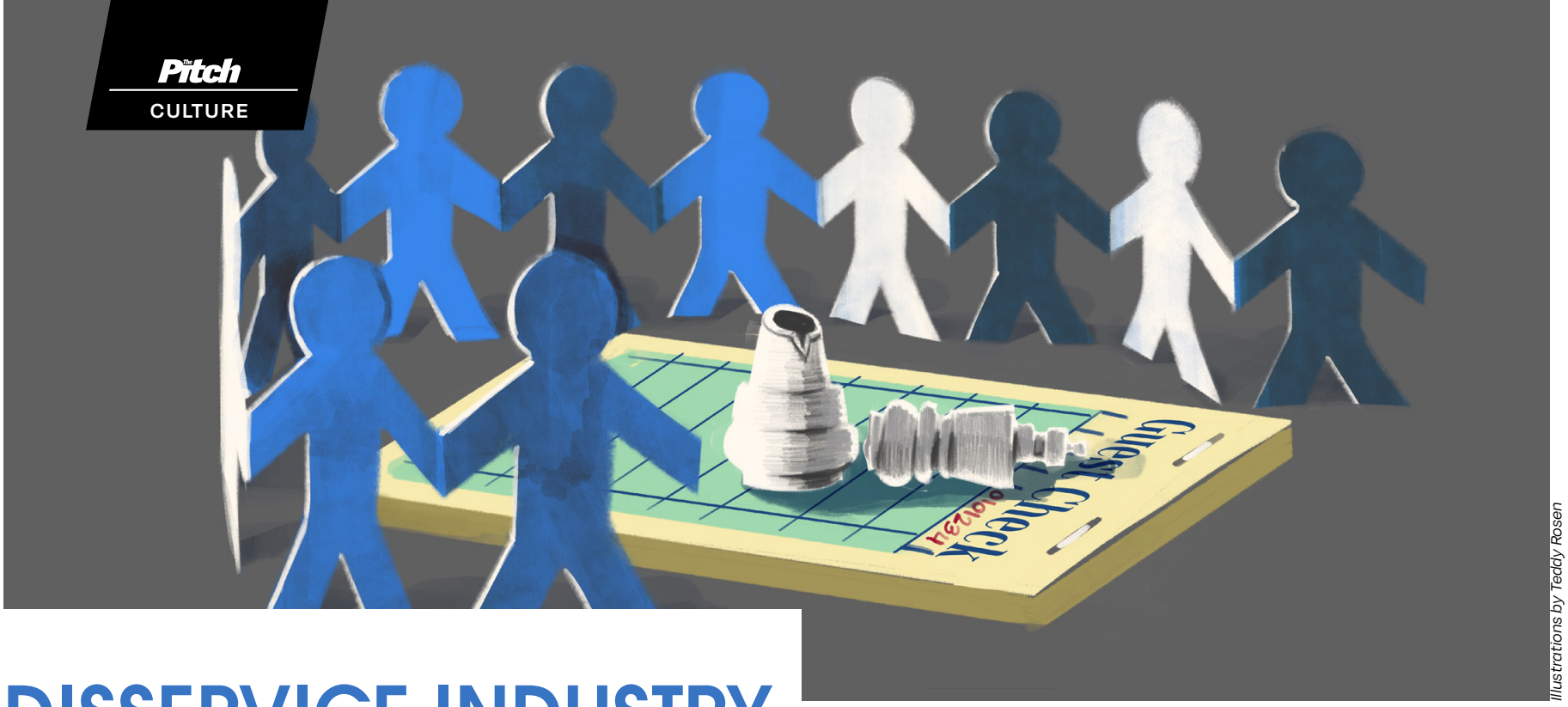
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Illustrations by Teddy Rosen

DISSERVICE INDUSTRY

BUSTING MYTHS AROUND EMPLOYEE WORKPLACE PROTECTIONS IN BARS AND RESTAURANTS

By Sarah Sipple

Bars and restaurants are critical components for both enhancing and defining a community. Most of them operate in a way that reflects the best of surrounding culture, but some have turmoil behind closed doors.

When a recent post on Reddit identified a nationally celebrated Shawnee bar owner as a source of abusive behavior and cruel management, it was horrifying but equally unsurprising. For those who spend more time planted in a booth than behind the swinging kitchen doors, it can be jarring to read how normalized these actions have become, maybe even in your own beloved neighborhood spot, and how silence has remained the default response—especially when other workplaces have made progress towards greater accountability.

What began as a story for *The Pitch* about one toxic individual in a position of power brought us to interviews with former employees, witnesses, and industry pros, but all involved agreed that it was only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to abuses in the service industry. Instead of focusing on just one source of violated trust, we're casting a wider net:

The best way to stop inappropriate workplace behavior is for people to stop behaving inappropriately.

That is the real answer. Full stop.

But because issues of alleged harassment, violence, discrimination, tipping violations, and more continue, a next step is for victims to stand up and demand better. This is far from a victim-blaming treatise; rather, a primer for when things feel the most hopeless.

One way to do that is by taking legal action.

Sure, some employees leave a bad boss, but the general public usually doesn't notice when a business has an unusually high staff turnover rate. If sales stay up, the owners see no reason to discipline anyone or change course. "They never did anything bad to me," one may say as they brush off others' experiences while local and national accolades roll in.

Maybe there are whispers from within the industry that an owner is more than unpleasant to work for, but that doesn't help a newbie. Plus, some people might still chance it for the establishment's notoriety and attractive pay.

But at what cost?

When trying to work within the system stops working for you, it's time to go outside.

Filing reports of discrimination or harassment, or suing an employer, is not simple. But knowing one's options when violence, wage theft, harassment, or other abuses have taken place may provide a path forward to accountability and the ultimate ideal: preventing the bad behavior from continuing.

The Pitch sat down with employment attorney Sarah Duggan of the firm Brown, Curry, and Duggan to address or dispel myths around reporting violations and even suing an employer.

As a veteran of the service industry, Duggan decided to pursue a law degree after an employer smacked her rear, which was the breaking point after a history of "casual" sexism and inappropriate behavior from bosses.

Now, she and her team take on cases big and small in the name of protecting humanity within the machine of capitalism.

"It is about breaking the silence of that culture. Sometimes there's got to be one person that just says, 'Enough's enough of this,'" Duggan says of her work advocating for victims in the industry she holds dear.

The following is not legal advice but general information intended to help workers better understand their rights, limitations, and options.

Myth: There's no one for me to report things to.

Truth: You still have options.

Many restaurants, bars, cafes, bakeries, breweries, etc. are small and do not have a human resources professional. It can make the idea of reporting someone, particularly to the perpetrator themself, feel pointless or even dangerous.

Locally, employees can make reports to the Missouri Commission on Human Rights (MCHR) and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC).



Reporting instances of discrimination or harassment to them is considered protected activity.

Duggan explains: "Let's say your boss slaps you on the ass at work. You don't have to say, 'Hey, don't do that. I'm reporting my grievance to you.' You can report it to the MCHR. That's considered a protected activity. If you're retaliated against for that, like, your shifts are cut, or you're fired, then you could have a potential lawsuit after that."

Bureaucracy can rear its head here though, so here's where getting a lawyer may be beneficial: "The MCHR is super backed up, so sometimes they have their appointments as far as six months out, but lawyers can file it immediately. So it's good to talk to a lawyer about it, to see if you can get it on file sooner rather than later," Duggan explains.



Myth: It's my word against theirs. I don't have enough evidence.

Truth: True, but there may be more evidence than you think.

First, if you believe there may be evidence, perhaps on a security camera or phone, it's beneficial for you to report the incident quickly and then contact a lawyer. They may elect to send your employer a preservation letter.

A preservation letter notifies the employer or individual that the employee is now represented by the lawyer, and in an effort to preserve the employee's rights, the employer must save the listed artifacts for any future litigation. Deleted evidence may not work in the employer's favor.

Second, you are legally allowed to record without your employer knowing. However, that doesn't mean your employer might not have internal policies against it; if they catch you recording, you could be fired for breaking that policy.

Both Kansas and Missouri are one-party states, which means that you can record a conversation as long as you are a participant. One party must know that it is being recorded; you cannot put your phone down and walk away.

Another thing to consider is who else you've told, or who may have been a witness.

Duggan explains, "Texting people, especially if you think someone saw, and saying, 'Did you see this?' or texting a coworker when you see something, and saying, 'I saw this happen.' The employees who texted that they witnessed it could be great witnesses in a legal proceeding because it was fresh in their mind when they texted and did not have the pressure of lawyers or legal filings pressuring them to say one thing or another."

The employees who texted that they also experienced the behavior are called "me too" witnesses.

Me Toos are a relatively new concept in law. The 'Me Too' movement inspired case law in Missouri to now allow another employee(s) to testify and say "That happened to me, too." Previously, each person had to have their own case, and each incident was treated separately by the courts.

Now, it's more valuable than ever to communicate with coworkers and peers.

Duggan says, "I would say, 'Hey, my manager fill in the blank... has he ever done this to you?' And you can talk about it to one another, but text or email each other, too. But once a lawsuit gets started, don't text about it anymore."

Myth: I'll be harmed somehow by retaliation.

Truth: You may.

Retaliation in the form of firing, reducing hours, demoting, threats related to calling ICE, and more is illegal. It may still happen.

However, retaliation claims can only hold water under the law if the original complaint was made and it was protected. In other words, an employee can't normally claim retaliation against reporting a wrongdoing when the wrongdoing was never actually reported in the first place.

Some employees may have signed an NDA upon or during employment, and assume they cannot report anything. However, the 2022 Speak Out Act restricts the enforcement of these provisions when related to sexual assault and harassment disputes.

"There are situations where people are going to get retaliated against. The law is not proactive with that. And so if it happens, you have resources later. But—when we don't report, or don't confront it, then we also contribute to the culture of silence that is a virus in the service industry," says Duggan.

Myth: It's just part of the culture.

Truth: It is in some places, but it shouldn't be and doesn't have to be.

"You can't just say no; it's not the norm. Because, yeah, it's undeniable in too many places," Duggan says. "And it usually is coming from the top down because sometimes managers are just such fucking losers. Like you got in this position of power and *this* is all you're gonna do with it? Wield it over people?"

Culture is malleable. How far would you go to change it for a career you love?

Myth: Getting a lawyer is too expensive.

Truth: Lawyer fees may not be what you expect.

When reporting abuses doesn't work, it may be time to lawyer up. And Duggan gets right to the point: "Oh, that one is easy. You don't have to spend any money."

Most employment lawyers take cases on a contingency basis, where they take on all the risk in the case by moving forward without you paying them. They even front case costs, like filing and depositions. Then, they take a percentage of what they're able to financially recover for you, usually around 30-50%, plus case costs.

"And attorneys are likely not taking cases that they are going to lose," says Duggan.

Myth: A lawyer already told me that they wouldn't take me as a client.

Truth: It might be worth another try somewhere else, and they may have said that because you truly don't have a legal case.

Multiple factors are at play in this situation.

Due to damage caps, businesses the size of most local restaurants, bars, and cafes are capped at paying out $50,000 in discrimination-related damages, such as claims under the MHRA and Title VII. This may turn some lawyers off from taking on your case because they don't consider their part of the payout worthwhile.



Also, what you're reporting may not actually be illegal.

It may be viewed as unethical, or even against the company's own policies, but that doesn't guarantee that it's unlawful. However, Duggan recommends examining the behavior from a wider perspective.

"When people tell me that, sometimes I try to dig a layer deeper to see if that policy or behavior is applied equally to people," says Duggan.

Curing the culture of silence in the face of abuse cannot be accomplished by one lawsuit or a single perpetrator receiving justice. We got here by group effort, and it needs to be remedied by group effort.

For further resources and worker organization efforts, we can look to how the Chicago Hospitality Accountability & Advocacy Database (CHAAD) has created public-facing support networks that offer those who are uncertain about next steps a roadmap towards protecting themselves, documenting abuses, and then taking action.

Kansas City's own Metropolitan Organization Countering Sexual Assault (MOCSA) has created the Sexual Assault Free Environment (SAFE) Training for restaurants and bars to give employees active bystander training to help prevent sexual violence and support survivors.

The Missouri Workers Center is attempting to create a food service workers' bill of rights.

And sometimes, taking someone to court is the next step. P

SCAN HERE FOR THE FULL STORY AND MORE RESOURCES.



Photos courtesy of *Don't Move*

Web Celebs

BIG ACTORS AND BIGGER SPIDERS MAKE LOCALLY FILMED CREATURE FEATURE TRULY TERRIFYING

By Abby Olcese

Good news, arachnophobes: *Don't Move* director Maclain Nelson says being afraid of spiders is an evolutionary defense. Your fear makes you more advanced than the rest of us, who are just moderately freaked out by eight-legged freaks.

"I did a deep dive on this," he says.

"Of course you did," laughs *Don't Move* star Lyndsy Fonseca.

Undeterred, Nelson keeps going, like a sixth grader who's just learned a cool fact in science class and can't wait to share it. "Evolutionarily, you survive if you know how to avoid spiders, because spiders would kill weaker, stupider humans. They have so much poison relative to their size," he says. "So arachnophobia is a good quality. Same with snakes. It's not that you're a wimp; it's a trait that helps your lineage survive."

See kids? It's cool to be scared of spiders.

In Nelson's defense, enthusiasm was palpable all over the Midland Theatre at the local premiere this week of *Don't Move*—a monster-driven horror-comedy that shot locally last year. Nelson directed and co-wrote the film, an adaptation of the book of the same name by Impractical Jokers star James "Murr" Murray, who also serves as a producer.

"It's one of those few times when I think the movie is actually *better* than the book," Murray says with a proud smile.

Don't Move draws inspiration from *Tremors* and more than a few vibes from 'Syfy Original Movies' (complimentary). The story follows a church group on a camping trip to the Ozarks who become the unwitting prey of a massive prehistoric spider living in the woods. Fonseca's Megan, who survived a traumatic accident that opens the film, must overcome her fears and jump into action to save her friends.

In addition to writing and directing, Nelson also brought to life the giant spider that stalks the pages of Murray's book—which was co-written with Darren Wearmouth.

"I had this cot in my backyard, and I'd lie down in like a one-meter square in my grass and just watch spiders," Nelson says, once again emanating wide-eyed kid vibes. "You'd be amazed at how many different kinds there were. My favorite one I found was a crab spider. The front four arms were twice as long as the back four. That's what I based the monster design on. I added a hornet body, a little cicada in there. I had the most fun designing that thing."

Along with Fonseca, the film features rapper Russ, *Holiday Touchdown: A Chiefs Love Story* alum Hunter King, and Kansas City all-around icon Rob Riggle. The production was originally slated to film in Canada, but Riggle claims he (along with recent Missouri filming incentives) had something to do with the choice to relocate production here.

"I like to claim something that's probably not true, but I had James come to Kansas City for Big Slick, and he fell in love with Kansas City so much that he just had to make his film here," Riggle says.

"There's 100 percent truth to that," Murray confirms. "The guys and I from Impractical Jokers came for Big Slick, like six years ago. Now we carve out a weekend of our tour every year for it because it's so important. We absolutely love the city. When Kansas City last year came out with that amazing film incentive program, it was a no-brainer."

Nelson, who had previous experience working on Hallmark movies—which often shoot in the area—was convinced after co-producer David M. Wulf contacted him from the set of *Holiday Touchdown* and told him to consider the area as a location. "They opened the city up for us, and they have great crews we worked with," Nelson says. "It was the best possible scenario to get what we wanted to get in the 17 days we had to shoot."

Riggle says he sees it all as the start of something big for Kansas City talent—both the folks who've come from the area and the ones who still call it home. "I can't get enough of it. I'm so happy to see the arts excelling, so many young talented artists coming out of the Midwest and specifically Kansas City," Riggle says. "I believe that when you come from Kansas City, you want to come back to Kansas City. I hope people go out and do amazing things and then they want to come back."

Whether it's giant spiders or hosting a World Cup, Riggle says, it's a great time to be a proud Kansas City citizen. Projects like Don't Move, which brings attention and jobs to local crews, help prove it.

"I do believe Kansas City is ascending right now," Riggle adds. "We should all be doubling down on it."



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Catch Me or I Go Houdini

ELABORATE ESCAPES KEPT PRESTIDIGITATION PRO BOUND TO KC

By River Louraine

If you ask someone, anyone from any generation, to name a magician off the top of their head, an incredibly likely and popular answer will be the world-renowned magician, escape artist, and "self-liberator" Harry Houdini. After reaching success in Vaudeville in the late 1800s, Houdini's career spiraled into death-defying escape attempts.

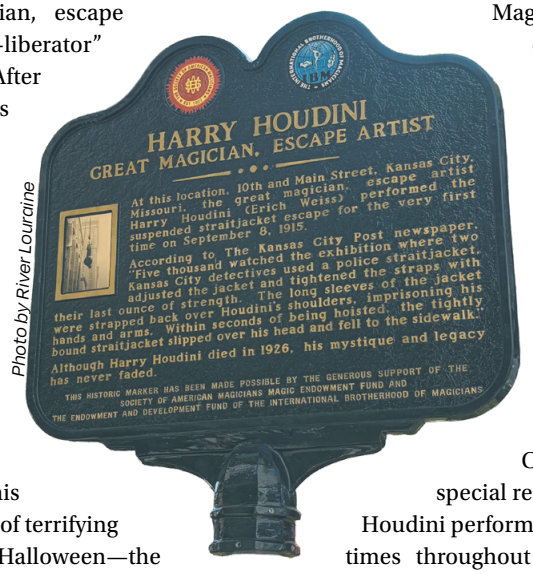


Photo by River Louraine

Despite having passed 100 years ago this Oct. 31—that's right; this magician capable of terrifying acts died on Halloween—the name 'Houdini' is so synonymous with his performances that it's become its own verb, meaning to escape a difficult situation quickly.

On Sept. 11, the local chapters of the Society of American Magicians, the oldest organization for magicians in North America, and the International Brotherhood of Magicians, the world's largest organization for magicians and magic enthusiasts, came to Kansas City for a very special reason; it turns out, Houdini performed in KC multiple times throughout his career, and even performed his very first public suspended straitjacket escape on Sept. 8, 1915.

5,000 Kansas Citians flooded the streets to watch this feat, and it was so popular that Houdini performed it almost 80 times throughout his career. These two prestigious magic societies commemorated the performance by unveiling a new marker in the courtyard at 10th and Main, where Houdini first performed the escape 111 years ago.

Before this magical event, John Cox, the leading authority on all things Houdini, flew in from his home in Los Angeles to give a lecture on Houdini's history at the Kansas City Public Library on Sept. 10. This is where we learned that Houdini got his big break in Vaudeville at the Orpheum Theater, had a "rivalry" with his brother/impersonator at two separate venues in KC on the same night, and that Houdini returned to Kansas City to do his suspended straitjacket trick again—only this time, he increased the original distance and performed this escape from 100 feet off the ground.

Cox also gave Kansas City the highest honor: an official five-out-of-five-star Houdini city rating. Houdini visited the city multiple times throughout his career, performed three of his most crowd-pleasing tricks (a jail escape, an underwater escape in a KC pool, and that infamous suspended straitjacket escape), and we still have a theater where he performed. While Mainstreet Theater is no longer open for business, this building, originally constructed in 1921, still stands tall in the Power & Light district.

At the marker unveiling, Kelly Rusk, current president of the I.B.M., Ring 129, read a proclamation from Mayor Quinton Lucas declaring September 2026 officially 'Harry Houdini Month.'

"Harry Houdini is memorable because he revolutionized the art of escape and illusion, becoming one of the most famous magicians in history."

David Sandy, former president of

I.B.M. and lifetime member of both magic organizations, said, "When it comes to being an escape artist, there was really no one of any notoriety before Houdini. He kind of invented this whole category of entertainment for thrill seekers." Sandy also said that nowadays with TV specials, viewers at home can rest assured knowing the production company wouldn't air somebody getting hurt–or worse. 100 years ago, however, Houdini's audience had no guarantee he'd live through his next escape attempt. They watched with bated breath, hoping this wasn't going to be the final performance.

"There was a real sense of fear that this man could die doing this stuff, hanging upside down in a tank of water, confined," Sandy continued. "You can only hold your breath for a couple of minutes. What if he doesn't get out?" Houdini's famous tagline echoed this sentiment: "Failure means a drowning death."

The pièce de résistance of this marker event was that Lance Rich, a magician and escape artist from Kentucky, had the honor of performing the suspended straitjacket escape in the same spot Houdini did over 100 years ago, and the pre-show jitters were definitely making their own appearance.

"I'm a little nervous," Rich said the day before the event. "And it's not the escape itself that makes me nervous. It's the idea that it feels like hallowed ground in a way. I'm doing this in the footsteps, or straps, so to speak, of this guy, you know? And that's a little intimidating."

In true magic-show fashion, Sandy pulled two volunteers from the crowd to help strap Rich up in the straitjacket, and showed the rest of the audience it was tight and secure. Sandy showed us the ends of the sleeves, confirming that both were completely sewn shut. Rich was then lifted about a foot off the ground, upside down and dangling for all of us to see.

The air was thick with tension, but also with shouts of encouragement as the performer struggled and wrestled with his confinement. It was just like Sandy had said; we had no real confirmation that this was going to be successful. It was a hot day, the sun beating down on us, and here was Rich, blood rushing to his head and sweat beading on his brow in that leather contraption, attempting something unthinkable to the rest of us.

Thankfully, we all cheered as Rich escaped the straitjacket in less than five minutes, bowing upside down and then right side up after being released from the bar he was hooked to. A proud smile spread across his face, as he had successfully completed the same escape that Houdini championed so long ago in the exact same spot.

"They talked about how this is the centenary of his death, and there are multiple events marking that occasion," John Cox said after the performance. "What I like about this occasion is it's the only one celebrating his life."

The local chapters of the Society of American Magicians and the International Brotherhood of Magicians meet on the first and third Thursday of every month at Westport Bowery, and they put on a performance every other month there. The current presidents of the organizations encouraged all magic lovers to join them; whether you're already a pro, just starting to learn, or just like to watch a magic show, you are welcome there. You can find more information on the Kansas City Magic Showcase Facebook page. P







Photos by River Lourdine

FOOD FIGHT

FOOD NOT BOMBS FACE COURT SHOWDOWN OVER BAFFLING TRESPASS ARRESTS

By Maisie VanSlander



Photo courtesy of Wavelength Productions

Two volunteers for the Kansas City chapter of Food Not Bombs (FNBKC) were arrested by KCPD on Jan. 4, during one of the organization's many Sundays dedicated to feeding the community. The arrest video gained national attention and called the arrest's legitimacy into question. Almost a year later, Wolfgang and Michael have a court date set for Oct. 7 to fight the charges and fight for the future of Food Not Bombs.

FNB is an international movement that aims to reduce food waste while providing vegan and vegetarian meals to the community. It is completely volunteer-led and identifies as a community, rather than a non-profit company.

"We are not a charity but dedicated to taking nonviolent direct action."

For over 13 years, FNBKC has brought warm meals every Sunday to the people of Kansas City, built on donations and volunteer manpower.

Recent reports find that Kansas City is facing record-high levels of hunger and food insecurity. Harvesters' recent report found that one in seven of Kansas City's adults is at risk of hunger. That is approximately 64,000 residents worried about where their next meal might come from.

Even more concerning is that one in five of the city's children face food insecurity, totaling almost 26,000.

With the reduction of federal food benefits like SNAP and the rising cost of groceries, FNBKC acts as a salve for this growing issue. By using donated ingredients and food that would otherwise be thrown away, along with community gardens, the movement also tackles the American food waste problem, despite KCPD's intervention.

Michael and Wolfgang returned to serving the community every weekend soon after their arrest. "I haven't missed a Sunday," Michael tells *The Pitch* in a recent interview.

FNBKC continued to do business as usual on the same block, just a little farther down the street, but the arrest had surprising ramifications.

"We had our hackles up," Wolfgang explains, "a lot of our regulars lost contact with us for some months, even though we continued service right down the street."

"Parents became nervous bringing their kids around because they were scared the police were going to come back," Michael adds.

With many months between the arrest and the trial, Wolfgang reflects on how the organization could have handled the situation during the arrest, "I wish we had been more paranoid; we lost a lot of context of that specific day leading up to the arrest."

Michael agrees, but adds that FNBKC did a great job under stressful circumstances during the day of the arrest. "We handled it very well; it brought our group closer together."

Both Wolfgang and Michael plan to fight the charges in court on the platform that they were not told they were being trespassed. Details on who trespassed the pair are still unclear, and both hope that becomes evident in court.

Similarly, KCPD has not made dashcam and bodycam footage available to the defense. KCPD claims there is no footage of the arrest; however, Michael recalls one officer stating, "I warned you twice, and it's on bodycam."

Many details around the arrest and the validity of the trespassing charge have been and will be called into question during the upcoming municipal trial on Oct. 7. Both defendants are preparing to not only advocate for themselves, but for the community as a whole.

"It doesn't feel like this is about trespassing," Wolfgang claims.

"Surrounding business owners want a simple solution to a systemic issue the police won't solve," Michael asserts. Businesses in the area served by FNBKC have claimed that it attracts people without housing and promotes littering. "The people are already here, and we have been making efforts to leave the block better than we have found it."

Before the FNBKC arrests, another hot-meal volunteer group, Free Hot Soup, was stopped by the Kansas City Health Department, which poured bleach on all the food in 2018. These actions from Kansas City workers call into question the reasoning behind the harassment of volunteer groups.

Rumored company policies have been leaked that surrounding store employees are not to serve FNBKC volunteers and not to take free meals during service, despite some employees previously using FNBKC's services. The hostility and upholding of the trespassing charges have surprised both defendants: "It's a wider societal problem. They aren't used to dealing with us, since we don't have a leader," Wolgang states, "we are leaderless and leaderful."

The pair feel they are properly represented and confident going into the trial. They will be represented by Claire Wyatt from Wyatt Law. The trial will be municipal, meaning there will be no jury. If things do not go their way at the local level, they are prepared to appeal and stand before a jury at the state level.

The trial will be open to public viewing on Oct. 7 at 10 a.m. both in person and via online stream.

"We appreciate anyone who pays attention to this case," Michael says.

Wolfgang hopes the attention this trial draws will push people toward a more critical view of local law enforcement.

"It's bullshit, everyone can see it. It's not cheap to send police out to step on us using tax dollars. I want people to rethink their concept of authority. We don't need these guys. How does any of this help real people?"

After the trial ends at noon, Michael and Wolfgang plan to be outside the courthouse—answering questions and helping raise awareness—in hopes of rallying public support for the cause.

"We are always seeking sources for donations, whether it's a grocery store or an office with a couple of extra pizzas," Michael says, "no donation is too small."

Whatever a municipal judge rules on Oct. 7, Foot Not Bombs Kansas City will continue serving the community, as long as there is a community to serve. Don't be surprised to find Michael and Wolfgang serving hot meals that very next Sunday, same as always, on the sidewalk of Independence Ave. and Monroe Ave.

Leaderless, leaderful. P

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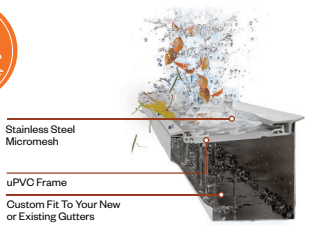
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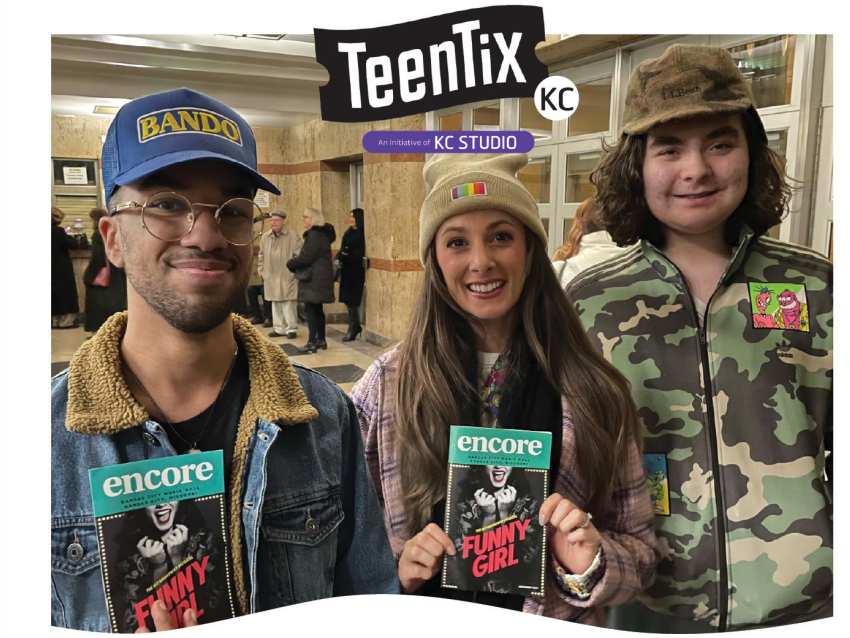
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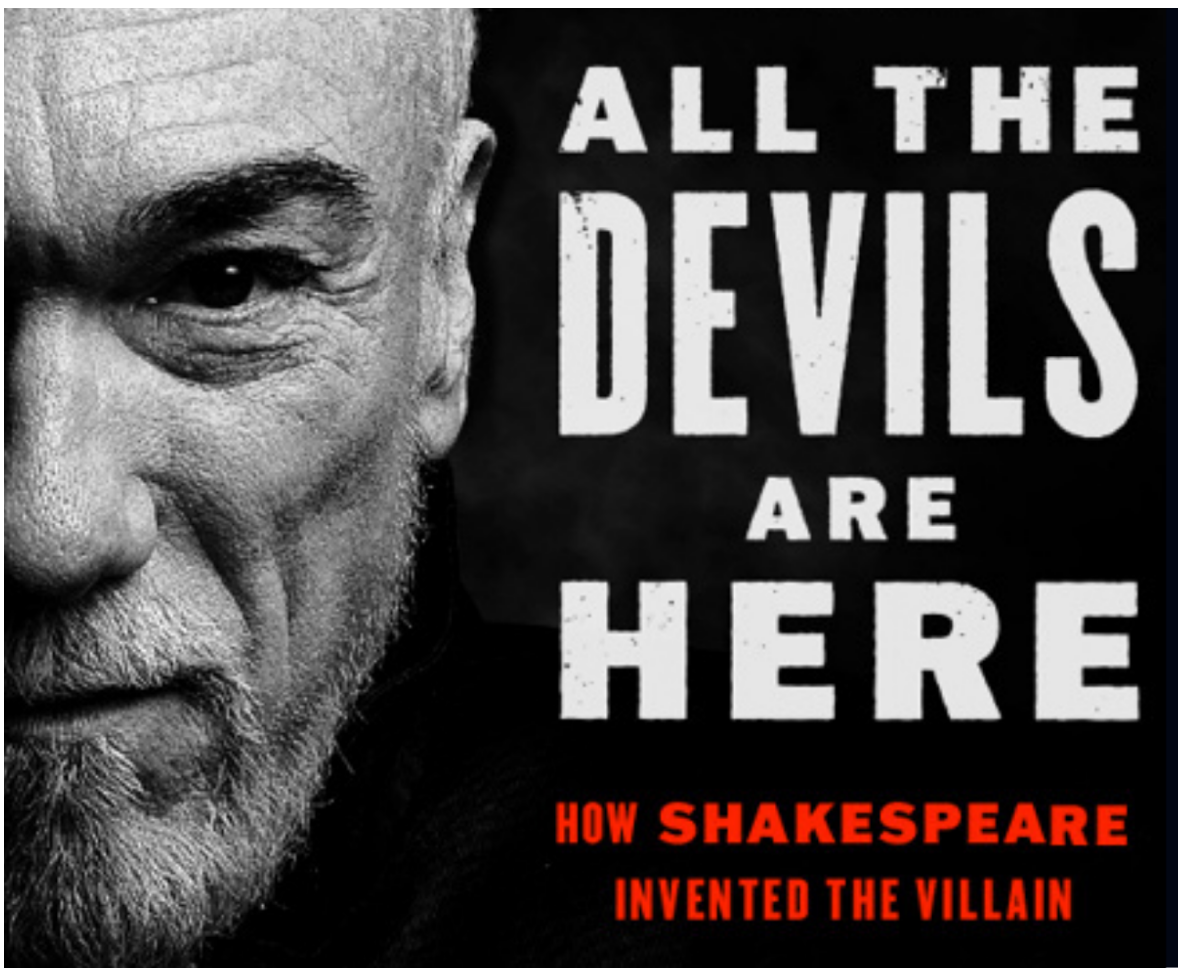
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FEELINGS DON'T CARE ABOUT YOUR FACTS IN KCAT'S VAXXTIRICAL *EUREKA DAY*

By Brock Wilbur

In a modern America full of folks who cannot agree on basic definitions of reality, there is perhaps nothing more threatening than a group of people who insist on hearing "every point of view." There is no unity to be found, and frankly nothing could be more off-putting to me right now than the kind of person who believes there is. Recognizing that there are problems whose solutions can be debated: this is noble. To believe that there is common ground where everyone goes home feeling good about a consensus: delusional. Delusional and perhaps un-American.

By any metric, that way lies madness.

Perhaps the only true, final political common ground—considering horseshoe theory and a shifting Overton window over the last decade—is knowing that no one hates themselves more than progressives. Republicans and Democrats may hate each other, but no one makes a Hell on Earth materialize faster than a room full of well-meaning white people who believe in their own superhuman ability to respect and amplify all voices.

So when a play about parents debating school vaccination policies hits the KC stage, I am soo seated early for an evening of self-annihilation. Hook that implosion of sweet, sweet liberal savior complex directly into my veins. Let the darkness slowly envelop me as we drift further and further from God's light.

Jonathan Spector's play *Eureka Day* is set in Berkeley, CA, during the 2018-2019 school year. The community of parents is built, like the school itself, from a blend of hard-working, bootstrap-pulling efforts efforts alongside affluent newcomers from the tech and culture world. Students and parents from all walks of life should make for a welcoming environment, but in an effort to force comfortable guardrails, the operations of Eureka become *too* open—and a policy of only making new policies by unanimous consent leads to massive time sinks, as a coalition of four parents and one principal can un-create solutions at record clip.

Case in point: the opening scene is a chaotic crosstalk of impassioned monologues and interruptions, all in pursuit of debating the word around a dropdown menu in a form on the school's website. Each participant, drowning in the best of intentions, manages to pursue their own lofty ambition of inclusion and representation until they suffocate in the inevitable word-salad. This is education administration run as performative political empty gestures, and once enough hot air has been burned, change can be comfortably sidestepped.

This is all fine for those involved. In fact, the pointlessness is preferable.

Principal Don (John Rensenhouse) is the captain of the ship, happy as long as the boat is moving, but would have no idea what to do if it encountered an iceberg. Suzanne (Cinnamon Schultz) is a granola lifestyle advocate whose decades of rotating children throughout the school have given her a self-appointed power atop a nonexistent hierarchy. Meiko (Erika Crane Ricketts) and Eli (Ross Hellwig) are parents who need this process to fill their lives, but the advisory panel also gives them a chance to explore Eli's open-ish marriage, which takes priority. Carina (Teisha M. Bankston) is the only new addition to the team—a new parent who is currently occupying a rotating annual seat, and who recognizes out of the gate that her voice as a Black woman will probably never carry the weight in conversation as the white people here, who cannot wait to speak to the perspectives and experiences of every race, gender, and creed.

All of this can function, pleasantly over scones with environmentally friendly plates, until an outbreak of mumps hits and a quarantine suspends school operations. The CDC's recommended vaccination protocol quickly highlights the divergent rates of student vaccinations across what is otherwise a universally ultra-liberal series of households.

Deep divisions immediately devastate a group more accustomed to solving hypothetical problems of their own making, and reopening the school with any sort of communal compliance becomes an untouchable fiction and a factory for friction.

A group of people who believe every voice deserves a seat at the table is soon doing anything within their power to make this table as small as possible—a politics of musical chairs in service of personal preference in the face of scientific consensus and government instruction. No one here is qualified to speak knowledgably about the facts, so the idea of facts is merely absorbed into their feelings. When a parents-only Zoom call with the entire school descends immediately into conspiracy theories and accusations of who is acting the most like Hitler, things are made immensely worse.

It is brutal. It is cutthroat. And nothing is funnier than watching every exercise in open community cause this team to implode further like a neutron star.

Director Darren Sextro is a maestro for knowing when to let one actor take the solo, and when to let every actor play in opposing keys in a race to unwinnable bedlam. The quiet moments are rare, honest, and inviting even when the topic or destination feels deranged. The loud moments are impossible cacophony, and more often than not the entire noise apparatus is churning unyieldingly from a single source.

From the show's opening moments, it is clear that characters are rarely going to finish a full sentence in *Eureka Day*—either from being spoken over by someone else, interrupting their own lines of logic, or (most astonishingly) pulling off pitch-perfect liberal guilt apologia that becomes more of an embarrassing musical expression than human communication.

Prime victors on stage here include Rensenhouse's rudderless but kind leader, whose openness to all input makes every point of dispute immeasurably worse. Schultz's mother martyr has to be reminded that there are no villains in this debate, despite casually steamrolling every point of contention to bend to her will, at least until the other advisors start to break. As always, Bankston is an actress who knows how to slip seamlessly into the larger cast and then take down her co-stars like a sniper. Here, she operates as the only cast member with the conviction and distance to repeatedly remind the others that, no matter how much they've convinced themselves through seniority, bylaws, and internet research... this is simply not how the world works and she won't allow it.

Kansas City Actors Theatre's production of *Eureka Day* is difficult, distressing, and deeply disturbing—mostly because it's hilarious to watch a pure reflection of the last decade jammed into our faces, and to crudely cackle at how meaningless the entire affair has become. No matter what twists befall these characters, or the institutions they align with, no version of these same protagonists would remain recognizable in 2026. These are people ready to die for ideas they back with total confidence, and yet we know that these same parents in the show are only a year away from the real world asking them about those same ideologies—this time with a gun to their heads.

Another all-time production from KCAT, and a piece that will stick with me for years. If you can, inflict this on yourself immediately, if only as a vaccination against what comes next. P



Photo courtesy of Eureka Day



Photo by Sarah Sipple

By Sarah Sipple

DRINK THIS NOW:

FALL SIPS AT APPARITION COFFEE

Apparition Coffee,
328 W 85th St,
Kansas City, MO 64114

Apparitions and heavy metal may scare off some folks, but Waldo welcomes the lot.

The team at Apparition Coffee has worked together to create a menu of autumn specials that may sound like a fright, but actually delight.

Jacob Kingsley has created the "Snapdragon and witch's fire," a unique but approachable raisin, cinnamon, and caramel latte. One doesn't have to consider themselves too adventurous to order this. The subtle tang of raisins was more present in the scent than the flavor. Kingsley has also kept the popular banana latte trend going with "Liberate bananas," a spiced banana bread latte that I couldn't stop reaching for.

Rye Boothe came up with a chicory-infused cold brew, potent on its own but made festive and fearless with a torched marshmallow topper.

And for a year-round trick (more like *treat)*, the signature "Apparition" latte is best served iced. Dark chocolate, black cocoa, black tahini, smoked sea salt, and milk are served with an espresso shot poured over the top for a ghostly visual effect on this mildly sweet and reliable option.

The uniqueness continues in the pastry display. Savannah Sellers concocts fresh-made scones, hand pies, protein balls, and more each day. I purchased two to enjoy later, since my bacon burrito was so filling: a caramel apple chai hand pie and a butternut squash, kale, and goat cheese scone.

Together, Kingsley, Boothe, Sellers, and the rest of the team make Apparition a delectable and friendly joint, like if Casper had a hardcore phase he never completely grew out of. P

By Alex Omorodion

EAT THIS NOW:

THE GLUTTON AT GRINDERS

Grinders has locations in the Crossroads and in Lenexa.

You pull open the wooden door and slither into the nearest booth. You stare at the menu, and the menu stares back. Though you feign a state of pensiveness, you both know what monstrous dish awaits.

A wry smile creeps across the face of the waitress as you utter the cursed words: "Give me The Glutton".

In anticipation of the task ahead, I received an extra plate, a fork and knife, and a swath of napkins—all of which proved to be much needed. The pressure mounted further when Led Zeppelin's "Kashmir" began echoing through the speakers.

"The Glutton" ($21) comes piled with six patties, three mozzarella sticks, pepper jack and cheddar cheese, bacon, lettuce, and grilled onion, with chips on the side. The smell of the grilled beef and onions hits you before the burger even arrives at the table.

Smash burgers generally aren't known for cheese pulls; however, the mozzarella sticks make each bite of "The Glutton" feel include some fried mozzarella. Brown sugar-coated bacon brings an undertone of sweetness, while the lettuce and grilled onion balance the umami of the beef and the multiple forms of cheese.

Short of dislocating my jaw, fitting this burger into my mouth was a task in itself, but a task worth doing.

The nerves going into my gluttonous burger experience at Grinders were simultaneously unsettling and comforting. On the one hand, I'd never been nervous before eating a burger, and on the other hand, what better time to experience this than the spooky season? In fact, Grinders Crossroads is hosting a weekend Spookeasy Halloween Pop-up Bar through Halloween.

Though I was only able to eat half before asking for a take-away box, this experience taught me something: a great burger can send chills down your spine. P



Photo by Alex Omorodion

Mise en Place

The Table
11485 S Ridgeview Rd,
Olathe, KS 66061

CHANGHYUN KIM MAKES AN INTRODUCTION TO KOREAN NOSTALGIA—FROM AN OLATHE CHURCH BASEMENT

By Kylie Volavongsa

A neighborhood side-dish shop in Seongnam, South Korea and a church basement dinner pop-up in Olathe, Kansas—they couldn't be more different.

But for chef and pastor Changhyun Kim, who runs The Table at Bonfire United Methodist Church—and before that, the aforementioned banchan spot—that isn't *exactly* the case. At least, beyond the logistics.

"I just know this food, and I love it," Kim wrote after I'd first reached out.

The signature dish at The Table is gomtang, a Korean rice soup in clear beef broth, simmered slowly with brisket and vegetables. It comes with a homemade trio of cabbage kimchi, radish kimchi, and onions and cucumbers marinated in a sweet soy sauce.



Photos by Phon Wills

"It's probably the hardest Korean dish to sell in America," Kim continued. "It isn't red, it isn't spicy, and it doesn't photograph well. But it's the food Koreans reach for when someone is sick, or grieving, or finally home."

That seems to be the through-line of Kim's establishment: Love and understanding, in the form of soup. And at The Table, it's offered with a welcome so simple and sincere that it feels far from the cliché one might expect of the premise. Most of this comes from how Kim holds the same conviction about people as he does food: you meet someone or something as they are, respect them, and let them stay themselves without asking to become familiar first—regardless of taste or religion.

He puts it this way: "Same belief, different table."

The Pitch: **Seongnam is pretty far away from Kansas City. What brought you to the metro?**

Changhyun Kim: I first came here in 2017 as an associate pastor in the immigrant church and seminary. I served at the Korean Immigrant Church, and I'm part of the United Methodist Church. We have an appointment system—a clergy appointment system like Catholics. I was appointed to Lecompton, Kansas, a very small white town between Topeka and Lawrence. I served there about three years, and later, about two years ago, we were planning on planting a church at the Bonfire United Methodist Church.

And when did you become a minister? Did you feel this process was connected to your relationship with food and cooking?

Long story short, when I was 20 or 21—all Korean men must do mandatory military service—I was in seminary before I went to mandatory service. I prayed for my calling: 'What kind of pastor should I be?' At that moment, God inspired me. The calling was to feed my sheep. So, after I got that calling, I paused my seminary journey. I went to cooking class to learn Korean food. So, because God said, "Feed my sheep," that means I have to cook and learn to cook.



Those cooking experiences and my ministry journey connected strongly with food, so I love food and feeding people. It's been over 15 years now. I cooked in the Korean military, and I cook almost every week for friends. I was also an Associate Chaplain at Baewha Women's University in Korea—that was my first career, and at the time, I didn't cook, but I had a restaurant touring group. We visited new restaurants, ate together, and built community. There are also Korean immigrant churches—so many people miss their own home food, so I cook a lot, serve a lot, and yeah, this is how I am here.

What has been the most memorable conversation you've had at The Table?

One family came from Lawrence, and they just said to me, "I appreciate this, because I really miss gukbap and this soup, but there's no place that makes gukbap right in Kansas City. Now, we don't have to go to Dallas." I remember that appreciation.

Another customer, who's now a church member, asked me, "Who are you?"

"Oh, I'm a chef and pastor."

She asked for my Instagram and everything, and asked, "Can I visit your church?" It was the very first question, so I said, "Of course you can."

The Table began as a living room dining club, then outgrew it. Was there a moment that led you to make that change?

At the very beginning, when we just started gathering as a church, we started in my living room. We had six planting members, including my family. We started inviting our coworkers and friends, and I cooked and served them every week for four to six months. We went through our network; we had no more friends to invite.

'How could we reach out to more people in this community?' We can invite friends and coworkers but not strangers. That sounds weird—'come to my house, eat.' So we became a restaurant and invited all people. I want to introduce people to Korean food, and if we have a chance, I want to share the love of Jesus.

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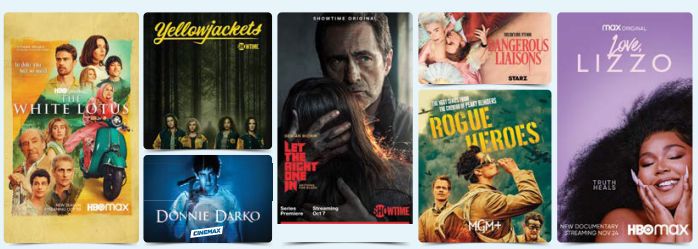
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Photo by Maura Dayton

This Meowing Kills Fascists

LFK'S CAT F!GHT BARES THEIR CLAWS IN DEBUT EP

By Olivia Steele

The Lawrence-based, fem-punk band CAT F!GHT, a Bratmobile-meets-B-52s-meets-Mommy Long Legs hodgepodge, formed in appropriately spooky fashion on Halloween 2022 by four KU students, released their self-titled debut EP this July and subsequently hit the road.

Comprised of lead singer Ali Madden, guitarist Maura Dayton, bassist Clare Hawkins, and drummer Lisa Hild, the band began as an answer to a lack of non-male representation in the local punk scene, providing a queer and fem perspective. When Madden expressed interest to Hawkins in starting a punk project, Hawkins asked to contribute and later brought in Hild, a mutual friend in the KU jazz program. They debuted as an opener in a basement venue, with "OH DOG!" later opening their EP, plus a cover of "I Can't Do Anything Right" by Red Aunts.

"We love to rock," Madden says. "I'd been seeing a lot of male-presenting punk acts at local shows, and wasn't seeing myself represented. I could tell other people had been feeling the same way."

"We want more variety in the punk scene," Hawkins agrees. "We want more non-male expression locally and to rage. It seems that all of the people making music tend to look the same, and it can get exclusionary. We want some more representation in the audience."

Ruminating in the high of rocking out at the Halloween show, they continued to write songs and book gigs, working their way through the DIY venues in LFK and stages such as Replay Lounge, recordBar, and Bottleneck. Their first big gig, Hawkins recalls, was opening for Deerhoof at Bottleneck her freshman year of college. Dayton also began following the band and became its photographer. When the band needed a new guitarist in early 2024, Dayton jumped at the opportunity, already familiar with the music and wanting to break into the scene themself.

Heavily influenced by the sound of third-wave feminism's offspring, CAT F!GHT's discography demands attention (in "LISTEN UP!," the band's second original song and corresponding second track on the release, Madden literally screams, "Listen to me! Listen, listen, listen, listen!"). They find inspiration in groups like X-Ray Spex, Bikini Kill, Red Aunts, Suburban Lawns, Siouxsie and the Banshees, and Blondie, creating a thrashy paw-swipe-at-the-face in each minute-long (give or take 15 seconds) song, complemented by the yelps and whines of Madden's vocals and occasional screams. Dayton turns the amp as loud as it'll go.

Doting on the empowerment of the riot grrrl movement and intersectionality that each member is passionate about, the group aims to create a space where everyone, regardless of who they are or how they identify–though fem and queer people, the group's peers, are the target audience–can enjoy music, mosh, and mingle without feeling threatened by possible targeted hate.

"I feel very obligated to this band–not like it's a job or a chore, but we're one of the very few bands in Lawrence that

is an all non-male group," Dayton says. "Representation is so important. You can go to a punk show and feel the testosterone in the room, which can be intimidating. You shouldn't have to feel threatened by the space you're walking into."

The band's progress culminated in the decision to record and release an EP, starting with sitting down and choosing which songs from their twelve-song discography they enjoyed playing together most. The group got together for a four-hour session at the *Live @ KJHK* studio in Lawrence, where the KU student-run radio KJHK 90.7 FM hosts their version of NPR's *Tiny Desk*, in spring 2025, and knocked it all out in one go.

"We'd been playing these songs for so long leading up to the recording, so it was a very painless process," Dayton says. "We put a lot of trust into Jack and trusted that he'd get the vision for the project."

The aforementioned Jack Goodrich, member of LFK bands The Flamin' Ghoulies, Jackoffs, and Drastic Plastic, recorded and produced the EP. Goodrich had been following the band since its early days and was deeply familiar with the band's style, influences, and members, so they chose him as the perfect fit. They let Goodrich take up any stylistic choices he so chose, including adding in layered vocals to "BACKGROUND NOISE" to emulate the band's chaotic live performance style and meows to open the EP in "OH DOG!"

"We did it the punk rock way," Madden says. "We got our good friend to mix our stuff and made it as cheap as possible. He was fitting our EP into his schedule. We were really intentional–your music is your baby."

Most of the songs on the EP were written at the band's start. "OH DOG!" and "LISTEN UP!" are anti-establishment sister songs in their jabs at double standards and gender roles and were written in late 2022, with "PERVERT," a song calling out "the creeps in the audience," and "BACKGROUND NOISE," a song designed to scream and kick to, followed soon thereafter. "MOSH BITCH," the most recent addition to the collection and another song intended to–ahem–mosh to, was written after Dayton joined the band.

"We wanted our EP to be holistic of CAT F!GHT and show our range," Hawkins adds. Madden adds, "We wanted it to be a sample that could encompass our sound nicely. It was hard to cut some songs out, but I'm happy with what ended up on there."

Though each member is busy with work, school, or living in a different city, they still find time to practice and keep honing their sound. Writing songs is a therapeutic practice as they channel dissent and frustration into their music, and the reward of hearing other people resonate with their message is something that can't be beat, as well as giving them a place to expand themselves artistically–for Hawkins, a member of three other local bands, this means being able to switch between jazz, pop, country, and punk regularly–and to see how many more times they can get people to dance to the beat of their organized chaos.

"We've grown so much throughout the years," Madden says. "When we were starting out, we just wanted to go out, have some fun, play some gigs, and do what our male counterparts were doing. Now, everything has come into place. We straightened our ties and decided to pursue it, and the progress paid off. I think that's what's fun about the EP, too–it shows our progress and how it's evolved. Our songs sound like what I imagined they would when I wrote them."

While nothing is set in stone yet, plans are in action for an album release, featuring more of their unreleased discography and new material, to release more merch, to find the time to plan a bigger tour–Dayton hopes for a week-long excursion on the road in various Midwest cities–and to curate an image for the band via photo shoots, music videos, and collaborations with other artists, hoping to make CAT F!GHT a collective work. While you patiently wait, you can stream CAT F!GHT's debut mix on Bandcamp or Spotify right meow. P

Photos by Erin Rockers





SURGICAL PRECISION

UMKC ALUM GAVIN BRIVIK BRINGS HOME AN EMMY FOR ANDREW BIRD COLLAB

By Abby Olcese

If you've seen HBO Max's medical drama *The Pitt* (and given that the show averages 12 million viewers per episode, those chances are pretty good), you may have noticed a song featuring Andrew Bird playing over the credits of the show's sixth episode, which aired February 12.

You may also have noticed the song recently won a Creative Arts Emmy for Outstanding Original Music and Lyrics. *Billboard* coverage called Brivik and Bird "giant slayers" in their headline because *The Pitt* track toppled a stacked category—beating out both Lady Gaga and *South Park's* Trey Parker.

"Need Someone" was co-created with *The Pitt's* composer, Gavin Brivik, a KC-area native and UMKC alum who's probably a familiar name to Pitch readers by this point. We first spoke with Brivik in 2021, when he'd composed the score for the indie film *Wild Indian*. Two years later, we discussed his work for Daniel Goldhaber's eco-thriller *How to Blow Up a Pipeline*.

This year may prove to be Brivik's biggest yet. In addition to his work for *The Pitt*, he's composed the score for *Sender*, a trippy mystery with an impressive cast (including fellow Overland Park native David Dastmalchian) that premiered at this year's SXSW in Austin and will show at the Sitges Film Festival in Spain in October. In April, Brivik's music was on our screens and in our ears again with the long-awaited premiere of Goldhaber and Issa Mazzei's *Faces of Death* (the film marks Brivik's third collaboration with Goldhaber—he also created the music for 2018's *Cam*).

With so much going on, it seemed like it was time to check back in. Brivik talked with *The Pitch* about the experience of working on *The Pitt*, his collaboration with Bird, Emmy win, and everything else he's been up to.

The Pitch: **So, you've been pretty busy lately! Congratulations.**

Gavin Brivik: It has felt that way! Things are moving fast, but I'm very grateful for it all.

How does it feel to be an Emmy winner?

I feel like I'm still processing winning, especially since I really thought *South Park* or *The Boys* were going to win. It feels very surreal, and I'm just happy to know peers and fans love this song as much as we do! To be honest, I'm so happy that Ernest Harden Jr. (who won for Guest Actor in a Drama Series for *The Pitt*) won, and the crowd's response to his speech brought tears to all of our eyes!

What is the campaign trail like for a music Emmy?

It felt like a very chill campaign trail. We didn't go as hard as some of the other people; we just performed the song a few times and let the fans and Music Academy peers judge its merit for themselves. It does seem like campaigning can get very political and aggressive, but thankfully our category was very mild, and all the other nominees were friendly and respectful! I love their music.

You've been working mainly in independent films up to this point, but *The Pitt* is a change of pace from that. What's the process like getting a job composing for a major show like this?

The Pitt showrunners had done a big call for composers, and my agents sent in my work for consideration. They were looking for a more experimental, innovative approach to the show's music. I remember getting the text from them, and they were looking for found sounds or experimental ambient music. I sent them stuff from *How to Blow Up a Pipeline* and *Faces of Death*. I think they chose about 10 of us out of the applicants and had us watch episode one, write music to a few scenes, and interview with them.

My pitch to them…it was almost talking myself out of a job because I didn't think the show needed a score, and they said: "We totally agree." Basically, I thought, "What would it sound like if the medical equipment was making the score?" Our idea was for the music to embed itself in the hospital's soundscape. Pitchfork and other outlets wrote about it like, "There's no music," which makes it feel like I'm doing what I pitched.

When I think of TV music, I tend to think of themes rather than scores, but in recent years that seems to have changed somewhat, in that shows now have full scores, not just themes, or in the case of *The Pitt*, no identifiable main theme at all.

It's interesting because I think that still exists. *Severance* is probably the best thematic-based show I can think of right now. I almost think it's genre-based. I love thematic TV shows like *Severance* and *The White Lotus*, which have prominent scores. But other shows, including *The Pitt*, have more ambient scores.

The Pitt is so in the moment, with each episode being one hour happening in real time. Keeping the score more sound-design-based, when you listen to it on its own, it's tense and almost ambient-aggressive, with weird machinery sounds. That stuff plays during intense surgery scenes. I think it's them trying to do something fresh and original in that space.

I still feel like TV shows in general are oscillating between the two (thematic and ambient). Even shows like *Task* and *Pluribus* still have bigger scores, with some themes. I'm not sure if it's a divided line, but I'm hoping shows go back to having more prominent themes. Same thing with film scores. We went too far in one direction where it's rebelling against old-school themes and now we're coming back to it.

How did you get to collaborate with Andrew Bird on a song this season? I've been a fan since I was in high school, so I think that feels like a pretty big deal.

It's so funny; I've also loved him since I was in high school, right after listening to all those early albums. I've always dreamt of collaborating with someone like him, but nobody from *The Pitt* knew who he was. Everybody kind of gave me a blank stare when I told them about it.

I had written these instrumentals for the end credits, and I had lots of other versions and variations and other songs. For season one, I collaborated with a singer-songwriter named Taji for the credits song.

This season, I thought it'd be amazing if I could get an even bigger collaborator to come on, and I wrote a dream list to my agent. Andrew Bird was the top name. As a musician and instrumentalist, he does everything I love. He can play every instrument and sing and write beautiful lyrics. Amazingly, my agent was like, "I represent him." He had signed with my agent to do film and TV work more recently.

My agent sent him my songs, and no joke, Andrew just responded directly to me with a voice memo of him singing on top of the song, and it was perfect. Legitimately, it brought me to tears; it was so damn good. The lyrics were so motivated by the scene it plays over and everything in the show.

To have idolized this guy and hear him singing over one of my tracks was amazing. We booked a session at a recording studio and reworked the song together. He gave me a lot of creative freedom over his own stuff. He let me edit his whistling solo and orchestrate the song, and he would text me notes and feedback. It felt so cool to be producing the song with him and get his insight into what would make it better.

"I got to edit an Andrew Bird whistle solo" isn't a thing a ton of people get to say.

It was surreal being in the studio with him, watching him do it. He'd do versions and be like, "What do you think of this one?" and I had to get over my imposter syndrome and put on my composer hat. He was so game for that. It was very cool and validating to have him like my choices. Also, he's the kindest guy. He gave me a shared credit on the song, which was so generous. Sometimes when you co-write with bigger artists, they get all the credit. That says a lot about him.

The two of you have gotten to spend more time around each other the last few weeks in the run-up to the Emmys than you maybe expected to when you first recorded the song! What was that like? Do you think you'd work together again?

I truly am a massive fan of Andrew's, and at first it was hard to see him as a colleague. I was fanboying over him, and I had to get past that mindset in order to work on the song as equals. Andrew is the best and most humble collaborator. He always presented brilliant ideas and thoughtful responses to any musical suggestions I put forward. I'd work with him again in a heartbeat and we've already discussed some potential ideas in the future.

You've got a lot of other work that's also getting a spotlight this year. What can you tell us about *Faces of Death*?

I'm so happy that IFC and Shudder really love the movie. It's going to be the biggest theatrical release in the company's history, and it'll be the biggest release of my own work theatrically so far. Musically, it's one of my most experimental scores. It's so different than *The Pitt*. This is high-energy, distorted hyperpop with artists like Cecile Believe, who's a vocalist on Sophie's albums, and Umru, who's produced for Charli XCX. The score is so weird and crazy, I can't believe I got away with it. I also got to bring in my former UMKC professor, Paul Rudy, and (KC-based musician and *How to Blow Up a Pipeline* collaborator) Morgan Greenwood to work on it.

And then there's *Sender*, which premiered at SXSW and is about to hit Sitges. How did you get involved with that project?

This director, Russell Goldman, actually found me through a test screening of *Faces of Death*. He's friends with Daniel and asked him, "Who did the score? I want to hire them for my movie."

The cool thing is that *Faces of Death* feels parallel to *How to Blow Up a Pipeline* because it's electronic. They share some inspiration. *Sender* is almost an acoustic score, using prepared piano and free-jazz drums. It's a left turn from my previous work, and feels exciting.

I got to express a different side to my music. I'm not constantly doing the big synth thing, which I do love to do. That's still there, but there's free jazz saxophone, drums going crazy, piano with weird stuff stuck between the strings. It was fun to play with a different kind of color palette.

I give the director so much credit. It was his first feature. He used to be Jamie Lee Curtis' assistant, and she really believed in him and knew he was trying to make this movie. He directed it like he was making his fifth film. The process was so eloquent and refined. I wrote music from the script before they even shot, and the actors listened to it on set, which was really cool. That's rare for a first-time director to do that. It was a dream project on all fronts. He kept letting me go weirder and crazier without holding me back. I'm used to feeling a little put in a box, and Russell felt, if anything, so open-minded that it made it so exciting. I think it's my best score.





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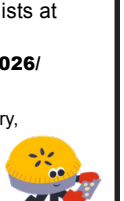
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