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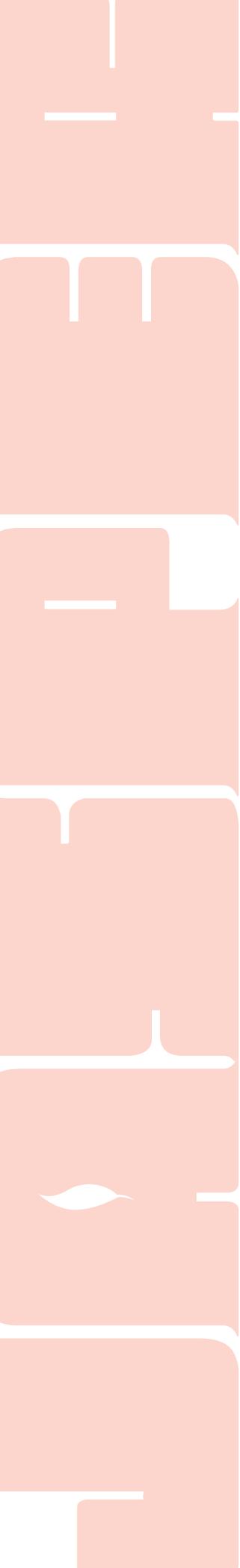
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Dear Friends,

Welcome to another springtime-in-the-South issue of Jasper.

The clock has jumped, the weather is weird, the pollen is thick and perverse, and the air is heavy with the shameful scent of Bradford Pears. And to top it all off, Americans all seem to hate one another and suddenly we don't mind saying so out loud. Even those of us who love one another seem to hate the things we don't love the same.

Something is maddeningly wrong.

When the world is wrong, I look to art to set it right.

As it does for many of us, art redeems me. It cuts through the disappointment and disillusionment and reminds us not only of our better selves, but our better neighbors, as well. George Bernard Shaw tells us that, "Without art, the crudeness of reality would make the world unbear-

able." And given our current political climate, he couldn't be more correct.

But it is important to remember that what we call reality is little more than a construct we are, at the very least, complicit in creating. We create the society we live in, the society we complain about, and then call it what's what, the way of it, how things are. Hypnotized by our own magic, we forget what we have the power to accomplish by dialing back rhetoric, embracing commonalities, and showing respect for the purest forms of things—what we find in nature and the passions we find in ourselves.

Jasper invites artists and arts lovers alike to make use of the inspirations spring gives us. Look beyond the layer of annoying yellow that cakes the buds at the fresh coursing green that runs through the new leaf's veins. Listen to

the murmur and hum of the frilling trees and imitate their dance. There is a type of unabashed perfection in newness that can revitalize us as artists and human beings. Let's make use of it.

A few weeks ago we lost a great literary artist, one of our own, someone precious to many of us whose loss will ache within us for a long time. Thankfully, he left us quite a legacy in his writing and among the many secrets to survival that the late, beyond great Pat Conroy gave us is the quote, "You must appreciate beauty for it to endure."

In this springtime-in-the-South, let's honor Pat, one another, and the gift of renewal in nature that he so loved. Let's make it endure.

Take care,



IN MEMORIAM

Pat Conroy

1945 – 2016

"One must always forgive another's passion." – *South of Broad*

~

"Don't go yet. Please. Tell me a story, one about us.

Tell what it meant. How on earth did it happen?

The story, Pat — tell it to me." – *My Reading Life*

Jasper // as in Johns, the abstract expressionist, neo-Dadaist artist as in Sergeant, the Revolutionary War hero as in Mineral, the spotted or speckled stone as in Magazine, the Word on Columbia Arts

MAR/APR 2016 / VOLUME 005 / ISSUE 004

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THE
JASPER GUILD

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The Jasper Guild is a group of supporting artists and arts lovers who appreciate not only the vital Columbia, SC arts scene, but the magazine devoted to promoting it. Members of the Jasper Guild recognize the labor-of-love that is Jasper and work to do their parts to ensure that Jasper continues to publish a 100% LOCAL & artist-produced magazine. You're invited to join us in our mission to make Columbia, SC the Southeast arts capitol by becoming a member of the Jasper Guild. And the next time you open a copy of Jasper you'll be able to say,

"I helped make this happen and here's my name to prove it!"

ISN'T IT TIME THAT YOU JOIN THE

JASPER GUILD

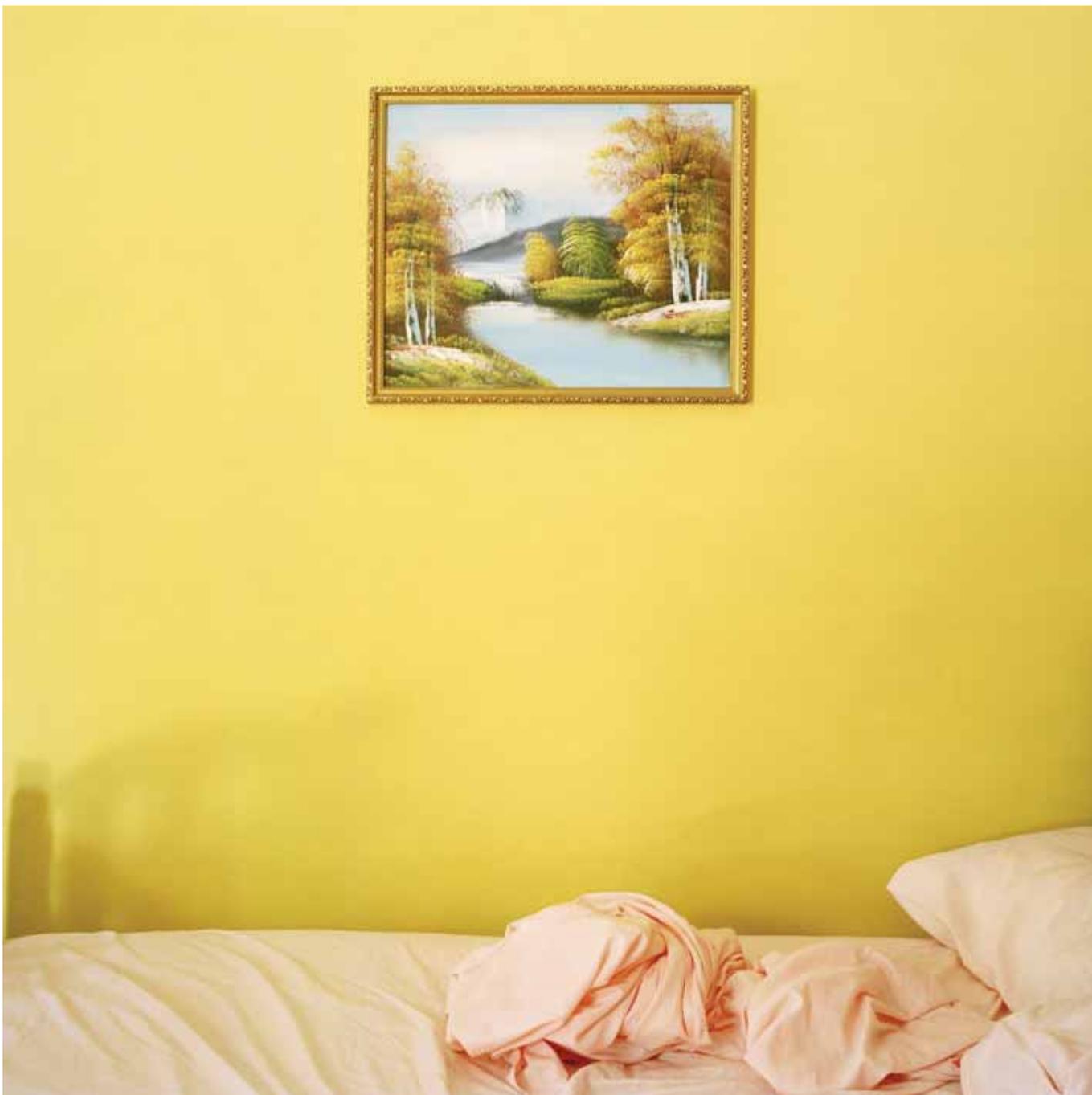
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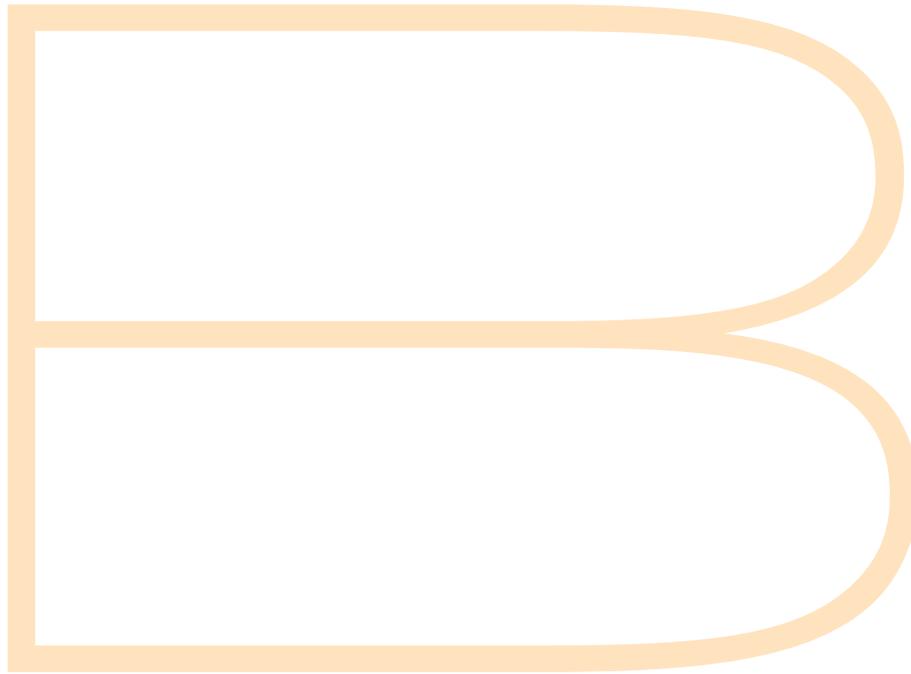
"But I'm just a starving artist myself," you say?

- **ARTIST PEER**
Practicing artists in dance, theatre, music, visual arts, film, & literary arts are invited to join **The Jasper Guild** at a reduced rate & see your name in **Jasper Magazine for 1 year - \$25**

THE ENDEARING ART OF PHOTOGRAPHER

MEG GRIFFITHS





orn in Indiana and raised in Texas, photographer Meg Griffiths' art has shown in San Diego, Boston, San Francisco, Houston, and Columbia, SC and been published in *Oxford American*, *Light Leaked*, *The Boston Globe*, *Photo District News*, *South X Southeast Magazine*, *Lenscratch*, *Le Journals de la Photographie*, and *Fraction*

Magazine. She was honored as one of PDN 30's 2013: New and Emerging Photographers and named one of eight Emerging Photographers of the South by Blue Spiral Gallery in Asheville. One of Columbia's own now, Jasper caught up with Griffiths and asked her to share some of her work with us.





Jasper: What brought you to Columbia and how have you found Columbia as a town for a photo artist?

Griffiths: I found my way to Columbia by way of a job. I'd just finished graduate school at Savannah College of Art and Design and came here the summer after to start teaching photography at the University of South Carolina, where I still teach as an adjunct professor in the School of Visual Art and Design.

Personally I feel like Columbia has been very supportive of my artistic career. I have had the opportunity to show work at 701 Center for Contemporary Art, Anastasia & Friends, and I was commissioned by the Columbia Museum of Art to make work for Photography Now, which ran in conjunction with the 150th commemoration of the burning of Columbia. While I always feel that communities can do more to promote and celebrate the arts, I believe Columbia is doing really well. Now if we could only start an annual Photo Festival!

Jasper: Whose work can you identify as your greatest influence?

Griffiths: I'm inspired by so many artists. I would say my main photographic influences thus far have been artists such as Jessica Bachkaus, Dorothea Lange, Stephen Shore, Laura Letinsky and Thomas Struth. But I'm also greatly influenced by writers and ethnographers, by my family, food, that which is intimate and of course, the quotidian.





Jasper: Where do you see yourself as a photo artist ideologically now?

Griffiths: Right now my focus is on the continuation of my artistic photographic research and teaching. I recently published a book of my Cuba work Casa de Fruta y Pan and have been promoting that through book signings and artist lectures around the country, and I'm working on a few different projects in tandem, one that takes place in rural Georgia, and more recently across Highway 50 in Nevada in collaboration with another artist. // CB



Roni Nicole Henderson & *Waterlines* at Indie Grits

R

oni Nicole Henderson says she is “a Midwest girl with Southern sensibilities.” Her grandparents, who raised her in Dayton, Ohio, “never lost their Louisiana flavor, so I came of age with hot-water cornbread and lengthy afternoons exploring our garden,” she says. Henderson attended Clark Atlanta University to earn double degrees in English and Education and then to Savannah College of Art and Design for an MFA in Film and Television. Having come to Columbia almost two years ago to answer what she describes as “love’s call,” Henderson plans to stay in the city which she describes as “a wonderfully fertile artistic community for myself and my daughters.”

Henderson is one of a number of artists commissioned by the Nickelodeon Theatre and Indie Grits Film Festival to tell her story in a larger project called *Waterlines*, a multi-disciplinary endeavor designed to feature multiple responses to the October 2015 floods that swept through the South Carolina Midlands. “I will be creating a dance film in collaboration with renowned choreographer Kwame A. Ross and composer Venecia Flowers,” Henderson explains. “We will move through the emotional memory of South Carolina’s major waterways from the summer through the fall of 2015, mapping the rivers’ dynamic narrative through the bodies of 9 dancers, in honor of the 9 fallen innocents from the Charleston 9 massacre. Our journey from the Holy City to Columbia, with its confluence of rivers, will allow us to connect to places touched by the floods of 2015 and ritualistically offer healing to a state that has seen its share of pain and overcoming in this time.”

Henderson says her first love was teaching English. “I enjoyed exposing teenagers to the world of character and encouraging critical thought. In my third year of teaching, I went through a tough divorce and that experience sent me to my grandmother’s house to recover. While living in my mother’s old room, I began having vivid dreams about my mother’s life—things she had never been able to express. That set me on the course to make films.” Henderson was given a full ride fellowship to SCAD as well as her grandmother’s blessing to go forth and tell their family’s story.

Prior to her work for Indie Grits, Henderson most recently created a short film about Columbia-based artist Michaela Pilar Brown, whose work in visual, installation, and performance art pushes the boundaries of social constructs and sets the local standard for activist art. “Michaela has been one of the best things about being in Columbia,” Henderson says. “We are friends and comrades in art. I’m [also] deeply inspired by her practice. When the Nickelodeon Theatre approached me about making a short documentary for their Art Doc series, I jumped at the opportunity because she’s a dynamo. Filming her during the crunch to produce work for her two most recent solo shows exposed me to Michaela’s multi-layered process. [I saw how] every item placed in her work has intention behind it. In truth, she needs a feature film to really capture how prolific she is.”

Additional Columbia-area artists involved in *Waterlines* include Daniel Machado, Michael Dantzler, Wade Sellers, Shannon Ivey, Jordan Young, Jason Craig, Lauren Greenwald, Jorge Intriago, Joshua Yates, and more. //CB



Voices

GUIDED BY

The Prairie Willows
Find **Harmony** In American Folk Music

BY MICHAEL SPAWN

PHOTOS BY **FORREST CLONTS**

es



a

ny discussion about female musicians in Columbia – or about Columbia’s best music, period – that doesn’t include the Prairie Willows is the result of either willful ignorance or beastly subterfuge. On the strength of a slim but stellar discography (2013’s *Prairie Willows* and last year’s *White Lies*) and a steady track record of room-demolishing live performances, Kristen Harris, Perrin Skinner, and Kelley McLachlan Douglas have shed their early reputation as a talented and promising folk trio to become a vocal ensemble unrivaled well beyond the city limits.

The Willows’ genesis was in the fall of 2012.

“We’d all kind of been separately involved in the music scene,” remembers Perrin Skinner. “Kelley was in Post-Timey String Band and I met Kristen through playing with a mutual friend of ours. She moved in with me and we all just decided to mess around and collaborate, you know, play in the living room, and then it just became what it became.”









From there, the newly formed Prairie Willows tested the waters at open-mic nights hosted by Utopia (which has since been shuttered), developing their chemistry and covering tunes by Willie Nelson, Waylon Jennings, Dolly Parton, and others. 2013 saw the release of their self-titled debut. With only five songs and a sixteen-minute running time, *Prairie Willows* is by no means an opus, but as a showcase for the band's celestial three-part harmonies and formidable songwriting prowess, it did the job and then some. The opener, "Whiskey," is a minor-key ode to better living through liquor, while the playful "Biscuits" is pure mountain bluegrass bliss. And all of the elements that worked together so well on their debut are even more pronounced on *White Lies*. The record's best track, "Dead, Drunk, or in Jail," exemplifies all of it. The first minute and six seconds are given over to an a cappella intro, squashing any doubts that the Willows are first-rate vocalists, and then segues into a masterful, melodic folk-pop jam with darkly funny lyrics that all but mask a certain sadness at the song's core.

Even though the Willows' catalogue is littered with forays into country and Americana, all with a deep vein of Southern Gothic storytelling running throughout, they generally write within a folk music framework. While for the most part consistent, their sound reveals a few different personalities at work. Hardly a surprise, given their creative process.

"We usually start with a melody and then spend hours trying to figure out the other two parts," says Harris, and then deadpans, "That's usually when we

get in a really big fight and go away for week. Then we come back after things have settled and we can start to tweak it."

"Typically, whoever writes the song does the melody," adds Douglas, who writes the bulk the material before bringing it to the band in various stages of completion. Here, edges are sanded down, vocal parts arranged, structure played with, meat added to the bone. "Then we might switch verses. I might lead one and then Perrin leads one and then we stack each other on top of that while Kristen takes the low." Instrumentally, Douglas and/or Skinner play acoustic guitar while Harris starts small fires with her fiddle. Percussion is light on their recordings – mostly rim shots and shakers (kazoo has been known to pop up, as well.) Live, extra instruments are often kept to a minimum, barring a little tambourine and the always-welcome washtub bass.

For many people of a certain age (us, ahem, millennials), the '90s were a sort of ground zero for awareness of female ass-kickery in music. There was the saucy, fun-loving Girl Power of the Spice Girls, but there was also the decidedly more adult-oriented Lilith Fair, which rode to enormous success on the popularity of artists like Sarah McLachlan, Jewel, and Mary Chapin Carpenter. Obviously, countless female performers had come before to pave the way for all of it, but the point is that a musical landscape populated with talented women never seemed novel or subversive, and today, as a result, it's pretty much the norm. Even still, in light of the fact that they are one of the all-female groups in Columbia, it's not unthinkable that some

*If people see us
and they feel
like that*

empowers

*them to be
in a band
and perform,
then I'm
all about it.*





might expect the Prairie Willows to be torchbearers of femme-folk militancy or that they themselves might feel a sense of duty to promote feminist ideals.

Really, though, neither seems to be the case and the band is quick to point out, with trace exasperation, how frequently they're asked to confront such notions. Their weariness on the subject is understandable. Just bringing it up makes me feel like a schlub. As mentioned earlier, Douglas is also half of the power-folk duo Post-Timey String Band. The other half is Sean Thompson (also of the Restoration), and one imagines he isn't too often asked what it's like to be a dude in a band. I know I'm not.

"I feel like people want to define us as a feminist band, but that's never really been our goal," says Harris. Douglas elaborates: "Even if there are undertones of that in our lyrics, it was never intentional...we write how we feel and I think sometimes that might come across as a feminist stance, but we don't mean it that way."

They may shrug off the idea of themselves as emblematic of any socio-political push, but the Prairie Willows don't downplay the importance their stature might carry for certain members of their audience.

As is her custom, Harris is succinct. "If people see us and they feel like that empowers them to be in a band and perform, then I'm all about it."

Tamara Finkbeiner



There are times at a festival short film screening where one film takes over the room. Whether it's the story, the humor or any number of unknown qualities, the film just captures the room at that moment. At the 2015 2nd Act Film Festival that film was *Eva's Plug* directed by Columbia filmmaker Tamara Finkbeiner

Tamara was born in St. Michael, Barbados. She is a graphic designer, videographer and stay at home mom to her four children and husband Janson. "2nd Act was a great experience." Finkbeiner said, "I was intrigued by the challenge. It was a very cool experience and it is always great to meet storytellers, each with quite unique voices."

This year, *Eva's Plug* received the Audience Award, an award determined solely by the votes of those in attendance. Her advice to anyone interested in making a short film is to "get out there and just do it. Be fearless but open to learn. If you're open to learn, your growth will skyrocket and literally the sky is the limit."



Columbia Museum of Art



Summer Camps at the CMA

This summer, the CMA is offering a variety of unique summer camps to capture the interest of any young artist. Having your child participate in our summer camps is a great way for them to think creatively, practice problem-solving skills, and have fun! All CMA summer camps are instructed by professional arts educators. These week-long camps are offered for ages 4 - 18. Check out all 27 camps on our website.



Gallery Tours:

REMIX: Themes and Variations in African-American Art

Saturdays | 1:00 p.m.

A guided tour provides an overview of the exhibition. Free with membership or admission.



ArtBreak: Tom Stanley on Artist Gene Merritt

Tuesday, April 5 | Café at 10:30 a.m. | Lecture at 11:00 a.m.

Begin the morning at the museum with pastries and coffee sold at The Wired Goat pop-up café. Then, Tom Stanley, chair of the Fine Arts Department and professor at Winthrop University, discusses the work of artist Gene Merritt, whose work dances between the real and imagined worlds. Free with membership or admission.



Artist Salon: Leo Twiggs

Friday, April 8 | Noon

SC Artist Leo Twiggs discusses his work in *REMIX: Themes and Variations in African-American Art*. Free with membership or admission.



CMA Chamber Music on Main

Tuesday, April 26 | Happy Hour 6:00 p.m. | Concert 7:00 p.m.

Aaron Boyd on violin, Jesse Mills on violin, Dimitri Murrath on viola, and Edward Arron on cello perform works by Schubert, Giovanni Sollima, Beethoven, and Tchaikovsky. Cash bar. Valet parking. Sponsored by U.S. Trust. \$35 / \$28 for members / \$5 for students.



Ceramics 101

Saturdays, May 7 and 14 | 9:00 a.m. - Noon

To celebrate a recent acquisition of ancient Chinese ceramics, the CMA offers visitors a chance to experience pottery firsthand. Whether you're a pro at the wheel or totally new to ceramics, come learn all about the medium in a two-part class with local art educator Molly Drews. In the first session, participants explore the galleries and create their own vessels. The following week, after the vessels have been fired, they glaze and embellish their work of art. Ages 18 and up. \$95 / \$75 for members. All materials included.

Join us for these exciting events and more. Details at: 803-799-2810 or
columbiamuseum.org



TAMARA'S TOP FIVE FILMS

Avatar, 2009, directed by James Cameron. "Visually beautiful and reminds me as a learning filmmaker to push the envelope every time."

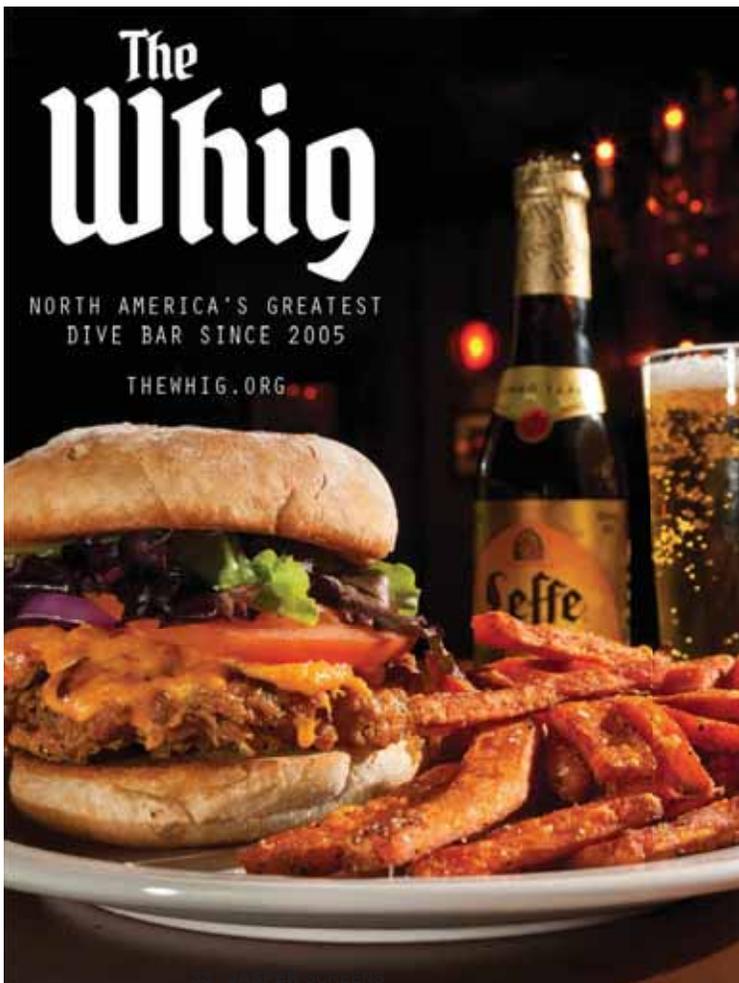
Uncle Buck, 1989, directed by John Hughes. "Hilarious! Always entertain through any story."

Sister Act II: Back in the Habit, 1993, directed by Bill Duke. "Reminds me to always

tell the types of stories that are close to my heart."

Desperado, 1995, directed by Robert Rodriguez. "This film ignites passion in me as a filmmaker."

Memoirs of a Geisha, 2005, directed by Rob Marshall. "Visual imagery is stunning. Pushes my eyes to see what the average viewer is not looking for." // WS



Jasper's on Instagram.
Take a gander.

@jaspercolagram

ARK, A New Book by Ed Madden



In a spring of floods, a son returns to rural Arkansas to help care for his dying father. *Ark* is a book about family, about old wounds and new rituals, about the gifts of healing to be found in the care of the dying. At once a memoir in verse about hospice care and a son's book-length lament for his father, *Ark* is a book about the things that can be fixed, and those that can't.

"This is poetry at its finest: Madden has found the strikingly right metaphors to quicken land and time and, above all, home."

- Jo McDougall, author of *In the Home of the Famous Dead: Collected Poems*

"Ed Madden has crafted a book of piercing intimate truth."

- Alicia Ostriker, author of *The Book of Seventy*

"Madden captures the truth about words: if they could not wound, they could not also heal."

- Jeffrey P. Bishop, Gnaegi Center for Health Care Ethics, Saint Louis Univ.

Available: siblingrivalrypress.com on Facebook: www.facebook.com/MaddenARK



One Fish, Two Fish, Big Fish ... Minnow!

B Y S U S A N L E N Z

W

ouldn't it be nice if the art world were as straightforward as a child's book of rhymes? As easily understood? As simple as Dr. Seuss' "from there to here, from here to there"? Wouldn't it be nice if, as artists, we could identify with the "red fish" or the "blue fish" instead of feeling so much like a tiny minnow swimming against the current in a great big ocean of art?

When I first started making art (2001), I thought Vista Lights and Artista Vista were the only two annual events in

which local artists could show new work. There were occasional exhibits and a few annual, invitational charity art auctions. Shows mounted by City Art, McMaster Gallery, and Morris Gallery generally featured work by established artists with lengthy resumes listing degrees from faraway universities and out-of-state solo shows. Breaking into the art community seemed as impossible as having work hang at the Columbia Museum of Art.

Scary as it was, I set my sights on local opportunities. I remember the thrill at seeing my work hang beside Mike Williams' and Laura Spong's at Gallery 80808. I submitted pieces to the Cultural Council's billboard project. I painted a platter for Artists Against Aids and Children's Hospital. Basically, I tried anything, including submitting slides to national juried exhibitions. Mostly, I got rejected. At first, rejection didn't bother me much. I didn't think I stood a chance in the first place. Slowly though, I started getting a few acceptances, building the sort of resume I previously thought impossible.

Growing a resume means looking outside the city limits. There, art opportunities multiply. As the art

world opens, the larger it becomes. But, the larger it becomes, the smaller an individual artist is within it. That's when rejection really starts to hurt. Those who tell you otherwise are generally those who rarely risk the pain. They aren't used to opening an email (because everything is now done by uploading digital images and paying entry fees via Pay Pal) and reading, "Thank you so much for applying! This year's field included over 1500 images submitted by 632 artists. Unfortunately, your work was not one of the 36 pieces selected."

Part of the pain comes from the standard \$35 to \$50 entry fee that is non-refundable. Part of the pain comes from the fact that it takes a juror nearly two hours to view 1500 images for merely five seconds each.

Most of the pain comes from personal insecurities. As artists, we work long hours in solitary spaces without much feedback. It is difficult to separate an acceptance from validation and a rejection from criticism. Acceptance does not necessarily affirm quality, craftsmanship, excellent concepts, or a well-written artist statement. Rejection does not necessarily mean the artwork is poor. Acceptance is, however, an

“The disappointments of rejection are well worth the opportunities that can only happen when an artist is willing to take
the risk.”

opportunity. Rejection simply means, “Try again!” It also means an artist is in excellent company, especially when the percentage for failure is so high. One makes artwork alone but one is rarely alone in rejection.

When I first started applying to out-of-state art events, my mentor, Stephen Chesley, told me that I’d have work rejected from local shows only to be awarded prize money on the national level ... and vice versa. Both happened. More than once. I’ve had arts administrators confess that most solo show proposals get pitched without anyone reading more than the cover page. Most galleries don’t correspond with artists seeking representation. They operate on the “Don’t Call Us, We’ll Call You” principle. I’ve applied to art residency programs that don’t bother to send rejection emails to unsuccessful applicants. Lots of difficult things happen. But, nothing compares to being accepted.

The disappointments of rejection are well worth the opportunities that can only happen when an artist is willing to take the risk. Beyond creating a stellar resume, the venture into the

wider world of art can bring networking opportunities, invitational exhibits, media interest, offers to teach workshops, and present paid demonstrations, lectures, and more.

Exposing your work to larger and larger audiences comes with another important benefit: Productivity. In order to submit to more shows, an artist must make more work. The more work, the better the quality. The more focus, the better the concept. The more submissions, however, the more chances for rejection. But, even a rejection can expand an artist’s world.

Once I submitted work for an artist’s book exhibit in Georgia. It got rejected but the images were shared with Lark Publications. As a result, my piece, *Some Things I’ll Never Know*, appears in *500 Handmade Books* (2008). That year a New York curator asked me to submit similar work for his consideration. I created *Wasted Words: Global Warnings*. He didn’t select it. So, I submitted it to the Textile Museum in Washington, DC for their exhibit *Green: A Color and Cause*. It got in. Sarah Tanguy, another curator, saw it there and requested it for her show, *Between the Covers: Altered Books*

in *Contemporary Art*, February 5 – June 6 at the Everhart Museum in Scranton, PA. Sometimes a work gets accepted; sometimes it doesn’t. That’s the risk.

It may seem safer to stay in the insular world of the local, the familiar; but the stakes aren’t as high, the risks not as daring, and the rewards aren’t as much of an adventure. To step outside our comfort zone is like closing the memorized lines in a Dr. Seuss book and opening a journal of blank pages. It can be intimidating. Yet as artists, we must write our own script and feel free to swim like minnows in the vast ocean of art where anything is possible, even achieving an impossible dream like having a piece hang inside the Columbia Museum of Art. That happened too. Risking rejection is the key.

Susan Lenz is a full time, professional studio artist working in fibers and installation art from her studio at Mouse House in Columbia’s historic Elmwood Park neighborhood. Her work has been juried into numerous national and international exhibits, featured in solo shows all over the United States, and shown on television and in print.

Local Record Reviews



GRAND REPUBLIC

Fade Out to Grey

In some ways it's easy to imagine a record like *Fade Out to Grey* existing. We're at a moment in rock music when a host of innovative sounds and styles from the 1990s are suddenly in vogue across the indie music spectrum, with bands like My Bloody Valentine and Yo La Tengo on the tips of tongues as much, if not more than, they were two decades ago.

And while Grand Republic guitarist and bandleader John Furr's 90s roots are in more punk and punchier groups like Blightobody and Danielle Howle's Tantrums, his adventurous, kinetic playing and ease in a variety of settings is certainly in evidence here. He's backed by a host of who's who scene veterans from that era, including drummer Troy Tague, Kenneth Abernathy on bass, and Jason Puckett on synths and guitar, a collection of players with similar poise and purpose. The net result is never

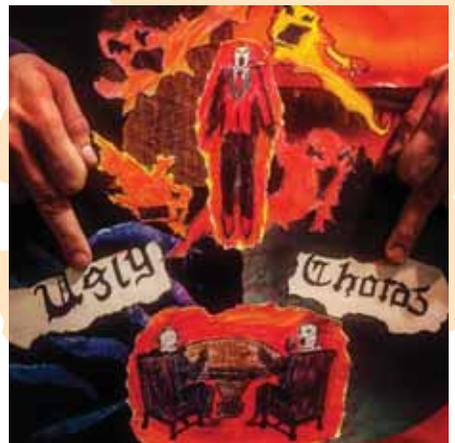
less than professional and assured, even if there's a certain affable formlessness that pervades the proceedings. Really, Grand Republic has more in common with contemporary bands like Yuck and Smith Westerns, groups who serve up a cozy mush of influences that balance distortion and melody in engaging soft-glow compositions that nonetheless feel like joyful pastiche then enthusiastic songcraft.

Still, Grand Republic has more going for them than either of those groups. Both "Yr Not Here" and "Camel Lights" have an unusual level of sprightly pep than most retro throwbacks, and Furr proves to be more capable crafter of hooks and choruses on the latter tune as well as "Waterslides" than his younger competition. But more than anything, it's the peaks of rock heroism that come through in the fearless soloing and punishing Sonic Youth snarl of "Wait For It" that surprises, suggesting that, while Grand Republic might be a little older than your average local band of twentysomethings, they are not going gentle into that good night. -KP

UGLY CHORDS

Harbinger

The notoriously ADD post-alt-whatever rockers The Ugly Chords's debut, the shapeshifting jigsaw of an album *Harbinger*, established a fascinating, no-rules approach that obliterated what remained of the boundaries between post-punk, prog, metal, new wave, noise, and indie folk, with snatches of hardcore pummeling and Brit rock grandeur also shining through. That template, such as it is,



remains on burn out and crawl into the ditch, their follow-up EP. The opening stop-star agony punctuated by doomy chord crashes on "what u give" assures the listener they are again in for a toying listening experience, and it's followed by a serious of songs that paints broadly and feverishly with strokes of beauty and ugliness. "ego deaths" follows the opener with a funky bass groove that descends into a dragging shoegaze madness, only to transition into the unlikely ballad "frost entrails," the most poignant and romantic (if you find Radiohead and Modest Mouse romantic) moment in the group's catalog.

From there it's the more-expected cavalcade of hyper-active guitars and spiraling compositions that seem to pull and shift apart at will. At times, like on the turbulent "kidnapped" and "krokodil," the shifts and turns are almost overwhelming as the band dexterously dives off cliffs. But if you've made it that far, I guess, the band trusts that you are gonna be along for the ride. -KP



MARK RAPP, DEREK LEE BRONSTON, CHRIS BURROUGHS

The Song Project, Vol. 2: Ballads

One of the more surprising success stories in contemporary jazz since the late 80s the work of Bill Frisell. An understated guitarist who makes heavy use of pedals and effects even as he tends towards minimal spirals around familiar melodies, he's won legions of fans for striking a keen balance between comfortable background music and engaging, innervating sounds.

While Frisell only occasionally finds himself in more traditional jazz lineups, his trademark sound is obviously one of the focal points for The Song Project, a collaboration between Columbia trumpeter Mark Rapp, Brooklyn-based guitarist Derek Lee Bronston, and Atlanta drummer Chris Burroughs. Initially a digital-only project with Rapp and Bronston trading files, TSP has since performed in various forms around the globe, including at Carnegie Hall, The Blue Note, and the Fillmore Jazz Festival. Bronston doesn't tend to be as languid or effects laden as Frisell, but the vibe and spirit of the famed guitarist's approach leads to arrangements that often feel like gorgeously skeletal jazz fusion takes on tunes both familiar and original.

Their second collection, *Art of the Song, Vol. 2: Ballads*, is as fine a showcase of that approach as you're likely to get outside of one of their rare live gigs. Recorded at Columbia's Jangly Records Studio, the measured patience of the trio makes each of their eclectic covers, ranging from Miles Davis's "Blue in Green" to Radiohead's "Exit Music," feel of a piece. Subtle percussion and reserved drumming keeps the focus geared towards Rapp's cool trumpet presence and the mellow-yet-nimble counterpoints by Bronston. While it's only natural for jazz musicians to play off each other, there interwoven aesthetic vision still feels profound, almost as if they aren't soloing off each other in free-floating ecstasy so much as uniting in pursuit of the song.

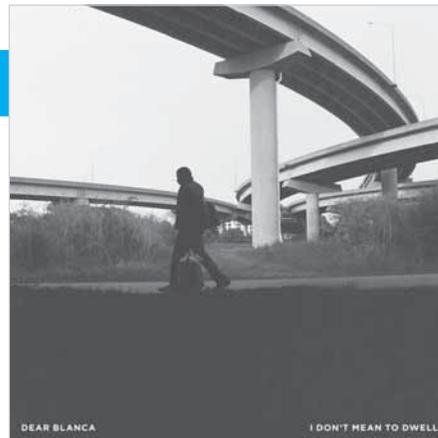
It's unlike almost any other record you're likely to hear out of Columbia this year. It's also probably going to be one of the best. -KP

DEAR BLANCA

I Don't Mean to Dwell

Not once in the past three years has Dear Blanca been a disappointment. Whether on record or the stage, the band has proven that its reputation as one of Columbia's finest is hard earned and well deserved. Given this, it's not the least bit surprising that the trio's latest EP, *I Don't Mean to Dwell*, is rock-solid satisfying from the first track's opening chordal gust to the dying-battery fade-away of the fifth.

With melancholic undertones and big choruses to part the clouds, "Joint Effort" is a fairly straightforward pop-rock song – at least by Dear Blanca standards – until the end, when the rhythmic cohesiveness is deliberately dismantled against a swing in time. As the song appears to be caving in on itself, Dickerson howls, "Goodnight, goodnight / I love you, I love you / I'll see you tomorrow" with an anguish that suggests maybe the opposite is closer to the truth. "Thoughtless" is a raucous two-minute blast of beach-punk energy. The lead single, "Temporary Solution," is a breezy mid-tempo cruise-along about a nearly



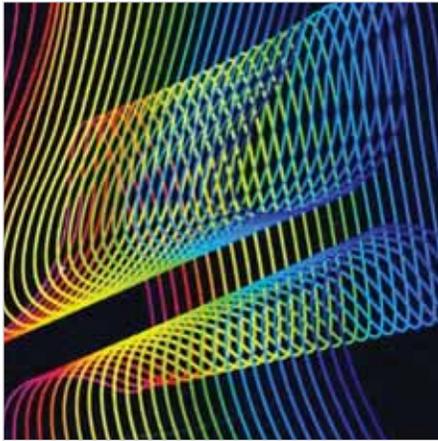
fatal encounter between a dog and a car; it also contains the EP's best line: "Given the opportunity, I might break the old routine / Just let me know when so I can ask off." "Do You Believe Me Now" is a frantic, moody rocker with no allegiance to any one time signature; while the closer, "Ill At Ease" moves between jangly, angle-grooved verses and a rave-up chorus.

The core elements that make Dear Blanca Dear Blanca are all accounted for – the guitar lines still possess the capacity for nursery rhymes' earworm stickiness, Cameron Powell and Marc Coty still make a deceptively dynamic rhythm section, and Dylan Dickerson still sings like Gordon Gano on 60 mgs of Dexedrine. If there's a hint of something new to the proceedings, it might be because ET Anderson's Tyler Morris – certainly a kindred spirit, himself no stranger to basement rock with high emotional stakes – joins Dickerson on guitar for much of the record. *I Don't Mean to Dwell* isn't a radical departure from previous releases *Talker* and *Pobrecito*, but it just might be the band's best. That's how it feels at certain moments, anyway.

Maybe it's too soon to tell. -MS

MORE REVIEWS





PRAY FOR TRIANGLE ZERO

Heaven & Hell

Under his avant-garde electro-pop/freak-rock alias Pray For Triangle Zero, Lucas Sams has released something like sixty-three records since 2009. He'll be the first to admit that it's easy to lose

count. For a music writer, this is both a rose and a thorn. On one hand, trying to keep up with his prolificacy is a fool's errand. On the other, anything released in the past three months is pretty much fair game for review since he'll have something new out in two weeks anyway. Blame the media all you want for society's troubles, but there's still a ceiling on how fast it can move.

So, let's look at *Heaven & Hell*. Released in January, Pray For Triangle Zero's sixty-somethingth collection continues Sams' exploration of things both possible and im- within the polarizing realm of electronic music. The opening "Mess" puts its gloomy, self-loathing mood before any sort of traditional formation, but then comes "Here, Now, and There" with its jaunty, Billy Preston-ish keyboard intro. "Deeper" slinks and grooves like a good bedroom jam should, while "Ultimata," with its 7+ minute running time and operatic nods to vamp-jazz, could be a GloStick-lit, digitally enhanced piano duel between Jim Steinman and Harry Connick, Jr.

With this sort of music, the line between a "song" and a "piece" is so thin you want to force-feed it a Big Mac. "Piece" suggests a sort of slaved-over composition process accomplishable only by someone with a rare combination of intelligence and vision, while, in comparison, a "song" seems like something that can be written by anyone with three chords and a base understanding of structure (and sometimes not even that), created to induce subjective recognition and/or pleasure in the listener. That's not a value judgment and neither definition is right on the money, but I think you know what I'm getting at. Nobody has ever said, "Boy, I just love 'Yellow Submarine.'" What a great piece." Outside electronic and experimental music (and prog-rock), there's little overlap between the two. And on *Heaven & Hell*, these admittedly arbitrary designations mingle with ease, often to the point of conflation. -MS

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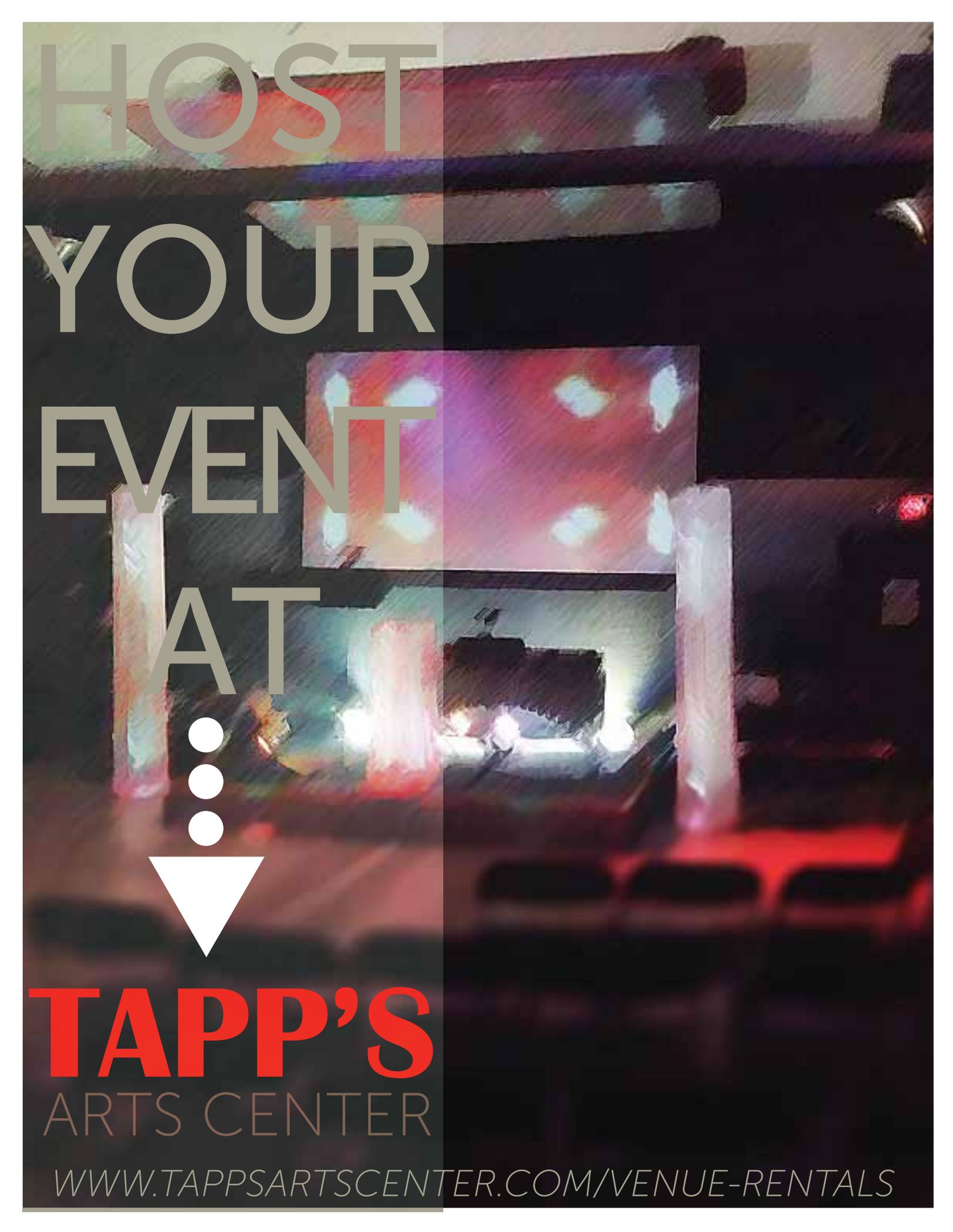
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THE BRAIN FEVER

THE BRAIN FEVER

Demo

The first song grabs your ears and jostles your brain. You're immediately addicted to whatever adrenochrome-like chemicals the vibrations shake loose. If there was a dance to this music it'd look like writhing induced by random assaults with a defibrillator. What a hell of a demo The Brain Fever's demo is. Blasting through six songs in about 9 minutes, it's two steps away from the type of tonal wreckage broadcast by that dude strapped to the apocalyptic hauler in *Mad Max: Fury Road*. The overall sounds has the tone of being recorded in a padded cell, then mixed and mastered in Sound City Studios (don't be fooled, it's local institution The Jam Room, that put the touch to it).

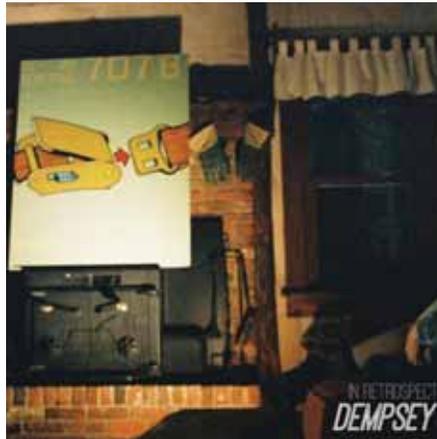
This sandblasting soundscape holds on to the manic joys of punk in its instrumental abuse. It's handled by some obviously seasoned players of the genre, especially in the ham-fisted keys of Milton Chapman, formerly of Scrotum Grinder, the now defunct Florida band who proved demented enough for Prank Records. Chapman punches in gut shots of howling organ chords in "Trust in Dust" and swells up the bones of this snaking set of recordings. The distorted ivories cook with ear static guitars and furious drums. They fight like bipolar androids facing the reality of their first manic day in "Anthemic Isolation, Universal Loneliness," and push the rest of the recordings beyond the red.

Veteran singer Christopher Bickel inherited the stance of Henry Rollins long ago with In/Humanity and Guyana

Punchline, taking sarcasm and morality to their logical extremes, catalyzed into hardcore punk rock verse. But Bickel seems almost acid-cleansed of his sardonic grin, letting the instruments handle that job, existential crises now grinding through his teeth. His words are despairing yet instinctively survivalist. They could be pulled from the consciousness of a Chuck Palahniuk character. "Faith my love / Who now lays dead / I lay a kiss upon your head / And place a rope around the throat," Bickel forces out his serrated vocal chords. "Consciousness is a curse spat back out but in reverse."

The end result of this scrawled lyricism and corybantic instrumentation is a primed and ready set of aggressive tunes that beat your head into bobbing. If this is just The Brain Fever's demo we should all get our helmets and gasmasks for the riot a full-length might incite.

-David Travis Bland



DEMPSEY

In Retrospect

It is to the band's credit that even a cursory listen to *In Retrospect* makes clear Dempsey's assuredness in the sound they've homed in on and the sort of band they know themselves to be. The record's five tracks are tightly focused on and unified by a common sonic thread with none of the character missteps or identity crises so common on debut releases. While commendable, this keen sense of self can sometimes backfire, resulting in a listening experience that offers few surprises beyond the first go-around. What seems at first

to be a strength can age a record prematurely and ultimately become a weakness. Luckily, this isn't the case here – in fact, the opposite is true. *In Retrospect's* cohesiveness turns out to be its most engaging quality because the musical guideposts the band seems to steer by are often so disparate they couldn't possibly be parts of any one equation that finds its sum in Dempsey.

Consider the opening guitar line of "Circles," the first sound one hears when the record starts. The hazy reverb and sustained notes bent seemingly at random bring to mind Modest Mouse's more pensive, starry-eyed moments, particularly on *The Moon and Antarctica*. This carries on through to track three, "Out From the Pines Part 2," where these Isaac Brock-ish fog lights meet the Edge's signature Doppler-effect thrumming to create what at first sounds like a hybrid of both guitarists' styles but becomes, by the song's end, something that no longer resembles either. And where the vocals are concerned, lead singer Zack Santiago works through his laments with a natural, unforced melancholy pointing back to Pedro the Lion, but without Dave Bazan's Prozac monotone. The same influence is felt in the moments where Dempsey decides to drop their moody blues and rock; they hit hard just the way Pedro did on *Control* – never letting the emotional foundation crack in the delirium of power chords while Santiago refuses to give himself over to unchecked histrionics. Even when switching energy gears, the song remains the same.

By any rational metric, Modest Mouse plus U2 times Pedro the Lion shouldn't equal anything that sounds like Dempsey, and yet it sort of does. What's interesting is that, taken on the whole, *In Retrospect* doesn't really sound like the work of any of these artists. The record – and by extension, the band – is an example of how to successfully dissect the inner workings of what has come before to create something distinctive, if not necessarily brand new. -MS

Auntie Bellum

A NEW LADY IN TOWN

BY AMI PULASKI

There's a new voice emerging out of Columbia's rich cultural soil—and this one is dedicated to the diverse experiences of ladies in the South. *Auntie Bellum* is a relatively new magazine that aims to be an “honest, unapologetic voice for Southern women.”

Although the organization just got up and running in 2015, this isn't the magazine's first time around the block. “It's a revival of short-lived journal for Southern women from 1978-79,” explains Meeghan Kane, *Auntie Bellum* editor. “We're attempting to take the spirit of that publication and broaden the scope.” The original publication produced four issues before folding abruptly. From the looks of things, this edition won't be nearly as short-lived as its predecessor.

The idea behind the original *Auntie Bellum* was to create space for Southern women to connect, particularly those in South Carolina. In their very first issue, the original founders posited that “this kind of publication is long overdue. Women here have lacked some necessary tools for examining what experiences they have in common with those of other women.” Over 30 years later, the new publication's mission remains the same: “Our magazine will help foster community and serve as a resource

in order to join the growing chorus of voices, who, like us, have ideas, imagination, and the confidence to bring about change. We are reviving the sincerity, criticism, dedication, and hope of that original publication, while broadening the scope and geographical range to include more women and more voices.”

Most importantly, *Auntie Bellum* is working to dismantle stereotypes of what a Southern woman is. As Kane notes, these women necessarily speak from a diverse array of positions. “They are white, black, Latina, Asian. They are poor, wealthy, educated, struggling for better schools. They are content, angry, hopeful, discouraged. They are American-born and immigrants and Dreamers. They yell at their televisions, they protest at the statehouse, they lobby, they have abortions, they give abortions, they birth babies, they work hard, they see their rights disappearing.”

Auntie Bellum isn't just a rising online magazine—the editors are striving to develop an inclusive community around the publication's goals. Roxy Lenzo, associate editor, explains, “For me, *Auntie Bellum* is a community. We've been able to bring people together to collaborate on projects like our Southern Cover Girl Series. At events, strangers have come up to me to talk about pieces I've written, or pieces they've loved on *Auntie Bellum*. I have been writing a series on some health problems I'm going through and

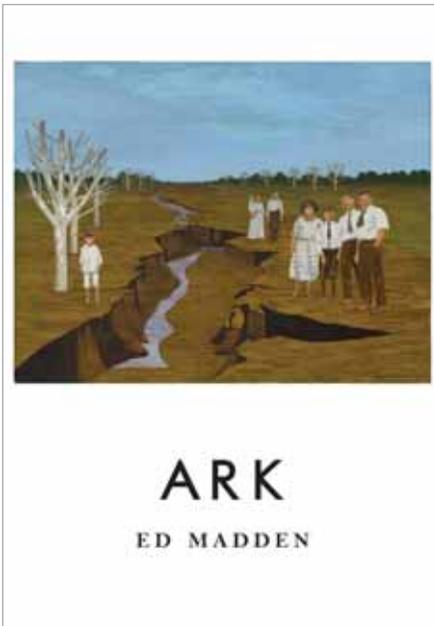
there has been an outpouring of support and sharing of similar stories.”

In just a year, the magazine has made a name for itself in the Columbia. The staff is involved in the community individually, but the magazine has given a platform to voice their opinions on social and racial justice. Earlier in 2015, *Auntie Bellum* published many stories on the Confederate flag controversy that emerged after the mass shooting at the Emanuel AME Church in Charleston. They supported Planned Parenthood when it came under fire in 2015, using stories of women who needed their services in various circumstances. In addition to political and social issues, the organization has supported local groups such as Girls Rock Columbia and Tell Them! “We've promoted whenever possible women doing cool and important things,” says Kane.

The future of *Auntie Bellum* is looking bright, with the first print edition scheduled to release in March. In line with their artistic goals, they're organizing a young women's poetry workshop with Richland County Public Library. There's a coloring book in the works featuring prominent South Carolina women. *Auntie Bellum* doesn't plan to stop just within the state's borders either—Lenzo says, “I want to see *Auntie Bellum* expand throughout the Southeast, throughout the country, but also into bigger projects than the magazine.”

Ark by Ed Madden

A KIND OF PEACE



In my friend Ed Madden's new book, *Ark*, (full disclosure, Madden is the literary editor of *Jasper* and this is not a review but rather a story about his new poetry collection) the reader is taken on the uneasy journey we all take, in one form or another, when a parent dies. In Madden's story, his father is diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and, being the good son that he is—that he *must be*—Madden goes home to Arkansas to help his mother care for his father during the final months of his life. Not even parenthetically is the casual reader aware, however, of the prelude to this story in which, many years before, the son comes out to his parents as gay and they respond unfavorably, breaking the son's heart. Only in his preface does Madden share the delicate poem "Ark" for which the book is titled and, with its "zoo of twos," we become aware of the ideological clash that has characterized Madden's relationship with his parents and continues to do so until the end of his father's days.

Divided into three sections, Madden's use of nature and his own easy fit into the natural world his farming family so highly values reinforces the son's view that he has a place at the bedside of his dying father. Part I – "Adrift," for example, places the poet alongside the armadillo, rabbit, snake, coot, and blackbird in the natural landscape of Arkansas as news of the father's diagnosis washes over the small, strange, and estranged family like the flood waters threatening their awkward peace.

Part II – "Landscape, with levees" introduces pills and wheelchairs and all the trappings of illness and waiting as the father doesn't die. In the tremendously laden poem, "How to lift him" we hear the silence between father and son and the tender phrases—the hug and arms and dance and blessing—that make the reader wince and almost ache before quickly moving on at the tense pace Madden has intentionally established so we don't belabor the issue because, after all, he *must* be lifted and this is how it is done.

And hidden in part II of the poem "Resemblances" the poet tells us what we've wondered all along, the closest thing to an answer to why:

"I wasn't here for years, heard
what he said and wrote—insistent
note read and reread, recalled
his voice that one visit when
he said we will never,
the blah blah of law, the lord,
your choice, difficulties of love
and such. For all that, still
I sit beside his bed, sit near,
for all that's the past, when
back then— but now
I'm here."

Part III – "In my father's house" brings us finally to "That day" when, in the garden, Madden picks a tick from his arm,

the father dies, the frustrated grieving can officially begin, and the coming to terms of the terms that can be come to happens at last. Madden writes in "Park" that "the dead/ keep speaking after all—just/ how quietly they speak/ how quietly." It is here that we recognize the transition in the son, finally let loose from the constraints of history and free to imagine the maybes and the cathartic possibilities of the supernatural.

"When I open my mouth to ask for forgiveness,
A little boy crawls out. He wanders off
Down the ditch bank, collecting pretty things—
Seedpods, goldenrod, buckeyes, anything
That catches his eye. I hope he'll come back
Before dark. My mother says someone
At church saw a panther on the road one night.
There are wolves—she's seen them—in the fields.
...
When I open my mouth to ask for forgiveness
A man crawls out. He is my dead father.
He can walk now, now that it's all over.
He looks at my mother. No one says a word."

("When I open my mouth to ask for forgiveness")

And in the final poem "Dogwood" the poet takes full advantage of the opportunity to end his journey by creating a kind of peace he can live with—a kind he has worked for and deserves.

"In the unoccupied air of the dark hallway, my
father appears,
He says nothing, just watches.

I think my dead father is learning to love me.
Or I am learning to love him.

I've waited a long time for this.

The sun lights up the last leaves of the dogwood
Like so many bloody baubles."

// CB

HOW TO LIFT HIM

B Y E D M A D D E N

Don't pick him up by the pits,
which seems easiest. You risk

broken bones, bruised skin.
Instead, once he's eased up, sits,

shoulders hunched, feet slung
over the edge, lean down for the hug,

your arms under his and around,
hands flat against his back, his arms around

you. This is what you do. Then lift him,
his feet between yours, this timid

dance around, this turn. Tell him
to bend his knees as you ease him

down to the chair, its wheels locked,
set him in slow. Kneel in front

as if to receive his blessing.

Lift each foot to its rest. Wrap
a blanket around him—you're going out.

Stop at the old flat-front desk,
last hiding place for his cigarettes—

why he wanted up, after all. Stop
at the edge of the porch and lock

the wheels. Make sure he's in the sun.
Stand silent by, he won't talk much,

though the lonely cat will,
rubbing its back against the wheels.

PAPERCUTS

B Y T I A N A R I L E Y

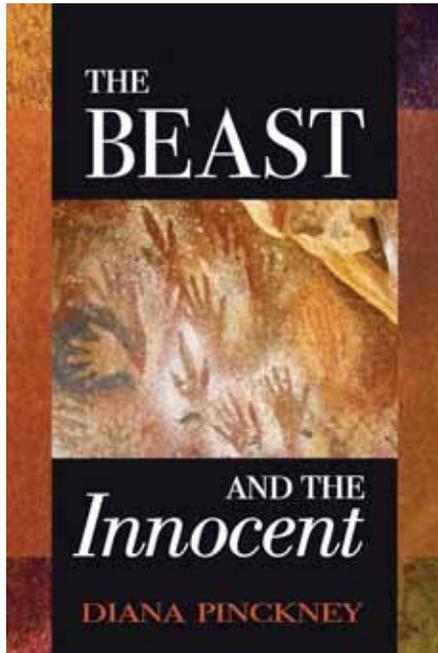
I remember when you got me my
first paint set.
And I was confused,
because all you saw
was black and white
and your rights were my wrongs
what was wrong was my rights.
You weren't able to understand
that I never understood
the laws on painting inside the lines.
That one was green,
Two was blue,
And not to forget yellow was 3,
Yet orange was four.
I had to grow up by five.
I would give you my art over and over in time.
Even if the colors weren't called for,
I would pretend to be proud even if I
Wasn't perfect and I was only six.
By then I would rip myself out the family portrait.
And now I'm left with my paper cuts.
I tried ripping you out but you seemed
To always glue yourself back into the picture
And was reminded I was wrong again
By the thoughts clanged on my mind
Fingerprinting
Is easy now
When your blood gives the perfect shade

Of Crimson, but it's only an accident
And can easily be healed
Yet, the pain is still numbing
And leaves you in awe
A simple kiss you
Could be needed
But when her lips uttered for you
and you respond
But, I'm use to the
Automatic messages
To say goodnight to me
And you use to say
"Don't say bye,
because bye means forever
And later means forever
And later means I'll see you soon"
Let me paint the picture
I'm not a 94 on a French exam
More than the 2nd birthed
And not your number one girl
Because you said bye
And didn't even notice
I was taught to be perfect
So why'd you make the mistake
I still have my toddler wounds
And kiss to heal everyday
I'm so glad I'm older now
And ran out of paint

Tiana Riley is a student at Irmo High School. She originally wrote this poem for Mona Elleithee's class on Poetry: Production and Performance. Students in the class competed in spoken word, written word, and in performance of poems by other writers. Riley's poem was selected by visiting writer Ed Madden, *Jasper* literary arts editor, as the best written work.

Diana Pinckney's *The Beast and the Innocent*

BY EMYLISA WARRICK



The *Beast and the Innocent* by Diana Pinckney (FutureCycle Press, 2015) asks: Who is the wolf at the door? Who is the innocent, and who is the beast? This is the second full-length collection by Pinckney, a South Carolina native who grew up in Columbia and now lives and teaches in Charlotte. The book includes poems invoking fairy tales and poems about famous artworks, but these are interspersed with poems about wolves. Pinckney views the wolf as the “ultimate other,” marked by both vulnerability and unfamiliarity. Through the skillful use of persona and ekphrasis (writing about visual art), Pinckney pen-

etrates simple, occasionally benign, representations and introduces messy, complex revisions of how we think about art, wilderness, otherness, and home.

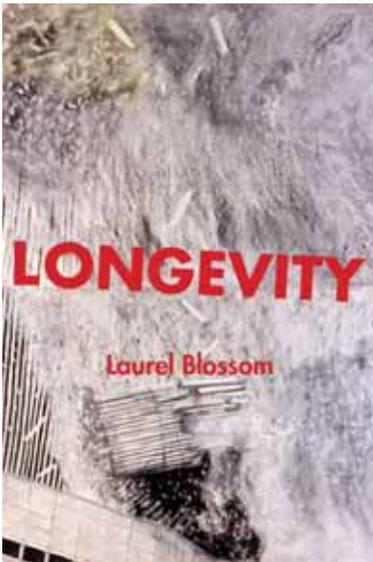
While some poems are straightforward narratives, the book includes a variety of forms, heightening the music of Pinckney’s poetry. Pinckney’s line is as delicate and precise as a painter’s brush; every stroke creates a vivid image with cool and clear-eyed language. In the lilting and lyrical poem “Yeats Exhibit, Downstairs National Library, Dublin”: “Walls ripple with birds, a screen / of words, the lake of lines mirror swans.” Some poems take on persona—some with a bit of attitude—as in “Little Red on YouTube”: “Here’s what went down that / day I met Big Bad hanging on the path . . . / . . . OMG, that killer grin.”

As in traditional fairy tales, Pinckney’s poems have a sinister bent coursing right below the surface. In “This: after The House That Jack Built,” a poem about a girl who is abducted and murdered by a seemingly nice boy is made even more menacing by its echo of a familiar children’s nursery rhyme. The ekphrastic poems of famous paintings and photographs also end notes of unease. Writing about Edward Hopper’s famous painting “Soir Bleu, 1914,” Pinckney writes, “Even Hopper in prewar / Paris couldn’t fathom / the numbers that would rot / in those ditches and bloated fields.”

The spaces the wolf poems occupy in Pinckney’s work are spaces of wonder. They underscore the wolf’s connection to the earth, its mysterious nature, and, conversely, mankind’s fervor to “rid the earth of a dangerous predator.” Who is the real wolf, Pinckney repeatedly makes us ask ourselves, the real predator?

Laurel Blossom's *Longevity*

BY MAYA MARSHALL



Laurel Blossom's *Longevity* (Four Way Books, 2015) is her second book-length narrative prose poem. These linked poems deal with four separate griefs. Blossom's speaker navigates the loss of her mother as well as the losses of her sister, Margaret, and of her best friend, Lucy, and all of this is bound between initial and

concluding poetic movements in which she engages with 9/11, the American national tragedy, which the life of her sister. Tackling these four tragedies in one poem is an ambitious project—one best suited for a long poem.

The book's guiding question is "what is a sister?", and in attempt to answer it, Blossom explores memories of a shared girlhood, tracing this emotional history against the swells and deflations of the stock market. Underlying questions of belief or certainty are underscored by poems with titles like "now what?" and close ups of milestone moments like this one, a memory from Margaret's wedding (from "The Longevity of Bone"):

*"Lost fan, jabbed skin, misplaced wedding ring.
Just my mother's way of making her absence felt.
Not that I believe in such things.
Believe me."*

Such moments reveal the speaker's process as she seeks to define herself in the wake of the loss of her mother. In pursuit of redefinition, Blossom allows herself to slip from itinerant lines to

prose blocks and back, much the same way as she allows herself to slip into and wade through moments of defining memory—the first-person speaker controlling and guiding the narrative throughout.

The most honest moments in the book arrive in the poem "Red Rewind"—the section in which the speaker describes the loss of her friend Lucy. "Red Rewind" is replete with color and the artifacts of a lost love. In it Margaret calls and says, "I know you loved her like a sister," and Blossom reasserts the book's central question, "what is a sister?" underscoring the significant comparison between Margaret and Lucy. The balance of lyricism with narrative in this work leaves unresolved the uneasy mystery around seemingly significant parts of the narrative, but the sincerity of the fifth and sixth movements of "Red Rewind" answer definitively and ironically what it means to be a sister:

*So close we could read each other's thoughts.
So close we got our periods together.
So close nobody, not even God, could tell us apart.*

SafeSpace2BraveSpace

BY O.K. KEYES



lay it “safe.” Keep it “safe.” Make it “safe.” But what exactly does it mean to be “safe?”

As activists, we often use the term “safe space” as a positive organizing principle

for creating a supportive environment in which everyone’s voice is heard and trigger-inducing language is avoided. Building a safe space requires community investment, guidelines for “stepping-up, stepping back” in discussion, and the understanding that trigger warnings for potentially psychologically damaging language is approached carefully rather than communicated solely for shock-value. An example of a safe space, would be Youth OUTLOUD, a small support group for LGBT youth that meets to discuss their experiences at home and school without fear of their peers and parents finding out. And while this certainly produces wonderful conversations and builds their confidences with one another, I agonize when they leave the group. Because only having two hours, every two weeks to simply “be” yourself is exhausting.

This January, I had the opportunity to represent Youth OUTLOUD at the Creating Change conference, the world’s largest LGBT conference. I attended a number of workshops about building safe spaces for youth to support and empower one another. But I also started hearing conversations about the next step. Where do we go after we establish these spaces where it is safe to “be” yourself? And do groups always need to transform?

I do want to tread carefully through these thoughts, because first and foremost personal safety (especially for youth) is a priority for me. However, as activists and as people living counter to the established norms of society, our existence is inevitably an act of resistance, whether intentional or not. Even as culture makes room for certain exceptions to their molds, these will only ever be tokenized deviations. But we must never forget that as marginalized voices, *representation* is when someone else tells your story, and it is an act of *revolution* when you tell your own.

This spirit of revolution is at the core of social justice. And I’m not talking about the Bernie Sanders revolution, but rather a significant cultural shift that goes beyond social acceptance and awareness but reimagines the bodies and experiences that “matter.” However, this kind of cultural change comes from the bottom-up, and requires activists to leave their safe spaces and venture into brave spaces of education, advocacy, and outreach to a society that rarely understand their language or experiences. This kind of work can be exhausting alone, but in solidarity with other groups and other peoples, can be a form of empowerment that goes

beyond the “safe space.”

However, going from a “safe space” of *awakening* to a “brave space” to *action* requires a great deal of time, energy, and spirit. And unfortunately, this kind of work is tireless and takes a great psychological toll on the individual in those spaces. I am reminded of several activists who have taken their own life in the past year, including Blake Brockington, an incredible trans activist and Black Lives Matter organizer who challenged not only society but his own activist circles to be more inclusive.

I am not saying that all safe spaces need to transform into brave spaces, but rather than brave spaces must not forget that they come from safe spaces. A group of friends meeting together to discuss being bullied in school that turns into an advocacy group for safer schools, must still take the time to check-in, to reflect with their peers, to allow themselves to be *vulnerable*. I always stress with the youth that I work with that it is safe “to break” and to “be broken.” That there are times when our edges are sharp and can cut down the structures that oppress us, but other times these edges can also cut ourselves. We must care for ourselves as we care for our community, because as Audre Lorde once said, “Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.”

O.K. Keyes is adjunct faculty in the School of Visual Art and Design at the University of South Carolina, currently serving as the Youth OUTLOUD Coordinator, a safe and affirming discussion group for LGBT youth and allies, as well as the Media Educator for TakeBreakMake, an after-school, youth media based project for high school students in Richland County District.

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