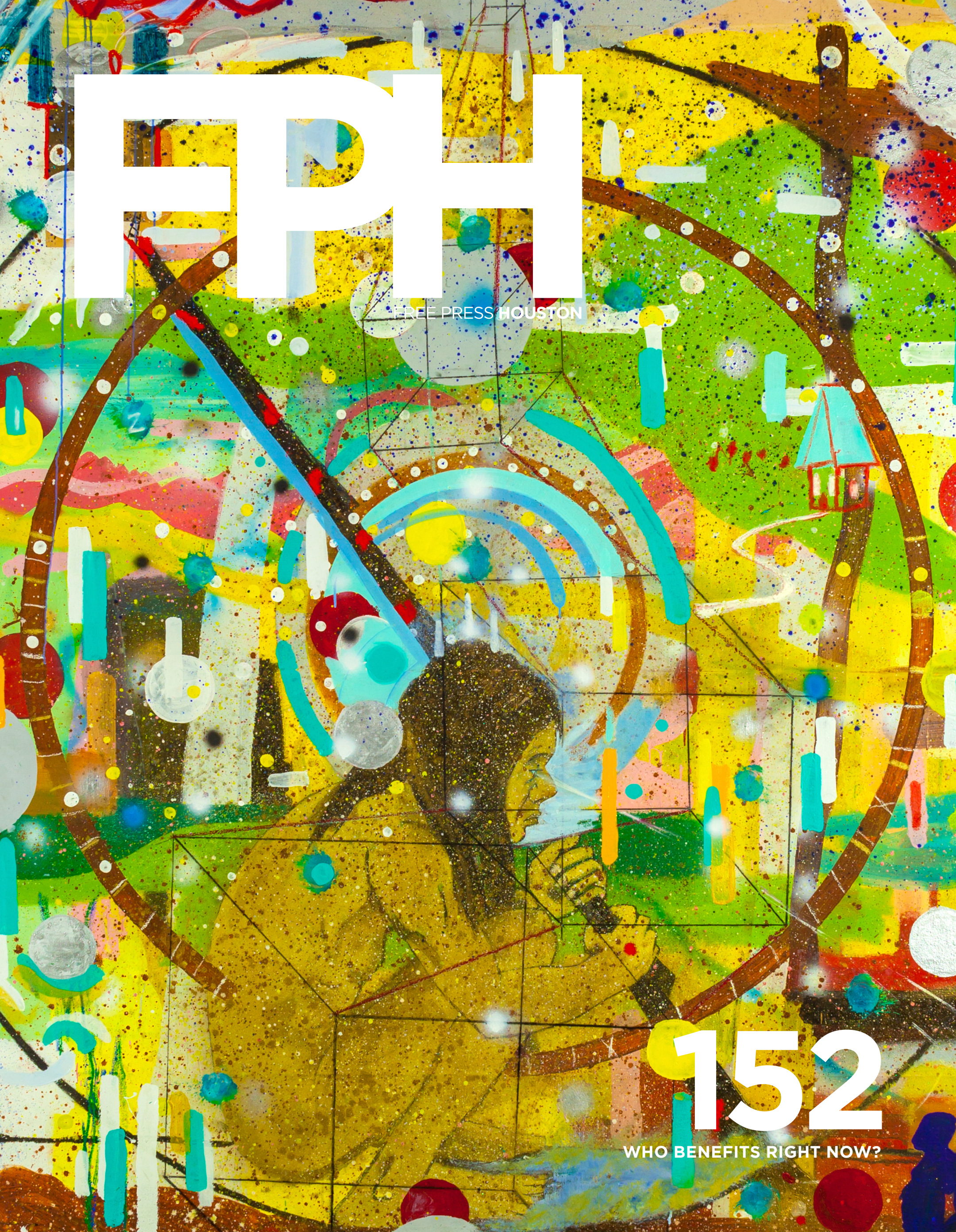
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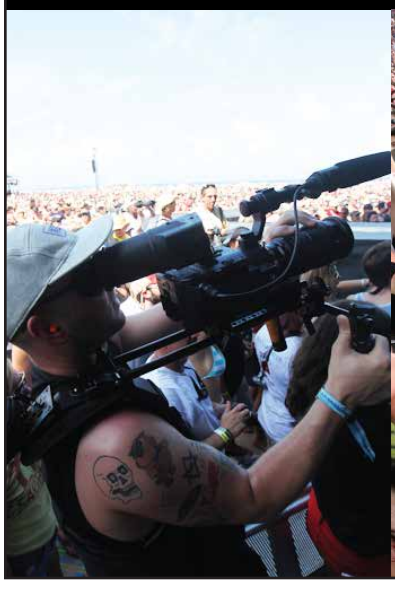
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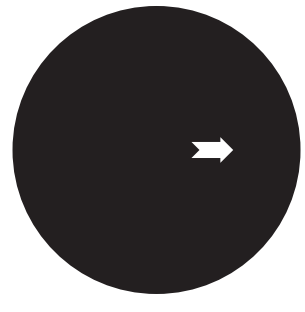
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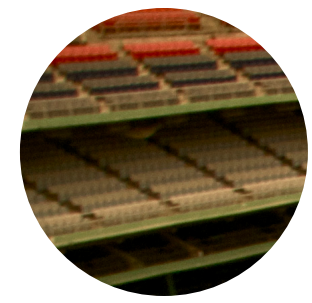
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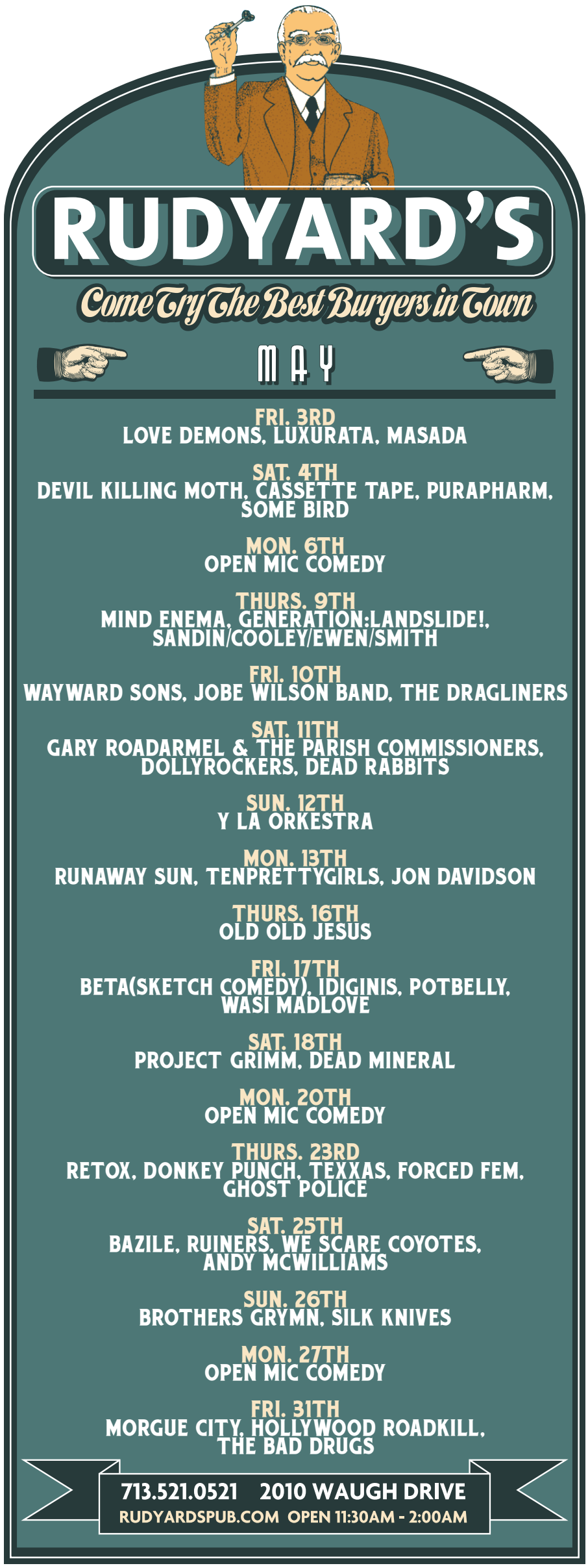
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LETTER FROM THE DUDER

I rub your belly.

Never enough time in the day for all the things I need to do, want to do, love to do. Now more than ever, there are so many projects, battles to fight, catastrophes to avert, and opportunities at every step. The hard part is being able to tell the difference between friend and foe, lamb and lion, dagger and crucifix (thanks Peter Gabriel) .

But there are the easy ones to hold on to: family, friends, breakfast tacos, etc. And if you are lucky, you get a curve ball which knocks everything out of whack in the best way. Am I making sense? I hope not. Either way, thank you unexpected diversion. You are suddenly making this all worth while.

Oh yeah, some great surprises and adventures in store. In more ways than one.

See y'all at FPSF June 1 and 2. Thank you to our staff who are busting their asses around the clock to make clutch things happen.



CECELIA JOHNSON
LIFE IN COLOR

By Meghan Hendley / Photos of Cecelia drawing by Andy McWilliams / Photos of artwork courtesy of the artist

DURING A TIME when our city should have been experiencing the typical heat and humidity of spring, I was grateful for an unexpected cold front and the day it allowed me to spend with Cecelia Johnson. Cecelia and I have been friends without knowing it for years, running in the same circles and sharing a love for the Houston arts community. Bubbling with joyful banter, wide-eyed and passionate, Cecelia embraced our day together by soaking in the beauty of a clear blue sky and the inspiration that comes from every stroke of charcoal. ¶ We debated a number of topics such as the next choice of color on rice paper and the musical offerings of chillwave. We took great pleasure in explaining our artistic influences, took advantage of the joy of chocolate milkshakes, and shared stories about our experiences in the local art scene. Our ideas bounced off each other and leapt from the pages of the paper strewn across the floor of Felipe Lopez's space at Winter Street Studios. ¶ Watercolors, charcoal, and



acrylics were engaged for hours as we laughed until our legs went numb. The day remained chilly and we used scarves to keep ourselves warm. The unseasonably cool weather provided not only an opportunity to indulge in a favorite fashion accessory but it also allowed Cecelia to be out and about for an entire day. Lower temperatures offer relief from the symptoms of the neurological battle that she endures. Rest breaks and guided steps were scattered throughout the day but they did not detract from the pure happiness found in the hours we spent together. Cecelia is not only a beacon of artistic light but also of personal strength. ¶ After we finished our art, we hung out and talked about life. The conversation touched on several topics including what it's like for Cecelia to be living with multiple sclerosis (MS). Despite the weight of contemplating this neurological disease, we found joy in the fact that art still remained as she pulled out page after page and piece after piece of her creations. These pieces revealed the story of joy, pain, intuition, and imagination.

VISUAL DISCOVERY

Cecelia's artistic influences include Leonardo da Vinci, Robert Rauschenberg, Hans Hofmann, and Commander Mark and the Secret City (a PBS program that taught children how to draw through a cosmic journey of the imagination). This show triggered something in Cecelia as characters such as Moonbot, Furbles, Violet the Dragon, Unibear, Pigasus, and guest artists demonstrated how to draw, along with displaying various art forms. Cecelia can say she drew her first oil painting while she watched Bob Ross, the puffy-haired PBS icon, create one of his legendary pieces. ¶ With an array of art at her fingertips, Cecelia fostered her imaginative creativity at quite an early age. Dance, music, and visual arts paved the way for her to embrace the passion of the beautiful through these various art forms. Gravitating towards visual arts, Cecelia chose to study stu-

dio art at Lamar University in Beaumont, Texas. Through this experience, Cecelia crafted her style of intuitive visuals combined with a subtle boldness of lines and subjects. Her greatest body of work includes massive Byzantine-inspired pieces depicting her interpretation of saints and religious icons. Grand in size, opulent in texture, and striking in appearance, these figures illuminate the talent Cecelia possesses and the ability to portray a stirring subject. The late abstract expressionist painter Dick Wray mentored Cecelia and helped her progress in her talent, aiding her with her imaginative processes. Not long after entering college, Cecelia discovered the physical component of her life that would change her personal landscape.

ABILITY ALTERED

Starting at the age of 12, this budding artist experienced signs of something that appeared to be neurological stirring inside of her. When Cecelia was in college, doctors diagnosed her with multiple sclerosis. She was 22. Multiple sclerosis, affecting more than 2.1 million individuals worldwide, is an inflammatory disease that affects the ability of nerve cells in the spinal cord and brain to communicate with each other proficiently.

Multiple sclerosis is unpredictable. One's immune system attacks and damages the myelin causing the axons to struggle when conducting signals. The actual name of the disease refers to scars, better known as lesions, in the white matter of the spinal cord and brain where the most myelin is stored. The cause? Unknown. A cure? Not yet. A mystery? In many cases, yes. Those living with MS face a daily battle with the disease at the helm.

Shortly after her diagnosis, this elusive disease worsened, significantly altering Cecelia's ability to perform even the most basic of tasks at times. Her abilities, including her great talent in art, became an indefinite struggle. Many individuals living with MS see the disease progress to not only a physical but also a cognitive disability. With acceptance of this fate, Cecelia chose to move forward instead of remaining stagnant in her condition. Despite the imminent struggle that would mark her daily life, she committed herself to her deep passion for art. One of the most difficult realizations for this artist was the fact that large-scale work, such as in her Byzantine series, was now near impossible to consistently create due to pain and limited basic mobility. She shifted her focus to smaller works, anything feasible that could work well as a canvas lying on a bed during the times when she faced limited mobility. Cecelia's talent and her fervor for both art and life give her a unique voice—one that can help educate and increase awareness of multiple sclerosis.

STEM CELLS AND PASTELS

There has been a great debate in this country about the use of stem cells. Dramatic discoveries have been made in the use of adult stem cells. The risk of stem cell use has been found to be the highest when the source changes. More and more documentation has pointed out that the safest cells are your own adult stem cells in comparison with embryonic stem cells (which bring up both a scientific and moral debate). There is also research and experimentation with new artificially-induced pluripotent stem cells that are still being investigated for their benefits and subsequent risks. Some would say that the great stem cell debate is fueled by money. Much of the stem cell shouting match has been sponsored by vested financial interests in order to protect markets. Many patients are going overseas or finding ways to access their own stem cells for therapy, which means bad business for companies trying to produce patented FDA stem cell drugs.

Stem cells can help regenerate, lessen symptoms, and aid someone in daily life as in Cecelia's case. Desperate for therapy to help slow down the rapid progression of her disease, Cecelia turned to stem cells in 2007, traveling with her mother to Mexico for experimental treatments. They continued this medical pilgrimage for four years, a decision that allowed Cecelia to continue to function and create. In 2010, these trips across the border ceased due to the high expense of the treatments.

Desperate for another solution closer to home, Cecelia began to look to the state of Texas as an ally. Early in 2012, the Texas Medical Board approved new rules and procedures for stem cell therapies. Cecelia turned to Celltex, a lab right here in Houston that would help her with therapy from her own stem cells. This saving grace came with a hefty price tag of $30,000 but, thanks to the support of family and friends, Cecelia was able to raise the funds she needed. In August of 2012, Cecelia had several hundred thousand cells harvested from abdominal fat. It wasn't long before the FDA got involved and started a full-blown investigation of Celltex, thus halting their efforts to aid those in need like Cecelia Johnson. Her story and that of others involved with Celltex was featured in a huge article for Bloomberg Businessweek. Cecelia was left to seek medical refuge overseas and faced a most difficult struggle for the rest of 2012.

So far, this new year has proven to be a better time for Cecelia but with the degenerating disease there comes good days and bad days. Her life and the evolution of her disease has been captured on film in a brief documentary revealing her hopes of improving the state of her health with stem cell therapy. Cecelia greatly wishes to have a more in-depth and widely-released documentary with the goals of shedding light on this complicated disease, aiding others who struggle with multiple sclerosis, and educating those who are researching MS on a daily basis.

Cecelia's current work utilizes charcoal, pastels, and anything else she can find during the times she must remain indoors due to the heat that worsens her symptoms. The work she creates in these moments is a melding of the primitive and imaginative, augmenting her eye for otherworldly ideas. Despite the loss of dexterity and mobility with each passing day, Cecelia still creates an abundance of artistic treasures that truly speak to this artist's commitment to her craft. She is a beacon of light to those who struggle with MS, and this light will not go out as long as she has the passion paired with the growing help of those around her. **FPH**

For more information, read a Q and A with Cecelia Johnson featured at www.freepresshouston.com. For more information on the artist and her work, visit www.ceceliajohnson.com.



BETTER LATE THAN DADA

By Michael Pennywark / Photos courtesy of the Menil Collection

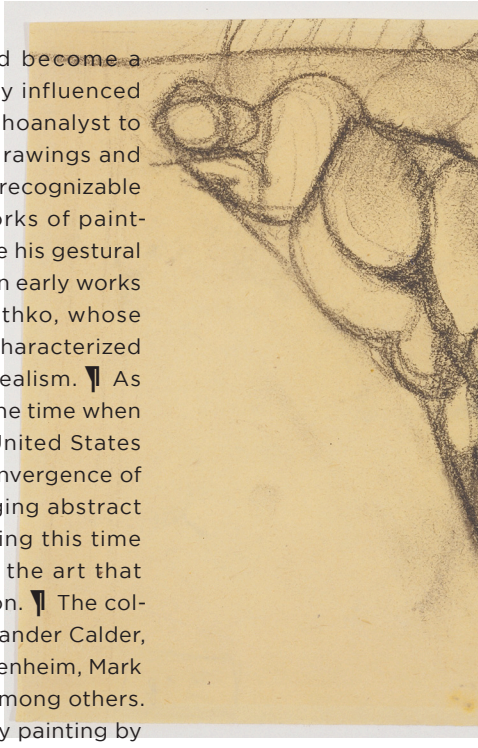
ART
FPH / 05.13

HOW MANY SURREALISTS does it take to screw in a light bulb? Two. One to hold the giraffe and another to fill the wheelbarrow with brightly-colored power tools. OK, so surrealist humor might not be my forte but given the state of the world these days, we could all use a momentary distraction. What could be more fitting than the Menil's upcoming exhibition, Late Surrealism? Opening May 24, Late Surrealism will feature some of the hidden treasures of the Menil from the 1940s and explore one of the most fascinating times in art history when New York was quickly overtaking Paris as the center of the art world. ¶ While this period saw an influx of European surrealist artists and thinkers seeking refuge in the United States, abstract expressionism was also beginning to establish itself. As Michelle White, curator of the exhibition, explained, "American art historians and scholars of the 1940s generally saw the two movements as diametrically opposed and most championed abstract expressionism. They believed surrealism's emphasis on subject matter expressed an irreconcilably different way of thinking about representation, one that was equated with a démodé European sensibility that they saw as increasingly irrelevant." The art world was at odds with itself as commentators sided with one ideology or the other. ¶ However, while critics were busy arguing over the finer points of each movement, we saw "a kind of cross-fertilization that is interesting and complex." As White put it, "There is a wonderfully slippery intersection and fusion between the two. The automatist ideas espoused by the surrealists, which involved strategies of making art by allowing the subconscious to drive the process, were a tremendous influence on the abstract expressionists in terms of their interest in probing the psyche and inventing new ways of painting in order to channel the subconscious."

Max Ernst
Le canard du doute aux lèvres de vermouth, 1948
The Menil Collection, Houston, Bequest of Marcia Simon Weisman
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Photo: Paul Hester



"Jackson Pollock, for example, who would become a leader of abstract expressionism, was deeply influenced by automatism. Working with a Jungian psychoanalyst to tap into his dream state, he made his early drawings and paintings in trance-like states. In these works, recognizable imagery competes with the complex networks of painterly lines, drips, and that would come to define his gestural abstraction." This same influence is also seen in early works by artists such as Lee Krasner and Mark Rothko, whose drawings and paintings from the period are characterized by the tension between abstraction and surrealism. ¶ As White points out, this period also represents the time when John and Dominique de Menil came to the United States from Europe, in many ways paralleling the convergence of surrealism from the old world and the emerging abstract expressionism of the New World. It was during this time that John and Dominique began acquiring the art that would become the basis of the Menil Collection. ¶ The collection-based show will feature works by Alexander Calder, Joan Miró, Max Ernst, Yves Tanguy, Meret Oppenheim, Mark Rothko, Jackson Pollock, and Arshile Gorky among others. Two highlights of the exhibition will be an early painting by Rothko and one by Pollock that reflect the surprising influence of surrealism on two of the most well known abstract expressionists from the United States. ¶ Which reminds me–what did the surrealist say to the abstract expressionist while they were walking down the street? Fish! OK, I promise I'll stop now. **FPH**



Meret Oppenheim
Steinfrau (Stone Woman), 1937
The Menil Collection, Houston
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Photo: Paul Hester

Late Surrealism • The Menil Collection
May 24 through August 25, 2013

Gallery Talk
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Arshile Gorky
L'amour du fusil neuf (Love of the New Gun), 1944
The Menil Collection, Houston
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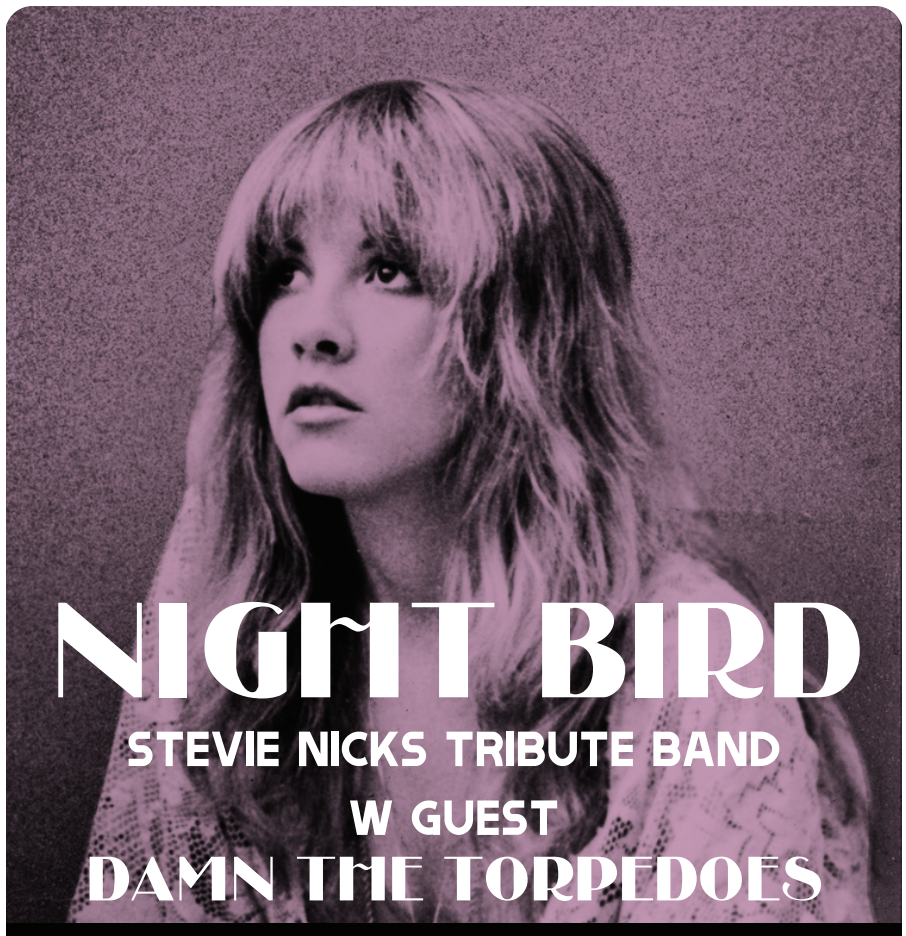
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MAY SHOWERS

FILM

FPH / 05.13

By Michael Bergeron





MAY OFFERS UP SOME HEAVYWEIGHTS but it may be the welterweights that surprise.

Every week in May, Hollywood rolls out a tentpole. The first week of the month offers the release of Iron Man 3, while week two brings The Great Gatsby to life in 3D. Week three is host to Star Trek Into Darkness and week four rounds out the month with some lighthearted entertainment by way of The Hangover Part III and Fast & Furious 6. No complaints here; I think each title speaks volumes.

However, there's one you'll want to put on your list of films to see, the Ken Loach film The Angels' Share. Loach is hardly under the radar, having worked as a director since the '60s and becoming known for social realism in films. The Angels' Share won a Jury Prize at last year's Cannes Film Festival.

The Angels' Share starts out knee-deep in street dirt. Our protag Robbie (impressive newcomer Paul Brannigan) has just been assigned 300 hours of community service in lieu of a jail sentence. His personal life is further complicated by the family of his pregnant girlfriend, including her brothers who will kick the shit out of him on sight. At one point, the girl's father literally offers Ronnie £5,000 to leave Glasgow forever.

Like other Loach films (Riff-Raff comes to mind), The Angels' Share actually uses subtitles even though the only language spoken is English. (Sometimes when I'm cruising parts of East Texas in search of the Big Thicket Yeti, I wish there were subtitles to better understand the drawl heard in those small town gas stations.) But unlike most Loach films, The Angels' Share doesn't stay locked into kitchen sink realism. Robbie recruits some of his fellow crew members—and a motley crew they are—to commit a heist. The Angels' Share then morphs into a semi-comic look at the world of rare Scottish whiskey. A barrel of really old whiskey from a brewery long-closed has been found at another brewery, and a single bottle of the svelte light brown liquid is estimated to bring $1 million at auction.

The Angels' Share refers to whiskey lost in evaporation each year. Robbie plans to siphon off a couple of bottles in the low-security castle basement where the auction is taking place. The Angels' Share offers an experience that is both rough and tender, and it's likely you'll leave with a completely new appreciation for the art of tasting spirits.

EVIL DEAD SLIGHT RETURN

A young woman travels with friends to a desolate cabin in the woods in order to shake an opiate habit cold turkey. In many ways, Evil Dead could be considered a metaphor for addiction. A remake of Sam Raimi's 1981 The Evil Dead, the new version reaches levels of blood and gore that will have audience members grasping for their armrest. Even after experiencing a gamut of supernatural and unspeakable terrors, our heroin junkie Mia (Jane Levy) finds no relief as the skies literally open up with a blood thunderstorm.

The directorial reins of Evil Dead were under the guidance of Fede Alvarez. Alvarez hails from Montevideo, Uruguay and is one of those guys that has been making films since he was a boy. Only Evil Dead is his feature directorial debut, and he got the gig after being signed by CAA on the basis of a YouTube video called Panic Attack (2009), a simple but technically adept five-minute short where giant robots attack Montevideo.

At a press junket during SXSW at the Driskill Hotel, producers Bruce Campbell, Robert Tapert, Alvarez, and Levy fielded questions. "Theoretically there's almost no digital effects," explains Campbell. "There's visual effects, so you're still compositing images. It's old school, you still paint stuff out and hide it. But nothing was generated, as a result everything looks real."

Tapert brings up the scene where a possessed Mia cuts her tongue in two. "That was an argument that Fede and I had because it was going to take an entire afternoon to mount the prosthetics and we can do it really simply. I shot a television show also in New Zealand where we shot Evil Dead, Spartacus, and we chop limbs off every single day. But Fede convinced me to go down that path."

During her round, Levy gives the lowdown on the preparation required for the tongue and other scenes. "I would sit in the makeup chair for around five hours; first they would do my palms, then my fingers, my legs, my toes. For the tongue scene, first they made a mold of my tongue. Then there were two puppeteers, each one controlling a part of the tongue lying underneath me, underneath the stairs moving the tongue with strings. I feel like I am telling secrets, revealing how the magician does their tricks."

"They [the ratings board] understood the spirit of the movie," counters Talpert about Evil Dead's R rating. Campbell adds, "The funny thing is, their notes were similar to our notes as producers. We told Fede you don't need to cut an arm off for four minutes. The first film we made was a melodrama. It was the second one where we added tongue-in-cheek humor. By then we were better filmmakers, more self-aware."

"We made sure we didn't put any one specific item that dated the film in a technological manner," helmer Alvarez mentions during his go-round. "I respect the legacy of the original movie but I'm also looking for a timeless feeling. That's also why we didn't use CGI. CGI looks great today, and then five years from now looks primitive. The goal from day one was to make a good movie with practical visual effects." **FPH**

(A longer version of the above article can be found on the Free Press Houston website.)

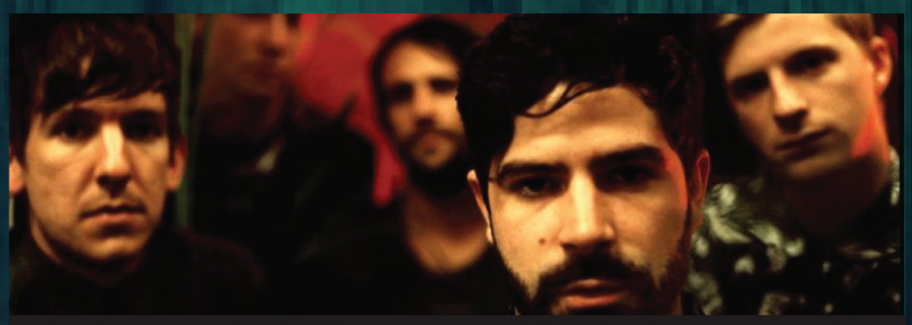


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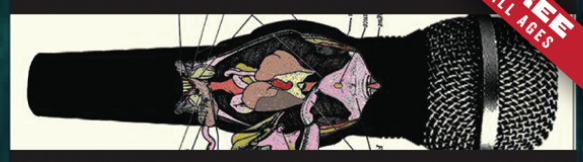
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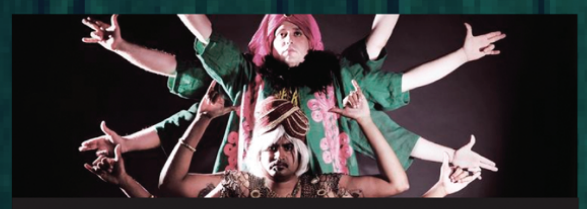
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WITH THE FREAKOUTS



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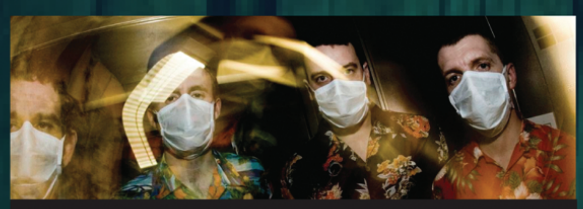
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WITH NO JOY



APR. **28** MAN OR ASTRO-MAN?
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APR. **29** BORN RUFFIANS
WITH MOON KING



MAY. **02** AN EVENING WITH: YO LA TENGO
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MAY. **05** THE DEVIL MAKES THREE
WITH JONNY FRITZ

ALSO COMING **BAAUER x DANNY BROWN APR. 09 | ESBEN & THE WITCH • HELIOTROPES APR. 11**
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WHITECHAPEL APR. 22 | NEAL BRENNAN APR. 23 | QUINTRON & MISS PUSSYCAT • VIETNAM APR. 25

BRING THE HEAT

By Will Guess

UNFORTUNATELY, IT'S THAT TIME of year again. The time when this city swelters and every AC unit in town is cranked to the max. Luckily, there are a ton of shows this month to get you away from sweating outdoors and into a place where you can sweat indoors. May brings Houston a rising star in the stand-up comedy world, a truly awesome local band, and a nostalgic attempt at a comeback. Enjoy the entertainment. It's good for you.

Amy Schumer / May 18 / House of Blues
With the closing of every comedy club in Houston besides the Improv, stand-up seems to be on its deathbed in our fair city. Fortunately, headliners still opt to come to town and this month the hilarious Amy Schumer brings her act to House of Blues. Schumer has been doing stand-up for quite a while but gained notoriety performing some pretty bawdy material on the Comedy Central Roast series. Since then, she has continued her winning streak by touring in larger capacity venues and landing her own TV show. Her new series is directed by co-creator and head writer of Chappelle's Show, Neal Brennan—an interesting combination to say the least. Schumer is known for writing and performing routines that can be considered fairly raunchy. She definitely doesn't shy away from approaching topics that make people squirm.



A Thousand Colours / May 25 / Fitzgerald's
I'm often asked about my favorite local bands and I've found it to been a tough question to answer lately—until now. A Thousand Colours consists of some truly talented dudes. Leading the band is Kenyon White, a guy who is no stranger to the Houston music scene. White has played in and toured with bands for many years, mostly on guitar. A Thousand Colours is the first time he's actually fronted one. And he can sing. He can sing really fucking well. After watching a recent TV performance, I was completely blown away. The songs are well-written, the band is tight, and that voice. Did I mention he could sing? The band doesn't play very often, yet, so I recommend catching them when you can. You won't be disappointed. This is what local music should be.



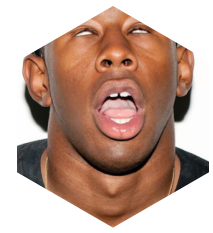
Limp Bizkit / May 29 / House of Blues
Okay, don't laugh, but when I was younger, I really, REALLY liked Limp Bizkit. I bought the red hat and wore it backward. I learned their songs on guitar, and I thought I knew what heavy music was all about. Since then, I've grown up (just a little) and realized that my taste in music wasn't all that great. But there are some bands who, when they come back around for their last hurrah or final embarrassing run, you just have to see live. Limp Bizkit is one of those bands. Probably one of, if not the most joked about band in music. They have been teasing a new album for what seems like years and no one really cares. They've booked tours and cancelled them, signed a deal with Cash Money Records, and still take themselves seriously. I'm not saying they shouldn't - they've sold more albums than most, played to thousands of fans, and honestly, that music video for "Nookie" is still badass. This is the show everyone wants to see but won't for fear of BEING seen. Just let your inner rap-rock fan out for one night. I won't tell anyone.





Suicidal Tendencies / May 6 / House of Blues

Father John Misty / May 8 / Fitzgerald's



Titus Andronicus / May 10 / Walter's

Smashing Pumpkins / May 15 / Bayou Music Center

Face to Face / May 18 / Fitzgerald's

Yngwie Malmsteen / May 18 / The Concert Pub North

Tyler, The Creator / May 23 / Bayou Music Center

Black Moth Super Rainbow / May 29 / Fitzgerald's

MUSIC

MUSIC OPINIONS

(Theme music begins, curtain opens illuminating a chair and a desk. On that desk is a glass of beer and a laptop. Scene begins...)

By K.M. Anderson

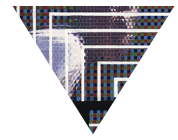
DAVID GRUBBS / The Plain Where the Palace Stood / Drag City
A palace exemplifies lineage, a majesty, an empire, a symbol, a display of power. Palaces rise and fall with time but the ground beneath them remains. David Grubbs has lineage: Chicago post-rock champion, Gastr del Sol, Bastro, and a solo career. This album signifies and solidifies his place in the pantheon of a particular brand of rock. "I Started to Live When My Barber Died" is a fabulous beginning. "Super-Adequate" is fierce and subtle. "The Plain Where the Palace Stood" is an adventure - a magnified moment. This album is a foot planted firmly in the ground while looking to the sun.

LIFE COACH / Alphawaves / Thrill Jockey
Phil Manley is a man who wears many coats; he is a possessor of outfits for any occasion. He owns many hues that can be appropriated at any moment—much like Mr. Roger's closet of sweaters. Producer, engineer, guitarist, keyboardist, bassist, all talents utilized in bands from Golden to Trans Am to The Fucking Champs to his current output via Life Coach. This album features Jon Theodore behind the kick. It is the surreal ("Ohm") and the motherfucking deal ("Fireball"). The album moves from psychy-prog to the action sequence that is "Mind's Eye." You have heard a lot of bullshit; this would not be categorized as that.

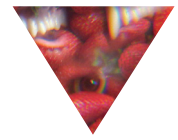
THEE OH SEES / Floating Coffin / Castle Face
Thee Oh Sees are awesomely consistent. They have albums come out every year, always awesome, always pleasing to those who know them while still forging new ground. The wealth and span of their sound is amazing. Floating Coffin is rumpus ("I Come From the Mountain," "Tunnel Time"), strangely elegant ("No Spell," "Minotaur"), weird groovy ("Night Crawler"), just groovy ("Maze Fancier"), all the while clearly being Thee Oh Sees. The imprint of the band is never lost. This album is the party, the freak-out, the come down, and the shaken drive home.

MAJOR LAZER / Free The Universe / Secretly Canadian
Major Lazer's last album (Guns Don't Kill People...Lazers Do) was great. It had no point of reference. It had the dancehall, reggae, dance characteristic but it was its own thing. Unfortunately, this album (Free The Universe) has that album as its point of reference. Most of the things that made that album new are the staples of this album, not to mention that many of the sounds introduced on that album are staples of this album. There are high moments ("Get Free," "Jessica," "Mashup the Dance") but the rest of the album is kind of just there. However, play it at a party and people will not complain, but they may say "Do you have their other album?" **FPH**

...and these have been MY MUSIC OPINIONS (stage lights dim, curtain closes).

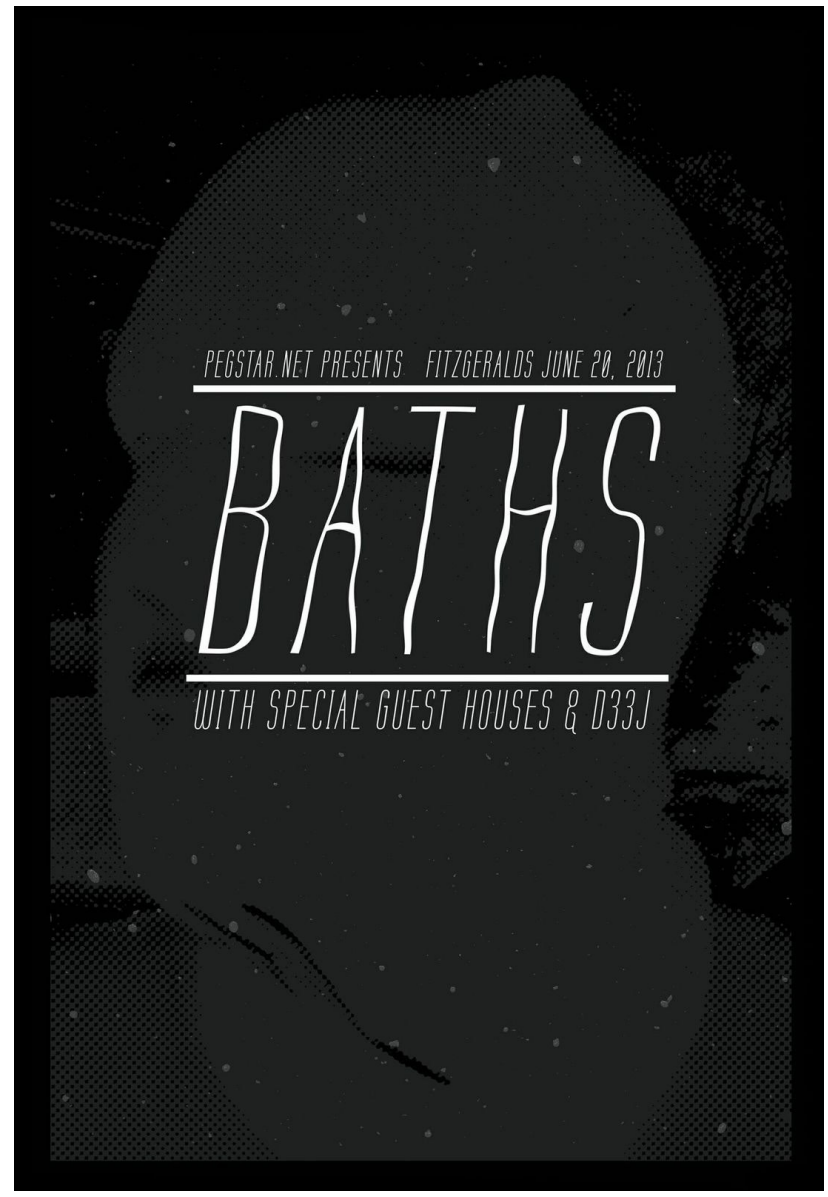




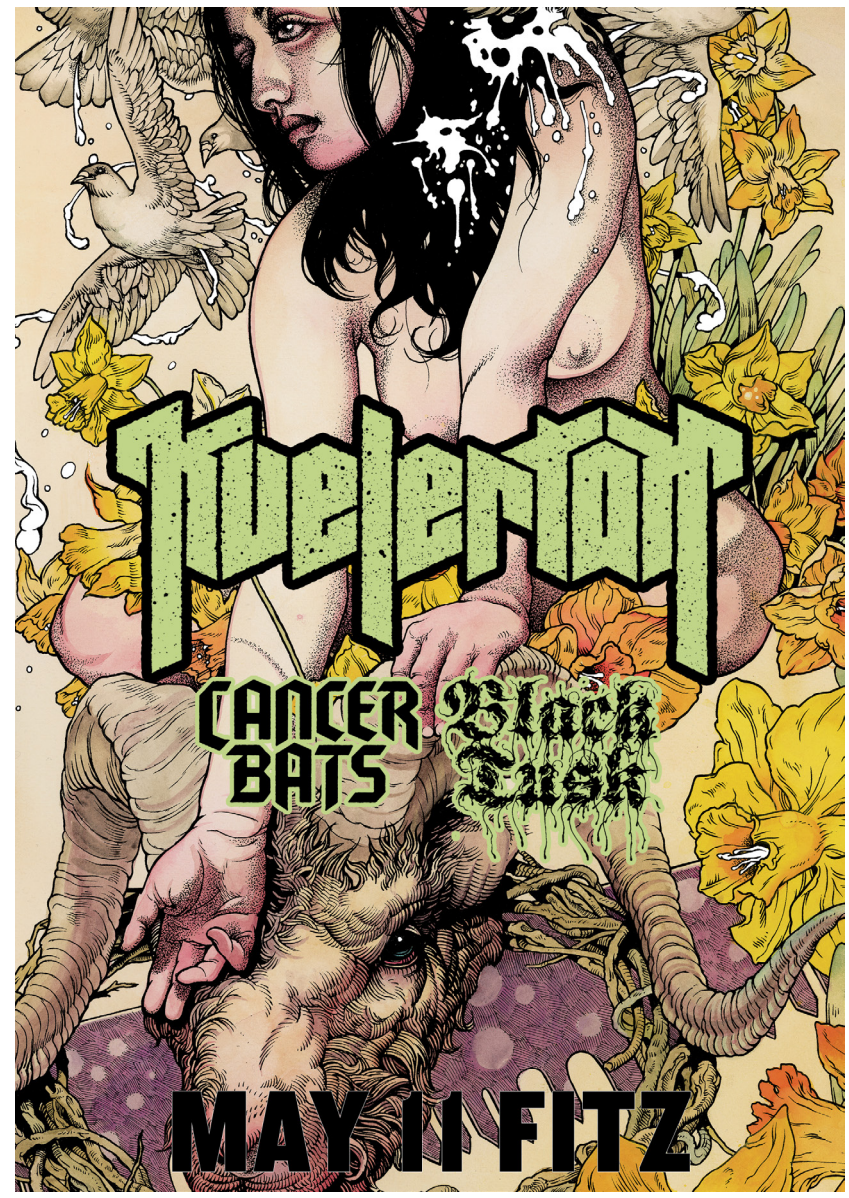





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◇ RENTS STIRNER

MUSIC

By Rob McCarthy / Photos courtesy of Orents Stirner

ORENTS STIRNER IS A BAND that thinks outside of the box and has successfully sought to shake off the shackles of structure for the freedom to flow for over six years. The band, which started around 2007, has been through multiple lineup changes but is now in what they consider to be “The Best Orents Stirner Ever in the History of Time.” The “classic” version of Orents Stirner came together in 2010, when founder Fletcher Stafford teamed up with Alex Harter, Russ Eckhardt, Tony Dojchinovski, and Kevin Palmer.

Since then, the band has sought to create a unique listening and visual experience for its audience. The improvisational nature of their shows and the works of art that both band members and friends create bring to life the ultimate vision that is Orents Stirner.

Free spirits Orents Stirner will be bringing their spontaneous and inspired blend of progressive and often psychedelic improvisational jams to this year’s FPSF and are one of many beloved local bands on the bill. We take a closer look at the inner workings of this mysterious band and shed some light on what makes them Houston’s Best Improvisational Band, as declared by the Houston Press Music Awards.

FPH had the pleasure of speaking with Russ Eckhardt, the well-spoken and extremely friendly drummer of the band, to dive deeper into the collective mindset of Orents Stirner.

Tell us the story of Orents Stirner. How did things get started? What are some of the band’s biggest achievements? What obstacles have y’all overcome? ¶ In the beginning, Orents Stirner sprang fully-formed from the head of Zeus, shortly after he and Odin had started a Residents tribute band with Anubis and Neptune. I think. I'm not sure. As I said, I wasn't there in the very beginning. But Orents is Fletch's baby—it's his vision that's driven the band since the beginning. I can tell you, though, that the impetus behind what we do is just living in the moment. Fletch would say, "Just be in the 'now' and see what happens." That's what we do when we play, we clear our minds and feel what flows.

I'd say our biggest achievement, besides being invited to play the FPSF, of course, is our big annual art and music show, MINDSET. Fletcher's also a visual artist. He paints and does screen prints and collages and things like that, and each year we invite other artist and musician friends of ours for a big show. We invite everyone we know and plenty more we don't, and everyone has a blast experiencing some amazing art and listening to some great music. This year's MINDSET was on April 27th at Super Happy Fun Land.

What inspires you to create? What inspires and moves the music forward? ¶ I can't speak for the other guys, but I think they'd agree with me in saying that we just love to hear the music we make. We never know what's going to come out of a session. We're all working stiffs and we all have families, so we only get together a couple/three times a month to jam. So for us, our sessions are like a musical recess from the daily grind. The five of us have very different musical backgrounds, so when we bring that variety to the table it's always exciting.

For example, I grew up a hardcore prog-rock drumming freak, listening to King Crimson, Rush, Yes, and the like. Fletch (vocals and guitar) is a huge fan of the Flaming Lips and Sonic Youth. Alex (lead guitar) is a little heavier, a little bluesier, into Zeppelin, QOTSA, Eagles of Death Metal. Kevin (keys, vocals, guitar) tempers all this with a slightly mellower sound. He's into indie rock like Grizzly Bear and Other Lives. Tony (bass) is from another planet and we have no idea what goes on in his head... I kid, of course. He's Macedonian, so, you know, he's got the trademark Macedonian sound that everyone knows and loves so well. So the end result of all this is King Lips Led Bear with a thick Balkan accent. Who wouldn't like that?

Where do you like to play in Houston? ¶ I think our favorite place so far has been Fitzgerald’s. It's legendary, of course. Rudyard’s is a favorite, too. And of course wherever we happen to hold MINDSET!

You guys are part of the FPSF lineup this year. Do you have anything special planned for your performance? I know the band is all about spontaneity... ¶ As far as something special planned, well, we improvise all our music so planning isn't really our forte. Ha! We usually have a bunch of broad ideas that we think might be exciting and just work from that when we hit the stage. Our set lists tend to have things like "Slow & Spacey in D" or "That Fast Thing Tony Did in A."

Any bands that you are particularly excited to see at FPSF 2013? ¶ Me personally, I'm excited to see The Postal Service mainly because I never thought they'd do anything together again, so that's great. Also Iggy and The Stooges because they're legendary. I really dig TV On The Radio, too.

Which local bands would you like to work with in the future? ¶ We've done a couple of shows with Ron + Cathy and that's always fun, so hopefully we'll be able to do that again. We've also worked with Eddie Mazariegos and Albas Serenatas. We played a benefit last year with The Flamin' Hellcats, those guys are freaking amazing and have such a great history with this city.

Your favorite thing about playing music/the music scene in Houston? ¶ It's the variety. There's so much demand for all kinds of music and new, weird kinds of music - which we excel at. Heh. **FPH**

Check out Orents Stirner’s music at https://soundcloud.com/Orents or find them on Facebook at https://www.facebook.com/OrentsStirner

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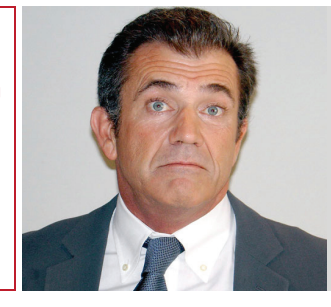
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This Is Not A Joke:

HE ORDERED A CHILI FRITO **PIE...** THE BOB BIGGER**STAFF** INTERVIEW

By Mills-McCoin

FPH / 05.13

COMEDY



THE NUMBER OF YEARS Bob Biggerstaff has been a stand-up comedian is irrelevant. What matters is that he's funny and, BY GOD, if he wants to excuse himself in the middle of an interview to take a shit because maybe ordering coffee and a chili frito pie at 59 Diner was a bad idea, then Bob Biggerstaff is going to do that very damn thing. Which he did. And it was hilarious.

Bob Biggerstaff has been hilarious since before he got a job as the doorman at the old gristmill on West Gray called The Laff Stop. Since then, Biggerstaff has added several television appearances including Comedy Central and HBO to his resume, along with performing at comedy festivals all over the U.S. and Canada. FPH caught up with Biggerstaff at the aforementioned 59 Diner to chat about the comedy scene in Houston and humor in general.

I know it's hard sometimes to pinpoint when your comedy career started or how it started but I was hoping you could give it a shot. When did the comedy thing start for you? ¶ My second semester of college, a comedian was coming to school, a guy named Steve Shaffer, and he'd been on An Evening at the Improv, etc. I didn't know who he was or anything. But I saw him at a table tent in the cafeteria in the dorm. He said to me, "Hey, you wanna be a stand-up comedian?" And I said, "Sure. This college stuff sucks."

When did you get the gig as the door guy at the Laff Stop? ¶ I started working there at the club, as a doorman, I guess at the end of '96. And there wasn't an open mic night, I just worked there. I didn't need a job because I had a day job, a warehouse job. But I wanted to try and do stand-up comedy and I didn't know how to do it. So, I figured get a job at the club for open mic night. Then they started open mic night and the guy let me host it. And I would host it all night, from seven at night until sometimes all the way to two in the morning.

Houston has reached a critical point wherein the city now only has one comedy club. We only have just the one. ¶ Yeah, it's pretty ridiculous. The fourth largest city in America has only one comedy club.

In your recollection, has Houston ever had just one comedy club? ¶ No. When I started working at the Laff Stop there was: the Laff Stop, The Comedy Showcase, Spellbinders, the Laff Spot... so that's four places. And just before I started working there, there was another Spellbinders. In the early '90s, up until about '93 or '94, there was like eight or nine places that did comedy.

How does Houston's comedy wasteland change the game for you? What's next? ¶ My plan is to start doing cruise ships.

Have you ever done that before? ¶ No. I'm going on my first one in May. For Carnival, of course.

What would you say to new comedians just starting out in Houston? ¶ As far as stand-up, just keep writing and get on stage as much as you can.

Is comedy an art form? ¶ Of course it's an art form, but it's comedy and it's silly. I would never call myself an "artist." Somebody else can if they want; they could say what I'm doing is "art."

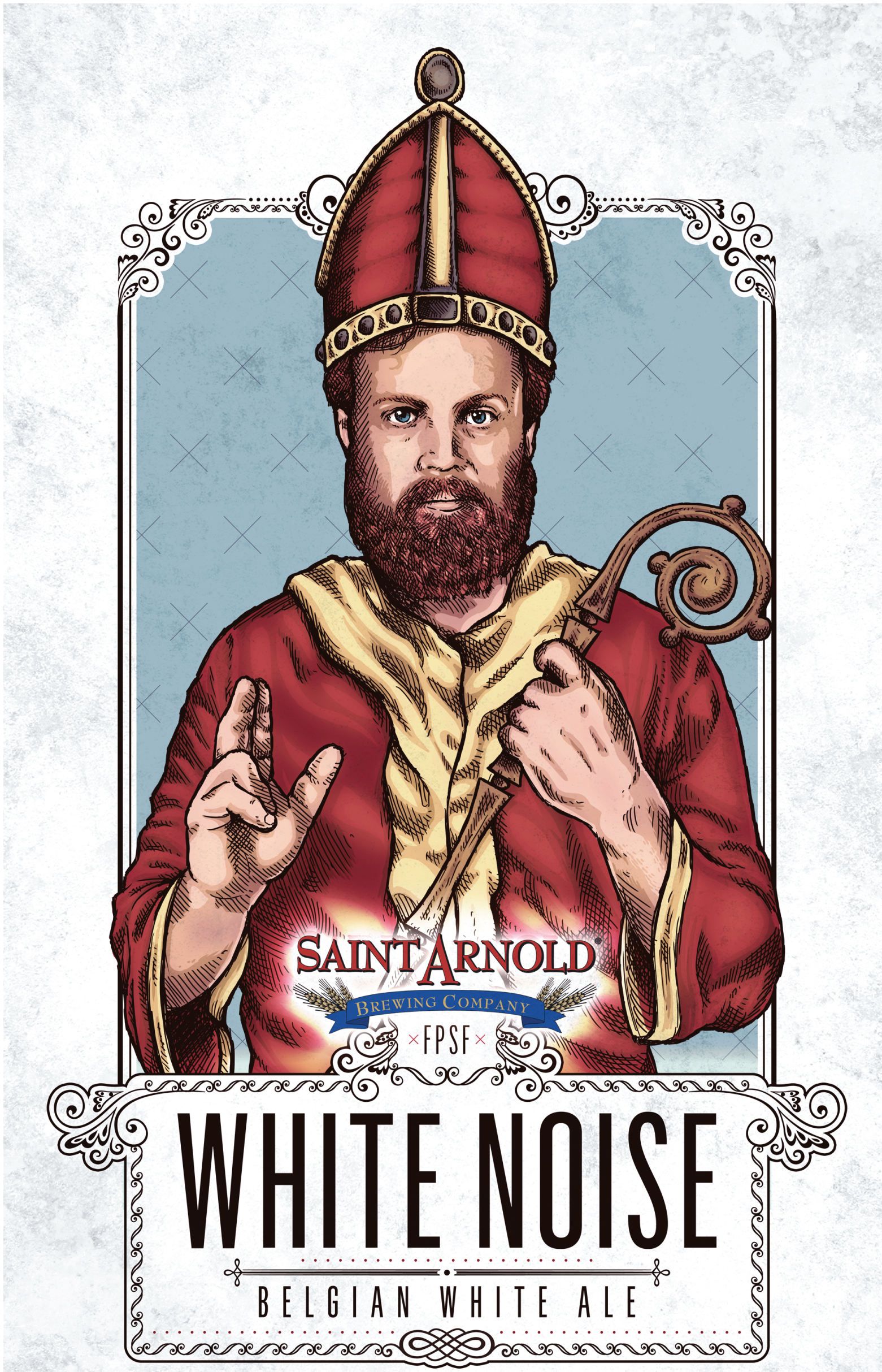
Why wouldn't you consider yourself an "artist?" ¶ I just say I'm a comedian. I mean, I guess it's like saying, "Well, if you're a baseball player, then you're an athlete." But don't call me "an athlete." Just call me "a baseball player." Does that make sense?
Sure.

Do you feel noble when you hear "artist" and terms like that? ¶ Yeah. And I can appreciate it if someone says, like musicians and people like that, when they say "I can't believe you do what you do." Because I'm like, "I can't believe you do what you do."

When you talk about all of those other art forms, here's where comedy is different. Artists often paint other people's paintings. Or they paint in someone's style. And all of that is okay. Musicians do cover songs. In comedy, you have to be completely original. You get no bonus points for doing other people's material.

Right. In fact, it's frowned upon. ¶ Yeah. Using a style, a lot of guys do that. You see a comic and think, "Oh he's obviously a Mitch Hedberg fan." But it comes down to what you're saying. With comedy, it has to be original.

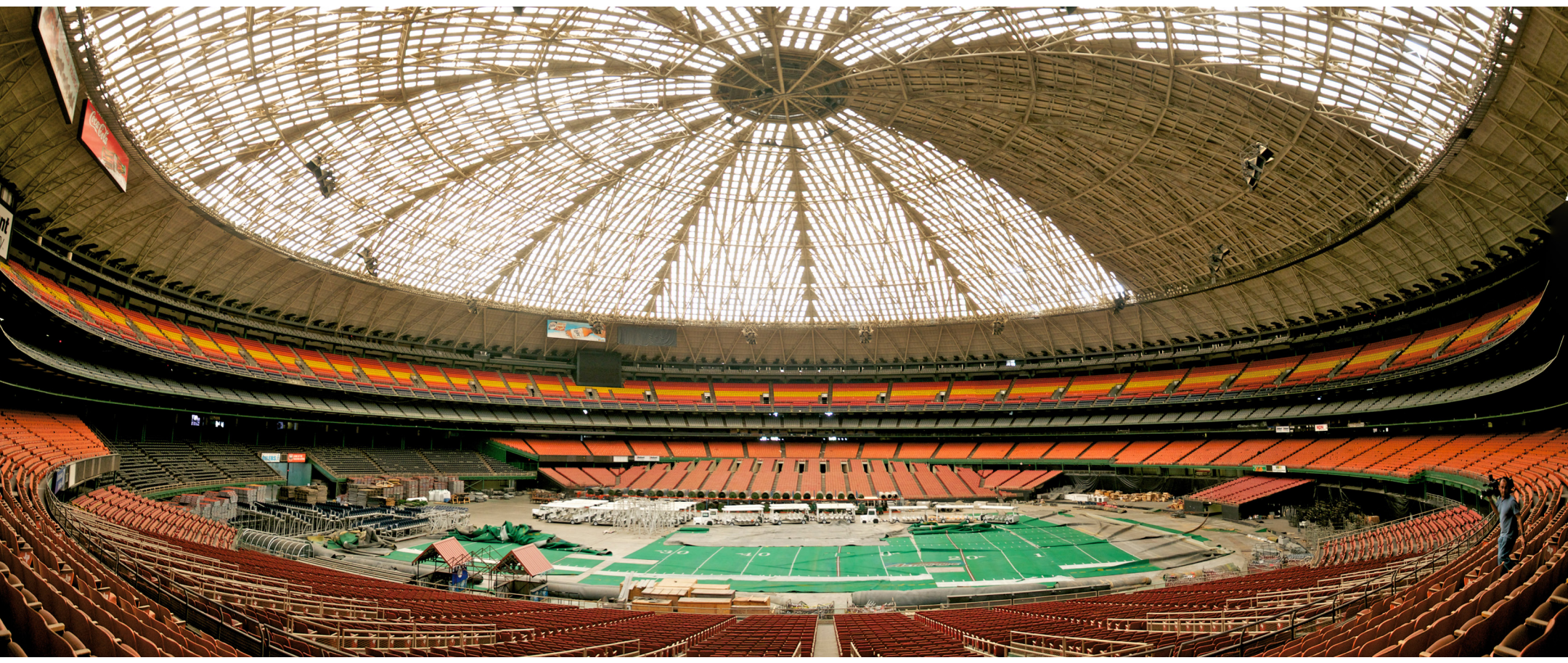
What's the future of comedy in Houston? What do you see happening in the next five years? ¶ I'm sure the Improv will be around because they never close. Hopefully, there's at least one, maybe two other clubs that open. I'd like to say "full time" comedy clubs—but even if it's just a weekend room that would be nice. But I don't know. It's not like Houston's going to suddenly be the hotbed for comedy in the country. I doubt that. But it's a big city and, like in all cities, the comedy goes up and down. **FPH**


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DOME OF DOOM

The Future of the Houston Astrodome



By Amanda Hart
Photos by Richard Ramirez II

IN 1965, the world's first doomed multipurpose building was born right here in Houston. Sorry, did I say doomed? I meant domed. The dooming part came decades later when the "eighth wonder of the world" sat unused and unmaintained for countless years. The Astrodome in its heyday was proof that Houston was ahead of its time. Houston is a city of growth but in order to continue that we need to learn how to incorporate our past.

In the early '60s our former mayor, Roy Hofheinz, was granted a major league baseball franchise after he promised to have a covered facility built due to the less than pleasant elements we experience in Houston. Turns out, it's not good business to expect your players and fans to bake in the sun or suffer through our tropical summer showers. The story goes that Hofheinz got the idea to build the Dome when he was visiting the Flavian Amphitheater, better known as The Colosseum, while on vacation. It was here that he learned that the Romans constructed awnings to protect spectators from the sun. When the Dome was completed in 1964, it stood 18 stories high and covered nearly 10 acres. And boy was she a beauty. Well, by Houston standards she was considered a beauty. We seem to have a fascination with ugly infrastructure and the Astrodome really brings the Houston landscape together. It could be argued that without the Astrodome, Detroit, Minneapolis, Seattle, New Orleans, and Indianapolis would never have had the pleasure of knowing their fully-domed stadiums. Many of the other domed stadiums have already met their demise or are in the process of being repurposed for other uses. Indianapolis imploded their RCA Dome in 2008. Their community of artists had a genius idea though and repurposed not only the roofing material but also used fabric from the dome to create messenger bags, wallets, clutches, and other unique goodies. Just imagine what sort of treasures we could create using the unforgettable orange vinyl seating still inside the Dome.

Over the last many years, numerous ideas have been tossed about by private and public entities as to what to do with the Dome. Everything from an indoor ski resort to a film studio to a converted green space has been considered. But after many years of rumors and speculation about the Dome's fate, we now, thanks to the Harris County Sports & Convention Corporation (HCSCC), have been given a timeline for the future of the Astrodome. HCSCC

has given public and private entities until June 10, 2013 to submit their proposals. All submissions must include viable funding options in order to be considered. In the past, lack of a firm plan for financing has been the main reason no action was taken. On June 10, HCSCC will narrow down the best proposals and turn those over to the Commissioners Court. According to County Judge Ed Emmett, who is one of the five judges residing on the court, they will begin the process of picking which option is best for Houston by June 25. Emmett stated that he believes at this point in the process, they will be ready to hold town hall-style meetings to receive public input on the final decision regarding the Dome. "If you go out now . . . you get as many ideas as there are people in the room," Emmett said. "We need to narrow that so that the public knows where we're going." Once a final option has been decided, the final decision will end up on a ballot possibly as soon as this November.

One proposal that has received some well-deserved attention came from a University of Houston architecture graduate student, Ryan Slattery. Slattery wrote his master's thesis about the future of the Astrodome. In the proposal, Slattery brilliantly concludes that the best use for the Dome is to make it green space while maintaining the bones of the structure as a monument. Slattery's vision is for the bones of the Dome to remain intact, such as the iconic domed roof. By removing elements such as the walls, seating, and the mezzanine, then planting trees and grass, Slattery has designed one epic green space. Slattery told KHOU, "What I propose is taking something that is ignored and avoided and turning it into something that can be experienced. If you don't need it, it does not need to be there. It is never going to be a stadium again. So, you don't need the seats. You need to take those seats out. Concrete on the facade? You don't need that. Leave what ultimately is the Dome. When people go to the neighboring Reliant Stadium for events, they walk around the Astrodome. Why not turn it into part of the experience? It can be like the Grove at Ole Miss. People can tailgate there or vendors can set up shops. It can be a flexible, functional space. With a project like this you get to interact with a piece of Houston's past that has been repurposed for Houston's future." This guy knows what's up. Not only is Slattery's proposal helping to create access to more green space, but it's also doing it in a way that tugs at our heartstrings by preserving a bit of our city's history. Along with this plan offering a place for tailgating, Slattery also proposed the location could be used as exhibition space and an outdoor grazing area for the livestock that visit every year during the Rodeo. To deconstruct the Dome would be far cheaper than demolishing it. How expensive can it be to plant some grass and trees as opposed to paving it over to be a parking lot?

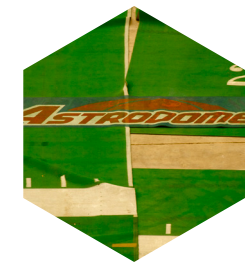
In the last month, countless articles have reported that all of this commotion is simply a way to get us to a place where we can demolish the Astrodome.You see, Houston has been selected as one of two cities in the running to host the 2017 Super Bowl. In an NFL news conference, NFL commissioner Roger Goodell was asked about a recent study commissioned by Texans owner Bob McNair and the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo in which they concluded it would cost $30 million to destroy the Astrodome and replace it with a parking lot. According to Goodell, "That issue is for the community to decide, but I think having an extra 2,500 parking spaces would enhance Houston's bid." Boom. Game over friends. If you remember correctly, the only reason Houston got a light rail in the first place was because we hosted the 2004 Super Bowl. If we were willing to spend $300 million on a light rail that ended up causing more problems than it solved to get the Super Bowl here, one can assume that the chances of the Dome making it out of this battle alive are slim to none.

Currently, the Astrodome stands as a reminder of what Houston once was and, depending on the Dome's fate, what Houston has become. We have a knack for razing historic buildings and building something new or replacing them with parking lots. The Astrodome was the first of its kind and showed our ingenuity as a city to the rest of the world. Very rarely do Houstonians put up a fight when it comes to preserving our history in building form. We often look the other way when historic buildings meet their demise and actively brag about our weird no zoning laws. This time though, our hearts are telling us that the Dome deserves better and should remain intact in some way.

Any native Houstonian over the age of 25 more than likely has very distinct memories of climbing the cement walkways to their seats and cheering the Astros or the Oilers to victory. We might remember eating turkey legs from the comfort of our orange seats while artists like George Strait or Reba McEntire serenaded us with terrible '90s country music from their revolving stage during the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo. Some of us might remember being a kid, covering our eyes as bull riders and calf scrambles did semi-abusive things to the animals they rode, chased or wrestled to the ground. And who could forget the childhood memory of ending every event by rolling down the large, grassy hill that surrounds the Dome leaving you quite itchy but willing to run back up it and do it all over again. Okay, so maybe those are my own fond memories, but I guarantee you that we all have childhood memories similar to those. Our memories and appreciation of the Astrodome extend far beyond childhood antics and resonate with people long after it had been abandoned.







Dave Maclean, published author and founder of the Poison Pen Reading Series, reminded me about one of the last ways in which the Dome was used. "My favorite memory of the Astrodome is after Katrina. The place was flooded with people—the floor awash in cots and piles of belongings. The people who donated food were Krispy Kreme, Chick-fil-A, and Coca-Cola, so the place stank of bodies stuffed full of sugar and fat. There was tension, anxiety, and fear everywhere, but it was a badly needed refuge for people. The Astrodome opened itself up to the dislocated people of New Orleans. Compare this to Joel Osteen who wouldn't open the doors of his megachurch to house any refugees, and I realize that the Astrodome was more giving, more charitable than even Houston's most famous Christians," said Dave. Dave's favorite memory is not an uncommon one, which proves that the Astrodome's impact on us as a community reaches far beyond hot dogs and sporting events. The Astrodome, in many ways, represents who we are as a city. Let's just hope we find a way to repurpose the building so our children can be allowed to make their own memories in the "eighth wonder of the world."

FPH





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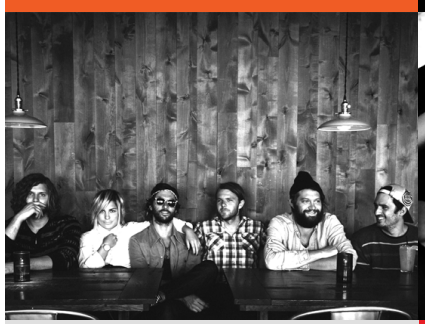
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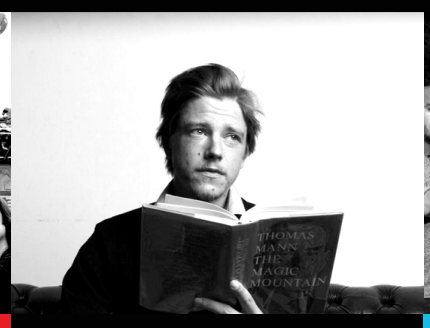
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Interview:

GLORIA MEDINA ZENTENO

President and Founder of Barrio Dogs, Inc.

By Amanda Hart / Photos courtesy of Barrio Dogs

HOUSTON HAS A NOTORIOUS HOMELESS ANIMAL population and, over the years, this problem has only become worse. Although homeless animals seem to wander all over the city, the problem appears to be of particular concern in Houston's East End. Barrio Dogs, a grassroots nonprofit, was started by the concerned citizens of the neighborhood. The organization is not only feeding and housing these helpless animals but also reaching out to the community through education about proper animal care and the importance of spaying and neutering our pets. FPH caught up with Gloria Medina Zenteno, president and founder of Barrio Dogs, to discuss the critical and important work they are doing in Houston.







How did Barrio Dogs come to be? ¶ I moved back to the East End in 2003 after living away for several years. As I traveled through the neighborhood, I began to see homeless dogs everywhere: pregnant mamas, dogs that were sick and starving, dogs that had been injured. I made the terrible realization that there was no one out there to help these animals. I started working with rescue groups but soon saw that rescue would never end. Also, rescue work did not begin to address the roots of the problem like residents who were too poor to afford to spay and neuter their pets or didn't make it a priority. In 2010, I founded Barrio Dogs for the purpose of providing education and raising awareness.

What services do you provide to the community? ¶ We're not a service organization—our mission is community education. Through education, we hope to transform our community's attitudes about proper animal care and the importance of spaying and neutering their pets. We talk to residents about why there are so many homeless and unwanted animals around them, which we think are: 1) people who are not able to or don't know how to take proper care of their pets, in particular the importance of spaying and neutering them, and 2) a lack of accessible, low-cost or free spay and neuter resources.

Our educational work takes place throughout the community in area parks, ice houses, community centers, and schools. Our message is consistent: the only solution to animal overpopulation is to spay and neuter pets. To that end, from 2010 to 2012 we spayed, neutered, and vetted approximately 400 animals, including many rescued and sick homeless dogs, free of charge. Our fall 2012 FixIt East End Spay Neuter project fixed an additional 205 dogs and cats belonging to low-income residents free of charge and we plan to repeat FixIt in 2013 and spay and neuter even more animals.

Our Youth and Paws (YAP) programs where we go into area schools or community centers, often with a therapy dog, are crucial to improving the future for the animals around us. We hope that teaching children to respect and take proper care of their pets and the animals around them will make them responsible pet owners later in life. Also, in many cases the lessons children learn at school about proper pet care are passed on to their parents and siblings at home.

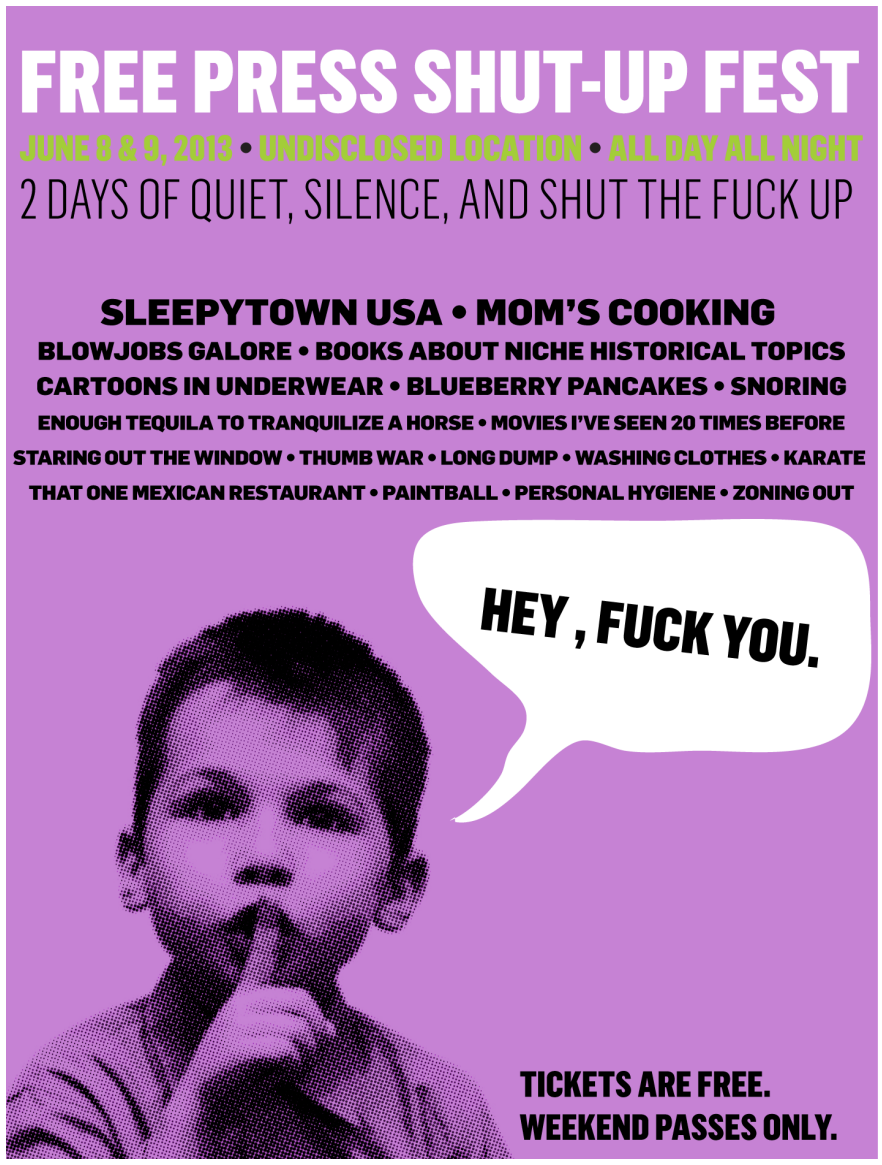
Our Barrio Watchdog program educates residents about animal protection laws and encourages them to report animal abuse or neglect in their neighborhood to the authorities. Our goal is to empower residents to take action when they see animal mistreatment.

Finally, while we are not a rescue group, we have rescued some dogs that were in especially bad physical condition, nursed them back to health, and found them foster or permanent homes. We have a few dogs living in a boarding facility and are always trying to find them and our foster dogs permanent homes. We have implemented a program called "A Home for All" to bring volunteers in to work with our boarded dogs since animals living in boarding become less adoptable the longer they live there.

What is the current state of Houston's homeless dog population? ¶ I can give you an idea of how bad it is by quoting some facts and figures. However, facts and figures don't show the suffering these animals must endure or how terrible it is to live in an area where you see homeless and unwanted animals, many of which are sick or injured, on a daily basis.

- In 2012, 13,226 dogs and cats were euthanized at BARC, the city animal shelter (figure does not include thousands more euthanized at the SPCA, Houston Humane Society, CAP, and Harris County Animal Control).
- Approximately 1.2 million homeless animals live on Houston's streets.
- Over 60 percent of residents surveyed in the East End, Near Northside/Fifth Ward, and East Houston/Settegast think stray and loose animals are a problem in their community.
- Only 5,000 dogs were spayed and neutered free of charge by the City of Houston in 2012.

What help does Barrio Dogs need from the community? ¶ First, we need for the broader Houston community to be aware of and understand the situation and encourage their local elected officials to come up with a better solution. We think the City of Houston's current animal control strategy, which relies on euthanizations and adoptions, isn't working. We need a better plan for Houston that focuses on community education and free and low-cost spay and neuter for pets belonging to residents living in areas hardest hit by overpopulation. Secondly, we need for people to donate to FixIt, our free spay and neuter project, or to Barrio Dogs. We do not have a steady source of income and have to work hard to raise all the money we spend on vetting and fixing animals. We have many kind and generous supporters but if we had more money, we could do so much more for the animals in our community. **FPH**


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RELIABLY RED

Why Texas Won't be a Swing State Just Yet

By Alex Wukman / Illustration by Shelby Hohl

THE RUMORS AND SPECULATION started almost as soon as the last ballot was filed in November 2012. This wasn't the normal political tongue wagging of who was in or out or starting to look good for the next race. These rumors were more electric and promised something that many could only dream of: a blue Texas.

Texas as a swing state has been the dream of many Democrats and progressives since Republicans took the keys to the Governor's Mansion in 1995. It's the goal of the well-funded and well-connected group Battleground Texas and has filled more column inches than State Senator Jane Nelson's proposals to drug test welfare recipients. The talk has even spooked the head of the Texas Republican Party, who recently sent out a fundraising letter solely to combat attempts to put Texas' 38 electoral votes up for grabs.

While progressive groups have been hyping Texas' sizable Hispanic population as the sleeping giant that will allow Democrats to be competitive statewide, they have been overlooking some of the main obstacles along the route to a blue Texas. This careful omission of demographic difficulties has let too many people in liberal circles forget Chuck D's immortal words on believing hype. As any first year poli-sci student knows, one of the main problems with trying to win an election is that "eligible voter" doesn't mean active voter.

A Pew Center analysis of eligible Hispanic voters in 2012 found that over 9.5 million Hispanics reside in Texas and 26 percent of all eligible voters in Texas are Hispanic. The Census Bureau estimates that Texas will have approximately 900,000 additional voting age Hispanics by 2016. Admittedly, that sounds like an impressive untapped resource that could sway many elections. What the people trumpeting the power of the Hispanic electorate fail to acknowledge is that, unfortunately, demographics break in complicated ways.



While nearly 40 percent of Texas' population is Hispanic, only 44 percent of those Hispanics are eligible to vote. Conversely, 78 percent of Texas' white population is eligible to vote. It's not just the lack of eligibility in the Hispanic population that will hamper attempts to turn Texas blue; it's the community's low turnout rate. A separate Pew Center analysis of the 2008 election results found that, nationally, 66 percent of eligible white voters went to the polls compared to 50 percent of eligible Hispanic voters.

Part of the discrepancy in voter turnout rates can be explained by the age difference between the two groups. With about one-third of eligible Hispanic voters in Texas in the 18 to 29-year-old age range the demographic skews young. The white demographic skews older—nearly 40 percent of its members are over the age of 45. Because of low voter participation in younger age groups, the disproportionately youthful breakdown of Texas' Hispanic population all but guarantees that any attempt to turn the state blue in the immediate future will be met with resistance.

Demographic data predicts the population of Hispanics in Texas will continually increase to the point of accounting for nearly 40 percent of the overall Texas population by 2024. However, a large portion of that growth will be from continued immigration, both legal and illegal, decreasing the proportionate number of Hispanics eligible to vote to only 30 percent by 2026. Although, more could be eligible if some manner of immigration reform is passed.

The problems in trying to turn Texas blue aren't limited to the Hispanic population. Any attempt to flip the state before 2020 will have to address the love white Texans have for Republicans.

While white people currently make up only 45 percent of Texas' population, they vote overwhelmingly, 75 percent, for Republicans. This creates a massive discrepancy in county vote tallies throughout the state. In 2012, President Obama performed incredibly well in the 30 Texas counties with a large Hispanic population, even carrying Dallas and Harris counties.

In Texas' other 224 counties, Mitt Romney kicked Obama's ass, averaging a lead of over 50 points. Unless liberal organizations start making inroads with rural whites, Texas will stay red because it's really hard to carry a state when you only win 12 percent of the counties.

Demographic issues aside, any attempt to flip Texas that doesn't consider Texas' history of voter disenfranchisement is doomed to fail. This is a state where all levels of government have attempted to prevent everyone from minorities to active duty military from voting. For the last few years, voter disenfranchisement has primarily meant voter ID laws. While Texas' restrictive voter ID law were struck down in August 2012—because 2.6 million Texas residents lacked a state-issued ID, including 1.3 million people who lost it because of state surcharges—that doesn't mean disenfranchisement is gone.

Disenfranchisement tactics range from misinforming voters about election dates and times to reducing the number of polling locations in minority and low-income areas in order to increase wait times. The movement to turn Texas blue isn't just in trouble from demographics and dirty tricks; it also faces the very real problem of trying to play a rigged game.

While it is considered cliché to talk about redistricting and gerrymandering, for those unfamiliar with the Texas' history of creatively drawing congressional districts a refresher course might be in order. Past congressional districts have followed highways to unite wealthy suburbs while bypassing poor areas.

Recently State Senator Eddie Lucio, Jr. of Brownsville noted that the redistricting map drawn by the Texas Legislature in 2011 and subsequently thrown out by a federal court gave white people control over 72 percent of Texas' congressional districts. While the court-drawn maps are slightly better, it's still very difficult for a progressive candidate to win.

A large part of progressive candidates' problems stem from the fact that Texas congressional districts are designed to dilute communities of interest by counterweighting areas that vote liberal with those that vote conservative. The desire to make it harder for Democrats to win is why large portions of Montrose and the Heights are in a district with conservative strongholds like Kingwood and Humble. It's also why two areas known for their gay population and dedication to the environment are represented by Congressman Ted Poe, who co-sponsored a Constitutional amendment banning gay marriage and legislation preventing the EPA from regulating greenhouse gases. **FPH**

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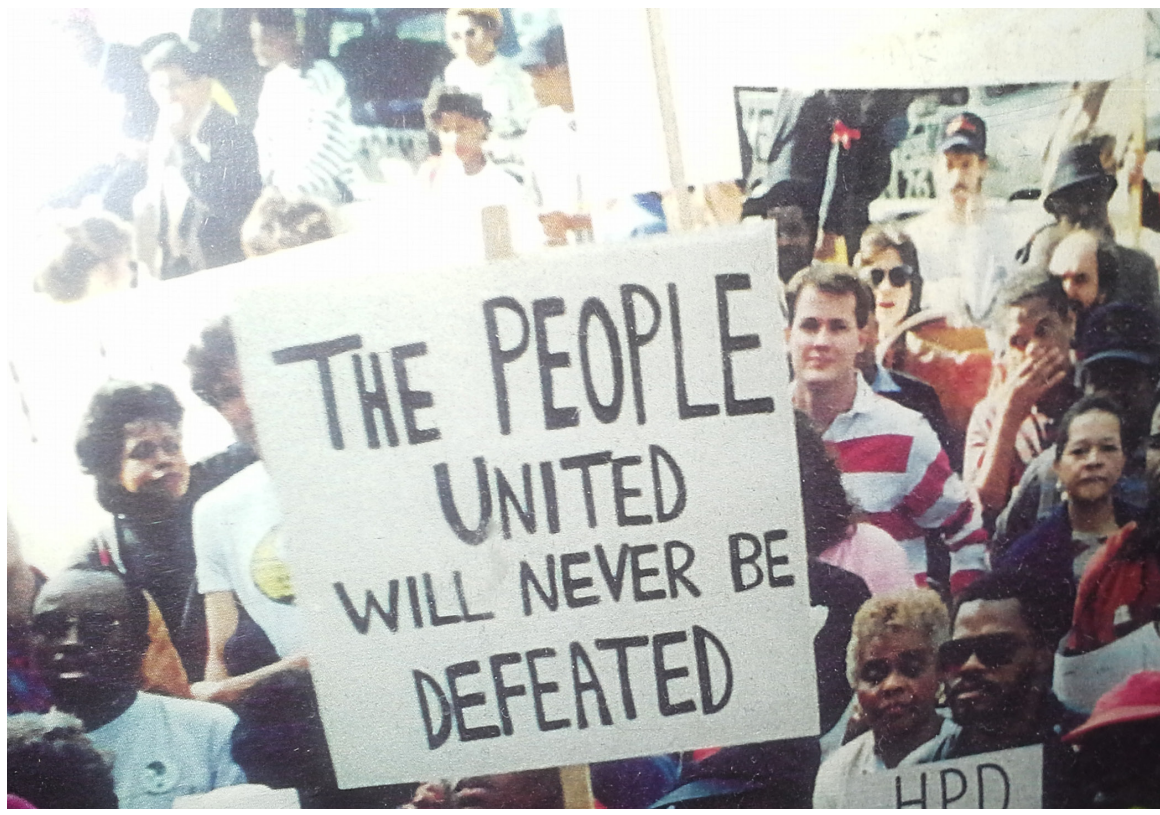
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THE SHAPE COMMUNITY CENTER

By Nick Cooper







IN FEBRUARY, IT WAS ANNOUNCED that the all three properties of Third Ward's prominent black cultural institution, The S.H.A.P.E. Community Center, valued at over $1 million, had been sold for $81,000, in order to pay fees on some copy machines that had been leased and repossessed years ago. When members of the community started to panic, director Deloyd Parker responded with a calmness informed by a lifetime of adversity and struggle, saying, "We aren't going nowhere."

Longtime board member and SHAPE supporter Ed Banks wasn't so sure. "Deloyd had a lot more faith than a lot of us," he said.

"We had all our prayer warriors and everybody," Ms. Blu, a volunteer at SHAPE, said. "I drove like seven people there."

They met at SHAPE, said a prayer, and left for the courthouse chanting: SHAPE ain't going nowhere, nowhere, SHAPE ain't going nowhere!

"There ain't no power like the power of the masses and I think they understood that," says Deloyd. "And if they didn't, we had the elders down there at the civil courthouse, ready to do whatever was necessary. A 91-old-year man, an 87-year-old woman—we went down there not to go to court, but to declare victory."

Deloyd's calm prediction ended up being right—attorney Ben Hall helped them win back all three properties. In fact, in the end, the people trying to auction off the buildings paid off the SHAPE Center's entire debt over the once-leased copiers. This wasn't Deloyd's first rodeo. Directing the SHAPE Center since 1969, Deloyd is accustomed to turning adversity into victory.

"The copy machine issue was a wake-up call for people who stopped giving to SHAPE on a regular basis like they have in the past," said Ed Banks. "Deloyd has a hard time asking for money but people need to know. We're asking for people in the community to invest in the future. If everyone who has been through SHAPE gave $5 every month, we wouldn't need to ask for money."

Origins

Before starting SHAPE, Deloyd worked with other community members, including Mickey Leland, in the "bottoms" of Third Ward out of his house, against apartheid in South Africa, and on behalf of oppressed apartment renters.

"SHAPE Center evolved from the civil rights movement—from the black liberation movement," said Deloyd. "The SHAPE Center came into existence so we can strengthen families."

Deloyd remembers Mickey Leland fondly, speaking of his commitment as an anti-apartheid activist to lie down on the runway at Intercontinental Airport to block South African Airways from landing there. "He was gonna do it," says Deloyd, "but they backed off." Terminal D at George Bush Intercontinental Airport is now named after Leland.

Deloyd worked with the Riverside Ministerial Alliance, seven progressive churches that helped open SHAPE and pay the bills. Deloyd made sure there were no strings attached. "We were uncompromising," said Deloyd. "People had to accept us for who we were. One thing we found out—when you stuck to your guns, there was a lot more respect people had for you, even your enemy."

"I was a Pan-Africanist, so I decided to name it 'S.H.A.P.E.—Self Help for African People through Education.' One of the first programs we started was a free breakfast program. That was one of the Panther's programs. That free breakfast program was important because that's how we got to the hearts and minds of the working class. They had to eat in the morning."

Two other programs were the Sons of Africa and the Daughters of Africa to help enhance identity and self-love. Their pledge was written by a child, Titus George:

- I pledge my allegiance to Africa, land of my of my forefathers' birth.
- I would never give up my birthright to the richest continent on Earth.
- I pledge my allegiance to Africa, so that one day she may bring all of her children into the warm comfort of her black bosom, giving us the security and confidence that we have not known in over 400 years.

"He's a grown man now but he wrote that when he was about 12," said Deloyd. "He was a little poet. He grew up through SHAPE and became a very productive and progressive brother in the community."

Working for the Community, in the Community

On any given day at SHAPE, several activities are happening simultaneously. Students are working on projects in the classrooms, dancers are rehearsing, people are using

the computer lab, handicapped and elderly folks are being attended to and, at the center of it all, Deloyd goes from one person to another trying to make sure they get what they need. "We deal with a lot of people with mental issues," says Ed Banks. "They come by SHAPE and Deloyd deals with them on a daily basis. He always seems to know what button to push to get done what needs to be done."

Mr. Banks has been involved with SHAPE since the '70s and has seen the collaborations that transform into long-term commitments. Sitting in the circle, different projects are considered and people speak up when they want to get involved in one. For example, the campaign to win freedom for death row exoneree Clarence Brandley took collective, hard work that happened over a 10-year period.





Ms. Blu has decided to become SHAPE's number one volunteer. "I challenge anybody else to beat that," she says. "I've been involved with SHAPE for over three years, since I got a ticket and had to do some volunteer work." She answers the phone, picks up children, makes sure that volunteers do the work that's needed, cooks vegetarian food for the elders, and helps folks in the enrichment programs find jobs and places to stay.

"When I came here, there was a lot of things to be done and I haven't left yet," she says. "We have a lot of diverse groups: Muslims, Catholics, Christians. We have death penalty, abolition, capoeira, volunteer work, African dance, food co-op for fruits and vegetables, raw cooking classes, black psychiatrists, lawyers, math tutorials, the libraries, Kwanzaa, Pan-African cultural festivals... SHAPE is a living museum of knowledge that has been kept from the world."

SHAPE has even established an NGO in Gambia, setting up computers, building wells, educating children, and contributing to other progressive projects.

Freedom Tour

Every year, SHAPE takes a group of children on a freedom tour, retracing the civil rights/black liberation movement. Ed Banks is currently sitting on one of the committees raising money for this year's tour in July. "The reason we go is, a people without a knowledge of history is like a tree without roots," says Deloyd. "Children who don't know how they got to where they are will be wandering in the wilderness."

Every year for the last 24 years, in a bus, with 40 children and 10 adults, a group from SHAPE travels to Jackson, Mississippi to where Medgar Evers was killed and then on to Selma, Alabama where Bloody Sunday took place. While in Alabama, the group also visits Birmingham to learn more about the four young girls who were killed during the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing, as well as a stop in Montgomery to visit the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church to become better acquainted with the life and work of Rosa Parks, Dr. King, and Reverend John. From there, the group moves on to Tuskegee for the Booker T. Washington/George Washington Carver experience. Other stops on the trip include: Little Rock, where the Little Rock Nine desegregated their school; Memphis, to see the temple where Dr. King gave his last speech; and Mound Bayou, Mississippi, an all black town in the Delta where black doctors had to do their internships when they weren't allowed to work in the white hospitals. The tour ends in Money, Mississippi where Emmett Till was killed. The children meet with Emmett Till's relatives, talk with his cousin, and visit the store where he allegedly whistled at a white woman.

Circle of Interdependence

The SHAPE Center building at Live Oak and Alabama has a large round room in it called the Enomoyi Room. On the walls hang the flags of countries with significant black populations. Set up in the center is a ring of forty or more chairs in a large circle. This circle is the shape of decision-making at the center. There is no head or point, it is a circle of interdependence. "A circle is a symbol of life, says Deloyd. "There's no beginning and no ending. So, we made the circle of interdependence, which means:

I am because we are
we are therefore I am
there is no me without you
and there's no you without me

Deloyd was inspired by an African proverb he likes to tell:

Some children were sitting around when an elder came along and said, "I've got a game we're gonna play. I got a whole lot of of baskets of sweet fruit under that tree a mile from here. Out of you 30 children, the one that gets there first gets to have all the sweet fruit for yourself."

They got excited but then they thought about it. They grabbed each other's hand tight and they ran and they all got there together because they were connected to each other. When they got there, they sat in a circle and they all ate heartily those sweet fruit.

An old man said to one of the children, "Son, if you had run there first, you could have had all this sweet fruit for yourself!" And the child answered, "Baba, how could I be happy if everybody else is sad?"

Modeling an institution on such a proverb is a sharp contrast to other schools and institutions.

"In America," says Deloyd, "there's that individualism—me-ism. There's no we-ism. Obviously, we're fighting that every day and we gonna be fighting it."

This is what Deloyd describes as African socialism, as opposed to textbook or European socialism. "African socialism is a way of life," says Deloyd. "It's not something that's created. You don't say, 'I'm gonna be a socialist.' With us, embracing self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, it has to be embraced through this culture as well."

The copy machine incident was one of the many examples of SHAPE being threatened or otherwise in conflict with the capitalist system. Organizing inside the larger culture, there are limits to how far these alternatives can reach.

"We know there's gonna have to be a revolution," says Deloyd. "I'm not crazy. I can fight all day. I can pray all day. I can work hard all day, but ultimately we're gonna have to turn this thing upside down, 'cause right now, it's not working. All we're gonna be doing is applying band-aids for the rest of our lives unless we recognize it."

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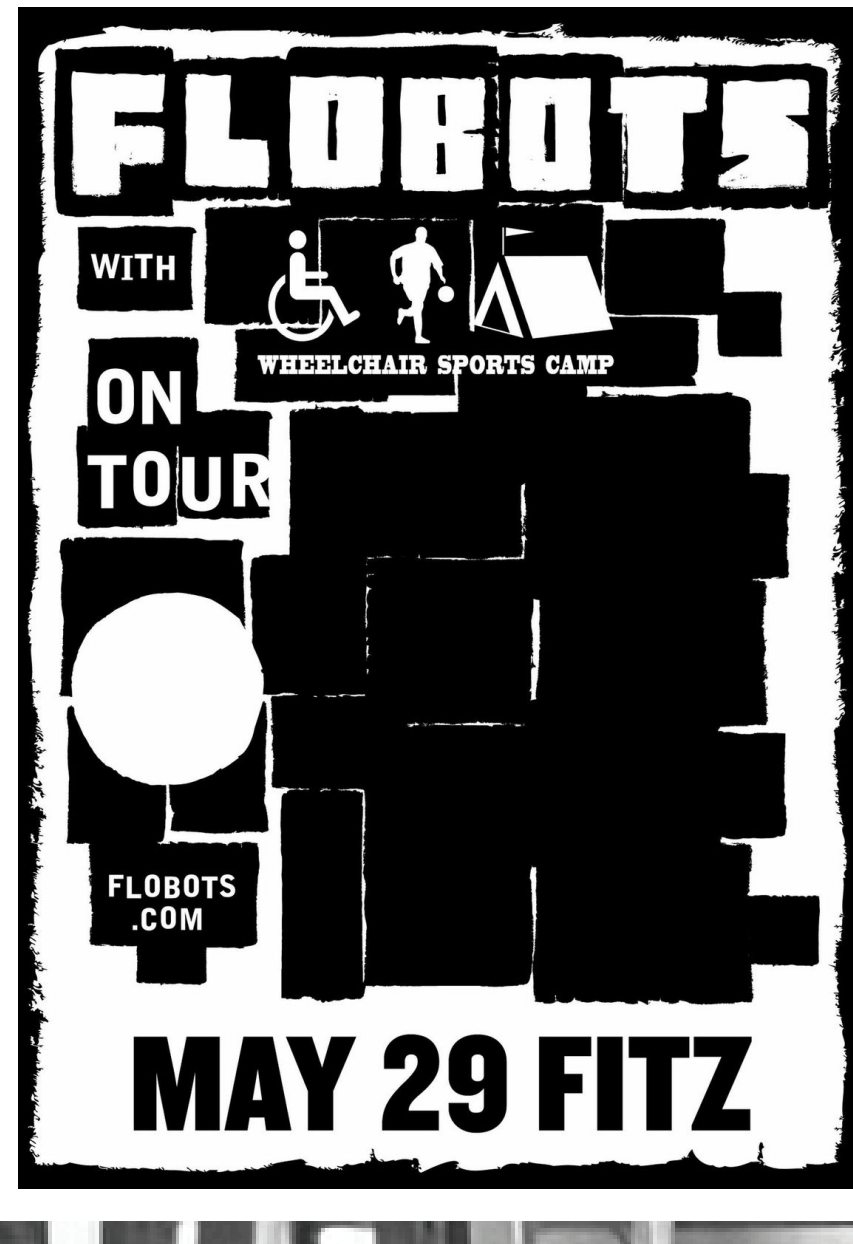
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ABBEY RODE ALREADY GONE

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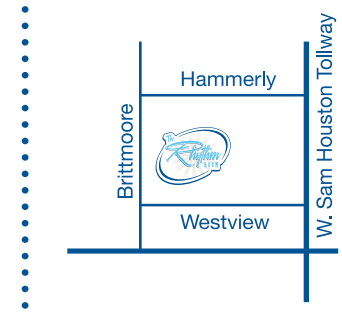




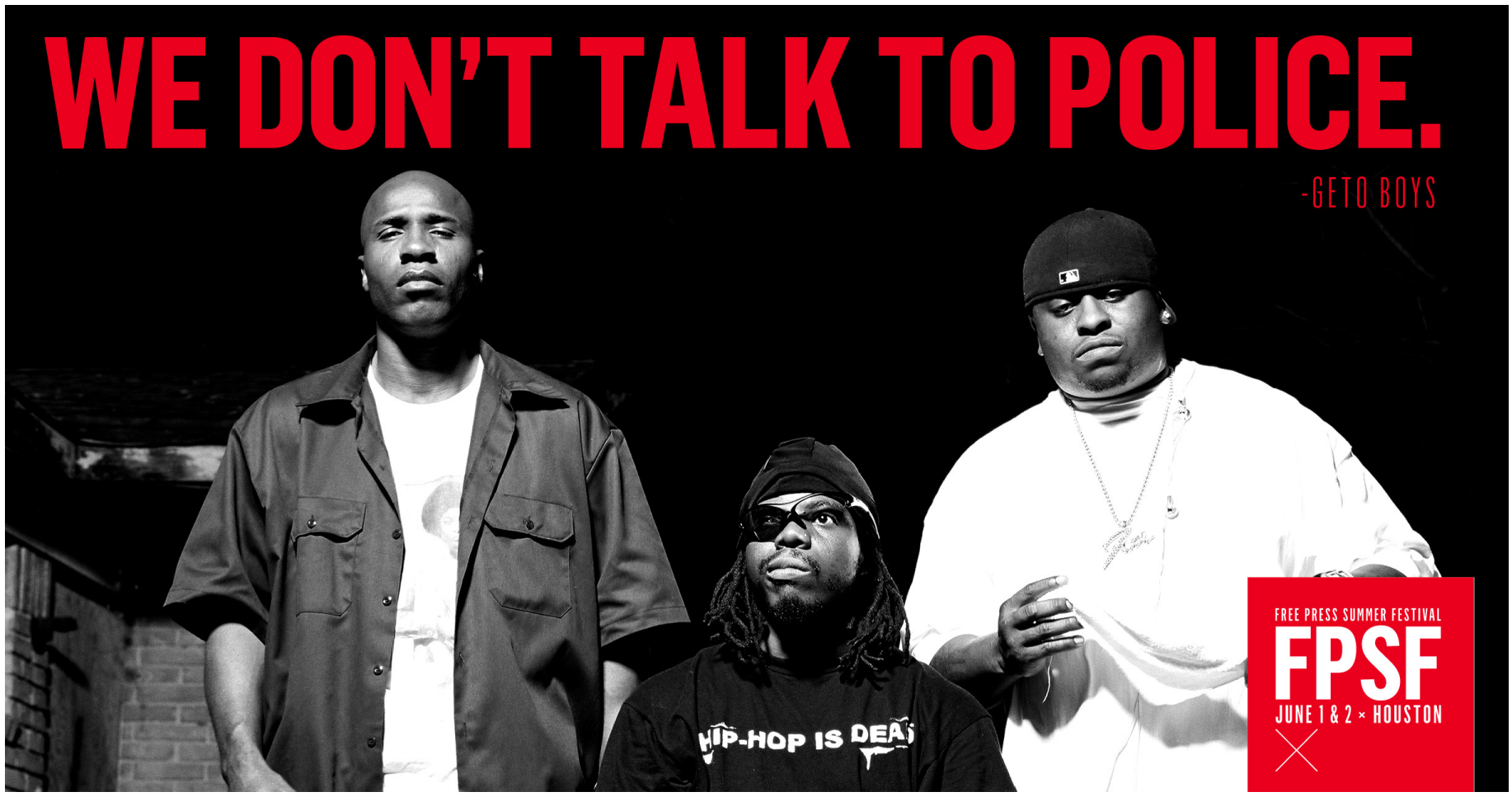
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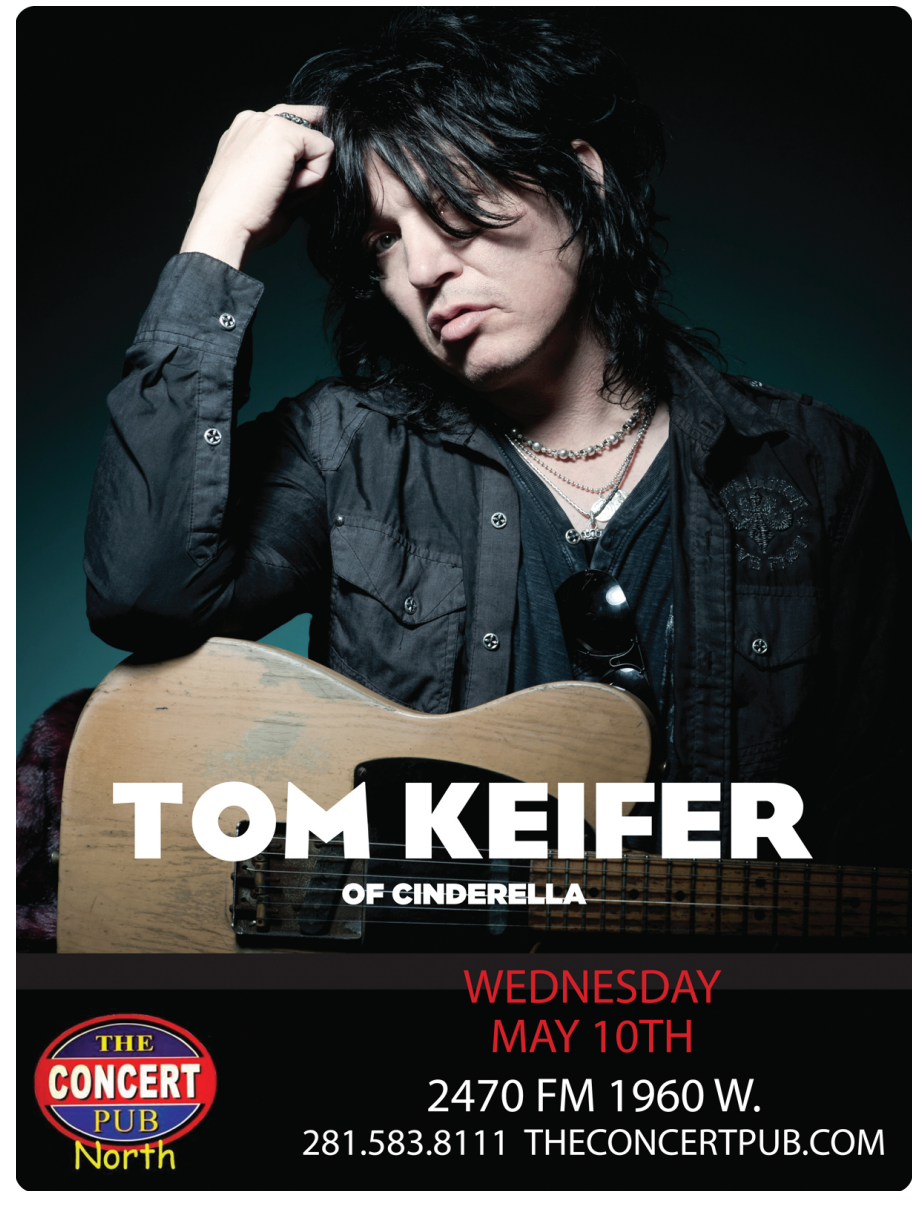
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IN 1998, MARA LEVERITT WROTE the award-winning book The Boys on the Tracks. In 2002, Leveritt released her findings on the West Memphis Three (Devil's Knot), a book that would eventually become the essential guide to a widely publicized case involving three young boys who were wrongfully convicted in the murder of three children. Now, over 10 years later, Leveritt continues her fight for justice for not only the young men in this case but for others who have also been wrongfully convicted. FPH had the pleasure of speaking with Leveritt about an array of topics including her writing process and her stance on the war on drugs.

What drew you to writing about true crime?
I've never been interested in true crime. I don't read it as a rule and I don't really care for it. I have always been interested in the behavior of our public officials and that has focused me on police, courts, and prisons. So in that way, I have always been looking at how those governmental entities are operating and, of course, with regard to the courts, a lot of what they do has to do with criminal matters. I became interested in the way that some criminal cases in my state were not perceived in a way that made any apparent sense to me. In those cases where I could not connect the dots between what the police were doing and what the outcome in the courts were, those were the cases I looked harder at until I could either satisfy myself that I had just misunderstood or I needed to learn something or, in fact, there was something amiss. But in those cases, I just tried to pursue further and further until I did figure out what was going on.

You've said that you approached writing Devil's Knot feeling completely neutral toward the case. What convinced you that the West Memphis Three didn't commit the murders?
I started writing Devil's Knot after I had seen the paperwork in the West Memphis Police Department file and read the transcripts of the trial and saw no evidence that these guys were guilty. I started writing from the point of view of "Where's the evidence?" As I wrote and learned more about the ways that those two trials and the investigation unfolded, I became personally convinced that it would've been just about physically impossible for those three to have committed the murders.

Have you ever been fearful or apprehensive about reporting something you've uncovered?
The only time that I have ever been fearful enough to report a concern to the police was when I was notified by a person who worked in a court and for a judge who told me that the judge on whom I had been reporting was eventually removed from the bench. That judge had gathered his court officials around him, including some armed bailiffs, and said, "Let us pray that God strikes Mara Leveritt dead." She told me that and under the circumstances, [con-



Interview:

MARA LEVERITT

Author of "Devil's Knot: The True Story of the West Memphis Three"

By Will Guess / Illustration by Blake Jones

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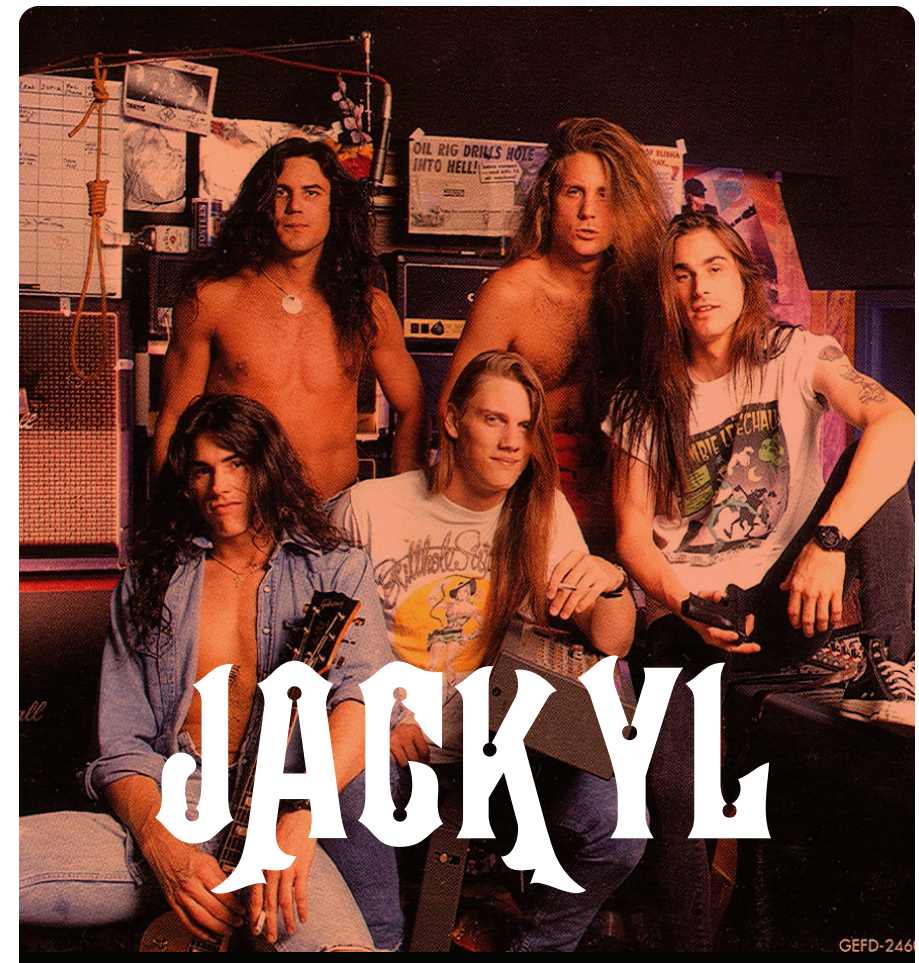
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sidering] what I was reporting about the judge, I took that seriously and notified the police that I just wanted them to know that had happened. Later on, there was a hearing about the judge by the state commission that manages judges and that woman testified at the hearing [about what] he had said and done. And not just because of that, but also because of other things, he was removed from the bench. So I've reported on a lot of crooks and killers but the one that concerned me the most was a judge.

Has anything happened with these cases since publishing your work?
I wrote my first book, The Boys on the Tracks, and I think it was published in 1998. That case still arouses interest. In fact, a reporter called me about it yesterday. I think there is going to be a film about that. After I completed that book, events have continued to unfold, not that the killers or killer of those boys has been identified, but certainly it's far from any conclusion that I would like to see. The things that I have reported on are real events in real time so the people involved are still, by and large, living and carrying on. In the case of Devil's Knot, since that book came out, tremendous new discoveries have been made and, of course, the West Memphis Three were in prison when I wrote the book and stayed in prison for a long time. Now they're out and there is still a lot of interest in seeing those men exonerated and seeing the state of Arkansas investigate who actually did kill those children. So nothing stops.

In the documentary "West of Memphis," the film seems to give the impression that a lot of the evidence points to Terry Hobbs. What are your personal thoughts on Hobbs? Do you think he did it?
No, I never go there at all because that's not my place. That is something that, again, is the official responsibility of the state of Arkansas to investigate. The state right now has done two contradictory things. They have said, "We have gotten confessions from these three men stating that they killed those three boys and we are satisfied with their confessions - satisfied that they did commit these murders and they have pleaded guilty." And on the very same day that they said that, the state turned around and said "...And so we are letting them all out of prison." It's a ridiculous stance and I maintain that it is a dereliction of the state's responsibilities to the families of those victims and to everyone else involved. I don't feel that I am in a position to say who's guilty and who's not, but I will say, as I have from the very start, that the murders were not properly investigated and were not properly prosecuted and that remains true to this day.

Do you think that the state is doing this because of money issues?
Prosecutor Ellington acknowledged as much. He said that that was a consideration in letting them go from prison, which I believe was a consideration. But it does not support the decision to let them out of prison. That doesn't make any sense either. So I think what we've got here is a real cynical position. The state was considering a lot of practical options if a new trial was ordered, but they knew they probably wouldn't be able to win it. So they said, "We're going to let these guys go." Well, if you believe that they were guilty enough that you were going to try to execute them at one time, why are you now willing to let Damien Echols and the other two walk out of prison? It's very, very cynical. Money, yes. Saving face is another factor.

How often do you think wrongful convictions happen?
A lot. We're seeing that all over the United States right now. DNA is proving it in a lot of cases and then there are all of those other cases that were not based on DNA evidence that we may never know about. I think what we're seeing are a lot of people being released from prison when it's indisputable that the convictions are wrong.

You seem to be a pretty big opponent of the war on drugs. What do you think is the starting point for turning around one of the biggest failures in history?
That's an interesting question. I think that courage on the part of everyone who has ever smoked marijuana would be a good place. As we're seeing now with the gay rights movement - that started with a lot of people coming out of the closet and saying I'm gay and people realizing "My gosh, he doesn't have four heads." We have seen, since the beginning of that, a very rapid change in the politics concerning gay rights in the country. More people who have smoked marijuana need to come out and say, "I smoked marijuana like thousands and thousands of other people who got caught and were sent to prison, and I managed to hold a job and not be a criminal in other ways." With their personal experience, refute the government propaganda that it's a gateway drug, it's a slippery slope, you're going to be shooting up heroin and meth and robbing banks and killing people if you start on this. I think it would open the door to a responsible discussion of drugs but as long as everyone is terrorized by the war on drugs, which is the case now, that that club is so heavy and the punishments are so strong it's squelching democracy. People are afraid to talk. So that's one thing. I also think that economics is ultimately going to change the discussion as well because every state knows we cannot keep on affording to manage these prisons on the scale we have because of the war on drugs. If we stopped trying to incarcerate everybody for drugs because we can't afford to, there's going to have to be some other explanation and some further discussion and some other rationale for why now we're changing course. I think that's probably the more likely way for this to unfold. **FPH**



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