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Charlotte 2025 Music Issue

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BUILDING A DIY MUSIC FESTIVAL FROM SCRATCH ♢ PG. 4

KRYSTLE BALLER GETS MEDITATIVE ON NEW SOLO PROJECT♢ PG. 6

NEW RELEASES FROM A SLEW OF CLT MUSICIANS ♢ PG. 17

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Copperhead Island is home to Camp Spectacles DIY music festival. Via Google Maps

KEEP IT CAMP

Camp Spectacles DIY music festival returns to Copperhead Island

BY SPENCER HORTON

You know what's cooler than a DIY house party? A DIY house party that lasts three days.

But what happens when you want to go even bigger?

Why not rent out an island and hold a whole DIY music festival?

That is the basic line of thought behind the creation of Camp Spectacles, a three-day festival of music, culture and camping that's set to return to Copperhead Island on Lake Wylie for its second year in August.

It was just four years ago that Abdul Smith started hosting small shows at his apartment in Charlotte.

What began as casual gatherings with friends led to him meeting and building a network of artists, musicians and creatives through the city's DIY scene.

That momentum eventually sparked a bigger idea.

After hosting a birthday celebration on Copperhead Island, Smith got the idea for Camp Spectacles, a free, three-day DIY music festival that came to fruition with the inaugural celebration in 2024.

"It was sort of a random moment of inspiration," Smith said. "I had my 22nd birthday on Copperhead Island and then I started that same year doing the house shows, so I just married those two things together."

This year's Camp Spectacles is set to take place on Aug. 29–31 and will feature acoustic performances, volleyball, face painting, vendors, tattoo artists, overnight camping and more.

Entry is free, with free food also available for attendees throughout the weekend.

Live music and a sense of community

While the full lineup for this year's Camp Spectacles has not yet been released, there will be some returning acts including Charlotte rockers StraightJacket, which closed the first night of performances in 2024.

"These shows always stuck out to me for the sense of community they bring," said Mason Cutshall, the 19-year-old frontman of the band. "It was always more than a music show and more of a big hangout with really cool people and really cool bands.

"These shows allow people to be surrounded by like-minded creative people and experience art in a really fun and eventful way," he continued. "Not only does Abdul bring the music but also the community."

It's that sense of community that Smith and his co-organizers have striven for in creating Camp Spectacles.

Smith told us that the free entry, free food and other experiences are designed to relax the mind in an age when anxiety and tension is at an all-time high.

"If everything is taken care of, I don't have to worry, and then that sort of lowers my guard to where I'm able to better connect and build bonds with other people," Smith told Queen Clty Nerve. "I want people to feel taken care of and feel empowered to take care of other people after they leave the event."

Smith said he has drawn inspiration from footage of Woodstock and other events during the 1960s, an era that he believes has parallels to the current climate with the way young people are stepping up to protest against war and government overreach.

He isn't doing it alone, however. Smith's co-organizers, fellow Gen Z Charlotteans Brennan Wooden and Sonnie Zayzay, have helped shape this year's event, bringing experience and their own ideas to the planning process.

Wooden is working as the event curator while Zayzay has booked DJs and worked on designing the festival ground.

Wooden said she would like the event to serve as a unifying experience in a city where creatives and others are too often siloed in their own circles.

"It really all comes down to community," she explained. "Seeing all kinds of people enjoy a common thing and enjoy each other, get out of their comfort zone, listen to new kinds of music, meet new people and see you can have fun without being put into a box of what you should be doing."

"I hope people take from their experience at the festival a sense of hope in community and the strength in numbers," added Zayzay.

Last year's Camp Spectacles came together in just two months, an experience that Smith described as chaotic and stressful but fulfilling.

This year, the team started planning just after Halloween, coming off a sprawling Spooky Spectacles party that comprised three parties in one at the former Area 15 campus off East 15th Street.

With increased planning time this year, the team has made several improvements to the Camp Spectacles itinerary, scheduling the event later in the summer to reduce heat, setting up water misting lines for attendees to cool off and

"Keeping people cool last year was a really big challenge," Smith said. "We had water and soda and other drinks on ice for people, but still, when you're out in the heat for hours, it can wear.

"The main thing that's always a challenge is organizing gear and understanding what gear people need," he continued, "what people are able to bring and what we'll need to source from a third party or something."

He's also aiming to make the festival more environmentally sustainable, utilizing eco-friendly materials to print promotional fliers and other literature that can then be folded into planters and sowed into the land with seedlings of one's choice.

As for the entertainment, this year's biggest addition is a two-night rave held at a lakeside property near Copperhead Island.

DIY or die

For Smith, the creation of Camp Spectacles is one more example of how creatives in the city who insist there's nothing fun to do should be stepping up to organize events themselves.

"I feel like the city would be boring without the DIY scene," he said. "It can be very stale and overly polished and I think that the DIY scene adds, you know, substance and it adds depth and it gives it texture."

Kenyon Irvin is a guitarist and singer for Charlotte-based alt-rock band Beauty, another returning act from last year's festival.

He agrees that DIY is what keeps Charlotte's cultural scene thriving, which may be why he refers to last year's festival as the coolest show he's played in his musical career thus far.

"Shows like this one are only possible through lots of people coming through and spending their time or money, if not both," Irvin said. "Independent events are so important for the community and us artists because it puts us much closer to you. Local places can feel like a middleman sometimes and they don't provide anywhere near the amount of fun or whimsy.

"For the community, it's great because it's inexpensive, everyone is welcomed, and you're usually going to find more entertaining shows than you would going to the usual live music spots," he continued.

Amplified music isn't allowed on Copperhead Island, a 14-acre piece of land located in the McDowell Nature Preserve just east of the South Carolina border.

Smith said has worked with the park ranger to ensure that everything is in compliance. As someone who got his start as an event organizer hosting shows in his Charlotte apartment, he's no stranger to cultivating a stripped down sound from the acts he's booked.

"This year we're expecting more people, so we'll see, but we're encouraging everyone to be on their best behavior," he said.

Smith says the most rewarding part of organizing shows is giving creatives a chance to flourish. He's a music fan after all, so putting on shows is one way to create the scene he wants to live in.

"Anyone who does music and performs and puts out music, I have an immense respect and admiration for because music is something that I've always been a fan of and enjoyed," he said.

While this year's Camp Spectacles event is expected to see growth, its future is uncertain at the moment. Smith is planning to leave Charlotte at the end of this year.

He said that, even when he's living elsewhere, he hopes to support the DIY scene from afar.

"One thing that I want to do after I leave is to see if I can do some type of fund or sponsorship or something where it's like, 'Okay, I'm not here, but I still have a connection to this city and so here's sort of just, a fund [with] money or gear or whatever for the people here who want to continue stuff on in the DIY scene."

For those who may be interested in picking up the torch to keep Camp Spectacles going or organize a similar event, Smith has some advice.

"Try not to be afraid, but even if you are scared of doing a show, still do it scared," he said. "I think a personal thing that I've found to help me navigate through things is to try to find a love for the work of it and not necessarily the outcome of it. Find what act of service you enjoy doing for others and really just go hard at that and the rest of it will sort of just work itself out."

Camp Spectacles will take place on Copperhead Island, located at 15200 Soldier Road on the banks of Lake Wylie, from Aug. 29–31. Follow Abdul Smith on Instagram at @_abdulsmith_ for updates as the festival nears.

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[From left] Ronda Linton, Max Kimpson and Mary Lee O'Daniel celebrate MAB's 91st birthday. Photo by Ryan Pitkin

SHORT-SIGHTED

Metrolina Association for the Blind faces cuts after grant program terminated

BY RYAN PITKIN

Max Kimpson remembers the moment when he realized something was wrong with his vision.

It was the summer of 1985 and he was a freshman at Morehouse College. He and some friends were playing football on the green when a pass came his way. He remembers how it left his field of view despite being right in front of him.

"All of a sudden, I saw the ball, it disappeared, and then I saw it again," he recalled. "That's when I knew something had happened ... something was going on."

That something would turn out to be retinitis pigmentosa, which refers to a group of inherited eye diseases that affect the retina and cause a progressive loss in vision over time, though he would go misdiagnosed for years before learning the true condition that affected him.

Kimpson would go on to graduate and work with the federal government for 27 years — first at the National Institutes of Health then the Environmental Protection Agency. In 2023, he was forced into early retirement after his vision regressed to the point where he no longer felt he could do his job effectively.

He was living in Charlotte by that time, having moved south during COVID, where he became involved with Metrolina Association for the Blind. The organization has changed his life since then through its training and peer support, allowing him more independence than he has ever known during his adult life.

"It was immediately a lifeline for me because I didn't have these tools before," he said. "I was stuck stumbling around at home in the house, and you become a little isolated because I don't want to ask my wife or my kids to do everything. This way, with the resources and the help that I received, now I can walk independently."

Metrolina Association for the Blind (MAB), which marked its 91st birthday in June with a celebration at its longtime facility on Louise Avenue in the Elizabeth neighborhood, has helped countless clients like Kimpson live more independently over generations of service.

The organization now faces a period of transition, however, after learning earlier this year that a grant from the county that had provided hundreds of thousands of dollars to MAB wouldn't be coming this year.

Facing a $29-million budget gap going into the Fiscal Year 2026 budget-making process, Mecklenburg County terminated its Community Service Grant program, which had provided more than $2 million to organizations like MAB that provide health care services to vulnerable populations.

MAB was awarded $340,000 in each of the last two fiscal years and this year had applied for more than double that as the need for its services continues to grow in the Charlotte area.

Leadership at the organization had hoped they would receive the original amount of $340K even if denied the extra. They had met all the necessary metrics laid out by the county, so learning that the entire program would be cut this year was a shock to them.

"When you apply for a grant, there's no guarantees with anyone that you're going to receive the funds — none," said Tracy Libertino, CEO and president at MAB. "So we're always mindful of the fact that we're going to have to adapt if that's the case ... The challenge is, in Charlotte, the need here is growing exponentially but the funds aren't."

MAB served 1,320 individuals in 2024. Libertino estimates that the community service grant helped the organization reach around 600 more people than it could have otherwise.

There are currently hundreds of people awaiting services on the organization's waiting list. When the list gets that large, they stop adding people, which means the need could be greater than they know.

Libertino says MAB is serving around 8-12% of the vision-impaired population in Mecklenburg County at any given time, which is a commendable number but one she hopes to bring up in the years to come.

"[People say,] 'Wow, these are huge numbers,' but I'm thinking, 'Oh my gosh, that's horrible,'" she said. "I can only reach 10% of the people that need me and these folks really need our assistance. They're living in isolation. Anybody that was isolated during COVID understands what that does to you if you can't get out and do things. That social aspect of your life is a really critical one."

Real impact at Metrolina Association for the Blind

A major point of emphasis that we heard from both clients and staff at Metrolina Association for the Blind (MAB) during our recent visits was that folks who struggle with vision impairment can do anything sighted folks can do, they just have to do it differently.

MAB helps teach clients those different skills with services that range from cane training and technology workshops to providing resources like talking remote controls and watches with large numbers on them.

There are also support groups that help clients connect with a community of folks going through similar struggles.

Queen City Nerve spoke with Ronda Linton, who worked in an Atrium Health emergency department for 23 years before a brain bleed robbed her of much of her vision in 2021. We met her as she made her rounds greeting friends at the organization's 91st birthday celebration in the facility's parking lot on Louise Avenue.

She described how she had been depressed and ashamed as she struggled with vision loss in the beginning.

"If it hadn't been for this center, I wouldn't have met a lot of these people, I wouldn't have went any further because I was so down about it," she recalled. "I couldn't drive. I couldn't do things that I normally do.

"I had to get used to using a cane, which at the time, I was ashamed to let other people see me using it," she continued. "I guess when you think you're up here and then something happens to you and then you feel like you're down at the bottom, when you get depressed, you can't really find your way out of it."

Dr. Laurie Hoffman, MAB's onsite optometrist, has been helping Linton relearn how to read using a magnifying machine.

While the training and care she received at MAB were a major help for Linton, she was also lifted up by participating in support groups — specifically one hosted by Mary Lee O'Daniel.

O'Daniel worked as a social worker at MAB for many years before retiring in 2012 at age 68. Since there was no one to take her place in leading the support groups, she stayed on, continuing to host support groups to this day at 81 years old.

Queen City Nerve heard from a number of people who credited O'Daniel with helping them out of their struggles with depression or other anxieties.

For her part, O'Daniel, who has been legally blind since she was 13 years old, said hearing people leave her meetings in a better place than they arrived is all the payment she needs for her tireless work.

"I love doing it. I love seeing people blossom," she said.



MAB CEO and President Tracy Libertino. Photo by Ryan Pitkin

O'Daniel always ends her sessions by asking folks what part was most helpful to them. There's one answer in all her years helping folks that sticks with her to this day.

"In this particular time, one of the ladies said, 'I learned I don't have to spend the rest of my life in my bedroom.' Oh, wow. That hit me hard, because she had not said that before."

O'Daniel said she has been through times when money was tight for the organization, and it's always a tough thing to see.

"I was having people die on the waiting list because the waiting list was two years long. That's what it is now," she said. "That's just a horrible thought, especially for the case managers and the social workers who are having to tell these people, 'I don't have anything I can offer you right now.'"

While vision loss affects folks of all ages, it is prominent among older people, affecting around one in 10 people aged 75 or older.

With Mecklenburg County expected to see its population of residents aged 65 or older double over the next two decades, the need will only get more urgent.

Libertino expects tens of thousands more residents in Mecklenburg County alone will need MAB's services in the years to come. She and her team are currently focused on how to raise the funds to meet those needs.

While the organization's accessible documents services agency — which translates official documents such as bank statements, credit reports and the like into Braille, audio and large print — funds much of the vision rehab services, that business is not growing at anywhere near the rate that the population with needs for services is.

Libertino and her team are currently working to create a more traditional nonprofit funding model that relies on donations to reach more clients.

"We historically had not really gone to the public like most nonprofits would and only living off contributed revenues," she said. "We're a 90-year-old organization that doesn't have this huge donor base because we were able to fund what we were doing. That was the culture. We're trying to transition."

For folks like Ronda Linton and Max Kimpson, MAB has been a lifeline — one that they want to see continue helping others like them in the future.

"This building, we need this place," said Linton. "There's a lot of people and a lot of children that we need to be able to help. They need all the funding they can get."

Visit the Metrolina Association for the Blind website to learn more about the organization and how you can help at mabnc.org.

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'Cutting Ties' (Cartoon by John Cole. Originally published by NC Newsline)



A production view of Krystle Baller's song "Litha's Treasure" from a recent exhibit. Photo by Lora Denton

IT'S ALL CONNECTED

Krystle Baller's new solo project is rooted in immersive art

BY ANNIE KEOUGH

In shamanic mediation, shamans use an introductory drum beat to pull you into a spiritual journey and a closing beat that calls you back out.

The repetitive, rhythmic beats throughout the meditation lure the listener into a trance state, guiding their spiritual bodies through grief, loss and healing.

For Krystle Baller, that trance state gradually built through the beats of what would become the local musician's first solo album, *Dust of the Self*.

"I just felt like I've never had a creative download like this before where I couldn't think about anything else," Baller said. "I barely slept, I barely ate and I just had to get all the music out of me. It was a solid week and a half of just putting all this music together"

The 45-minute electronic shamanic journey was originally born as a short soundscape for the upcoming immersive exhibit at Arts+ titled Chromatic Roots, which features similar projects from a number of local producers and musicians. However, the project took on a life of its own in Baller's hands.

What resulted is part musical project, part novella, part environmental meditation.

Released June 13, the new concept album follows the story of a janitor who discovers roots growing out of the old church basement he maintains. When he clears the roots, he creates space for previously repressed life to flourish, immersing him into a world rediscovered.

The janitor's general story originated in the Discord channel where Chromatic Roots collaborators were discussing a baseline for the exhibit's thematic soundscape. The more music Baller wrote, however, the more the story came to them.

Growing up in West Virginia, Baller always had a connection with nature. When they started regularly hiking in 2021, they would listen to intelligent dance music artists like Aphex Twin, Bonobo and Boards of Canada, linking music with the meditative act of walking among nature.

The janitor's discovery of a new world amidst the stagnation of everyday life is Baller's "sonic offering to the sacred wild," they explained, a culmination of years of hiking, living and connecting with themselves through nature.

"Everything just lined up for this moment in time and the album itself," Baller told Queen City Nerve. "The journey of the janitor, I wrote the story and then started seeing myself in the story of things that I've gone through, of dealing with grief, dealing with loss, of finding joy in these spaces and finding a childlike send of wonder, and that's the feeling that I wanted to invoke with the music."

Chromatic Roots and Meow Wolf

Known as SuperDaftBros, creative manufactures Ian McCormick and William Baucom build custom props and replicas, often designed in collaboration with displays or work by local visual artists.

Three past collaborators include Arko, Luvly Moon and Rebecca Lipps, and now that group of five Charlotte creatives has reunited, working with artist and project manager Cat Babbie to spearhead the Chromatic Roots installation at the Arts+ Community Campus facility at the former Plaza Presbyterian Church on The Plaza.

Held in collaboration with art gallery Activation Studios, also located on the former church campus, the Chromatic Roots installation will explore the fight against apathy and stagnation. It's set to open on Aug. 1.

Organizers will direct 30 artists in transforming the century-old church basement into a subterranean root forest. The janitor — and exhibit patrons — will journey through the different biomes of the new world, from forest to desert to ocean and all the mysterious nooks and crannies in between.

Amid the artists' representations of a world rediscovered, the installation follows the narrative that anyone can be a hero, McCormick said.

"Anyone can change the world around them somehow, not necessarily by doing drastic actions but by taking smaller acts," he said.

The organized chaos of Chromatic Roots follows the principles of Meow Wolf, an arts company creating large-scale, immersive exhibits that allows patrons to explore exhibits that exist more like complex, creative movie sets than just art hanging on a wall.

"There's definitely this rise in creative, artistic spaces and immersive experiences," McCormick said. "And we know that there is an interest here in Charlotte and we are trying to foster it in whatever way we can."

In 2008, Game of Thrones author George R.R. Martin purchased an abandoned bowling alley in Santa Fe at the behest of a group of alternative artists called Meow Wolf, who then renovated it into The House of Eternal Return, an exhibit that the group described as "a science fiction story that leaps off the page and becomes your total environment."

It was in this spirit that the team behind Chromatic Roots set out to reimagine the space they inhabited at the Arts+ Community Campus.

"It's a unique expression of artistic interests, of narrative feelings," McCormick explained. "It's like you're almost walking through a movie [or] an escape room that makes you feel like the world has meaning or the world can be a better place again. It's just whatever you want it to be."

While Chromatic Roots was inspired by the essence of Meow Wolf, the fun part is that it allows the individual participating artists to bring their own experiences to the installation, creating an amalgamation of different perspectives that meld together more fully than would occur in a curated art show with separate pieces.

"It's something that is hard to capture in just an art gallery," McCormick said. "I think that this broader medium allows us to explore that better."

McCormick acknowledged that the group's previous shows had lacked an impactful sound presence, but they knew just who they could turn to in Charlotte's creative scene to fix that.

According to Babbie, Baller was the first person the curators thought of to create a soundscape for the exhibit.

"There was no question, there was no debate," Babbie said. "It was whatever Krystle Baller wants to do, we want it."

"Krystle really gravitated to this and I can't tell you how it totally changed the game for us," McCormick added. "Krystle brought this, like, energy and this human element to the whole narrative."

Even to folks who don't necessarily follow the narrative and just want to see some cool art, Baller's soundscape taps into an emotionality that makes them feel like there's something deeper, explained Babbie.

"It's perfect for the space and it's perfect for the narrative," she said. "It's mysterious, it's familiar, it's, as the highest compliment, infinitely repeatable."

Baller's songs will be included among other original soundscapes produced by Charlotte artists playing in different biomes throughout the exhibit. Local producer and DJ Simon SMTHNG, for example, has announced that he has created some original work to contribute to the score.



From Krystle Baller's most recent immersive exhibit at McColl Center. Photo by Lora Denton

Nature and music in perfect harmony

Baller has a form of the neurological condition synesthesia, a phenomenon that utilizes multiple senses to process the things around you. Baller's iteration of the condition creates different sounds for different colors.

They don't hear the sounds in their ears but in their brain, they explained.

"It's not even a sound I can sing. The pitch is lower than I can say with my throat."

Thanks to synesthesia, Baller can hear the varying pitches given off by different surroundings. The frequency among the greens and browns painting the woods have lower tones than brighter colors, allowing Baller to "hear" the sound a desert or forest would make.

Though the pitches can be overwhelming in large crowds — people make different sounds, too — they act as a starting point to find accompanying notes with Baller's instruments.

"I think because my brain works differently, I can hear what I need to do," they said. "I can tell if [the sounds are] in harmony or disharmony ... it's very intuitive."

As cofounder and creative director of music and film nonprofit We Rock Charlotte, Baller has become intimately familiar with music performance and production to the point of now hearing melodies in their head and knowing exactly how to manipulate the sounds of their computer to achieve them.

Baller also used panning techniques to imbue spiritual meaning into the album, signifying past and future — though that technique may take a pair of earbuds or surround sound to really make out.

For example, if the sound of a bird is flying to your left, that could mean that it's looking into your past. If it's flying to your right, it's looking into your future.

In "Mother's Well," Baller manipulated an audio clip of someone doing a cannonball to sound like a sharp clap. In the beginning of the song, the clap moves from right to left, smacking you back into your childhood. At the end, the clap smacks you back to the present, moving from left to right.

The spiritual journey that begins and ends with Baller's varying versions of shamanic drums in the new album acted as a catalyst for healing; both within themselves and those around them.

Bridging the gap through music

Baller's music allows them to explore the different facets of themself through diverging sounds. They use their bass guitar and lead vocal position in feminist punk band Hey RICHARD to express their political opinions and social justice advocacy through words, detailing their coming-out story to an unaccepting family in the band's song "Coming Out."

When Baller came out to their conservative parents seven years ago, they disowned them. Over time, however, Baller and their parents began to heal that relationship, a process reflected in the janitor's journey.

While Baller was working on the album, they visited their family in West Virginia for their niece's graduation.

"I just had a really healing, good visit with my mom and my dad ... [And they got] to know my wife better," the said, referencing local visual artist Elizabeth Palmisano. "It was just a really healing thing for me."

One night, Baller and their mom stayed up until 2 a.m. talking outside when a storm rolled in. The rain and wind rattled the wind chimes, creating a beautiful cacophony of sound.

Baller recorded that moment and included it in "Forgotten Road," a track off *Dust of the Self*.

"My superpower is music and that's what I wanted to do, not for anybody else, but honestly, I just needed to go through the process myself so I could get to a place of deep forgiveness [and] gratitude for the people that raised me," they told Queen City Nerve.

Because of Hey RICHARD's feminist values and political ethos, Baller found that by writing instrumental music they could bridge the gap between what their family would and wouldn't listen to.

"I found a peace and a joy in writing instrumental music," they said. "I could ... speak to anybody, no matter [what] they believe, how their values are different than mine. And coming to that peace happened halfway through making [the album].

"I'm seeking radical joy," they continued. "Joy is an act of resistance and I refuse to put people on the left and right; I'm honestly sick of both. Like, we have to find a way to bridge a gap."

Though Baller still can't justify the reaction of their parents when they came out, they realized it was their way of showing Baller love. Their parents were freezing Baller out as a way to damn Baller's soul.

But their parents are also the people who instilled the values Baller carries today. The work Baller does with children through We Rock Charlotte is directly impacted by the work their dad did with youth.

Baller has decided to look past their parents' politics and focus on the fact that they're human beings, the same ones that taught Baller to care for people at a young age.

The last song of Baller's album, "All Roads Return," compiles small pieces of all the other tracks from Dust of Self to create a circular spiritual journey strengthened by the healing each listener endured.

Writing the album shifted Baller's headspace, making them realize that most people are good. Like the janitor, people can change the world simply by showing up and doing their best.

Baller has built a beautiful life with Palmisano in a house surrounded by trees and peace. No matter the state of the world around them, they chose to fix it by starting with themself.

"That's all that I can control is myself, and I don't want to continue the way that we're continuing," they said.

"So I'm going to live outside of this divided capitalist system and make art and have a life that I love and no matter what happens, at least now in the present moment, I can feel secure in my decisions."

Listen to Baller's first solo album Dust of Self on Spotify. Chromatic Roots is set to open at the Arts+ Community Campus, located at 2304 The Plaza, on Aug. 1. Follow chromatic.roots on Instagram for updates.

AKEOUGH@QCNERVE.COM



Krystle Baller Photo by Gloria Zavaleta



ARTS & CULTURE ◇ JULY 9 - JULY 22, 2025 ◇ www.qcnerve.com

JESSIE REYEZ
July 10 • 8 p.m. • The Fillmore, 820 Hamilton St. • $70 • fillmorenc.com

Canadian singer-songwriter Jessie Reyez is a musical magpie, plucking bits of hip-hop, pop and soul and funneling them through an edgy R&B-alt rock filter. "Intruders" off her fearless debut LP *Before Love Came to Kill Us* (2020) equates love with scorched-earth colonialism. On Reyez's latest LP *Paid in Memories*, her charismatic chameleonic vocals mourn a lost love on "Couldn't Be Me," and on taunting psych-rocker "Psilocybin and Daisies" she throws down the craziest of sexy challenges: "*Let me fuck you in a field full of daisies/ 'Til we both run dry…*" Fellow Canadian R&B artist RAAHiiM supports.

SOUNDSCAPE: A MOONLIT FLOATING SOUNDBATH
July 11 • 7:30 p.m. • 1108 Cedarwood Lane • $55-$66 • tinyurl.com/MoonlitFloatingSoundbath

"Turn off your mind, relax and float downstream." John Lennon wasn't singing about this tranquil escape in the midst of east Charlotte's Coventry Woods neighborhood in his song "Tomorrow Never Knows," but he could have been. Presented by Artifact Life, Soundscape offers the restorative aspects of floating, relaxing and quieting the mind beneath the stars. Participants settle into comfy inflated mattresses or poolside loungers, unwind to a multi-instrumental immersive aural journey led by sound alchemist Sofia Paloma, release tension with the aid of aromatherapy, imbibe craft tea or botanical mocktails and more. It's a safe and serene opportunity to soothe the nervous system, reduce stress and rejuvenate the body.

'BABY BOY'
July 12 • 7 p.m. • Booth Playhouse, 130 N Tryon St. • $40-$83 • blumenthalarts.org

After high school senior Daniel loses a friend to gun violence, his mother sends him away to live with his aunt in the suburbs. The young man soon discovers that being Black has limitations no matter what ZIP code you're in. *Baby Boy* is the latest touring play by Tre Floyd, owner of Tre's Place, the first Black-owned live theater in Forest Park, a suburb of Atlanta. After launching a career producing web series in 2018, Floyd transitioned to producing, writing and directing stage plays that address the concerns of Black audiences. Floyd's previous shows include *Atlanta Child Murders*, loosely based on the 1979-81 case in which 28 children, adolescents and adults were murdered.



Soundscape: A Moonlit Floating Soundbath
Photo courtesy of True North (does not depict local event)
7/11



Nature Remains Opening Reception
Photo of artist Barbara Schreiber courtesy of McColl Center
6/14

QUEEN CITY COOLERFEST
July 13 • 3 p.m. • Route 29 Pavilion, 5650 Sandusky Blvd., Concord • $48 • route29pavilion.com

For its third annual iteration, Coolerfest presents its Southern Soul edition. The event features two stars of the burgeoning genre, a danceable vocal-driven blend of gospel, blues, R&B and funk. Shelby native Meechie (Demetric Allen) performs his crowd favorites "Cowboi Boogie," "Sailing," and "Shake It Like a Tailfeather." Ricco Barrino jams with "Go Head" and his collaboration with sister Fantasia, "So Serious." Stepper Showcases keep the line dance party going with performances by 4K Steppaz and DK Steppas. The soul-powered outdoor celebration also offers complimentary mechanical bull rides and actual horse rides.

BASHFORTHEWORLD
July 14 • 8 p.m. • Neighborhood Theatre, 511 E. 36th St. • $30-$32 • neighborhoodtheatre.com

With a calm, understated cadence, Mexican-American rapper BashfortheWorld seems to lay out a philosophy with one line from the title tune off his 2024 LP *Mundo*: "One thing about me is I'm never in a rush." On new tracks like the eerie, grinding "Migo," the Dallas-based artist continues to take his time, spinning a sharp narrative weighted with raw emotion, vulnerability and confident swagger. Rappers Tommy 2 and SSG Splurge are both featured on cuts off BashfortheWorld's 2025 *Migo in America* LP. Together the two rappers collaborated on the sinister, chiming "Nickname."

UX EMPATHY: THE BLUEPRINT FOR ALL INNOVATORS
July 16 • 6:30 p.m. • Harvey B. Gantt Center, 551 S. Tryon St. • $10 • ganttcenter.org

Aspiring and intermediate UX professionals will learn how to understand and connect with clients and users in this interactive, two-hour session. Led by UX designer, storyteller, innovator and advocate for user-centric designs Roderick Wilkins Jr., the workshop challenges designers to put empathy into practice by crafting meaningful digital experiences. The session includes hands-on activities, practical exercises like empathy mapping and persona creation, and a realistic case study that simulates real-world design scenarios. By collaborating with fellow participants, exchanging diverse perspectives and refining user-centered design approaches, designers will be empowered to apply these UX empathy concepts immediately.

LIFELINE
UPCOMING EVENTS IN THE QUEEN CITY * JULY 9 - JULY 22 *
LIFELINE ◊ JULY 9 - JULY 22, 2025 ◊ www.qcnerve.com

NATURE REMAINS OPENING RECEPTION
July 17 • 6 p.m. • McColl Center, 721 N Tryon St. • $10 suggested donation • mccollcenter.org

Nature Remains features new work by painter and McColl Center alumni Barbara Schreiber. Speaking to Queen City Nerve in 2019, Schreiber described her paintings as a juxtaposition between "pretty pictures and ugly subjects." Her new work moves away from the explicit storytelling of her earlier pieces — where animals often stand in for humans in frozen theatrical allegories about trauma, displacement and grief — to more atmospheric compositions in which movement is created through the use of vivid colors and the irregular patterning of plants. Balancing humor and dread, Schreiber's paintings are deeply personal yet speak to our shared anxieties about the current moment.

CHARLOTTE HOE DOWN
July 18 • 10 p.m. • Blackbox Theater, 421 E Sugar Creek Road • $28 • blackboxcharlotte.com

Artwork featuring a buff Black cowboy in leather chaps advertises this unabashedly queer, sex- and body-positive dance party. Attendees are invited to move to the rhythms of house, Afrobeat, bounce, tribal and hip-hop — all sounds rooted in Black and Brown culture. The dress code, "show some skin to get in," invites guests to "dress in ways [they've] been historically denied based on heteronormative social and gender norms," say show promoters Deviant Events and Foxx Entertainment. To that end, the poly-positive soiree also bans racism, sexism, ableism, transphobia, homophobia, body shaming, kink shaming, drug shaming, and femme-phobia. It sounds like the perfect celebration of queerdom and the righteous rejection of pearl clutching.

BITES & BREWS BLOCK PARTY
July 19 • 4 p.m. • Petty Thieves Brewing, 413 Dalton Ave. • Free • tinyurl.com/PettyBitesAndBrews

Break out your angsty grunge flannels, your riot grrl babydoll dresses, ripped tights and combat boots, your Brit-pop parkas, polos and bucket hats, your rap hoodies and Timberland boots and whatever the hell it was the Spice Girls wore. Petty Thieves' Bites & Brews Party celebrates the '90s — the decade that somehow began 35 years ago — with an evening of nostalgia that will include a vendor market, food trucks, live DJs and a trucker hat bar. Honor the decade that brought us scrunchies, acid-washed jeans and over-plucked eyebrows with an evening that promises to be phat, rad, dope, da bomb, jiggy, slammin', kickin' and fly.

THE SYMPOSIUM, JOHN MYRTLE
July 20 • 7 p.m. • Neighborhood Theatre, 511 E. 36th St. • $26 • neighborhoodtheatre.com

Ever since The Symposium launched on Halloween 2013 with its melodic, midtempo *Brain Jail* EP, the Chicago alt-rock quartet has drawn comparisons to The Strokes. The resemblance is detectable in the metronomic bass, interlocking guitars, swirling keyboards and yearning vocals on the band's latest LP *The Sonic Age*, but it's been a long time since Julian Casablancas and company produced anything this catchy and dynamic. Coupling soulful vocals, intricate guitar work and witty yet heartfelt lyrics, British indie singer-songwriter John Myrtle crafts uplifting gently rippling gems like his ebullient 2025 single "Me and My Dog."



Queen City Coolerfest
Photo of Ricco Barrino via Facebook
7/13



Charlotte Hoe Down
Courtesy of Deviant Events
7/18





Jon Lindsay — Photo by Colin Rich

KILLER VIDEO

Jon Lindsay and Chris Walldorf hit the mark with "Dear Assassin" visuals

BY PAT MORAN

Jon Lindsay's "Dear Assassin" video, which drops July 14, starts like a power-pop gem accompanying a head-over-heels love story. As Lindsay basks in the sunshine, chunky guitars gambol under his crystal-clear reverb-laden vocal.

"*I'm beggin' won't you please bring a steady hand/ If you're aim is true, I don't stand a chance…*"

Coiling snakelike cymbals signal something's wrong. As the lyric's acidic edge sharpens, it becomes clear that Lindsay (The Catch Fire, NC Music Love Army) sits in a cemetery by a headstone bearing his name.

The video suddenly pulls the viewer through a changing, nightmarish depiction of a doomed relationship; the camera zooms out endlessly through time and space as a succession of overlapping Lindsays get drunk, meet a woman, stumble into bed with her, get "his-and-her" tattoos, propose marriage and more. There's always more — a never-ending trap.

The video is directed by local musician and film editor Mark Walldorf, whose past projects include the 2020 Netflix documentary series *Night Stalker: The Hunt for a Serial Killer*, and the online ad campaign for comedian and writer Danny McBride's celebrity tequila brand Don Gato.

Lindsay also wrote and recorded the song "Cool Times" for an upcoming music video promoting Don Gato.

"Dear Assassin," the third video/single from Lindsay's latest LP *Big Stage*, dropped in May. He recorded the project at Hollywood's Barefoot Recording Studio, where classic albums like Stevie Wonder's *Songs in the Key of Life* were tracked.

"I was trying to come up with a video that has a cool visual style, but also is relatively easy to pull off," Walldorff says of his goal for "Dear Assassin." He and fellow local filmmaker Mike Lee decided on an effect called "infinite zoom," featured in the 2011 Bradley Cooper movie *Limitless*.

The technique involves shooting each scene three times at different focal lengths with a high-resolution 12K camera, Waldorf explains. The shots are then blended in post production to create a seamless, continuous zooming effect. In "Dear Assassin," Lindsay passes through shots that seem to zoom for miles through Camp North End and Uptown Charlotte while successive iterations of Lindsays take his place.

The March location shoot in Charlotte was a homecoming for Lindsay, who recorded three albums of experimental alt-pop — *Escape From Plaza Midwood*, *Summer Wilderness Program*, and *Cities and Schools* — at Walldorf's Sioux Sioux Studio in Plaza Midwood.

Lindsay decamped for Raleigh in 2015 then New York City in 2017. There, he pursued a successful public relations career that landed him in Forbes Magazine. Two marriages, multiple kids and a move to Savannah, Georgia followed.

After recording *Big Stage*, Lindsay toured with fellow Charlotte singer-songwriter Benji Hughes. The jaunt included a South by Southwest showcase, jamming onstage with Jackson Brown, getting interviewed in California wine country by actor Jeff Bridges and a May 30 Evening Muse show.

Lindsay's set included many tunes from *Big Stage*, which he calls his most accessible work to date.

"[The songs] are mega-confessional [but] not experimental," Lindsay offers. "There are moments of beauty … [and] sheer devastation on the album."

He says "Dear Assassin" is about the feeling that a romance you're involved in is not going to end well, but you're too deep to stop it.

"It's just going down with the Titanic," he says, pointing to a pertinent lyric in the song: "*I'm watchin' my life's waning days/ but if I've got it figured out/ how come I'm spending my nights at your place?*"

The video drives the point home with Lindsay's disgruntled wife trudging through the forest in full bridal veil and gown while cradling an assault rifle. When she sets a distant Lindsay in her weapon's sights, the camera suddenly reverses. After endless zooming out, the camera pushes in, bearing ever closer to Lindsay in the graveyard, like a bullet finding its mark.

Then Lindsay slumps, bringing the sardonic and technically breathtaking video to a close. The aim was true, after all.

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Adrian Crutchfield in the Queen City — Photo by Carter Wade

BLAST FROM THE SAX

Adrian Crutchfield discusses new album in lead-up to CeeLo show

BY PAT MORAN

When Adrian Crutchfield was 4 years old, his parents took him to a Kenny G concert. The smooth jazz saxophonist saw the child sitting on his father's shoulders and invited him up onstage. After chatting with the preschooler, Kenny G gifted Crutchfield a small Casio synthesizer saxophone.

Crutchfield never forgot the kindness an older musician showed an eager kid.

"That's what started everything for me musically," he says.

Crutchfield went on to build a career as an inspired saxophonist and sideman, touring with Lionel Richie, Bette Midler, Young Jeezy, Anthony Hamilton, Prince and more. He's released four solo albums, the latest of which, Slick, dropped in May, and on Aug. 8 he'll bring his energetic stage show, featuring friend CeeLo Green (Gnarls Barkley, Goodie Mob), to the Carolina Theatre.

Throughout a career of iconic collaborators, Crutchfield is most identified with The Purple One. Crutchfield collaborated with Prince from 2011-16, playing on the albums Plectrumelectrum, Art Official Age, HITnRUN: Phase One, the Grammy-nominated HITnRUN: Phase Two, and Black Is the New Black.

Crutchfield knows he'll be forever known as Prince's last saxophonist, so he wears the title as a badge of honor.

"He was the greatest artist of our time," Crutchfield insists.

Crutchfield moved from Roanoke, Virginia to Charlotte as a kid, attending Northwest School of the Arts from sixth through 11th grade. There, he befriended Charlotte musicians Harvey Cummings II and Tim Scott Jr.

"I take a lot of pride in Northwest," Crutchfield says, "For me and for many artists that went there, that's the place that made us."

Similarly, Paisley Park, Prince's home and studio complex outside Minneapolis, holds a place in Crutchfield's heart. Prince hired Crutchfield after seeing him play for Anthony Hamilton. He then tasked his new saxophonist with finding players for his New Power Generations Hornz section.

"I told [the recruits], 'If we work with Prince, we become immortals in the music world,'" Crutchfield recalls.

After Crutchfield's debut solo LP *Private Party* (2009) failed to find an audience, Crutchfield focused on being a sideman. In 2016, Prince encouraged Crutchfield to "take a leap" by continuing to pursue a solo career with even more vigor despite the disappointment of *Private Party*.

Prince died a month and a half later but Crutchfield remembered his words. In 2017, he released his second solo LP and dedicated it to his mentor, titling the project *Leap*.

"I liked all kinds of music and I put it all on wax," Crutchfield says of his first two albums. In contrast, he calls *Lover* (2022) more refined, a straightforward contemporary jazz record that nevertheless retains Crutchfield's restless eclectic soul.

The latest LP *Slick* is Crutchfield's first on a record label, the British smooth-jazz imprint Trippin N Rhythm. While as varied as the rest of Crutchfield's music, it is his best produced, most tactile work to date.

"I just want anybody to be able to pick at least one song off each of my records and say, 'This is one I'm putting on my playlist," Crutchfield says.

For the Aug. 8 Carolina Theatre show, Crutchfield performs with flamboyant singer-songwriter and Dirty South pioneer Green, writer of pop hits like his solo joint "Fuck You," Pussycat Dolls' "Don't Cha," and Gnarls Barkley's "Crazy.""

"I love CeeLo,' Crutchfield says. "He's a true artist, and a great inspiration."

The upcoming gig will offer variety, Crutchfield says — a mix of old tunes, new tunes and unexpected covers. The show will also point back to another concert in Roanoke 36 years ago.

"Every year I look for a kid to give a saxophone to," says Crutchfield, who notes he wants to find someone already into music, in school, showing potential and probably without access to good equipment. In short, someone like his childhood self.

Crutchfield says audiences will have a blast at the show, but they will also get the rare chance to see one musical generation passing encouragement onto the next. So that a younger artist may benefit from his experience, experimentation, virtuosity and vision, Crutchfield plans to pass on an older musician's gift from so long ago.

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Weekend Friend performs at Amos' Southend for their album release show. — Photo by Bethany Ivan

BRING THE HEAT

Weekend Friend creates summer soundtrack with 'Days Like June'

BY BETHANY IVAN

There are many ways to welcome the first day of summer, but with a heat dome bearing down on the Carolinas during this year's seasonal transition, an indoor observation of the solstice may have been the most prudent pick for 2025.

Fans eagerly standing at the barricade of Amos Southend on June 20 had the right idea, as they lined up in South End to head inside and watch nascent indie-rock five-piece Weekend Friend celebrate the release of their new EP, *Days Like June*.

Through groovy guitar riffs that call back to certain classic rock tunes, the new project carries an energy that is both lively and reminiscent.

"*Days Like June* are a mix of warm, nostalgic indie rock with down-to-earth lyrics and catchy sounds that fit any mood," said Weekend Friend in a joint email response to questions from Queen City Nerve.

Originally launched as a solo act by vocalist Bryan Wynne, the current lineup has roots that go back to middle school friendships for some members while having added newcomers from New York and Florida along the way.

Days Like June was the first project the band created together from scratch, strengthening their bond and making the result all the more special for all of them.

"The songs are full of upbeat energy, which has become a really big part of our live shows," they said. "We've been playing a lot of this EP over the past year and it's been exciting to see how people connect with the songs in real time. Now that the EP is released, we're really looking forward to fans finally being able to live with the music beyond the stage."

Weekend Friend had a chance to share that energy with what was likely its largest crowd to date in May as one of a handful of local acts invited to play at Lovin' Life Music Festival.

The band's June 20 show at Amos' kicked off a summer tour that will see them perform July shows in Washington DC and New York City before returning to the Carolinas for gigs in Winston-Salem and Charleston.

Back in South End on the summer solstice, Weekend Friend had heads banging throughout their set in a packed Amos' thanks to that signature mix of high energy and nostalgic style.

The band danced into the weekend as Wynne continuously interacted with the audience and danced alongside fans. He was clearly having the time of his life, showing immense gratitude toward the show's openers: Charleston band Wilmot and Raleigh-based band Harvey Street.

Wynne was also sure to thank the many fans in the audience, his bandmates, and his brother Patrick, who manages the group.

Songs like "Smile" and "Wrong To Be Right" transported fans back to a simpler time when they could count down the school days 'til summer vacation. Each song brings up the question, "Wait, have I heard this before?" then morphs into something all its own.

Listening to *Days Like June* takes me back to two important moments in my life: the time when I stumbled upon a newfound love for classic rock and the annual anticipation of attending summer camp with my best friend as a kid.

Days Like June marks a return to the carefree days of summer — or the weekend, for those of us who have arrived in adulthood.

"Weekend Friend embodies your eager anticipation for the weekend, personal time, and connection," describes the band's bio from Lovin' Life.

Throughout the EP, Weekend Friend flawlessly captures certain undertones of classic rock tracks while putting their upbeat and lively spin on each tune, creating the perfect soundtrack for those summer activities we can still enjoy as adults — whether driving a car full of your friends down the interstate to Carowinds or Crowders Mountain, or kicking back at a poolside cookout with family and friends.

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Gauxstman performs at Snug Harbor. Photo by Kevin 'Surf' Mitchell

HE PUTS ON

Gauxstman makes the Southside all-city on '28217'

BY TYLER BUNZEY

Charlotte rapper Gauxstman comes from a long and mostly venerable tradition of shit talking.

Rappers like Too $hort, Suga Free and even Snoop Dogg circulated narratives of salacity and sagacity, playing off of their predecessors like Red Foxx, Moms Mabley and Richard Pryor.

These comics built off an earlier tradition of toasting and playing the dozens (think "your mama" jokes) that can be traced through the diaspora back to West Africa itself. These pimp (non)fictions fashioned some of the most iconic figures in hip-hop history, transfiguring the ugly realities of America's malevolent urban neglect into tragicomic folktales.

Since dropping his debut projects *Extra Game* and *Southside Get the Money* in 2017, Gauxstman has followed in the footsteps of predecessors like this. He was first introduced to this tradition through Southern hip-hop, picking up influences as a kid flipping through CDs at Manifest Disc near Archdale Drive from artists like 8Ball and MJG, Botany Boyz, Dirty South Rydaz and the canonical Houston duo UGK.

Through these influences, he built a music career rapping about the triumphs and tribulations of hustling out a life in Charlotte's south side. In a long tradition that includes figures like the first gangster rappers Ice T and Schoolly D, Gauxst was inspired by the 1967 Black pulp classic, *Pimp: The Story of My Life*, adopting the alias Archdale Slim after that novel's author, Iceberg Slim.

His newest release, *28217*, which dropped in April, transposes this tradition into a different key.

Certainly, Gauxstman's signature shit-talking bawdiness is far from absent from this one. As Gauxst puts it in "From E4 with Love" off *28217*, "*It ain't what you say, it's how you say it/ It's all in your voice…*"

While the jazz and soul samples somewhat soften lines like, "Bitch, get your mouth wider for the legendary Southsider," the first four tracks of the album maintain the tone and tenor of much of Gauxst's hustle-focused rhymes that composed his previous projects.

While these themes remain, *28217* is a more settled and personal portrait of the Charlotte rapper, reflecting Gauxst's challenges as he has become a father.

"I'm a lifestyle artist. I literally can only pull from what I'm going through," he told Queen City Nerve. "I realized I'm getting older, so it's important if you're building an audience, you've got to grow with your audience."

This shift began with 2024's *Palm Trees for the Win*, which he composed after moving to South Florida. The nine-month period away from Charlotte, brought on by familial fractures, was sobering for Gauxst.

After deep reflection, he moved back to the Queen City in October 2024 to be near his kids and family again. Moving away from the frenetic intensity of the streets, he began to change the way he rapped as he worked through his relationship to fatherhood.

This tone shift culminates on "Ice on 77," a doleful reflection on the moment when a fast life outruns you. Gauxst intones on the hook: "*Lately I've been feeling like I ain't living right/ Nothing that I'm doing ain't sitting right/ I'm just trying to come alive, every night…*"

Dreamville rapper Lute provides a poignant guest verse that meditates on the pressures that artists experience while trying to stay true to community.

Lute's feature meant a lot to Gauxstman, who deeply considered whom he should include on this project.

"Man, he always shows up for me and everybody else in this city," Gauxst said of his fellow Charlotte rapper. "He doesn't ask for a damn thing in return."

He also included features from longtime friend DJ Wonder ("From E4 with Love"), up-and-coming northside rapper Yaboysmoke ("Findin My Way"), and childhood friend Slutlord ("Archdale University").

Slutlord's brazenly ribald guest verses were particularly significant to Gauxst since this is the first officially released collaboration between the two Archdale artists.

Zooming out, the range of features from across the city are emblematic of Gauxstman's broader commitment to representing Charlotte as a whole. The album's title is the South Charlotte zip code that contains Archdale and Nations Ford roads, known as the Southside. It's an area that's always been a part of Gauxst's persona; he performed as Southside Gauxst in the earlier parts of his career.

Track titles on the new project reference spots across the city like "Archdale University" and "Ice on 77." Each song is lyrically peppered with Charlotte references like "*I'm from Nation's Ford, can you say that?*" (Big Tymers (Interlude)") and Lute's "*West side in my heart, that shit made me a star…*" ("Ice on 77").

Gauxst's Instagram promo for the album was shot across the city in spots like the Archdale Blue Line station, E.E. Waddell High School's old stadium and even the upscale Elizabeth restaurant Fig Tree for the project's eponymous single.

As he put it on an interlude for the new release, "*I was made in this city/ I could never leave…*"

For Gauxstman, being all-city is more than just a show of unity.

"I kind of want to be obnoxious until I get my point across, until I get where I'm going," he reflected. "I need the world to really understand. I want you to land in Charlotte and be like, 'Wait, I need to go to Nation's Ford. I need to go to Big Apple Deli.'"



Gauxstman Photo by Jalen Marlow



Gauxstman with his daughter. Photo by Marc Prosper

This kind of commitment to raising up Charlotte across genre, style and geographical boundaries is of particular importance to a city that perpetually struggles to articulate basic aspects of its own identity. The contradictions that Gauxst explores in *28217* are the contradictions that mark our city — the energy of youth and reflection of age, the poignancy of lyrical substance and power of pimp-inflected style, and the plastic lustrousness of Uptown with the predetermined grit of the neighborhoods surrounding it.

In 2024, Nigel Malone created a documentary that posed a simple question: Does North Carolina hip-hop have a sound? The question generated myriad answers without a simple consensus.

If Charlotte hip-hop had a sound, however, it would sound a little bit like *28217*. With elements that can be found across the diaspora articulated through hyperlocal specificities, Gauxst sounds the city every chance that he gets on the project. His contradictions embody our own.

Gauxst crafted a project that intentionally cut across city boundaries with tracks that are equally at home in a low-lit open mic poetry night at NoDa's Evening Muse, South End's Broken Promises, or a joyride through the Nation's Ford corridor.

28217 is the sound of our weird little city. As Gauxst puts it in the project's ultimate track: "Represent this city, bitch. You better know it."





Ettore Buzzini — Photo courtesy of Ettore Buzzini

ALL THE BUZZ IN BLUEGRASS

Young Ettore Buzzini builds hope for one of Charlotte's oldest music scenes

BY RYAN PITKIN

When Ettore Buzzini was 6 years old, his great-grandfather on his mother's side, a family that hails from eastern Tennessee, gave the young boy his old iPod and told him he could clear the data and put whatever music he liked on it.

Young Buzzini hadn't quite fleshed out his tastes in music yet, so rather than delete all his great-grandpa's tracks he started listening to what was already on the iPod: lots of bluegrass. He particularly enjoyed one tune from 1957: "Shuckin' the Corn" by Flatt & Scruggs.

"I think banjo players, many of them who hear Earl Scruggs for the first time, that's how a lot of them get started because it's like an electrifying moment," Buzzini told Queen City Nerve. "It's just such a cool sound and it's so captivating. Right then [upon hearing 'Shuckin' the Corn'], I was like, 'I want to play banjo.'"

At age 9 he received his first banjo on loan from his grandfather. The rest is history … or at least history in the making.

Buzzini, who grew up and still attends high school in Mooresville, learned the ropes from local bluegrass legend John William "Bill" Rippey before he passed away at age 74 in 2022.

Shortly thereafter, Buzzini released his debut album at 14 years old. At that point he was making music as Eddie Ray Buzzini, a moniker he took on for a short time because it was easier to say than Ettore, but he's since returned to his real name (pronounced et-tor-ray).

Now 17 and a rising senior in high school, Buzzini has become a fixture on the local bluegrass scene, traveling down to Charlotte to play bluegrass jam nights at Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar in east Charlotte and taking advantage of his summer vacation to book gigs.

In the fall of 2024, he shocked many in the crowd at the annual FreshGrass Festival in Massachusetts when he won the prestigious Freshgrass Banjo Competition Award, for which participants are asked to perform a traditional song ("Dear Old Dixie") and an original composition ("Birth of Eros").

Buzzini wowed the judges with his original song, which showcased the style of playing that he refers to on his business card as "Trad-scendental Bluegrass."

"There was one [other participant in the competition] who was really good … and I'm nervous about that because he's older and he's played for a long time. And if I'm being honest … on a technical level, he probably was playing better and cleaner … but the reason that I won was because of the original song … it was different and it was a totally new thing, really, in bluegrass."

Buzzini plans to build upon the track to create a concept album that draws inspiration not only from the master of bluegrass who came before him — figures like Del McCoury whom Buzzini looks up to — but from icons of the classical genre as well.

Buzzini's ancestral knowledge of music doesn't only come from the hills of Tennessee but from the hills of Switzerland, where his father hails from and his great-grandmother was a classically trained musician.

Following his win at FreshGrass, Buzzini took began reimagining "Birth of Eros" for his school band, in which he plays trumpet. He worked for months composing each section of the song so the full band could play it live at the school's annual spring concert earlier this year. Buzzini was front and center as conductor.

While he's currently working in the studio on a traditional bluegrass album with his backing band — a quartet that comprises a fiddle, guitar and bass supporting his banjo, Buzzini is also looking to build on "Birth of Eros" to create a hybrid bluegrass-classical album with leitmotifs inspired by Wagnerian operas.

He aims to release the traditional album before the end of the year and the concept album next fall, all while juggling his senior year of high school and continuing to support Charlotte's underground bluegrass scene.

With all the runway one could ask for in a promising career, Buzzini could be the one to bring bluegrass back to Charlotte's center stage.

RPITKIN@QCNERVE.COM



OB Swank — Promotional Photo

BRAND NEW SWAG

OB Swank pivots from politics

BY RYAN PITKIN

In our 2024 Election Guide, describing the platform of NC State Senate District 41 candidate Kendrick Cunningham, Queen City Nerve wrote, "Cunningham's approach to politics is encapsulated by his Next Step Framework, a blueprint meant to guide Charlotte's communities to healing from systematic disenfranchisement."

Cunningham did not win that crowded race between four Democrats and in the time since it ended has stayed true to his passion for civic engagement and political activism — if pivoting in the way he expresses it.

On Aug. 1, Cunningham plans to release his first project as musician OB Swank, blending rock 'n' roll with elements of hip-hop and spoken word to help inspire his listeners to follow their true path rather than that set by algorithms and influencers.

"Politics taught me how hard it is to be heard," he said upon announcing the upcoming release in April. "Music lets me speak louder, reach further and move people, not just to act but to heal."

The lyrical content in OB Swank's debut project, an eight-track EP titled *Poster Playboy*, isn't overtly political. In fact, it swings in the other direction, aiming to be relatable with songs about summer nights, heartbreak, motivation and dealing with haters.

The former Democratic National Committee deputy organizing director says he's left the Democratic Party and wants to be a bipartisan voice for civic engagement without pushing his own politics on people.

"Now as an unaffiliated voter and as an influencer, I feel like I have a greater ability to inspire people from all walks of life to be able to become politically engaged, especially among my generation," Cunningham said.

He hopes to use any influence that comes from his music to get fans and listeners engaged, hosting candidate fairs and forums to help millennials and younger generations better understand what their politicians are engaged in.

A west Charlotte native, Cunningham discovered his love for the arts as a student at Bishop Spaugh Community Academy in the Camp Greene neighborhood, where he starred in a production of *The Soulful Lyric*, which he called "a hood take on *A Christmas Carol*," in seventh grade.

He was the lead anchor for the school's student news program, incorporating music into the broadcast wherever he could, and started a Glee Club after the show *Glee* became popular in 2009.

The lack of any such arts programming at Phillip O. Berry Academy of Technology, where he attended high school, was discouraging, but he learned how to make beats while on the IT track there and continued making music into college, where he regularly freestyle with friends.

Entering the political realm around that time, Cunningham regularly heard from folks who were discouraged by the political climate to the point of apathy.

"My peers were always asking me, 'Why are politicians all the same? … 'What different things can people do who aspire to influence society or make decisions on behalf of society? What are different ways that they can communicate their message to the masses in order to get people to hear their message, listen to their message, and take action based upon the message that they see?'"

It was through these ponderings that Cunningham began to consider how the intersection of politics and music could play a role in livening up the conversation around civic engagement, not necessarily through targeted campaigns like Vote or Die and Rock the Vote but by simply encouraging young folks to be comfortable in their own skin and letting the rest fall in place.

"This project takes everything that I've been through over the last two to three years in life and politics and in my social life to inspire people to be themselves, conquer their dreams and accomplish what it is that they want to do," he said.

RPITKIN@QCNERVE.COM

PLAY: THE SHOWCASE

FROM THE STAGE: JUNE 2025 — Submit your photos to info@qcnerve.com



Noir Noir performs at Snug Harbor, 6/26/25 (Photo by Dan Russell-Pinson)



Noir Noir at Snug, 6/26/25 (Photo by Dan Russell-Pinson)



Ringo Starr at Ovens Auditorium, 6/25/25 (Photo by Jeff Hahne)



Wine Pride at Snug, 6/26/25 (Dan Russell-Pinson)



Noir Noir at Snug, 6/26/25 (Photo by Dan Russell-Pinson)



Somnium at Snug, 6/26/25 (Photo by Dan Russell-Pinson)



REWIND: NEW MUSIC RELEASES

LP

TYLER BAUM - 'POSTCARDS FROM PANGEA'

Using the ersatz "world music" of 1950s composer Martin Denny as the barest scaffolding, Tyler Baum runs jaunty Hawaiian guitars, chintzy keyboard loops, unidentifiable sound effects, snatches of dialogue from movies and TV shows that even Quentin Tarantino would consider obscure and genuinely addictive percussion loops through a musical Cuisinart. The result is fun, vaguely psychedelic and genuinely catchy.

Stream at tylerbaum.bandcamp.com

SINGLE

CARRIE ANN - "CAROLINA SUMMER BLUES"

Monroe's Carrie Ann currently performs in a Black Crowes tribute band, but if "Carolina Summer Blues" is any indication, local audiences need to hear more of the singer-songwriter's original music. With a fine-grained, slightly weathered yet controlled alto, she unleashes her far-from-idealized lyrics with an offhand grace that seems more casual than it actually is.

Stream on Spotify

LP

WOODY - 'BULL FIGHTIN' BETTY'

Drawing on rustic alt-rock, fractured folk storytelling and celestial psych-pop, Woody's latest LP is stuffed with nursery rhyme lyrics and a silly yet mysterious sense of foreboding. From one track to the next, the four-piece band is either adopting a childlike point of view, engaging in droll humor, or maybe a bit of both.

Stream on Spotify

SINGLE

DEPRESTON - "TROUBLE"

With supple simple rhymes, Depreston's cyclical tune owes as much to the structure of hip-hop as it does to alt-pop. His yearning, wistful and regretful vocals fall firmly in the realm of confessional singer-songwriter pop, with a soupcon of the ethereal stripped-down production of 10CC's "I'm Not in Love."

Stream on Spotify

EP

M143 - 'LIVE AT THE ILLAGE VIDIOT'

Songwriter, vocalist and guitarist M143 drops this set of five songs, recorded live with a five-member alternative genre-jumping band. Leadoff track "Looking Glass" is straight ahead pop with tasteful brass, cascading keyboards and supple jazz guitar under Emily Edenburg's raw, emotive vocals, which sets the tone nicely.

Stream on Spotify

SINGLE

MAVI FEAT. SMINO - "POTLUCK"

Since releasing his third studio album, shadowbox, in 2024, MAVI has done everything but slow down. In his second release of 2025, the Charlotte rapper melds well with Missouri's Smino over lo-fi production from Nephew Hesh, Cade and Asean Bwoy, trading melodic verses in a kicked back, summer cypher style that promises our 2022 Best in the Nest selection for Best Rapper in Charlotte is still on the projected track to make a real impact on the broader hip-hop world.

Stream on Spotify

EP

ADINA REY - 'ADINA REY'

Music nerds may scoff at a local singer/songwriter billing herself as "a mix of Stevie Nicks, Sia, Kate Bush, Dolly Parton and Phantogram," but any such smug feelings quickly evaporate with a spellbinding clip of Adina Rey performing "Like a Drug" from her upcoming self-titled EP on Instagram, with support from Flagship's Drake Margolnick. Sidelined by chronic illness for much of her life, Rey's aspirations to sing were nearly stolen by an unexpected and frightful reaction to medication that stole her voice four years ago. She eventually recovered and the local music scene will be better for it, as the power of her resilience shines through on her new project.

Stream on Spotify

WEDNESDAY JULY 9

SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
Heidi Sidelinker (Comet Grill)
Josh Daniel, Jim Brock & Kerry Brooks (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)*
HIP-HOP/SOUL/R&B
Sanpriest w/ Afrobeta, Dazy Bea (Snug Harbor)
JAZZ/BLUES
DJAM Collective (Camp North End)
OPEN MIC
Singer/Songwriter Open Mic (The Rooster)*
Open Hearts Open Mic (Starlight on 22nd)

THURSDAY JULY 10

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
High June with Sophia and LaurenNicole (Amos' Southend)
FRND CRCL w/ Cheer Up Dusty (Evening Muse)
This Island Earth w/ Calicuzns, Stress Fractures, Between Two Trees (The Milestone)
Wes Parker w/ The Phantom Friends, Cassettiquette (Snug Harbor)
COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
Nick Smith (The Underground)
FUNK/JAM BAND/REGGAE
Shana Blake's Musical Menagerie (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)*
JAZZ/BLUES
Najee & Regina Bell (The Amp Ballantyne)
Cosmic Collective (Comet Grill)
HIP-HOP/SOUL/R&B
Jessie Reyez (The Fillmore)
LATIN/WORLD
Scythian w/ Anna J (Neighborhood Theatre)
COVER BANDS
EnVision Presents R&B Legends (Middle C Jazz)

FRIDAY JULY 11

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
Nemesis w/ Electrocutioner, Vigil, Vesterian (The Milestone)
The Constellations w/ The Olde Guard, Anthmz (Petra's)
Bronco w/ Cosmic Reaper, Doomsday Profit (Snug Harbor)
Doubting Thomas w/ Shake the Dust (Visulite Theatre)
JAZZ/BLUES
Vincent Ingala (Middle C Jazz)
SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
Low Groves w/ Hotel Hugo (Evening Muse)
Parks Brothers Band w/ Riverstone Duo (Goldie's)
MIXED-GENRE/EXPERIMENTAL/FESTIVAL
Emanuel Wynter w/ Sapphires Garden, Chris Bullock, Bob Lanzetti (Camp North End)
POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
Circle K @ CUE (Blackbox Theater)
Sorry Papi: All Girl Rave (The Fillmore)
COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
Justin Clyde Williams w/ Late For Supper, Tony Logue & The 184 (Evening Muse)
FUNK/JAM BAND/REGGAE
Lettuce (Neighborhood Theatre)
COVER BANDS
Queen Flash (Amos' Southend)
Same As It Ever Was (Talking Heads tribute) (The Amp Ballantyne)
Persona Sings Alicia Keys (Stage Door Theater)

SATURDAY JULY 12

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
Daisyhead w/ Stay Inside, Bouquet (The Milestone)
Mel Bryant & The Mercy Makers w/ Family Video (Petra's)
Celebrity Death Slot Machine w/ Vacant Company, Pretty Baby, Lofidels (Snug Harbor)
Warp Street w/ Shelf Life, Private Violet (Snug Harbor)
COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
Wim Tapley & The Cannons w/ Ran Albright (Evening Muse)
JAZZ/BLUES
Vincent Ingala (Middle C Jazz)
MIXED-GENRE/EXPERIMENTAL/FESTIVAL
Jeezy Presents TM: 101 Live feat. Color of Noize Orchestra (Belk Theater)
POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
DJ Mike Soden (Blackbox Theater)
FUNK/JAM BAND/REGGAE
Celestial Company (Birdsong Brewing)
Shankai & the Goonie Tunes (Comet Grill)
COVER BANDS
Sickman (Alice in Chains tribute) with Let Love Rule, Hard To Handle (Amos' Southend)
GoodTimes BadTimes (Led Zeppelin tribute) (Carolina Theatre)
Rumours ATL (Fleetwood Mac tribute) (The Fillmore)
Jam Garden w/ Rod Fiske Duo (Goldie's)

SUNDAY JULY 13

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
Mispaint w/ Draag, Pat & the Pissers, Amorebeautifulversionofyou, Shrine (The Milestone)
FUNK/JAM BAND/REGGAE
Leftover Salmon w/ The Infamous Stringdusters, Kitchen Dwellers (The Amp Ballantyne)
JAZZ/BLUES
Rebecca Jade w/ Andrea Lisa (Middle C Jazz)
POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
Paige Fish w/ Cailyn Kratzer (Neighborhood Theatre)

MONDAY JULY 14

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
Summoners Circle w/ Illusion of Fate, Angel Massacre (The Milestone)
JAZZ/BLUES
BashfortheWorld w/ SSG Splurge, Tommy 2 (Neighborhood Theatre)
The Bill Hanna Legacy Jazz Session (Petra's)
OPEN MIC
Find Your Muse Open Mic feat. Sara Harrod (Evening Muse)

TUESDAY JULY 15

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
Red Rocking Chair (Comet Grill)*
Spirit Leaves w/ Further Within, Mudlotus, Infinxty (The Milestone)
Counting Crows w/ The Gaslight Anthem (PNC Music Pavilion)
The Head and the Heart (Skyla Amphitheatre)
SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
Sam On Someday (Petra's)
OPEN MIC
Open Mic Night feat. The Smokin J's (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)*

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WEDNESDAY JULY 16

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
Homicyde w/ Detest the Throne, Divinicide, Defile the Crown (The Milestone)
SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
Fred Heintz (Comet Grill)
Josh Daniel, Jim Brock & Kerry Brooks (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)*
JAZZ/BLUES
DJAM Collective (Camp North End)
The Chris O'Leary Band (Middle C Jazz)
COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
Chad Frick w/ Tobacco Road (Evening Muse)
POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
Mates of State w/ Tōth (Amos' Southend)
Big Time Rush (PNC Music Pavilion)
OPEN MIC
Singer/Songwriter Open Mic (The Rooster)*

THURSDAY JULY 17

FUNK/JAM BANDS/REGGAE
Imogene and the Box Car Band (Evening Muse)
Wastoid w/ Colo, Blab School, Curiosidades de Bombrile (The Milestone)
Shana Blake's Musical Menagerie (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)*
COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
Jayson Arendt w/ Sloane Letourneau (Amos' Southend)
SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
Josh Daniel (Comet Grill)
COVER BANDS
A Major Party Band (Middle C Jazz)

FRIDAY JULY 18

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
The Lenny Federal Band (Comet Grill)*
DustBowlChampion w/ Casket Cassette, Dead Cool (Evening Muse)
Oh! You Pretty Things w/ The 91's, My Blue Hope, Home for the Day (The Milestone)
The Band Solstice w/ Red Dress Amy, Jackson Slater (Snug Harbor)
Spafford (Visulite Theatre)
FUNK/JAM BANDS/REGGAE
Muskrat Flats w/ The Halem Albright Band (Evening Muse)
POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
Tsu Nami @ CUE (Blackbox Theater)
Bop to the Top (The Fillmore)
Small Records w/ DJ Overcash (Salud Cerveceria)*
JAZZ/BLUES
Quiana Parler & Charlton Singleton (Middle C Jazz)
Dave Potter feat. Jason Marsalis (Stage Door Theater)
SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
Jake Haldevang w/ Hutcheson Brothers (Goldie's)
Sunny Sweeney w/ Cam Pierce (Neighborhood Theatre)
COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
Sam Bettens w/ Carolina Down Boys (Petra's)
COVER BANDS
Shortest Straw (Metallica tribute) w/ Undertow (Tool tribute) (Amos' Southend)
Listen to Her Heart (Tom Petty tribute) (Carolina Theatre)

SATURDAY JULY 19

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
Ocean Alley (The Fillmore)
Nospun w/ Abacab (Visulite Theatre)
POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
Sidequest: A Lights Out, Figgy Dance Floor Rave (The Milestone)
Groove-A-Thon (Petra's)
Latin Dance Party (Salud Cerveceria)*
JAZZ/BLUES
Blake Aaron & Will Donato (Middle C Jazz)
Dave Potter feat. Jason Marsalis (Stage Door Theater)
SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
Abbey Elmore (Comet Grill)
Jack Burns (Evening Muse)
Bailey Marie Band w/ String Theory (Goldie's)
POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
San Holo (Blackbox Theater)
Broadway Rave (The Underground)
LATIN/WORLD
Bakalao Stars w/ Pachanga 02, Selector Mikey Tags (Snug Harbor)
COVER BANDS
Nirvani (Amos' Southend)

SUNDAY JULY 20

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
Your Spirit Dies w/ Wielded Steel, Reviler, Fliora, Lowest Point (The Milestone)
The Symposium w/ John Myrtle (Neighborhood Theatre)
POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
Hazy Sunday (Petra's)
FUNK/JAM BAND/REGGAE
Tripping Daisy (The Underground)
COVER BANDS
Joe Grandsen (Chet Baker tribute) (Middle C Jazz)

MONDAY JULY 21

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
Architects (The Fillmore)
Lowheaven w/ Tan and Handsome, Senza, Barrow (The Milestone)
JAZZ/BLUES
The Bill Hanna Legacy Jazz Session (Petra's)
OPEN MIC
Find Your Muse Open Mic (Evening Muse)

TUESDAY JULY 22

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
Red Rocking Chair (Comet Grill)*
The Wallflowers w/ Jackson Melnick (Knight Theater)
Troubleshoot w/ Dime, In an Instant, Cursejar (The Milestone)
Glom & Drook w/ Rosary (Snug Harbor)
HIP-HOP/SOUL/R&B
Russ w/ Big Sean, Sabrina Claudio (PNC Music Pavilion)
POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
Strutman Lane w/ Dazy Bea (Petra's)
OPEN MIC
Open Mic Night feat. The Smokin J's (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)*

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J Bliss Birthday Bash | July 10
Big Jay Oakerson | July 11-12
Tara Brown | July 13
Shelly Belly | July 13
James Austin Johnson | July 16
Jon "Polar Bear" Gonzalez | July 17
Chico Bean | July 18-20
Mick Foley | July 22
Gabriel Rutledge | July 23
Jen Kober | July 24
Arnez J | July 25-27
Chente Ydrach | July 31
AUGUST
Tony Baker | Aug. 1-3
Tyrone Burston | Aug. 3
Hugh Howser | Aug. 6
Tip Harris | Aug. 7-9
Mike Goodwin | Aug. 10
Bundle of Laughs | Aug. 13
Ashley Hesseltine | Aug. 14
The Magic of Eric Eaton | Aug. 15-16
Christian Johnson | Aug. 15-16
Greg Warren | Aug. 17
Uncle Lazer | Aug. 20
Sam Tallent | Aug. 21-23
Ejspeaks | Aug. 24
Led Varela | Aug. 27
Shuler King 8/28-8/31
SEPTEMBER
Tyrone Burston | Sept. 7
Fiona Cauley | Sept. 7
DC Young Fly | Sept. 13-14
Alton Walker | Sept. 18
Bryan Callen | Sept. 19-20
Jesse Peyton | Sept. 21
Ryan Davis | Sept. 24
Kountry Wayne | Sept. 25-27
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The Comedy Zone - Charlotte
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Charlotte, NC 28206

HOROSCOPE

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JULY 9 - JULY 15

ARIES (March 21 to April 19) Your persistence pays off as the information you demanded starts to come through. The pace is slow at first, but it begins to speed up as the week draws to a close.

TAURUS (April 20 to May 20) An unwelcome bit of news jolts the Bovine who would prefer that things proceed smoothly. But at its most, it is a momentary setback. Meanwhile, a LEO brings more welcome tidings.

GEMINI (May 21 to June 20) You need to pay close attention to details before making a commitment. Don't accept anything that seems questionable unless you get an answer that can be backed up.

CANCER (June 21 to July 22) Congratulations on getting a project up and running! But as exciting as it is, don't let it carry you away. Make sure you set aside time to spend with family and friends.

LEO (July 23 to August 22) Be sure you're part of a discussion involving your suggestions. Your presence ensures that you can defend your work, if necessary. It also helps you gain your colleagues' support.

VIRGO (August 23 to September 22) A misunderstanding needs to be dealt with, or it can grow and cause more problems later. Be the bigger person and take the first step to clear the air.

LIBRA (September 23 to October 22) Set some strict guidelines for yourself so that your heavier-than-usual work schedule doesn't overwhelm the time you need to spend relaxing with loved ones.

SCORPIO (October 23 to November 21) You might feel a little uncomfortable being among people you hardly know. But remember that today's strangers can become tomorrow's valuable contacts.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22 to December 21) Reward yourself for all that you've accomplished despite some annoying situations that got in your way. Enjoy a well-earned getaway with someone special!

CAPRICORN (December 22 to January 19) Realizing that someone else is taking credit for what you did is bound to get anyone's goat, but especially yours. Be patient. The truth soon comes out.

AQUARIUS (January 20 to February 18) Forget about opposites attracting. What you need is to find someone who thinks like you and will support your ideas, even if others say they're too radical.

PISCES (February 19 to March 20) Workplace problems can affect your financial plans. Be prudent and avoid running up bills or making commitments until things begin to ease up in mid-July.

BORN THIS WEEK: Your intuition helps you communicate easily with people. You can understand their needs without having to say much.

JULY 16 - JULY 22

ARIES (March 21 to April 19) Your honesty is, as always, admirable. But you might want to be more tactful when discussing a sensitive issue with a family member. Remember, you can give advice without giving offense.

TAURUS (April 20 to May 20) An unexpected workplace snag should be handled quickly and efficiently so that it leaves you time for family get-togethers. Also, you might soon get a long-sought apology.

GEMINI (May 21 to June 20) Aspects favor family matters, especially where children might be involved. Spending time with loved ones helps restore some much-needed balance to your typically busy schedule.

CANCER (June 21 to July 22) A seemingly clear-cut agreement might not be quite so straightforward after all. Recheck for language that could make you liable for hidden costs and other unpleasant surprises.

LEO (July 23 to August 22) Careful, Kitty! It's better to deal with someone with proven reliability than a big talker who promises much but can't confirm that they will deliver. Meanwhile, your social life really zings this weekend.

VIRGO (August 23 to September 22) Your matchmaking skills are at peak performance levels -- both in helping to staff workplace teams for upcoming projects and for bringing people together on a more personal basis.

LIBRA (September 23 to October 22) You're finally seeing some progress with your new venture, but be prepared for it to continue at a slower pace than you're used to. Meanwhile, a loved one could be preparing a surprise.

SCORPIO (October 23 to November 21) A family member's success pulls you into the spotlight as well. Enjoy it, but don't let it overshadow or otherwise obstruct what you're doing with your own creative projects.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22 to December 21) Using what you already know might not be quite enough to get a proposed project off the ground. Look for any new information that might help tilt the scales in your favor.

CAPRICORN (December 22 to January 19) Good news! While a changing workplace environment can be daunting for some, it could be the challenge you've been hoping for. If so, confront it with confidence and move on.

AQUARIUS (January 20 to February 18) It's a good time to recheck travel arrangements for any changes that could work to your advantage. Aspects also favor strengthening and restoring old, fraying relationships.

PISCES (February 19 to March 20) Using your intuitive reasoning helps you cut right through the double talk and straight to what's really going on around you. Stay the course until all your questions are answered.

BORN THIS WEEK: You radiate light and warmth, and others love being close to you. You also might be quite nurturing with children.

GO FIGURE!

The idea of Go Figure is to arrive at the figures given at the bottom and right-hand columns of the diagram by following the arithmetic signs in the order they are given (that is, from left to right and top to bottom). Use only the numbers below the diagram to complete its blank squares and use each of the nine numbers only once.

	+		÷		=	6		
-		+		+				
	+		+		=	15		
+		×		-				
	+		×	5	=	55		
=		=		=				
5		28		3				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

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Even Exchange

by Donna Pettman

Each numbered row contains two clues and two 6-letter answers. The two answers differ from each other by only one letter, which has already been inserted. For example, if you exchange the A from MASTER for an I, you get MISTER. Do not change the order of the letters.

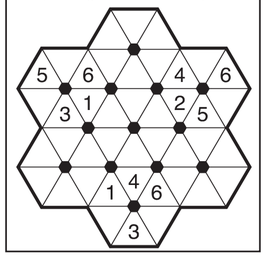
1. Georgia crop	_ _ _ _ _ H	Truce	_ _ _ _ _ E
2. Director Scorsese	_ _ _ T _ _	Florida major-leaguer	_ _ _ L _ _
3. Military trainee	_ _ _ D _ _	Proofreader's mark	_ _ _ R _ _
4. Twisted hairdo	_ _ _ _ _ D	Noggin	_ _ _ _ _ N
5. Bowling score	_ _ _ _ _ K _	Pace	_ _ _ _ _ D _
6. Recliner or rocker	_ _ _ _ _ R	Series of links	_ _ _ _ _ N
7. Deliberate	_ _ _ N _ _ _	Talcum, e.g.	_ _ _ W _ _ _
8. Depart	L _ _ _ _ _	Use a loom	W _ _ _ _ _
9. "Braveheart" star	_ _ _ _ S _ _	Long-armed ape	_ _ _ _ B _ _
10. Santiago's country	_ _ _ _ _ E	Youngster	_ _ _ _ _ D

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SNOWFLAKES

by Japheth Light

There are 13 black hexagons in the puzzle. Place the numbers 1 - 6 around each of them. No number can be repeated in any partial hexagon shape along the border of the puzzle.



CryptoQuote

AXYDLBAAXR
is **LONGFELLOW**

One letter stands for another. In this sample, **A** is used for the three L's, **X** for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each week the code letters are different.

DUTS XK XW ORWUXSC KUONRCU MNR, ZTWKONMXSC MNR, VXYT XW CNOCTNRW, CVNOXNRW. – Z.U. VJDOTSFT

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CryptoQuip

This is a simple substitution cipher in which each letter used stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Solution is accomplished by trial and error.

Clue: **V** equals **L**

GTGXSVNLNTPD VSZOVSB FSZGB BT US RNDBXNUPBSR BT Z VZXLS GPFUSX TO ISTIVS: Z DSAPVZX ANXAPVZX.

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TRIVIA TEST

BY FIFI RODRIGUEZ

1. ANIMAL KINGDOM: What is a female goat called?
2. TELEVISION: What is the name of the town in "Gilmore Girls"?
3. GEOGRAPHY: How many states does the Appalachian Trail cross?
4. MOVIES: Which actress voices the character Jessie in "Toy Story 2"?
5. U.S. PRESIDENTS: What is believed to have caused President Zachary Taylor's death?
6. ANATOMY: What is the most abundant protein in the human body?
7. GEOMETRY: How many sides does a hexagon have?
8. LITERATURE: Serial killer Hannibal Lecter first appears in which novel?
9. ASTRONOMY: What are planets outside our solar system called?
10. MUSIC: Who was the first women inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame?

SUDOKU

BY LINDA THISTLE

2025 King Features Synd., Inc.

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2	4	7			6			8
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PLACE A NUMBER IN THE EMPTY BOXES IN SUCH A WAY THAT EACH ROW ACROSS, EACH COLUMN DOWN AND EACH SMALL 9-BOX SQUARE CONTAINS ALL OF THE NUMBERS ONE TO NINE.

TRACING YOUR ROOTS

Join us for a free, hands-on genealogy workshop to explore your family history with expert research techniques from John Sadler of the Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society Charlotte Chapter. Details at library.charlotte.edu/tracing

Tracing Your Roots is made possible with funding from the Mellon Foundation

Saturday, July 26 | 10am - Noon

CHARLOTTE MUSEUM OF HISTORY 3500 Shamrock Dr, Charlotte, NC 28215

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CHARLOTTE MUSEUM OF HISTORY

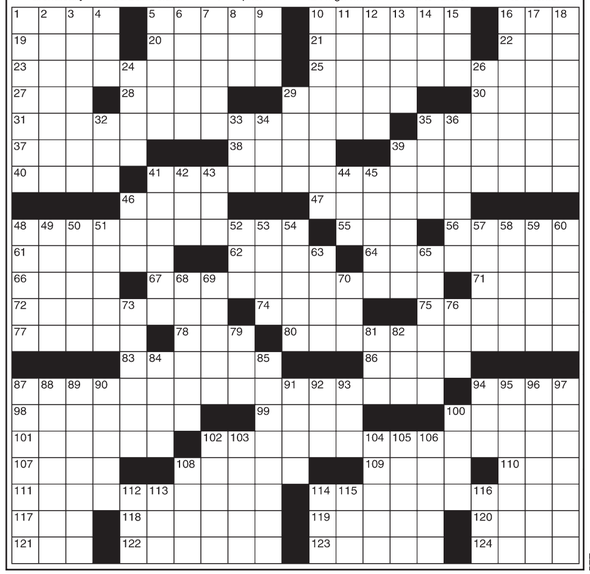
CROSSWORD

THE VIEW

2025 King Features Synd., Inc.

ACROSS
1 Short leaps
5 "No — español"
10 Crammed
16 — Paulo
19 Milky gem
20 Like much pond scum
21 Shoelace tips
22 Feeling sick
23 Luciano Pavarotti had a famous one
25 Verity or falsity of a proposition
27 Gershwin or Glass
28 Physics Nobelist Niels
29 Maine city
30 Camera part
31 Choosing a "lesser evil" candidate at the polls
35 Central rd. through town
37 Moral climate
38 Bana of "Troy"
39 Scary ghost, say
40 Encounter
41 Any of 12 spinal bones
46 Couple
47 Advocate of a lawless state, archaically
48 Document allowing passage through a country
55 Phillies' div.
56 Astrologer Sydney
61 Clevelander, e.g.
62 Faux pas at a dinner table
63 Creeper in the bignonia family
71 Football player Junior
72 Types, as data
74 Ample, in dialect
75 Cooling appliance, in brief
77 Singer Lewis
78 E. Coast ocean
80 Amount of seawater that periodically rises
83 One feeling sympathy
86 Bank claim
87 Fastest speed of a freely falling object
94 Twirl
98 Six Nations members
99 Festive party
100 School, in Somme
101 Finally
102 Central cavity of the brain
107 Did pool laps
108 Black-and-white cookies
109 Alternative to Levi's
110 Large Brit. lexicon
111 Lower-leg blood vessel
114 10 things featured in this puzzle?
117 Dir. from Ariz. to Ky.
118 "Burnt" color
119 Cries loudly
120 Castle trench
121 Playa — Rey
122 Paper Mate competitor
123 Amtrak train
124 Norway port

DOWN
1 Huge seller
2 Function
3 Spirited style
4 — -pitch
5 Ruination
6 Hawaii "hi"
7 Female rap fan
8 Fond du —
9 Heady quaff
10 "Hud" actress Neal
11 "Glee" actress Dianna
12 Held tightly
13 Like a very low-carb diet
14 Archaic verb ending
15 "seaQuest —" (1990s series)
16 Feature of the word "thumb"
17 Father or son auto-racing star
18 Fake fat
24 MLB stats
26 Flared skirt
29 Of the ear
32 Little tyke
33 Edition: Abbr.
34 "... cup — cone?"
35 Podcaster Maron
36 Writer
39 Found on this page
41 Sullies
42 Huge seller
43 Redenbacher of popcorn, for short
44 Erin Burnett's channel
45 Frankie with a falsetto
46 Ad Council ad, e.g.
48 Sauna wear
49 Arles' river
50 — -surface missile
51 All-female club's policy
52 Classic PC
53 Apartment building VIP
54 "— we all?"
57 City in Iraq
58 "Would you like to see —?" (waiter's question)
59 Draw a better bead on
60 Path
63 Spitting sound
65 "Megan —" (2017 biopic)
68 Lassos
69 Up to such time as
70 Hook-and-ladder co.
73 Canoeist's challenge
76 Scam
79 Bible book after Exod.
81 Foe of Liston
82 Enkindled
84 — the finish
85 Wider than local
87 Saluted prior to drinking
88 Interweave
89 Tag anew
90 Florida port
91 Filmmaker — von Trier
92 Antiquated
93 Cleveland hoopster
94 Chem., e.g.
95 Pennsylvania resort range
96 Not lawful
97 Really must
100 Once, once
102 Ex-senator Lott
103 Poet Heinrich
104 Kemper of "The Office"
105 Sam of "Dead Calm"
106 Thompson of "Selma"
108 Broiler, e.g.
112 African viper
113 False story
114 Bygone Pan Am rival
115 Wet/dry —
116 "As I see it," to a texter



AERIN IT OUT

ISLAND HOPPING

Platform Sports' 'Love Island' watch parties leave it all on the field

BY AERIN SPRUILL

On the first Saturday in July, I was deep in that delirious "Wait, what day is it?" haze. You know the one — when you prematurely activate three-day weekend mode the Monday before the holiday, and by the time the real day off hits your internal clock is fully fried.

You're three naps and two "Oh shit, I forgot to [fill in the blank]" jumpscares deep.

But then the real jumpscare hits. You remember you've got an article due, and you're already committed to the topic: a *Love Island USA* watch party at Platform Sports bar in *gags* South End! The worst part? You don't have a single bombshell to enter the villa with.

Text to bestie at 9:15 p.m.: "How bad Aerin didn't wanna enter the chat? I'm JUST getting in my Lyft to head to Platform and the new episode already started *melting emoji* WHEN ARE YOU GONNA BE BACK OUTSIDE AGAIN?!"

If you haven't been pulled into the orbit of *Love Island USA* or any of its international iterations, here are the CliffsNotes: It's a reality dating competition where unrealistically attractive singles are confined to a villa, filmed 24/7 and subjected to a series of emotional obstacle courses. Think: surprise recouplings, "bombshell" arrivals, and Casa Amor, a mid-season temptation trap.

All of this unfolds under the guise of finding true love in six weeks and $100K to split — if you can survive betrayal, public voting and a challenge that involves mouth-to-mouth milk regurgitation. It's giving ... Very raunchy. Very incestuous. Very unsanitary.

While season 7 premiered on June 3, the real surge hit Charlotte when nightly *Love Island* watch parties took over the TVs at popular nightlife spots like Platform Sports — an 11,000-square-foot venue that streams episodes on all of its wall-sized screens with sound, including a towering 40-foot media wall that practically dares you to scream, "SHE'S NOT A GIRL'S GIRL."

Add in the fact that Charlotte native Clarke Carraway entered the villa as a midseason bombshell, and yeah — it's packed every night at Platform (except Wednesdays, the villa's only day off).

Judge if you want, but let's be real — the news these days looks just as unhinged but with worse lighting, fewer guardrails and it's actually reality. Somehow, watching influencers spiral over pancakes and tonguing each other down feels like the more stable choice.

That being said, your fave easily over-stimmied, neurodivergent girlie would've much rather stayed home screaming her commentary from the couch while her boo rewinds for the third time because he missed the scene ... again.

But there I was, tapping a digital fortune cookie on the iPad slung over the back of the Lyft passenger seat, heading to "LoSo" to watch trash TV with hundreds of strangers. Now, Gen Z, that's what I call the "ick."

Fortune cookie opens Strive for the best but don't forget how far you've "came." Encouraging, I guess?

I stood stuck, unsure of where to enter until the familiar voice of Iain Stirling, our fearless narrator and sultry islander, spilled over the rooftop patio; there was no time to waste.

An alleyway looked promising. Then I noticed the actual sign directing me to the elevators and the third floor. I followed the sounds of the commercial break to the hostess stand and stood awkwardly, waiting for direction like a deer in headlights.

With everyone focused on the TVs surrounding the entrance, it felt like open season.

Bump it, I'll do this uncomfortable shuffle at the bar. Standing room only. Just when I started beating myself up for being late, I overheard a couple ask the hostesses about a table.

A two-hour wait?! I was late at 3 p.m.

I stared at the bar selection like I knew what I wanted while internally bracing for someone to tap my shoulder and say, "We're at capacity."

Instead, it was: "Ma'am. Ma'am. Can I check your ID?" Whew. Just the security guard, Tuck.

I fumbled through my bag, already rattled — not quite overwhelmed, more like visually pummeled by the sheer size of the screens — while "taking pics" to look busy.

I overheard another latecomer as he made a play for my section of the bar, "There's lots of space on the patio still." Begrudgingly, I stepped away from my safety net. His promise of a potentially cozy nook offered the courage I needed to brave another 100 sets of eyes waiting for me. Well, that and a large glass of Pinot Grigio.

My nook turned out to be by the stairwell exit. And there was Tuck again, chewing chicken wings and checking IDs between bites without putting them down. Iconic behavior.

Fittingly, the only person who didn't make me want to implement my exit strategy immediately was Tuck — unbothered, steady and casually offering me a seat on the emotional support cocktail table I was already clinging to ... along with his last two wings. Green flags all around.

I let my guard down and realized you could hear a pin drop. Dozens of people wildly different in demographics were all united in one shared instinct: to not miss a single shady phrase, flirty glance or cringey exchange at the firepit.

"Is it always this quiet?" I asked. "And are there always this many people?"

"It's probably the tamest you'll ever see this spot," he said. "Once the music turns up..."

Feeling chatty, I asked, "Who's your favorite couple?"He squinted at the screen, then smirked, "Well, I don't know much. It's only my second or third time here. But her [referring to Chelley]? ... She don't know what she want."

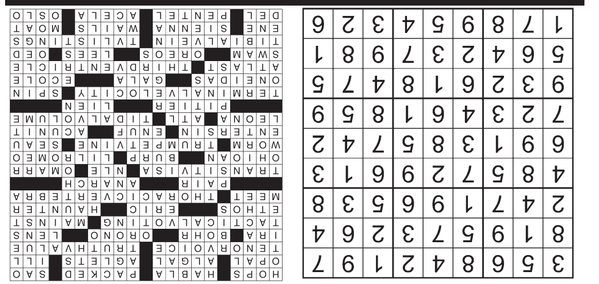
I laughed out loud. Touché, Tuck. Touché.

Spoiler alert By the time Amaya was giddy over potential with Bryan, the crowd clapped and awww'd in unison. It was just like an IG story reshared earlier that day, "America is divided, but I've never seen such unity. We can all agree Amaya Papaya deserves to win, and I think that's beautiful."

If you want to catch a *Love Island* watch party, you better hurry; Season 7 wraps up on Sunday, July 13. Reservations are highly encouraged.

INFO@QCNERVE.COM

PUZZLE ANSWERS





Even Exchange answers

1. Peach, Peace
2. Martin, Martini
3. Cadet, Carat
4. Braid, Brain
5. Strike, Stride
6. Chair, Chain
7. Ponder, Powder
8. Leave, Weave
9. Gibson, Gibbon
10. Chile, Child

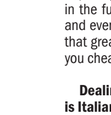
CrypTOquip answer

Nonreligious leaflet meant to be distributed to a large number of people; a secular circular.



Trivia Answers

1. A doe or nanny.
2. Stars Hollow.
3. 14.
4. Joan Cusack.
5. Acute gastroenteritis.
6. Collagen.
7. Six.
8. "Red Dragon" by Thomas Harris.
9. Explanets.
10. Aretha Franklin.



CRYPTOQUOTE answer

When it is rushing through you, destroying you, life is gorgeous, glorious.
— D.H. Lawrence





SAVAGE LOVE

QUICKIES

Ain't that a kick in the balls

BY DAN SAVAGE

What advice do you have for young people who want to have an open conversation with their partners about changing aspects of their sex life to make it more pleasurable without hurt feelings or awkwardness?

What's more likely to lead to hurt feelings in the long run: a few awkward conversations now that hopefully will lead to better conversations (and sex) in the future ... or avoiding the awkwardness now and eventually reaching a point where the sex isn't that great so you have it less and less until one of you cheats or leaves? Your choice.

Dealing with cultural differences: My boyfriend is Italian and weirdly superstitious; at times, it's anti-science. Not sure what to do here.

Keep your mouth shut, your legs open, and get that EU passport.

Do you like tighty-whities?

What's not to like?

We're two late-blooming bi people in a monogamous relationship. We have small children. Tips for exploring being bi?

Next time grandma babysits, say you're going to the movies but go to a sex club or a swingers party or a mixed queer space, etc. Check it out. Meet some people. Maybe fuck. (Pro tip: Whoever isn't driving should read the synopsis of the film you "saw" out loud in the car on your way home. You wanna be prepared to answer grandma's questions.)

Will semen damage your tooth enamel if you swallow and then sleep without brushing again?

Have you seen my teeth?

Is it pee?

Who cares?

My boyfriend and I have just started messing around with chastity. I have been interested in it for a while and got a cock cage, and he put it on for him yesterday. It really turns me on letting him have this much control and I wanna keep going. Any advice as we start this out? Getting kinky with him is so much fun and I want to get as much out of it as we can!

"They should check out Reddit's r/chastitytraining for online help, community, and resources," said Dark-Blue and DB-Vice in a joint statement. Dark-Blue is a dominant hot wife and DB-Vice is her locked (and cucked) husband. "For detailed sizing guides and high-quality cages, look at KINK3D. Our own advice: Put your health first — watch out for swelling, discoloration or excessive pain at night. Always remember: Chastity play is more mental than physical and that cage is a means to an end. The end being a constant reminder in your pants of your keyholder's control and your submission."

Follow Dark-Blue and DB-Vice on Twitter @ DarkBlueGoddess.

My husband, a trans man, died unexpectedly. How do I respectfully dispose of his dicks?

First, I'm so sorry for your loss. If I were in your shoes, it would break my heart to re-home or otherwise dispose of my husband's dicks. I would put them in a box, tuck them away on a high shelf someplace, and let my heirs worry about what to do with them when my time comes. Again, so sorry for your loss.

I can't make plans the way I did when I was single because of my partner's anxiety. What do I do?

Partnered people can't make plans the way single people can; you have to take your partner into consideration, you have to check in with your partner, you can't decide at the last minute to fly to Europe or disappear into a sex dungeon. But while you need to be considerate of your partner and their anxiety, you can't let their anxiety control you — and you should be wary of a partner who leverages their anxiety to isolate you. Basically, if you're never allowed to do anything on your own, or see anyone on your own, or make plans on your own because it makes your partner anxious ... that's not a partnership, it's a hostage situation.

I hate it when my sub bites me as I'm fucking him but he's SO into it. I want him to be happy! Do I tell him?

If he's your sub ... you should be able to order him to knock it off. If you still wanna let him bite you once in a while because it makes him happy, folding his love for biting into your existing D/s dynamic shouldn't be that hard. Identify something he hates but is willing to endure to please you — kind of like you've been willing to endure his biting — and punish him with that thing (flogging? tit clamps? piss?) as his punishment whenever he bites you. But make sure it's not something he loves to endure as that would incentivize the biting.

Most overrated public sex location?

CPAC.

Mid-40s bi/pan woman here who is afraid to fuck women because I do not know what to do. Advice?

Put that in your personal ad — no experience with other women — and you won't hear from women who aren't interested in fucking women who don't already know their way around a vulva. The women you do hear from will either be open to showing you around or actively turned on by the thought of being your first/breaking you in.

How do I convince my fuck bud that I'm serious that I'm not afraid of/turned off by anal accidents!

It's nice that you don't want your fuck buddy to think you're turned off when shit happens —literally — but you don't want your fuck buddy to think you're turned on when shit happens either. So, immediately suggest a shower break, give him a minute to breathe (or something to eat if he's been starving himself all day), then finish on him not in him.

Monogamously nosy: What's your take on those "no fooling around with friends" clauses?

Open couples get to make up their own rules — just like closed ones do — and lots of open couples rule out friends. But unless a couple also has a "one-and-done" rule, i.e. a rule against repeats, it's unfair to a regular third to rule out treating a regular third with kindness and decency. Not offering benefits to friends is understandable — denying friendship to someone who's regularly offering you benefits is petty.

Open m/m couple. I lose interest in my partner — temporarily — after he's had a hookup because I don't want to compete. Am I the asshole?

Depends. If you're withholding sex to punish your partner for having sex with someone else — something you're both allowed to do — and the point of punishing him is to make him hesitate to have sex with other people, then you're the asshole. If you're just insecure about direct-and-immediate comparisons and/or the whole "reclaiming" thing isn't a turn-on for you and you've let your partner know (more than once) that this is a "you" problem and not a "him" problem, then you're not the asshole.

Hubs loves having his balls kicked/smashed. Safe, healthy ball-play limits?

You're going to want to take tiny, baby-steps — or tiny, baby-kicks — to figure out where your husband's limits are. If he's like most guys who enjoy having their balls busted, you'll wind up kicking him harder than you think you should but not as hard as you can. But please note: Ball busting is risky.

Two months ago, I started noticing something that looked like clumps of slightly yellowish jelly in my cum. What's wrong?

Probably nothing. Jelly-like clumps can appear in your semen if it's been a while since your last orgasm — but those clumps can be a symptom of a prostate problem or an STI. If you're not experiencing other symptoms, it'll probably go away on its own. If clumps persist, get an STI screening and have your prostate checked.

Why do I want to be submissive in bed but dominant in real life?

Our sexual fantasies often involve transgression — not just against social conventions and/or expectations, but against the person we pretend to be and/or want to be and/or actually are.

Met a hot girl with a bi boyfriend, also hot. She said I could fuck her so long as her boyfriend could suck my cock before or after. I didn't think I would get hard — I've never been attracted to men — but I was rock hard the whole time. Almost came. Does this make me gay or bi or pan or something?

No. Google "situational homosexuality."

Who is your favorite for president in 2028?

Mark Cuban/Jen Shah.

I can't take thick dick — been bottoming for years and just can't. How do I say this nicely on the apps?

Since guys rarely face rejection for having thick cocks (or six packs or great hair), stumbling over some stranger on the apps whose profile bluntly expresses a preference for smaller dicks (or rounder bellies or balding heads) is unlikely to cause offense. Non-existent wounds can't be reopened.

My partner is badly injured; recovery may take a while. How can we stay close?

I'm so sorry you're going through this — best wishes to your partner for a speedy recovery. I'm sure it's not the same as what your partner is going through, but I recently had rotator cuff surgery and the recovery from that is long and painful. My husband's willingness to sit with me, read or watch TV helped us stay close. My heart goes out to you.

New to the big city. Single, solo. Pride parties seem cliquey. Tips for loosening up/meeting people?

What looks like cliques from the outside are usually just established friendship groups on the inside. So, instead of looking at guys chatting with their friends and feeling excluded, look for the guys who — like you — are out at the bars or clubs alone. If you approach enough of them just to make conversation, you'll have a friendship group of your own soon.

Fifteen years ago, I sucked a guy's dick and failed to mention that I was HIV+ until after I blew him. The guy ended up pulling a gun on me. He said if I ever told anyone he'd report me to the police. Should I be worried?

There are still mandatory HIV-disclosure laws on the books that were passed at the height of AIDS hysteria in the 1980s. These laws are counterproductive, as they can discourage people from knowing their HIV status (you don't have to disclose what you don't know), but most HIV-disclosure laws have statutes of limitations, usually under three years. So, even if this guy is out there and somehow managed to find out you confided in someone about this experience, the police aren't going to come looking for you — and the crime he committed (threatening you with a deadly weapon) is worse and has a longer statute of limitations!

BROADWAY'S DEARLY BELOVED MUSICAL COMES TO CHARLOTTE!

BEETLEJUICE

The Musical. The Musical. The Musical.



PHOTO BY MATTHEW MURPHY

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