VOLUME 8, ISSUE 15; MAY 27 - JUNE 9, 2026; WWW.QCNERVE.COM

QUEEN CITY NERVE



KICKED OUT

IMPACTS OF IMMIGRATION CRACKDOWNS CONCERN FANS IN LEAD-UP TO A BIG SUMMER FOR SOCCER IN CHARLOTTE

BY KALLAN LOUIS

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MAILING: PO BOX 6007
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INFO@QCNERVE.COM

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COVER PHOTO: David Palma **COVER DESIGN:** Justin LaFrancois

AAN publishers · Lion Publishers · NCPA North Carolina Press Association

QUEEN CITY NERVE WELCOMES SUBMISSIONS OF ALL KINDS. PLEASE SEND SUBMISSIONS OR STORY PITCHES TO INFO@QCNERVE.COM. QUEEN CITY NERVE IS PUBLISHED EVERY OTHER WEDNESDAY BY NERVE MEDIA PRODUCTIONS LLC.

FIRST ISSUE OF QUEEN CITY NERVE FREE. EACH ADDITIONAL ISSUE $3.

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Latino fans make up an estimated 20% of Charlotte FC's home attendance. Photo courtesy of Tepper Sports

KICKED OUT

Impacts of immigration crackdowns concern fans in lead-up to a big summer for soccer in Charlotte

BY KALLAN LOUIS

Soccer fandom peaks every four years with the FIFA World Cup. The "beautiful game," a term popularized by legendary Brazilian fútboler Pelé in the 1970s, takes center stage globally as people proudly support their native countries or familial heritage.

While American interest in this quadrennial tournament and the sport in general has lagged behind much of the rest of the world in decades past, this year has seen a rise in interest in the US.

Among a number of other factors, that's due in large part to the fact that the United States will host the 2026 World Cup, along with Canada and Mexico, for only the second time ever — the first since 1994.

From the launch of Group Stage fixtures on June 11 to the final match in New Jersey's MetLife Stadium on July 19, North America will be home to one of the world's most elite and exciting competitions.

That momentum will only carry on in Charlotte, which MLS has selected to host its 2026 All-Star Game for the first time, scheduled for July 29 at Bank of America Stadium.

Both events will attract international attention and tourism from all corners of the globe. That's almost always a positive, but issues around racial profiling and immigration crackdowns have some fans concerned about what should be a glorious summer for soccer in America.

Immersed in the culture

Bryan and David Palma are siblings and diehard Charlotte FC fans. Both are active members of the Carolina Hooliganz, an official Charlotte FC Supporter Group made up predominantly of Latino fans.

The Palma brothers' passion for soccer comes from their father.

"I just remember growing up watching the games," said David Palma. "My dad always had soccer on the TV. So it started from a very young age. I played it all the way up to college until I broke my leg."

With his playing career done, David put his passion for soccer into his local MLS squad, Charlotte FC, alongside his brother. After witnessing the energy flowing through the supporter group section during home matches, they knew they had to get involved.

The brothers now produce content for the Carolina Hooliganz. David even acquired media credentials to capture content on the field. He became a capo, one of the designated leaders of chants and songs on match days.

"The capos are the ones who set the tone on game day," David told Queen City Nerve. "They get the party going. They're like DJs. They feel the vibe out on the match, they pick the chant, and they get it going. Then they get the next one ready and keep it rolling."

Among major professional sports in America, the international fan support at games is most pronounced in soccer. As the world's most popular sport, it transcends borders, languages and status.

Match day fan rituals include prematch stadium marches, with sounds of percussion, brass instruments and supporter chants announcing a group's presence along the route, often in foreign languages.

One might see fans in masks or sombreros. "Latin Night" isn't necessary; it's inherently part of the soccer experience in the supporter group tailgates and within the stadium.

Before games, Hooliganz and other supporter groups tailgate at 703 McNinch Street before marching to the stadium, creating an experience through sights, sounds and culture that builds up to the match.

"It doesn't matter if you're Latino or not, we welcome everyone," said Bryan Palma. "We're just one big family."

Building a soccer city

In its inaugural home match in 2022, Charlotte FC set the MLS record attendance with 74,479 fans at "The Fortress," as the team's most fervent fans refer to Bank of America Stadium. Charlotte's home-match attendance consistently ranks among the best in MLS, averaging close to 30,000 fans per match, with Latino turnout playing a large role as a key demographic.

According to the club, Latino fans account for nearly 20% of the team's home attendance. The stadium has hosted international matches in recent years for which more than 60,000 fans usually pack the seats.

MLS pointed out these factors as reasons for rewarding Charlotte the 2026 All-Star Game.

"Charlotte has turned into a big-time soccer city, and we are pleased to bring the 2026 MLS All-Star Game to the Queen City," said MLS Commissioner Don Garber upon announcing the event in July 2025.

"The city and region keep showing up for the sport – from packed Charlotte FC crowds to global events like the FIFA Club World Cup and Copa América the past two summers," Garber continued. "We're excited to bring another marquee soccer event to Charlotte."

As the Charlotte region's growth continues to outpace the rest of the country, Garber's endorsement reinforced Charlotte's belief that it should be a host city for premiere events targeting international audiences, a point the club's owner, David Tepper, underscored during last July's press conference.

"The success of soccer matches at Bank of America Stadium has helped position Charlotte on the global stage as a premier destination for hosting some of the world's top players and teams," said Tepper, owner and chairman of Tepper Sports & Entertainment, which owns not only Charlotte FC but the NFL's Carolina Panthers and Bank of America Stadium.

The Palma brothers are looking forward to the spotlight the MLS All-Star Game will place on Charlotte's soccer culture.

"MLS All-Star is going to showcase Charlotte," said Bryan Palma. "It's a boost to our economy and it's going to help the city grow. It's what we need to bring to Charlotte to keep growing as a soccer city."

However, events that have transpired in Charlotte since last summer's announcement have only added to a broader political climate that has raised concerns around how Latino fans, whether visiting from other countries or simply attending festivities in their own towns, will be treated during a summer of high-profile soccer matches in America.



Carolina Hooliganz have a presence at every Charlotte FC home match. Photo courtesy of David Palma



At a Carolina Hooliganz tailgate. Photo courtesy of David Palma

Immigration crackdowns in Charlotte

In November 2025, the Department of Homeland Security's Customs and Border Protection (CBP) launched Operation Charlotte's Web with a stated purpose to target criminal illegal immigrants. The execution of the raids struck fear in the community, as videos of ICE agents entering Latino-owned businesses, accosting landscapers while they worked and making arrests on church premises spread across social media.

Local Latino residents took precautions. Some didn't leave their homes for days, missing work or school. Some businesses modified operating hours or paused operations entirely.

Research from Bloomberg News showed that foot traffic along Central Avenue, one of Charlotte's most heavily Latino corridors, declined not only in November but the months that followed, lasting to the present.

Bloomberg also found that absenteeism sharply increased during the raids in predominantly Latino middle and high schools in Mecklenburg County.

Whispers about impending immigration raids during MLS matches swept through Charlotte earlier in the fall. However, by the time CBP arrived in the Queen City, Charlotte FC had been eliminated from the playoffs.

"The concerns were there, but overall, I felt safe," said Byran Palma. "Charlotte was always transparent with us. We didn't have a game during that time stretch here, but if we did we probably weren't going to tailgate. Community is such a big part of soccer and to fear even going outside, it just breaks my heart to see people go through that."

Charlotte FC said it has no knowledge of DHS presence at any tailgates or matches during the 2025 season or this season, which kicked off on March 7.

Organizations call on local officials to act

For the coming MLS All-Star Game, the MLS All-Stars will compete against the stars of Liga MX, the highest level of the Mexican football league system. If the turnout is similar to previous matches at Bank of America Stadium that have featured teams from Latin American countries, the stadium could be near capacity — and overwhelmingly Latino.

Some fans worry this could create an atmosphere for targeting and racial profiling by immigration officials around the stadium.

MLS failed to return interview requests or written questions for this story regarding how it will ensure fan safety during All-Star Week.

"The current administration already made it clear they're going after asylum seekers, refugees, people with green cards, and anyone who hasn't achieved the American dream yet," said Hector Vaca Cruz, a community organizer with Action NC and the son of immigrants. "Their priority is to go after everyone, especially the Latino community."

Vaca Cruz said Latino Americans are less fearful because they know their rights, but they can still be profiled, which can be traumatic in its own right. He said he's had similar experiences himself.

"I've had ICE agents make me strip off all my clothes to prove I don't have any tattoos," Vaca Cruz recalled. "I've been stopped by Border Patrol agents at the airport, where I had to prove my US citizenship even though I had an ID. That's the way they operate."

In addition to immigration crackdowns, recent violent conflicts with Iran and Venezuela as well as strained relationships with European allies could spill over at World Cup events. DHS confirmed they will be present at all US host cities, but insisted that its focus will not be on immigration.

Fans and event workers have still expressed concerns and threats of boycotts loom.

On May 31, Bank of America Stadium will host the Allstate Continental Clásico, considered a sendoff game for the US National Men's Team, which will play Senegal before preparing for the Group Stage of the World Cup.

In the lead-up to that match, Action NC has joined a coalition of community organizations such as Carolina Migrant Network to call on local law enforcement to commit to not collaborating with immigration agents. They are also requesting that local government officials enact policies to create immigration enforcement-free zones.

"The presence of ICE and CBP agents at the May 31 game could have a negative impact on predicted gains for our city," read a release from the coalition. "As 2025 showed us, ICE and CBP presence in our community led to civil and human rights violations. According to DHS's own statistics, over 66% of individuals arrested during Operation Charlotte's Web had no violent criminal record."

The group cited a recent travel advisory released by more than 120 civil society groups warning that 2026 World Cup attendees "could be at risk of serious rights violations as the Trump administration doubles down on its draconian immigration and anti-human rights agenda."

The travel advisory states that, in the absence of meaningful action from FIFA, host cities or the Trump administration, people traveling to the United States or domestically could be at risk of arbitrary denial of entry and risk of arrest, detention and/or deportation; expanded restrictions and limitation on travel and entry to the US; invasive social media screening and searches of electronic devices; violent and unconstitutional immigration enforcement, including racial profiling; suppression of speech and protest amidst increased surveillance; and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment at the hands of ICE.

"Sports are one of the few places left that people can gather to find shared identity outside of home and work," read a statement from the Charlotte Metro Democratic Socialists of America, one of the groups joining Action NC in calling for action from local leaders.

"Fans worldwide fight to keep their fellow fans safe and dignified inside and outside of the stadium. Everyone should be able to attend a game without fear that they won't make it home. We want everyone to be able to keep their eye on the ball, not looking over their shoulder."

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Mecklenburg County's former juvenile detention center, known as Jail North, closed in 2022. Photo by Michelle Crouch

THE PRESSURE BUILDS

Sheriff's office announces plans to reopen Jail North amidst surge in detentions

BY RYAN PITKIN

The Mecklenburg County Sheriff's Office announced May 19 that it plans to reopen its jail facility in north Charlotte, unused for detention purposes since 2022, due to "historic overcrowding" in the Uptown facility, where hundreds of inmates are being housed in overflow areas and utilizing temporary, Stack-a-Bunk sleeping arrangements.

Mecklenburg County Sheriff Garry McFadden hopes to begin moving inmates to the facility, which is located near the intersection of Statesville and Sunset roads, in early August.

"To maintain the safety and security of our staff, residents, and the community, we must take immediate action to address the growing population inside Detention Center Central," McFadden said in a release on May 19.

"As we move into the summer months — when crime tends to increase — reopening Detention Center North is a necessary step to help manage the overcrowding while we continue working through these ongoing challenges," he continued.

According to the release, the population inside the Uptown jail had reached 2,084 as of May 18 and continues to rise "dramatically," with 288 residents housed in overflow areas.

In a video released in April, McFadden warned that "the pressure is building" at the Uptown jail. He blamed the overcrowding in part on House Bill 307, known as Iryna's Law, which has led to an increasing number of people being held in the jail for lower-level charges.

In its release, MCSO added that approximately 60 inmates who had already been sentenced to state prison remained at the Uptown jail awaiting transfer to Department of Adult Correction facilities. In some cases, residents have remained at Central for around three months after being sentenced, according to the release.

Sheriff Garry McFadden closed the juvenile detention facility known as Jail North in 2022, citing staffing shortages tied to operations at the Uptown jail.

At the time, it was the state's largest juvenile detention center, with a capacity for up to 72 juveniles. The building has since been used for administrative offices and training, but no one is housed there.

A letter sent by the National Association for Upward Mobility to MCSO in late April demanded solutions to troubling conditions some inmates had reported at the Mecklenburg County Detention Center Central (MCDCC) in Uptown.

The letter raised concerns about reports from three men being held in the Uptown jail who said they were forced to sleep on the floor of the facility despite suffering from major medical issues ranging from severe arthritis, hernia and heart conditions to diabetes, obesity and geriatric ailments.

The letter also claimed the detention center ran out of toilet paper on April 25.

In a video released by the MCSO on April 29, Major Anthony Durrah, facility commander at MCDCC, claimed that the conditions described in letter were "not accurate."

According to Durrah, none of the inmates at the Uptown jail sleep "on the floor," though some do sleep on what are called Stack-A-Bunks, temporary sleeping surfaces that are raised about 8 inches off the ground. He also denied that the facility had run out of toilet paper.

As reported at the time by Rachel Crumpler with NC Health News, McFadden insisted in January that MCSO was unable to reopen the facility for juveniles, claiming it would take 96 detention officers, plus staffing for health care, food service and other support.

"Where are we going to get the resources?" McFadden asked at a juvenile justice forum in Charlotte, emphasizing that he's still struggling to fill dozens of vacant jobs at the Uptown jail as it had already begun seeing a surge in detainee population after Iryna's Law took effect in Dec. 1, 2025.

"Where are we going to get the funding? But the main part that we have to understand is this: How are we going to hire 96 people? Where are we going to get 96 people from?" McFadden asked.

In its release on May 19, MCSO announced plans to immediately roll out an "aggressive hiring initiative" that they hope leads to hiring as many as 50 detention officers to help with the Jail North reopening. The initiative will offer starting annual salaries beginning at $68,000 with a $7,500 sign-on bonus.

A preliminary report from a state-funded research group provided to state lawmakers on April 1 identified "key pressure points that need to be addressed" to fully implement Iryna's Law, including constraints on the legal system.

"North Carolina is undertaking one of the most significant overhauls of its mental health and criminal justice systems in decades, with [Iryna's Law] introducing changes with substantial operational, fiscal and public safety implications," said the report, published by the NC Collaboratory, a multi-disciplinary research group based at UNC Chapel Hill.

Lawmakers have allocated more than $2 million for more assistant district attorneys and legal assistants in Mecklenburg County, but McFadden has repeatedly complained that no new funding has been provided to help ease the strain on his jail.

The proposed Mecklenburg County budget for Fiscal Year 2026-27 includes $5.3 million in new funding to support medical services, maintenance, juvenile housing and overtime to serve an increased jail population. County manager Mike Bryant, however, stated during his presentation of that budget to the Mecklenburg Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) on May 20 that the budget does not include funding for the reopening of the jail.

It appeared during the presentation that Bryant's office had been taken by surprise by McFadden's announcement on the previous day.

"Deputy County Manager Derrick Ramos is working with their team to learn more about what this may mean possibly from a financial perspective," Bryant told commissioners.

The BOCC is expected to vote on its budget on June 2, while Bryant has said he will bring his separate findings related to the reopening of Jail North in front of the body at a later date as more is learned.

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MCSO Maj. Anthony Durrah addresses claims about the Uptown jail. Still courtesy of MCSO

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'UPDATING'

May 27 • 9 p.m. • Comedy Zone, 900 NC Music Factory Blvd. • $36 • cltcomedyzone.com

In the basement of a New York City taqueria, two dudes had a vision. Stand-up comic Brandon Berman combined his obsession with disarming humor and shock value with producer Harrison Foreman's fixation on life's relatable and cringe-inducing moments. The result is *Updating*, a comedy dating show that brings two singles on a blindfolded first date in front of a live audience. With results that can be humiliating, steamy, or surprisingly heartfelt, *Updating* is like reality TV without plastic participants and judicious editing. Authentic and unfiltered, Berman and Foreman's brainchild mixes modern romance, audience participation and feedback in pursuit of relationship magic — or meltdown.

FEMME FEST 3

May 29-30 • 9 p.m. • Snug Harbor, 1228 Gordon St. • $25 day, $45 two-day • snugrock.com

In 2024, Callie Wolfe and Joseph Conde, cofounders of adventurous Charlotte alt-rock band Oh! You Pretty Things, launched Femme Fest as a response to the music industry's ongoing discrimination against women and femme-presenting artists. After expanding from one night to two in 2025, the event doubles down again this year at Snug Harbor with a pair of dynamite bills. Eleven local and regional acts including electronic noise punk terrorists Girl Brutal, swaggering protest rockers I Hate Dave, alternative indie quartet Leaving for Arizona, raucous pop-rock combo Little Heart Machine and more raise funds for organizations that support women, femme-presenting people and LGBTQIA+ community members.

ILANA GLAZER

May 28 • 7 p.m. • Knight Theater, 430 S. Tryon St. • $39-$76 • blumenthalarts.org

"Do you remember blue balls?" Ilana Glazer asks her audience while reminiscing about her high school years. "I fell for it. I thought it was a medical condition." A lot has happened for Glazer since being duped by horny teenaged boys. The stand-up comedian, actor, writer and activist has made her mark in TV and film, co-creating and starring in the surreal comedy series *Broad City* and the raunchy, relatable film *Babes*, which delves into female friendship, motherhood and adulthood. Glazer debuted on Broadway, starring alongside George Clooney in *Good Night, and Good Luck*, which depicts journalist Edward R. Murrow's clash with red-scaring US Sen. Joseph McCarthy.



Ashlyn Uribe
Promotional photo
5/30



'Bamboozled'
Still courtesy of New Line Cinema
6/5

ASHLYN URIBE, ELI THE FOOL, JAMIE JADOTTE

May 30 • 8 p.m. • Petra's, 1919 Commonwealth Ave. • $10 • petrasbar.com

Charlotte indie-pop artist Ashlyn Uribe eschewed an NYC acting career to pursue her storytelling songwriting. Returning to the Queen City, she dropped her 2019 debut single "Take Your Time," which fuses the R&B-infused agility of Ariana Grande with the mystery and experimentation of Kate Bush. Slinky and sultry 2025 single "obviously" brings depth to Uribe's artistry. Los Angeles-based Eli the Fool tilled a stripped-down indie folk/alt-rock furrow in the past, but her 2025 track "Dream in the dark" is a slow burning, mysterious soundscape built on trilling piano and Eli's fluttering ethereal vocals. On "Shakespeare," Jamie Jadotte essays ebullient new wave-inflected pop rock.

LOW GROVES, MOTOCROSSED, MA

May 31 • 8 p.m. • Visulite Theatre, 1615 Elizabeth Ave. • $15-$20 • visulite.com

With pensive vocals threading through spectra, shimmering guitars, Chicago-born singer-songwriter Low Groves crafts folk-adjacent indie rock tunes that are personal yet mythic. His stripped-down 2026 *Old House Sessions* EP is down-home, plaintive and joyful. Blair Fullager's Motocrossed crafts cowboy rock in which quiet, plaintive alt-country parts jostle with noisy indie rock. Tunes like "Under the Moon," suggest the Elephant 6 Collective appropriating The Mekons' ramshackle groove. Chris Vercauteren's songwriting moniker Ma means "ghost" in Vietnamese, and there's a ghostly quality to his political yet plaintive tunes. Played by Ma's power trio, swaying soulful tunes like"The Abyss" reveal a steely, rocking resolve.

ECHO AND THE BUNNYMEN

June 2 • 8 p.m. • The Fillmore, 820 Hamilton St. • $64 • fillmorenc.com

Over scurrying drums, swaggering bass and Will Sergeant's chiming air raid siren guitar, singer Ian McCulloch summons spirits like a shaman possessed: "*If I said I'd lost my way/ Would you sympathize/ Could you sympathize?*" In 1980, there wasn't much like "Rescue," the moody, psychedelia-tinged manifesto that kicked off side two of Echo and the Bunnymen's debut LP *Crocodiles*. The Liverpool post-punk veterans have essayed everything from magisterial goth-pop ("The Killing Moon") to rampaging violin-driven rock ("The Cutter") propelled by McCulloch's transfixed vocals. Though raspy and time-ravaged when the band came through town in 2024, his voice still calls an arcane cult to prayer.



Front Porch Market
Courtesy of Esther & Elsa
6/6

FRONT PORCH MARKET

June 6 • 11 a.m.-4 p.m. • FreeMoreWest, 2215 Thrift Rd. • Free • estherandelsaretail.com/frontporchclt

The monthly Front Porch Market made its move this year to FreeMoreWest, a walkable district near Wesley Heights featuring restaurants, shopping and cool stuff to do all in one place. The market is a daylong celebration showcasing over 120 small businesses, including the area's best curators, shop owners, designers, makers and bakers. The experience is enhanced by live bands, DJs, interactive experiences and The Broken Crayon kid zone. Bites, brews, lemonade, cocoa and lattes enliven the day, along with familiar faces and the kind of energy that lingers long after the party wraps. This is what it looks like when a neighborhood comes alive.

KALI UCHIS, MARIAH THE SCIENTIST, LAILA

June 8 • 7:30 p.m. • Truliant Amphitheater, 707 Pavilion Blvd. • $35-$154 • truliantamp.com

Drawing on R&B, jazz and salsa, Kali Uchis crafts a continually surprising, distinctive and danceable left-field style. The Colombian-American singer-songwriter scored with her 2018 debut LP *Isolation*, pulling reggaetón, funk, breezy tropicalia and psychedelia into her gravitational orbit. But her secret weapon is her ranging voice, a soulful alto on her debut and a raspy flutter on her sensuous 2026 LP *Sincerely,*. Mariah the Scientist essays sensitive songs of love and heartbreak on her smoldering, atmospheric 2025 LP *Hearts Sold Separately*. Laila produced half of her 2024 debut LP *Gap Year!* in her bedroom. Her unforced sincerity shines through on songs like the limpid "Like That!"

CHARLOTTE LYRIC THEATRE SHOWCASE CONCERT

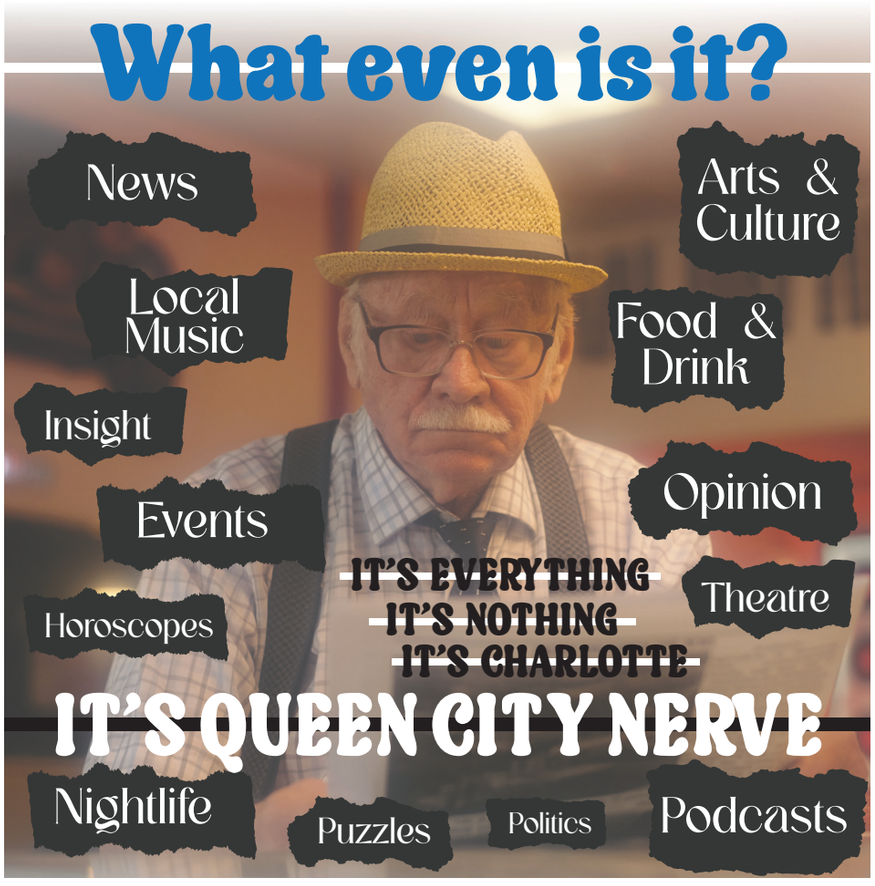
June 4 • 7 p.m. • Christ Church Charlotte, 1412 Providence Rd. • Free RSVP required • charlottelyrictheatre.com

In 2025, Opera Carolina ousted its general director, artistic director and principal conductor James Meena. In 2026, Meena rebounded by launching Charlotte Lyric Theatre, a tuition-free training program and performance company. It's a month early, but Meena's nonprofit, artist-led organization gets a jump on the Fourth of July with this musical tribute to America's 250th birthday. Billed as an evening of great American song, the program features works by composers and national treasures including George Gershwin, Leonard Bernstein, Carlisle Floyd, Jake Heggie and more. Local artists Corey Lovelace, Amber Rose, Johnathan Stanford White, Zachary Hugo and Daria Ruzhynska perform under the direction of Maestro Meena.

BLEAK WEEK: 'BAMBOOZLED'

June 5 • 7:15 p.m. • Independent Picture House, 4237 Raleigh St. • $10 • independentpicturehouse.org

Presented in partnership with the American Cinematheque, Bleak Week: Cinema of Despair showcases international cinema that ventures into the darker realms of humanity. Spike Lee's *Bamboozled* lost money and received mixed reviews when it was released in 2000. The plot concerns Black TV producer Pierre Delacroix (Damon Wayans), who determines to get fired by his network bosses by pitching the worst idea imaginable: a 21st century minstrel show. The network not only airs it, but it becomes a smash hit. Local artist and curator de'Angelo Dia moderates a post-film discussion with artist-educator Carla Aaron-Lopez, Assistant Professor of Africana Studies at Davidson College Dr. Randi Gil-Sadler, and DJ-sound artist Simon SMTHNG.





Mike Collins (in red vest) & Co. in a former Charlotte Squawks production. Photo by John Merrick

LET'S ROAST THIS BIRD

'Charlotte Squawks' returns for its 21st year of sassy localized satire

BY PAT MORAN

The Carolina Panthers winning the division despite a losing record is celebrated with a rousing medley that includes "We Will Block You," a satirical take on Queen's "We Will Rock You." The sassy, brassy production number "Estella" sings the praises of Charlotte's first Black woman police chief, Estella Patterson, to the tune of Rihanna's "Umbrella." In "Let Us Get a Star," the Grammy-winning for the TV musical drama *SMASH*, "Let Me Be a Star," gets a local upgrade in which impassioned foodies beg the gourmet gods to bless the city with more than one Michelin-star restaurant.

These are just some of the comedic and melodic barbs featured in *Charlotte Squawks 21: Hold My Beer!*, a tuneful and topical package of satire, sketch comedy, video vignettes and parody songs rooted in the faults, foibles and dysfunctions of the Queen City.

The irreverent institution, which runs from June 4-28 at Booth Playhouse this year, is a mash-up of *Saturday Night Live* and *Forbidden Broadway*, says Mike Collins, co-creator of *Charlotte Squawks* alongside Charlotte attorney Brian Kahn.

Now in its 21st year, the locally written, performed and staged musical comedy revue would be old enough to legally buy a beer if it were a person, but *Hold My Beer!* is a doubly-fitting subtitle for the show because 2026 has truly been a "hold my beer" year.

Collins, longtime host of WFAE public radio's morning news show *Charlotte Talks*, co-produces and directs the annual summertime stage play. He notes that it has been particularly tricky to nail down the topical parody tunes for this year's production of *Squawks* because the 2026 news cycle has changed with whiplash-inducing frequency. New I-77 toll lanes were prepared to plow through town — and now they're not. Vi Lyles sailed to electoral victory and settled in to serve her fifth term as Charlotte's mayor — but now she won't.

"This year has been a tough slog," Collins admits.

The problem is not so much the timely monologue that Collins delivers at the top of each show, or even the two comic newscasts — similar to *Saturday Night Live*'s "Weekend Update" — that he co-hosts with cast member Johanna Jowett.

"We've always had to make some adjustments over the run of the show," Collins says. "We can do that easily in the monologue and in the newscasts because we actually read the newscasts."

The show's carefully choreographed musical numbers, however, are a bigger challenge. There are 22 songs in this year's show, performed by combinations of *Squawks*' 11-member cast. One number about the proposed — and apparently dead-in-the-water — toll road project has kept co-creators, cast and crew on their toes.

"I've already had to rewrite that damned [toll road] song four times over the past month," says Kahn, who remains a co-producer and writes the show's script and song lyrics. "I'm sure I'll have to rewrite it again."

Kahn adds that he wrote a new song for the show when Mayor Lyles surprisingly announced her resignation.

"Now [there is] going to be an all-out scrum for the interim mayor position," says Kahn, who is also managing partner of McGuireWoods' Charlotte office. The new mayoral number means a previously scheduled song about NC Senator Phil Berger's defeat in his district's Republican primary was dumped — much like Berger.

"Something had to give," Collins offers. "The show has to be as balanced as we can make it ... from fast to slow, from groups to solos, from local to national. Otherwise we get stuck in a rut and can't get out of it."

Collins compares putting the show together to assembling a complicated puzzle. It's a puzzle that's not quite been fully put together by the time this story is going to press.

"It's very much a work in progress," Kahn says. "We're building the plane as we're flying it."

How 'Charlotte Squawks' hatched

Kahn and Collins seem like the ideal partners to create a show like *Charlotte Squawks* on the fly. Growing up, Kahn loved comedy. He worked as a political cartoonist in high school and college while singing in an a cappella group and performing in musical theatre.

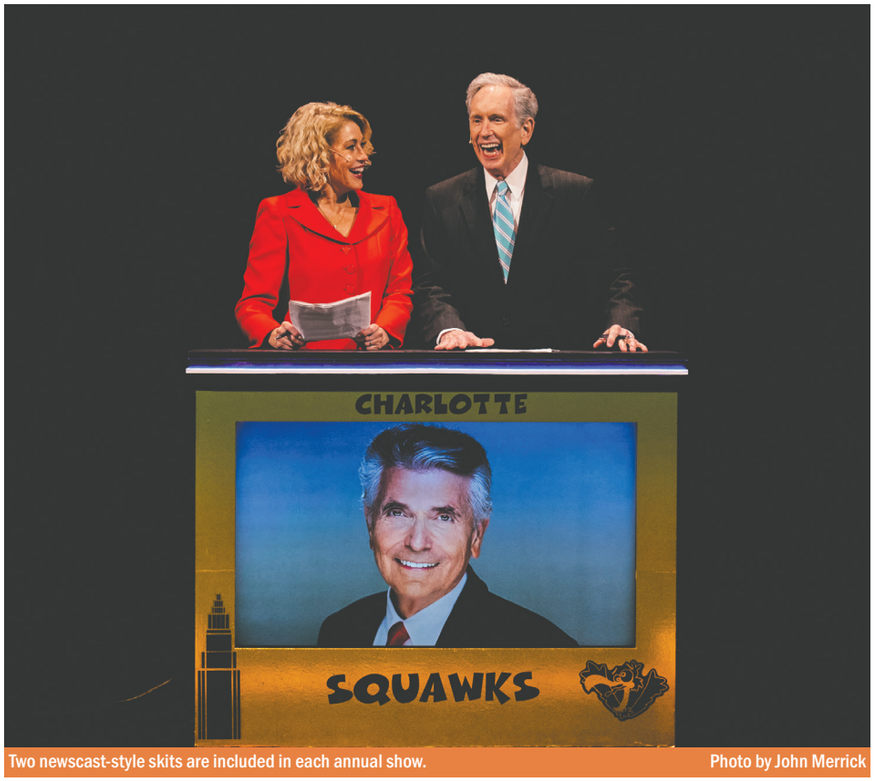
"The ability to deeply analyze the issues and get to the heart of what makes them interesting, or funny, or uncomfortable is a lot of what I do as a lawyer," says Kahn, adding that a theatrical background comes in handy when he makes presentations in court. "Lawyering is storytelling; writing shows is storytelling as well."

Collins has a similar background in theatre and comedy, and as a radio and television personality he's made plenty of public appearances over the course of his career. Deep down, however, Collins always wanted to be like legendary late-night TV host Johnny Carson.

"There was no book to tell you how you got to be Johnny Carson," Collins says. "There was no path."

In 2003, the comedy gods — or Keith Martin — intervened.

Martin, then with the now-defunct Charlotte Repertory Theatre, approached Kahn to create a show that parodied Charlotte as a fundraiser for the city's public TV station WTVI. Martin also asked Collins to host the show, christened *Charlotte Squawks* as a spoof on Collins' radio show *Charlotte Talks*. The very first show went up at McGlohon Theater in Uptown. It was a modest



Two newscast-style skits are included in each annual show. Photo by John Merrick

production with minimal choreography, costumes brought from performers' homes, and a cast of eight, including Kahn.

"We were good at selling tickets, but we weren't a great fundraiser because we made fun of the sponsors and pissed people off," Kahn remembers.

Squawks got dropped by WTVI but Blumenthal Arts saw potential in the scrappy musical comedy revue and agreed to co-produce the show. It was moved over to Booth Playhouse for its second iteration, where it is still performed 23 years later.

in the time since, *Squawks* has only skipped two years. There was no production in 2020 due to the COVID pandemic. In 2008, Squawks canceled a season when Kahn's wife gave birth to triplet boys. By then, he had retired from the cast.

"I wanted to stay married and be present," Kahn explains.

He continues to write the show's book and lyrics while designing a constant barrage of PowerPoint slides that flash on screens throughout the show. The visuals act as a kind of Greek chorus, adding humor and commentary during the parody songs.

"It's a frenetic piece of [the show] that I think the audience really likes," Kahn says.

The Squawks team also produces videos, either mock commercials or commentaries on the news cycle. They serve to break-up the musical numbers and sketches but have a practical purpose too; they give the cast a chance to change costumes and allow crew time to bring on props or scenery.

Collins has been fully committed to every production except for *Squawks*' second year, when he was double booked, appearing simultaneously in Charlotte Rep's production of the play *Copenhagen*. Even then, Collins opened *Squawks*, breaking off mid-monologue to replace himself with a cardboard cut-out of … himself, before racing down the theater aisle and up the street to catch *Copenhagen*'s opening curtain.

'Squawks' sharpens its comedic claws

If there was any fault in *Squawks*' early years, it was that the production was too careful not to offend anybody, Collins maintains.

"We found that the edgier we were, the more people liked it," he says. "We thought Charlotte couldn't take it. They can take it, and in fact they want it. They thirst for it."

One surprise element the show springs on audiences is the use of guest stars. Former Charlotte Mayor Jennifer Roberts, NC Attorney General Jeff Jackson, and former Panthers head coach Ron Rivera have all popped up on Squawks, either onstage or on video. A recurring guest is former Queen City Mayor and NC Gov. Pat McCrory.

One night, when McCrory appeared onstage, Collins talked with the then-governor's security detail. They said a show like *Squawks* would never fly in Raleigh because the state capital, unlike Charlotte, doesn't have a sense of humor about itself.

That said, the show has had its fair share of hecklers, push back and walk-outs.

"Every year people walk out and I love it," Kahn insists.



A past skit took aim at the clientele of Selwyn Pub. Photo by John Merrick

"Some people sit in the front row and don't laugh and don't smile ever, and we see them," Collins notes.

One year, Randy Marion car dealership took offense at a faux commercial that lampooned the company's habit of putting all its family members in its commercials. The business sent *Squawks* a cease-and-desist order.

Kahn wasn't ruffled.

"First of all, why?" Kahn says. "And second of all, I'm a lawyer. I know where the line is and this isn't even close."

Everything, it turns out, is fair game for *Squawks* as long as the creators, cast and crew can "find the funny" in the topic, Collins says.

"If it's happening in Charlotte, it's coming up," Kahn promises.

Hold My Beer! will tackle rising gas prices, Sycamore Brewing's attempt to rebrand as Club West Brewing, the Uptown car crash involving Charlotte Hornet star LaMelo Ball's camouflaged custom Hummer, and the current administration in Washington D.C.

"If you are a hardcore Trump fan, you probably will not like our show," Kahn says.

As if to prove Kahn's point, cast member Lucia Victoria describes a Trump "tribute" she sings in the upcoming show, which is set to the bold and brassy James Bond theme "Goldfinger."

In "Goldfucker," the lyrics reference our current president's obsession with all things gold. Trump, played by Victoria's husband and *Squawks* cast member Jeff Stetson, even trundles onstage during the number.

"He's doing various ridiculous things that you would expect from our president," Victoria says.

Amid the funny, Squawks occasionally presents a serious number. This year, it's a heartfelt tribute to local businessman and activist Manolo Betancur, the founder and owner of Manolo's Bakery, who has become a rallying figure in the community's resistance to ICE and Customs and Border Patrol agents' attacks on Charlotte.

'Squawks' connects Charlotte

A lot of heart and effort goes into producing each year's show, and that can take its toll on the performers. Victoria reveals that, after last year's production, roughly half the cast of Squawks decided to retire.

"It was a big year; we had a great year [but] we were tired," says Victoria, who has been with *Squawks* for 13 years.

"We actually got as far as having auditions scheduled and then got a call, and they're all back," Kahn says.

"It's a bit like childbirth," says Victoria, explaining the cast's decision to return. "It's really painful and hard on your body, and then a few months later you remember how cute the baby was and you want to have another one."

Collins notes that almost all of the cast have worked at one time or another in professional theatre. In fact, one *Squawks* alumnus, Nkeki Obi-Melekwe, went on to star in *Tina: The Tina Turner Musical* on Broadway.

The process of birthing *Hold My Beer!* began right after the previous show wrapped in 2025. Kahn opened a document file on his computer and immediately jotting down on concepts, sketch ideas and song parodies that he thought might be funny.

From January to April 2026, he worked on the new songs and started sending them to Collins, who has only vetoed one or two suggested parody tunes in *Squawks* history. In April, Collins got together with the show's choreographer, Linda Booth.

"[We] get these words on a piece of paper and they're very clever, but sometimes the challenge is to find out how to stage them," Collins says.

After consulting with Collins, musical director and conductor Bill Congdon started working on the songs' arrangements, fitting the words to the music and working them out with a five-piece band, including keyboardist Kaarin Record, guitarist Tim Murray, bassist Dave Vergato, drummer Greg Lilley and woodwinds player Jack Murray.

The returning cast, which includes Alex Aguilar, Griffin Digsby, Olivia Edge, Patrick Ratchford, Susan Roberts, Kayla Simone and Bobby Tyson in addition to Victoria, Collins and Jowett, came together in early May to start rehearsing and learning the music in broad strokes before choreographer Booth came in to work with them.

Collins says directing *Squawks* is unlike other stage shows he's directed in the past.

"[They] were book shows, where you know what the songs are, the script is set in stone, and you just do it," he says. "[Here] we're making it up. No one's ever done these songs this way before."

It's not unusual to run a number in rehearsal, realize it doesn't work and decide to restage it.

When the audience comes on opening night, they're seeing a new musical that no one's ever seen before, and the *Squawks* team doesn't know how a number is going to land until it's in front of the audience.

It's an arduous process to produce an unusual show — with the result that enthusiastic audiences return year after year to see what new surprises *Charlotte Squawks* has in store for them. It's not unusual for the show to sell out before it even opens. So, why does *Squawks* continue to connect with audiences year after year?

"We don't shy away from a thing because it's difficult … but if folks can get a little bit of laughter out of it, it doesn't have to be as divisive, it doesn't have to be an elephant in the room," Kahn says.

Victoria feels *Squawks*' satire connects Charlotteans to their city.

"It's provided an identity and a way to connect and laugh about everything that we both love and are frustrated about with our city," she maintains.

'We're the only show right now that takes Charlotte on," Collins says. "Charlotte's a character in the show, and the people in the audience are included in that character, because they're part of Charlotte."

Despite — or maybe because of — the hurdles, frustrations, rapid-fire changes and sheer lunacy that Charlotteans have learned to live with, the city truly embraces laughing at itself.

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Carol Tyner onstage during the QC Comedy Experience — Courtesy of Carol Tyner

ENTER THE CHAT

Comic Carol Tyner commits to the stage

BY DARRELL HORWITZ

To pursue stand-up comedy takes a little bit of recklessness no matter who you are. To walk away from an established career in the medical field to follow that pursuit is acting with a different level of abandon.

But that's the choice that local comic Carol Tyner made in August 2025, when she left her 13-year career as a registered nurse and director at a private practice to pursue her passion full time.

This was not some midlife crisis for Tyner but a calculated decision. Ironically enough, Tyner's move to pursue comedy came out two tragedies: COVID-19 and Hurricane Helene. Seeing the storm wipe out homes, businesses and community infrastructure in her hometown of Burnsville in September 2024 reminded Tyner that nothing is promised.

"Watching my community be impacted so directly made me reflect on what I was waiting for," Tyner said. "It pushed me to stop treating comedy like something I'd get to eventually and instead treat it like something worth building a life around," Tyner said.

"It gave me the clarity – and honestly, the permission — to fully commit to comedy, not as something on the side but as something I was willing to bet on."

Now, about nine months after following through on that life-changing decision, Tyner has hit the road with Group Chat Girlies, a comedy duo she launched with local comic Skylar Schock around the same time she committed to pursuing standup full-time.

The Girlies started in the South in May before heading west, with two California shows scheduled in June then a homecoming gig at Cain Center for the Arts in Cornelius on July 18.

Group Chat Girlies passes the mic to women in standup … and the crowd

Tyner met Schock when the two appeared on the same bill at a local venue. The two hit it off and quickly began collaborating on the Group Chat Girlies (GCG) project, which puts women in a room and asks them questions about what they're actually doing — like a group chat, but IRL.

GCG shows start with standup, followed by interactive comedy segments during which women in the audience divulge what they're watching, listening to, reading, etc. Then Schock and Tyner go through a juicy story or piece of gossip before getting to the "Burning Questions," which is Tyner's favorite part of every GCG gig.

Submitted by the audience prior to the show, Burning Questions often consist of things the women might be too embarrassed to ask in a group chat — perhaps a trend they have seen on TikTok that they want to know more about.

The shows have brought women together. Tyner mentioned that fans have told her after shows how they met their best friend at a GCG show and are still attending together.

It's also been a help to Tyner professionally, as GCG's unique format has helped her get into different venues and make connections where she otherwise may not have.

According to Tyner, it's not always a disadvantage being a woman in comedy.

"Because there are fewer women in the circuit," she said, "there are bookers who are looking for women to have in their lineups to have diversity."

Despite that, Tyner has found the comedy scene to be less than inviting to women.

"It just seems to be a world that exists on a structure that supports men more than women," she said, recalling that she's heard men ask, "Who's taking care of the kids?" to women at open mics.

There are also many tropes that surround women in the comedy world, stubborn holdovers from a more chauvinistic time.

"People tend to think women aren't as funny or don't have as much good material, which is categorically untrue," Tyner said. "The women in the scene are better prepared, funnier and very often, in my opinion, better comics."

She added that folks are quicker to write off a woman's thought process than a man's.

"I think people often don't want to listen to what women have to say," she said. "Even when we're trying to make it funny, the immediate response is, 'I don't want to hear that anymore.' It's like, 'Okay, I don't want to hear you talk about your dick anymore.'"

Carol Tyner's early journey in comedy

Tyner's first experience performing comedy was in an improv class at the Charlotte Comedy Theatre and Training Center (CCT) in early 2022. She loved it enough to stick with it, eventually becoming a founding member of Shameless Society improv, a two-time Queen City Nerve award winner for Best Improv Troupe in 2023 and 2024.

Tyner took a standup comedy class taught by Lauren Ansley in 2023 and performed her first set during graduation in June of that year.

"I think standup was always the thing that I was most interested in," she said, "but it seemed so terrifying to try while improv seemed like a team sport and a little more attainable in some ways. I loved it and very quickly realized all the dreams that I just pretended I didn't have when I was young are real and I should look into them."

At the graduation for Ansley's all-women class, Tyner performed in front of around 100 people. Though she found that frightening, it was the best type of crowd because they were so kind and supportive, she said. After she got her first laugh, she thought, "Okay, I love this and I would be up here for as long as they would let me talk with the mic."

Comparing standup to improv, Tyner said writing is the hardest part of the former, but the payoff makes the effort worth it.

"The high of a great standup set is so unbelievable," she said, "but the low is so unbelievably low. Standup is very vulnerable.

"There's very little you have to do to prepare for an improv show, because you're going to make it up once you're there," she continued. "If things go badly in improv, you care less because there's somebody in the boat with you while it's sinking. The silence in standup is a lot louder."

The improv skills do come in handy when a standup set starts to go the wrong way and Tyner is forced to pivot onstage, she said. That's why working out material on open mics is important.

"Open mics are super helpful because you can learn that what you think is funny is sometimes not funny at all," she said, "and areas you don't think had jokes in them is what the crowd is actually responding to."

Tyner is willing to stay stubborn with some material, however. "Sometimes something is worth fighting for. It's not funny … until it is."

While her comedy career is still in its early stages, Tyner said she performs six or seven paid shows per month. She's not making a living off the art yet; she works with a nonprofit during the day.

Thus far, Tyner said Group Chat Girlies has been her most rewarding venture because it was built from the ground up and successful enough that comedy venues in other areas are interested in hosting shows.

"But more than that, I think it has really allowed a place for women's voices, which is a huge part of why I love doing comedy and one of the reasons that I really wanted to pivot to make it my full-time focus," she said, "proving to women that we can do anything at any time."

Learn more about Carol Tyner, including upcoming shows, at caroltyner.com. Follow updates on Group Chat Girlies at groupchatgirlies.com.

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Carol Tyner — Courtesy of Carol Tyner

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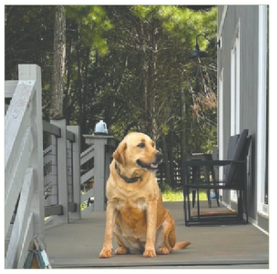
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Emily June (left) and Ali Forrest. Photo by Brooke Ballentine

A GREAT BIG ADVENTURE

Emily June and Ali Forrest hit the road to co-headline national tour

BY PAT MORAN

Two recent songs by local women artists overlap in intent if not delivery. On "can i heal?" plangent cross-picked guitars emerge like figures from the mist as Emily June's quicksilver singing courses clear and vibrato-free:

"*Learned about survival/ When I was just half a child/ When I walked up to the light/ And turned around…*"

A split second after the first chunky guitar note hits, Ali's Forrest's lilting, earthy vocals surge on "Magnifying Glass." Her supple, register-shifting flutter — a freefall from head to heart — unleashes cross currents of humor and heartbreak:

"*Broke up with you on a Tuesday at noon/ Almost ran over you at a stop sign/ So I wouldn't have to see you…*"

Both June's "can i heal?" which appears on her April 17 EP *hurting, holding, healing*, and Forrest's "Magnifying Glass," which dropped on May 14 as a teaser to her upcoming *Learning Love* EP, address ongoing self-discovery with a potent mix of vulnerability, honesty and strength.

"['can i heal'] feels simple in a beautiful way," June says. "The words aren't anything crazy, but it just feels both bad and hopeful at the same time, which is a theme I'm really leaning into."

Forrest describes "Magnifying Glass" as being "classic goofball, but also really earnest."

"It's funny, but everything I say in it is true," Forrest says. "I had to make it funny so that nobody would think I was being honest."

There are other parallels between the two artists; both women released their debut singles in 2023 and have since emerged as two of Charlotte's most incisive singer-songwriters. Both artists will also soon embark on their first large-scale tour — and they're doing it together.

Billed as "indie folk (June) meets indie twang (Forrest)," Emily June & Ali Forrest's Great Big Adventure Tour runs June 17-July 25, with 21 dates across the United States and Canada.

And both women will be caught up in a flurry of activity before leaving town for the first show in Jackson, Mississippi.

Forrest and June share a bill at Snug Harbor, an album release show for the debut of Forrest's six-song *Learning Love* EP, on May 27. Then on June 13, local filmmaker Nick Will screens his latest project, a musical documentary about June, at Starlight on 22nd.

As part of the multimedia event, June will play a live set with her current band, comprising guitarist and producer Brett Ennis, drummer and multi-instrumentalist Timothy Chandler Hicks, and bassist Ma.

"[The film] shows Emily's experiences of writing music, discovering that she enjoyed it [and] finding these different artists, like Ma, Brett and Tim, and what the beauty of bringing everyone together can create," Will says.

Parallel tracks

After taking an undergraduate songwriting class at UNC Chapel Hill, Charlotte native June pursued a Masters of Songwriting degree, taking remote classes with Boston's Berklee College of Music. While doing her online coursework, she recorded and released her 2023 debut EP, *Something About Decay*.

The project was a learning process for the fledgling artist.

"I'm still proud of myself for doing it, [but] now I have a much clearer vision of what I want," June says.

In February 2024, she met Ennis, who began co-producing much of June's music. That fall, she started playing Charlotte open mics, where she met Chandler Hicks. June dropped her debut album, *notes for when i lose myself*, in February 2025, and Ma joined her band the following month.

June cites the pensive, anxious "Stomach" as one of her favorite songs from the LP:

"*Suckin' in my stomach/ So you can grab my ribs/ Make a human out of me like God did…*"

"It wrote itself as I kept singing," June remembers. "It ended up being about that feeling of mincing your words to please other people — how that can feel so physical. Sucking in your stomach can feel the same as biting your tongue."

In the meantime, Forrest had followed up two



The Great Big Adventure Tour starts on June 17. Photo by Brooke Ballentine

EPs, 2023's folk pop-adjacent *Raised Wrong* and the following year's indie rock-inflected *Body*, with the harrowing, compulsively catchy single "The Maze," for which Queen City Nerve named her 2024's Best New Singer-Songwriter. By then, Forrest had assembled a band that she fondly calls "the boys" — guitarist Ben Burrows; bassist, guitarist and engineer Cole Covington; drummer and engineer Caleb Whitlock; and guitarist Eric Maust.

Forrest's debut album *Cagefighter* came out in 2025 and was a knockout, tracing an emotional story arc from combative self-doubt toward healing self-acceptance.

June and Forrest team to tour the U.S. and Canada

In May 2025, June was looking for acts to share a bill. Ennis recommended Forrest, who proved unavailable, but the two women got a chance to play together at a July 2025 show in Durham.

"The first time I was really absorbing [Forrest's music] was at that Durham show," June says. "She was funny, clever and witty, while also being so emotional. I remember watching her and wanting to be as full, warm and confident as she was on stage."

"What I love about Emily's music is that it is so well articulated," Forrest offers. "She's so effortlessly poetic, but not so poetic that it's impenetrable. It's perfect."

June and Forrest's Great Big Adventure Tour originally began as two separate undertakings. With her Charlotte lease expiring, June was already planning a string of summer dates in the northeast US. Concurrently, Forrest was planning her summer tour out west. Forrest contacted June and the friends and artists decided to combine their respective tours into one.

"We split up the responsibilities, which made booking a tour this size a lot easier," Forrest says.

Although each singer has recorded their recent music with their respective bands, the tour will consist of solo sets.

Keeping an eye on rising gas prices, June and Forrest plan to offset costs by selling stickers saying "I gave Emily and Ali $10 for gas money on their big summer tour, and all I got was this sticker."

On the plus side, the tour takes June and Forrest close to several national parks that both hope to visit between gigs.

"I am excited for my world to get bigger and more full," June says.

After the tour, June notes that Charlotte will always mean much to her, but it will no longer be home.

"I want to wander around for a little bit before I settle somewhere," she offers.

Further adventures may include a stint working on a Vermont farm or stops in the northeast and Florida where she has family.

Forrest, meanwhile, will return to Charlotte, but her future plans seem open-ended.

"Playing with the boys has been truly the honor of my life, but I'm excited to go back to where it started, which is just me and my guitar," Forrest says. "It's ... when I feel most connected to the music and the people I'm playing for."

Often, it's only in retrospect that we realize that a decision was life-changing. Every fork in the road is ripe with potential — and not just for individuals. Each stop on the Great Big Adventure Tour exposes new listeners to two of Charlotte's most insightful and heartfelt singer-songwriters.

Any Queen City artist breaking onto the national stage is an affirmation for Charlotte's burgeoning music scene. Having two doing it is twice the reason for a celebration.

For June and Forrest, the tour has all the hallmarks of a true adventure, a signpost to life's passages ahead — after which everything changes.

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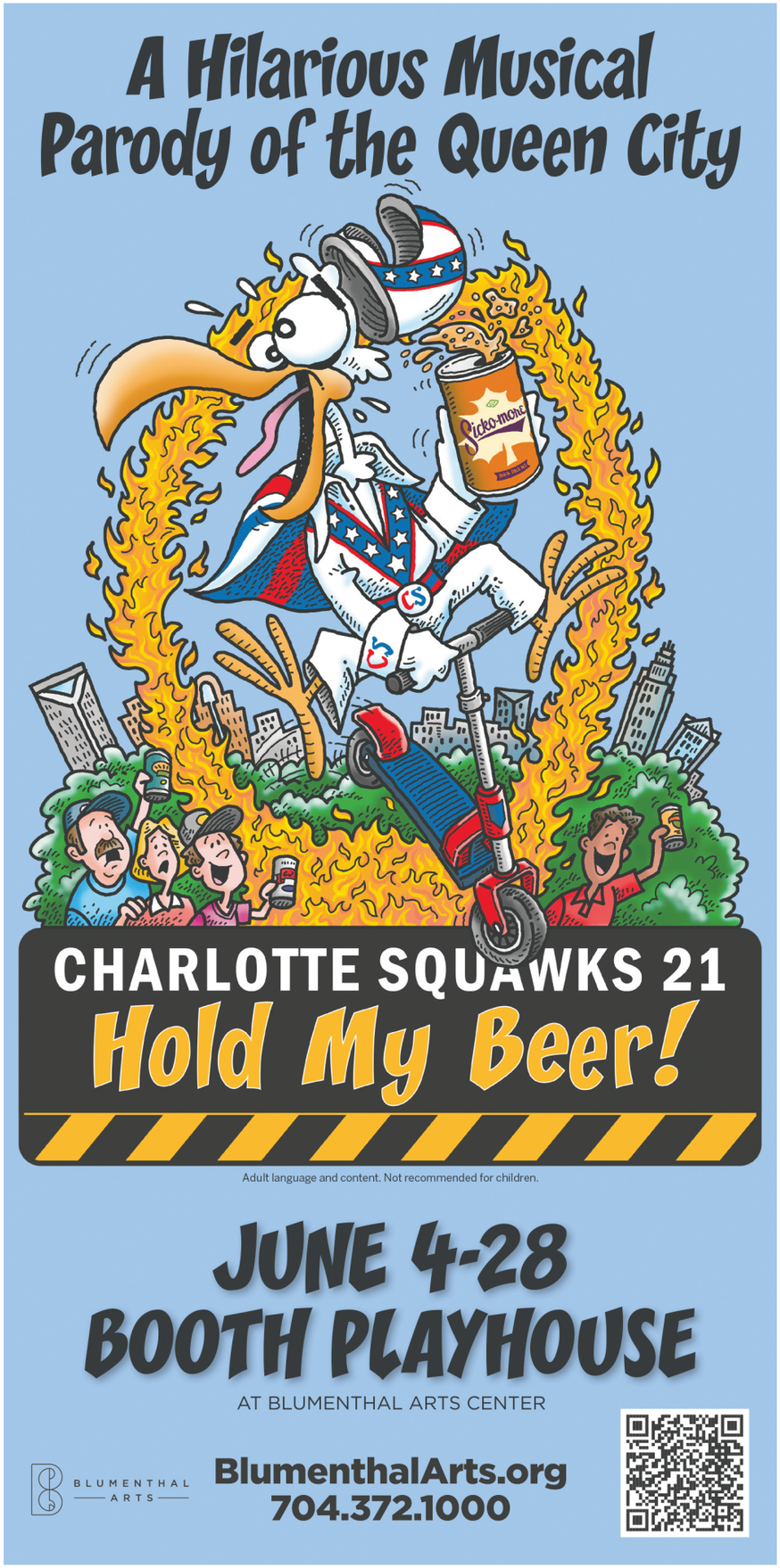
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WEDNESDAY MAY 27

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
- BadCameo w/ Warp Street (Evening Muse)
- Highly Suspect (The Fillmore)
- Divinicide w/ Mind Virus, Forfeiture, Midvale Terrace, Fleshworm (The Milestone)

SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
- Ben Mignogna (Comet Grill)
- Andrew Duhon (Neighborhood Theatre)
- Josh Daniel & Friends (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)*
- Ali Forrest w/ Emily June, Ranford Almond (Snug Harbor)

JAZZ/BLUES
- Blackhawk Quintet's Bop Theory Jazz Jam (Eighty Eights)*
- Persona Bell (Middle C Jazz)
- Wednesday Jazz Jam feat. Lovell Bradford Trio (VisArt Video)*

CLASSICAL/INSTRUMENTAL
- Bach & Brahms: From Counterpoint to Power (Free Range Brewing)

OPEN MIC
- Singer/Songwriter Open Mic (The Rooster)*
- Starlight Jams Open Mic (Starlight on 22nd)*

THURSDAY MAY 28

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
- Caught Off Guard w/ Lacy Dooms, AITA, The Hand Off (The Milestone)
- Buckethead (Neighborhood Theatre)

JAZZ/BLUES
- Friday Night Vibe (Eighty Eights)
- The Bean Tones (Evening Muse)

HIP-HOP/SOUL/R&B
- Alex Isley (The Fillmore)

FUNK/JAM BANDS/REGGAE
- Shana Blake's Musical Menagerie (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)*

SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
- Johnny Holliday (Comet Grill)

CLASSICAL/INSTRUMENTAL
- Phillip Bush (Free Range Brewing)

COVER BANDS
- Spank the '80s (Amos' Southend)
- Tony Tatum (Bobby Brown tribute) (Middle C Jazz)

FRIDAY MAY 29

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
- Lenny Federal Band (Comet Grill)*
- The Band Solstice w/ The John Wood Band (Evening Muse)
- Slugline w/ Cardboard Cutout, Rothschild, Mary Anna (The Milestone)
- The Mountain Goats (Neighborhood Theatre)
- Come In, Travis! w/ Y'All're, The Tremors (Tommy's Pub)

JAZZ/BLUES
- Jeremy Turgeon (Eighty Eights)
- Alex Bugnon (Middle C Jazz)
- Dez the Artist w/ Eric Gales (Visulite Theatre)

POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
- Shadow Play (Crown Station)
- It's Murph (The Fillmore)

FUNK/JAM BANDS/REGGAE
- Fulton Lee (The Music Yard)
- Motion (Smokey Joe's)

CLASSICAL/INSTRUMENTAL
- Tanja Bechtler & Jonah Bechtler-Teixeira (Free Range Brewing)

SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
- Anna J w/ Riverstone (Goldie's)
- Sam Shackleton w/ Murphy Campbell (Petra's)
- Kadey Ballard (The Spoke Easy)

HIP-HOP/SOUL/R&B
- Fattmack (The Underground)

EXPERIMENTAL/MIXED-GENRE/FESTIVAL
- Femme Fest Vol. 3 (Snug Harbor)

COVER BANDS
- 7 Bridges (Eagles tribute) (Amos' Southend)
- Dark Echoes (Pink Floyd tribute) (The Rooster)

SATURDAY MAY 30

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
- The Hollow Party w/ Laura Vinson (Goldie's)
- Promises Unsaid w/ Rust Eater, Ham Radio, Moneyball, This Island Earth (The Milestone)
- American Theory w/ Den of Wolves, Mourning Lotus, Suppressor (The Rooster)

HIP-HOP/SOUL/R&B
- The Queens: Gladys Knight, Chaka Khan, Patti LaBelle, Stephanie Mills (Spectrum Center)

POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
- Slander (Blackbox Theater)
- Basic Printer w/ Valentine Wolfe (Evening Muse)
- Fannie's Hang Suite (The Long Room)
- Coco & Breezy (The Music Yard)
- Ashlyn Uribe w/ Eli The Fool, Jamie Jadotte (Petra's)
- Community Cookout feat. Jah Freedom & Wisdom Kenyatta (Starlight on 22nd)

JAZZ/BLUES
- Dez & The Third Wave (Eighty Eights)
- Alex Bugnon (Middle C Jazz)

COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
- Crystal Fountains (Primal Brewery)
- Hank Williams Jr. (Truliant Amphitheater)

CLASSICAL/INSTRUMENTAL
- Virtuosity Unleashed: A Piano Extravaganza (Free Range Brewing)

FUNK/JAM BAND/REGGAE
- Johnny Holliday & the Silver Lining (Comet Grill)
- Cosmic Collective (Smokey Joe's)

EXPERIMENTAL/MIXED-GENRE/FESTIVAL
- Femme Fest Vol. 3 (Snug Harbor)

COVER BANDS
- Lovesong (Cure tribute) w/ First Wave (Amos' Southend)
- A Foreigner's Journey to Boston (Neighborhood Theatre)

SUNDAY MAY 31

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
- Young the Giant w/ Cold War Kids (Skyla Amphitheatre)
- MGK (Truliant Amphitheater)

POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
- Nite w/ Feyleux, Idol Talk, DJ Spider (The Milestone)
- Hazy Sunday (Petra's)

JAZZ/BLUES
- Omari & the Hellhounds (Comet Grill)*
- Braxton Bateman (Eighty Eights)*
- Steve Oliver (Middle C Jazz)

SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
- Darren Deese (Heist Brewery)
- James Brock & Friends (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)*
- Frank Brown (Starlight on 22nd)
- Low Groves w/ Motocrossed, Ma (Visulite Theatre)

FAMILY
- Rock & Roll Playhouse (Neighborhood Theatre)

MONDAY JUN. 1

POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
- Charlie Puth (Skyla Amphitheatre)
- What's Good (Snug Harbor)

JAZZ/BLUES
- The Bill Hanna Legacy Jazz Session (Petra's)

COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
- Oliver Anthony w/ Joey Davis Band (Amos' Southend)

OPEN MIC
- Find Your Muse Open Mic (Evening Muse)

TUESDAY JUN. 2

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
- Echo & the Bunnymen (The Fillmore)
- Crunk Witch w/ Y'All're, IIOIOIOII, January Knife (The Milestone)

COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
- CLT Bluegrass Allstars (Comet Grill)*

FUNK/JAM BAND/REGGAE
- Tank & the Bangas w/ Ariel J. (Visulite Theatre)

OPEN MIC
- Crown Collab Funk Jam & Open Mic (Crown Station)*
- Tosco Music Open Mic (Evening Muse)
- Open Mic Night feat. The Smokin J's (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)*

WEDNESDAY JUN. 3

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
- Dollars, Taxes w/ Machine Country; Auroras Hope; Endless, Nameless (The Milestone)
- The Unlikely Candidates w/ Snorkeler, Willingdon (Snug Harbor)

JAZZ/BLUES
- Blackhawk Quintet's Bop Theory Jazz Jam (Eighty Eights)*
- Melvin M. Miller w/ A.R.I.A. (Middle C Jazz)
- Wednesday Jazz Jam feat. Lovell Bradford Trio (VisArt Video)*

SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
- Josh Daniel & Friends (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)*
- Patterson Hood (Visulite Theatre)

HIP-HOP/SOUL/R&B
- Babyfxce E (The Underground)

COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
- NC Bluegrass Jam Night (Birdsong Brewing)
- Jayson Arendt w/ Out of the Blue (Coyote Joe's)

OPEN MIC
- Singer/Songwriter Open Mic (The Rooster)*
- Starlight Jams Open Mic (Starlight on 22nd)*

THURSDAY JUN. 4

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
- Leaving Echoes w/ The Ruff'tons, 77 Lies, Squirt Vile (The Milestone)
- Cassettiquette w/ Rock Eupora, Local Nomad (Petra's)

JAZZ/BLUES
- John Shaughnessy Trio (Eighty Eights)

HIP-HOP/SOUL/R&B
- Yungblud (Skyla Amphitheatre)

FUNK/JAM BANDS/REGGAE
- Monallo w/ Krystal King (Evening Muse)
- Shana Blake's Musical Menagerie (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)*

JAZZ/BLUES
- The Voltage Brothers (Middle C Jazz)

FRIDAY JUN. 5

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
- The Lenny Federal Band (Comet Grill)*
- Self Made Monsters w/ Regence, Slow Stab, Going Clear (The Milestone)

JAZZ/BLUES
- Groove Masters (Eighty Eights)

FUNK/JAM BANDS/REGGAE
- North State Grass w/ Holla at Ya Mama (Evening Muse)
- The Great Outdoors w/ Evercolor (Evening Muse)
- Greazy Keyz (The Spoke Easy)

COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
- Sam Barber (Skyla Amphitheatre)
- Jamey Johnson (TD Amp Ballantyne)

POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
- One Direction Night (Amos' Southend)
- Space Laces (Blackbox Theater)
- Forester (The Music Yard)
- K-Pop Night (Starlight on 22nd)
- Can't Feel My Face: 2010s Dance Party (The Underground)

CLASSICAL/INSTRUMENTAL
- Charlotte Symphony: Black Panther in Concert (Belk Theater)

COVER BANDS
- Chris Taylor & the Rumor w/ Caleb Davis (Goldie's)
- Shana Blake & Colby Dobbs: Flip the Script (Middle C Jazz)
- Confetti Cannon: A Warped Tour Tribute (The Rooster)
- Harvest Moon (CSNY tribute) (Visulite Theatre)

SATURDAY JUN. 6

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
- Enuff Z'Nuff w/ Spread Eagle, Kickin Valentina, Testarossa, Tyger (Amos' Southend)
- Te'Jani w/ Scattrbrain (Evening Muse)
- House of Heavy (Neighborhood Theatre)
- The Black Crowes w/ Whiskey Myers (Truliant Amphitheater)

POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
- Dance Circle Day Party feat. Mark Francis (Cue @ Blackbox Theater)
- Cathedral (The Milestone)
- Resonate Groove (The Music Yard)

CLASSICAL/INSTRUMENTAL
- Charlotte Symphony: Black Panther in Concert (Belk Theater)

HIP-HOP/SOUL/R&B
- Ari Lennox (Skyla Amphitheatre)

COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
- Mason Cole & The Hellbenders w/ Common Clay (The Rooster)

JAZZ/BLUES
- Buff Dillard (Eighty Eights)
- Morgan James (Middle C Jazz)

EXPERIMENTAL/MIXED-GENRE/FESTIVAL
- Patois Counselors w/ Truth Club, The Infinity Ring, MIDS (Snug Harbor)

COVER BANDS
- Spiderwebs (Gwen Stefani tribute) w/ Bald Brothers (Goldie's)
- Pool Shark (Sublime tribute) w/ Rob Simmons (Visulite Theatre)

SUNDAY JUN. 7

POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
- Nick Jonas (The Fillmore)
- Sadie Jean (Neighborhood Theatre)
- Soul Sundays feat. Guy Nowchild (Starlight on 22nd)

JAZZ/BLUES
- Omari & the Hellhounds (Comet Grill)*
- Braxton Bateman (Eighty Eights)*
- CLT Blues Society (Heist Brewery & Barrel Arts)
- Morgan James (Middle C Jazz)

SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
- Ike Dweck w/ Anna Hamilton (Evening Muse)
- Beau Norwood (Free Range Brewing)
- James Brock & Friends (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)*

CLASSICAL/INSTRUMENTAL
- Charlotte Symphony: Summer Pops (Symphony Park)

Open Mic
- Lady Like Open Mic (The Rooster)

MONDAY JUN. 8

POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
- Dinner Time w/ Group Therapy, Driftwood Drive (Snug Harbor)

HIP-HOP/SOUL/R&B
- Kali Uchis w/ Mariah the Scientist (Truliant Amphitheater)

OPEN MIC
- Find Your Muse Open Mic (Evening Muse)

TUESDAY JUN. 9

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
- Yellowcard (Skyla Amphitheatre)
- Cancerslug w/ Secret Idol, Midvale Terrace (Snug Harbor)

SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
- Joshua Slone (The Underground)

COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
- Post Malone w/ Jelly Roll (Bank of America Stadium)
- CLT Bluegrass Allstars (Comet Grill)*

POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
- Hudson Freeman w/ Lots of Hands (Neighborhood Theatre)

OPEN MIC
- Crown Collab Funk Jam & Open Mic (Crown Station)*
- Open Mic Night feat. The Smokin J's (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)*

*WEEKLY EVENTS THAT MAY BE SUBJECT TO CHANGE. VISIT QCNERVE.COM FOR THE FULL SOUNDWAVE LISTING

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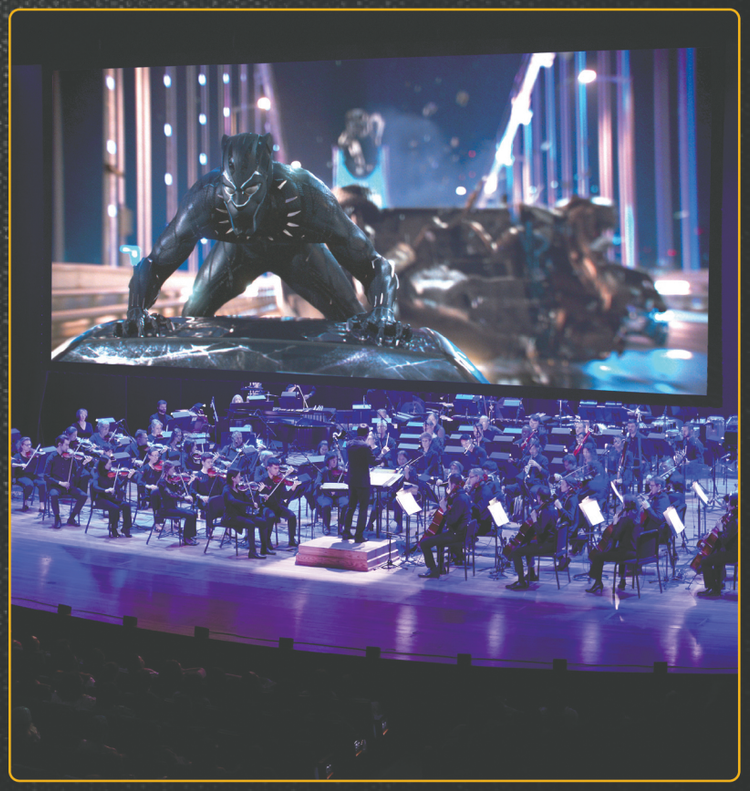
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Juliana Luna at Not Just Coffee in Eastover. Photo by Ryan Pitkin

LIFE AFTER THE LIVING KITCHEN

Juliana Luna's latest chapter finds her behind the scenes of a local coffee powerhouse

BY RYAN PITKIN

On May 30, when Night Swim Coffee celebrates the grand opening of its seventh location inside the new Queensbridge Collective on South Tryon Street, it will mark a new beginning for patrons.

Yet for the team at Night Swim, the celebration marks the end of a long planning process that included working with developers over many months to ensure the new location could live up to their high standards.

Working behind the scenes alongside Nigh Swim's owners has been Juliana Luna, VP of operations at Black Rock Hospitality Group, which comprises Night Swim, Undercurrent Coffee, and Not Just Coffee.

"In the last two years, we have refined the steps to open a shop and who is in charge of what," said Luna. "I'm involved from the get-go when the negotiation starts with the company, with the property management or with the lease office, whatever it is."

In the case of the new Queensbridge Collective development, Luna worked with her colleagues before construction even began inside the space to ensure every piece of equipment that needed to be installed would have the right amount of space, a power source, and any other details that might go unnoticed.

From there, Black Rock owners Miracle and James Yoder and Erin and Todd Huber work with regional directors, the food director, the director of operations, and all 150 team members who have some role in getting everything in place.

Night Swim Coffee launched in 2021 as a partnership between the established Undercurrent and Not Just Coffee brands, and with 16 locations currently operating between them in Charlotte, opening a new space has the team working like a well-oiled machine (or a top-notch commercial coffee machine).

With the May 30 grand opening approaching and two more Night Swim locations scheduled to open later this year, Luna is already looking ahead to new projects that will go beyond opening new spaces.

That includes the launch of a coffee truck to serve Charlotteans where they are and implementing beer and wine programs at certain existing locations so they can stay open later.

There are also plans in the works to begin offering workshops on brewing techniques and other similar lessons for customers.

"That's the kind of creativity that we are trying to bring," she said.

It's been a new experience for Luna to work behind the scenes. She was once known as the founder of Luna's Living Kitchen, an organic, plant-based restaurant that she ran from its opening in 2011 to 2018, when she stepped away to focus on family and pursue other career paths.

The Colombian immigrant sees her role now as a full-circle moment, reconnecting her past, having grown up in the third-largest coffee producing country in the world.

"I always wanted to have a coffee place," she told Queen City Nerve during a recent interview at Not Just Coffee in Eastover. "We are drinking coffee in Colombia since we are 10, maybe 5 [years old]. We behave around coffee. You always have a break. You have your morning coffee, then you have another break for coffee at 11, and then in the afternoon you break again for coffee. It's a part of the culture."

Since joining the Black Rock Hospitality team in 2021, Luna has made herself part of the coffee culture in Charlotte, drawing on the steadfast work ethic she learned in Switzerland and the mentorship of others in Charlotte she has crossed paths with during her remarkable journey.

Learning the ropes in Switzerland

At age 23, Luna wasn't sure yet what career she wanted to pursue. Coming up in a family that always centered home cooking, she wanted to pursue the culinary arts but her father pleaded with her to reconsider.

"My dad is a spreadsheet guy, but I just wanted to cook. Give me an onion and a cutting board," she recalled. "He said, 'Juli, we will help you to be a chef, but please study the business. Other than that, you are not going to know what you are doing. You need to understand the business of numbers.' I always fought that. I didn't care about the numbers."

When she learned of a scholarship opportunity to study hospitality at the César Ritz Colleges in Switzerland, she applied, knowing it was a perfect chance to engage with food while addressing her father's concerns with the business end of things.

As one of just a few women studying at the school and not yet strong in the English language, she thinks back on her time there as one of the most stressful of her life.

"I would say that was my military career because I cried so many times," she said.

Nevertheless, she earned her degree after three years and looks back fondly on the lessons she took with her.

"I remember with this Austrian chef that I was just like, 'I'm gonna die here' because he is so perfectionist that it was just just driving me crazy. But what I don't understand [then], that kind of work ethic and that mentoring is where I start to kind of build myself as an operator in general."

Recruited by Hilton Hotels to work in America, Luna chose Charlotte over Maryland and Miami because some of her family members had previously passed through the city to learn English here and thought she would like it for its many trees and small-town feel.

While working on a two-year visa, she met the man who would later become her husband. He worked in gyms and elsewhere in the wellness industry as an expert in vitamin supplements and smoothies.

During that time, Luna began experimenting with raw foods, becoming interested in the aesthetic more than the diet aspect of the growing trend.

"What people were doing, the science behind it, was beautiful," she said. "Cheesecakes with



The new Night Swim Coffee at Queensbridge Collective opens May 30. Courtesy of Black Rock Hospitality

macadamia nuts and extracting the juice of a carrot to make a pumpkin pie. I was like, 'Whoa, what is this?' It's just fruits and vegetables. It was crazy."

She began making meals for friends and family, pairing them with her husband's smoothies. When her visa expired, the two married and opened Luna's Living Kitchen in a 600-foot space where TEA ReX Teahouse had closed in 2009 in South End.

Their initial investment was just $7,000, according to Luna.

"We ended up writing this [business plan] and then we say, 'Okay, let's start.' We didn't need a hood, we didn't need a range, we didn't need anything. At that point the regulation is almost nonexistent because you're not cooking, we are just blending."

Hitting a wall at Luna's

The restaurant became a staple and a pioneer in a culinary field that had not yet blossomed in Charlotte. However, after new locations in Raleigh and Chapel Hill failed to find a fanbase, Luna made the decision to step away.

"We wrote 200 recipes on this journey and the production was so big, I was like, 'I want to take a break.' I didn't want to be a creator anymore," she said. "Sometimes you want to sit down and say, 'Please tell me what you want from me.' I can cook as much as you want, however you want it, but I don't want to write at all. I want to be silent. I felt motherhood [calling me]. So that was kind of the switch at that point."

Luna initially took a job running catering for Showmars but quickly decided it wasn't for her. A longtime friend of FS Food Group founder Frank Scibelli, she joined his team as an assistant manager at Yafo Kitchen's East Boulevard location.

She found her spark again at Yafo, learning under Chef Carmen Vasquez, though she remained protective of her family time.

"I didn't want to take any management position at that point," she said. "I had a 2-year-old. I was like, 'I don't want to be the last call. If the dishwasher breaks, I will help you, I will solve it, but I don't want to be the last one washing dishes. I need to go home.'"

Luna said she learned a lot with FS Food Group, helping formulate the plan for Calle Sol Latin Café & Cevicheria before her friends at Undercurrent and Not Just Coffee approached her about helping merge the two businesses to make Night Swim.

Luna said she was attracted to the way the Black Rock team centered sustainability and fresh ingredients.

"Everything is from scratch — syrups from raw materials, we are making breads, we're making loaves, everything," she said. "We are handmakers of something."

During her four years with the company, Luna has helped consolidate the three brands so that employees working in an Undercurrent Coffee shop can easily transition to Not Just Coffee or Night Swim.

She compared it to businesses that spoke three different languages, so she made it her mission to get them all speaking one tongue.

"The bar flow may change, the location may change, but the skeleton is the same now," she said.

The new owners of Living Kitchen closed the flagship location in Atherton Mill in 2024. Luna says she sometimes misses running her own restaurant, mostly because so many of her fans and regulars lost touch with her once she stepped away.

"They don't know where to find me," she says as we wrap up our discussion. "I hope this [story] can show them where to find me."

What's clear in the meantime, however, is that she's found a new family in Black Rock Hospitality Group.

Night Swim Coffee at Queensbridge Collective is located at 1111 S. Tryon St. After its grand opening on May 30, it will be open Monday-Friday from 7 a.m.-5 p.m., Saturday from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., and Sunday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. For more information, visit nightswimcoffee.com for more info.

RPITKIN@QCNERVE.COM



Juliana Luna. Courtesy of Black Rock Hospitality Group



HOROSCOPE

2026 King Features Synd., Inc.

MAY 27 - JUNE 2

ARIES (March 21 to April 19) An unexpected development could change the Arian's perspective on a potential investment. Keep an open mind. Ignore the double talk and act only on the facts.

TAURUS (April 20 to May 20) A surge of support helps you keep your long-standing commitment to colleagues who rely on you for guidance. Ignore any attempts to get you to ease up on your efforts.

GEMINI (May 21 to June 20) Family continues to be a dominant factor, but career matters also take on new importance. You might even be able to combine elements of the two in some surprising, productive way!

CANCER (June 21 to July 22) A realistic view of a workplace or personal situation helps you deal with it more constructively once you know where the truth lies. Meanwhile, reserve the weekend for someone special.

LEO (July 23 to August 22) As much as you Leos or Leonas might be intrigued by the "sunny" prospects being touted for a potential investment, be careful that you don't allow the glare to blind you to its essential details.

VIRGO (August 23 to September 22) A friend's problem brings out the Virgo's nurturing nature in full force. However, don't go it alone. Allow others to pitch in and help share the responsibilities you've assumed.

LIBRA (September 23 to October 22) A business decision might need to be put off until a colleague's personal matter is resolved. Use this time to work on another business matter that you've been anxious to get to.

SCORPIO (October 23 to November 21) Relationships (personal or professional) might appear to be stalled because of details that keep cropping up and need tending to. Be patient. A path begins to clear by midweek.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22 to December 21) A promotion could cause resentment among envious colleagues. But others recognize how hard you worked to earn it and will be there to support you if you need them.

CAPRICORN (December 22 to January 19) A delicate personal matter needs both your wisdom and your warmth. Expect some setbacks, but stay with it. The outcome will more than justify your efforts.

AQUARIUS (January 20 to February 18) Resist the temptation to cut corners just because time is short. It's best to move ahead step by step so you don't overlook anything that might later create time-wasting complications.

PISCES (February 19 to March 20) Use the good will that you recently earned with a well-received project to pitch your ideas for a new project. Expect some tough competition, though, from an unlikely source.

BORN THIS WEEK: Your love of family extends beyond your personal life to include others, to whom you generously extend your care and affection.

JUNE 3 - JUNE 9

ARIES (March 21 to April 19) An apparent act of injustice might turn out to be either an error in judgment or just plain stupidity. So, calm down, cool off, and let the explanations roll out.

TAURUS (April 20 to May 20) It's upsetting when someone you trusted has failed you. But with new opportunities ahead, you'll soon be too busy to feel even a wee bit sorry for yourself.

GEMINI (May 21 to June 20) A sense of uncertainty could be a good reason to change your position on an important matter. Someone close might try to talk you out of it, but it's your decision to make.

CANCER (June 21 to July 22) Being too zealous in pursuing your goal could create some resistance. Try to be more mindful of what you ask people to do, and they'll be more likely to do it.

LEO (July 23 to August 22) Things change as you go from being ignored to being Lionized once again. This is a good time to reintroduce some previously rejected ideas to a more receptive audience.

VIRGO (August 23 to September 22) Someone new in your life creates both anticipation as well as anxiety. Avoid the potential for misunderstandings by watching what you say and how you say it.

LIBRA (September 23 to October 22) Watch your budget so that you don't overspend now and have less to invest when the time is right later on. Also, arrange to share your weekend with someone special.

SCORPIO (October 23 to November 21) The temptation to involve yourself in a friend's or family member's personal problems is laudable. But get the facts before you make a firm commitment.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22 to December 21) You might be upset by some of your critics. But most of your associates continue to have faith in your ability to get the job done — and done well.

CAPRICORN (December 22 to January 19) You've reached an important point in the ongoing pursuit of your goals. You now might want to consider letting someone you trust join you on your journey.

AQUARIUS (January 20 to February 18) You've been going through a spate of uncertainty involving people you care for. But it might be time to take a stand on a position that you feel sure you can defend.

PISCES (February 19 to March 20) Treading water keeps you busy, but it won't get you where you need to go. It's time to stop making excuses and start moving ahead toward your goals.

BORN THIS WEEK: You see life as both creative and pragmatic. You'd be a fine artist — and also a successful one.

CHILL AT IPH

This summer series comprises a full schedule of short, multisession workshops for those hungry for community, intellectual stimulation, or just a place to get away from internet streaming during summer months. CHILL workshops cover topics with easy introductions to the biggest questions of our time or tap into your creative side.

All classes start at **10am** and are done by **12pm** and **take place at the Independent Picture House.**

Session 01: "A New Birth of Freedom: Abraham Lincoln, Frederick Douglass and the Civil War and Reconstruction, 1861-1877"
June 1 and 3; June 8 and 10

Session 02: "Jesus at the Movies"
June 2 and 4; June 9 and 11

Session 03: "Writing Flash Memoir & Personal Stories"
June 15 and 17; June 22 and 24

Session 04: "Goodbye, Lenin! and Hello, Berlin!"
June 16 and 18; June 23 and 25

Session 05: "Barbie: An American Icon,"
June 29 and July 1; July 6 and 8

Session 06: "Wes Anderson's Elaborate Archaeology of Moving Pictures"
June 30 and 2; July 7 and 9

Session 07: "Silver, Hook, and Sparrow: Disney and the History of Caribbean Piracies"
July 13 and 15; July 20 and 22

Session 08: "AI: The Good, The Bad, And The Ugly In Charlotte And Around The World,"
July 14 and 16; July 21 and 23

Session 09: "What Does Pinocchio Still Have to Tell Us?"
July 27 and 29; August 3 and 5

Session 10: "Capitalism in Action,"
July 28 and 30; August 4 and 6

TRIVIA TEST
BY FIFI RODRIGUEZ

1. ANIMAL KINGDOM: What is a female fox called?
2. HISTORY: In what year was the first iPhone released?
3. MOVIES: What was the first U.S. movie to be rated PG-13?
4. GEOGRAPHY: What is the southernmost capital city in the world?
5. U.S. STATES: Which state is home to the world's largest cave system?
6. GENERAL KNOWLEDGE: What category of writing are the Hugo and Nebula Awards given for?
7. TELEVISION: In what year did the comedy show "Saturday Night Live" debut?
8. MATH: What is a polygon with seven sides?
9. LITERATURE: What city is the setting for Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet"?
10. ENTERTAINERS: Which New Jersey city has a statue of singer Frank Sinatra?

SUDOKU
BY LINDA THISTLE

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			9			8	2	4
2						7	9	3
	4		2					
8		3			1		6	7
	6			4			1	
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4	3		7	6	2		8	9
		8		9		3		
	5	2		8		1		6

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.

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. Knight's garb	__ __ M __ __	Gazebo	__ __ B __ __
2. Light breeze	__ __ A __ __	Wander aimlessly	__ __ I __ __
3. Customer	__ __ __ __ __ N	Squad	__ __ __ __ __ L
4. Lawnmower's target	__ R __ __ __	Goblet	__ L __ __ __
5. Conduct	M __ __ __ __ __	Flag	B __ __ __ __ __
6. Christmas plant	__ O __ __ __	Mountainous	__ I __ __ __
7. Stumble	__ A __ __ __ __	Coffeemaker paper	__ I __ __ __ __
8. Palomino or pinto	__ __ __ S __	Crowd	__ __ __ D __
9. Terrier breed	__ __ __ __ N	Egypt's capital	__ __ __ __ O
10. Snowy season	__ __ __ T __ __	Victor	__ __ __ N __ __

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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 **T**

MN VSP PMFSVPPCVS FZPPW

UPVVPZ SRI VE GP TEZC RX

R QRZW EN XSRQP, MV TEBUI

GP R XMFQR XVMFQR.

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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.

ZNZEQ OHWZ H LRDS YB

FERMM, H IZZD MYEEQ

VZJRPMZ H SBYL OCZ FERMM

HM MJEZRWHBF RO WZ.

— VREVRER WJJDHBOYJS

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GO FIGURE!

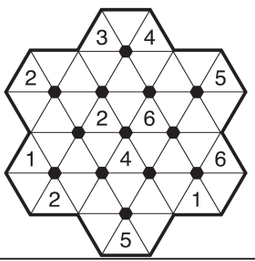
The idea of Go Figure is to arrive at the figures given at the bottom and right-hand columns of the diagram by following the arithmetic signs in the order they are given (that is, from left to right and top to bottom). Use only the numbers below the diagram to complete its blank squares and use each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

	+		-		= 4			
-		+		-				
	+		÷		= 2			
÷		-		+				
	+		×		= 27			
= 2		= 5		= 11				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

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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.

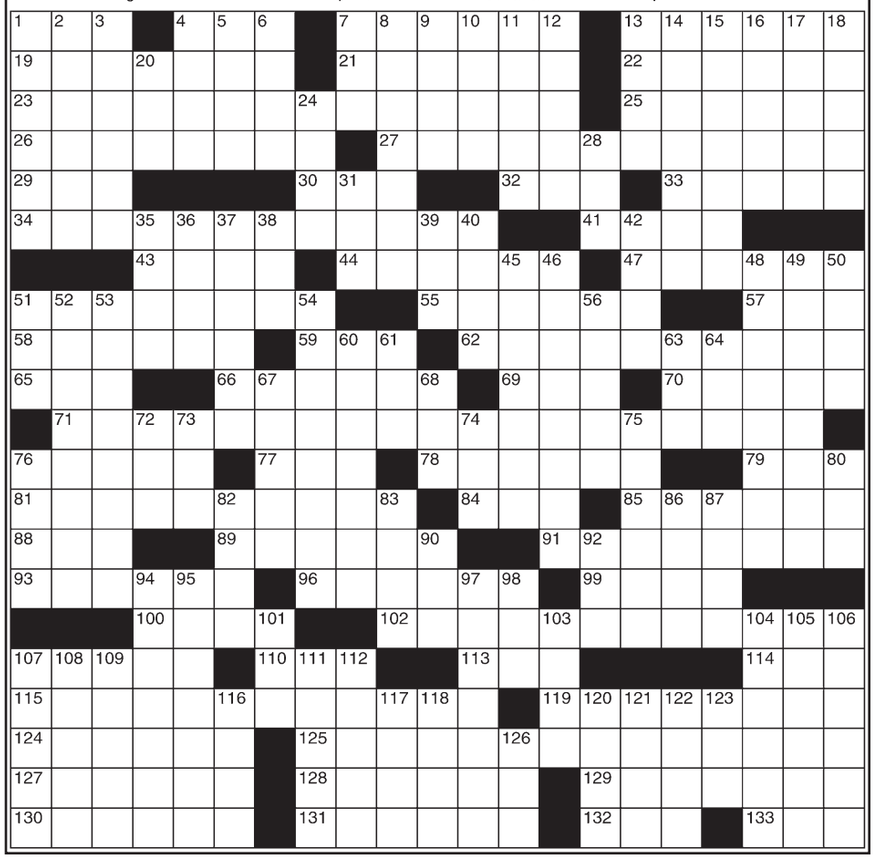


CROSSWORD
D-PARTING

2026 King Features Synd., Inc.

ACROSS
1 PlayStation 3 competitor
4 Prefix for "bird"
7 Man-to-man term of endearment
13 Luau skirt
19 Native (to)
21 Modern way to shop
22 Neckwear clasp
23 Noteworthy septet of piers?
25 Spanish fleet
26 Worship
27 Publicly revealing Edison's secret?
29 Bottom-row PC key
30 Recipe qty.
32 Overly
33 Eggs' shapes
34 Successfully trap a moray?
41 Shrek is one
43 "There oughta be —!"
44 Dozing
47 Spellbound
51 "This works like a charm!"
55 Up-to-the-minute
57 Director Ang
58 Like family-friendly films
59 Pres. after FDR
62 Bring a Ferris wheel to a complete stop?
65 Scrape (by)
66 Charlotte —, Virgin Islands
69 Internet ID
70 TV host Philbin
71 Like a king who has wild mood swings?
76 Burns a little
77 Army NCO
78 Teensy bit
79 Noted period
81 Ruling eagle sitting in her high nest?
84 Org. giving tows
85 Iridescent button materials
88 Architect I.M. from China
89 "Avengers: Age of —" (2015 Marvel film)
91 Government revenue sources
93 Ukraine port
96 Basketry willows
99 Shout
100 Mask
102 Wish you had never met the star of "Firestarter"?
107 Curved
110 — Fridays (restaurant)
113 Bank acct. amount
114 Uncooked
115 Response to a question about "Swan Lake"?
119 1996 #1 hit for Los del Rio
124 Funnel-shaped bloom
125 People with unorthodox opinions about a girl in Wonderland?
127 Quick raids
128 Cringed
129 Sugar alcohol used as a sweetener
130 Tiny amounts
131 Goes hastily
132 From — Z
133 Pop/soul singer Des'—

DOWN
1 Floor cleaner for liquid spills, in brief
2 Suffering, figuratively
3 — -Kit (police face-maker)
4 Part of ACLU: Abbr.
5 — voce
6 "High Rollers" rapper
7 See 109-Down
8 With the wish (of)
9 Actress Summer of "Serenity"
10 Encircled with a band
11 Not suitable
12 Like many simple questions
13 TDs or RBI
14 Loud warning device
15 Eliminator
16 Former first lady Michelle
17 Rafael of tennis
18 Lawn surface
20 Suffix of nationalities
24 Amsterdam is its cap.
28 Sticky gunk
31 Island setting
35 Appellation
36 Dressed
37 Bible book before Zechariah
38 Prefix with light
39 Pipe joint
40 Foliage unit
42 Stan of jazz
45 Region of pre-Roman Italy
46 Viewed intently
48 Some wheel adjusters
49 Animal's "family tree"
50 Golf pegs
51 Deep anger
52 Pay attention
53 Sault —, Mich.
54 Replace with
56 Bud of Cooperstown
60 Some roofing specialists
61 Up to, in brief
63 Suffix with southwest
64 Outdoor gear retailer
67 Large city in Iraq
68 Raised RRs
72 "Either he goes — go!"
73 Mao — -tung
74 Diva Sumac
75 Boomer's kid
76 Mafia chief
80 Horse cousin
82 Campus area
83 Film genre
86 Skillfully
87 Tranquil
90 Modern, in Munich
92 Scottish port
94 Varnish resin
95 Judgy glance
97 Make more offspring
98 Govt. loan agency
101 LAX guess
103 — mater
104 Collier's tram
105 Really bug
106 Discarded PCs or TVs
107 At the stern
108 Barber's tool
109 With 7-Down, the original "It" girl
111 Chews on
112 Town on Long Island's South Shore
116 Russian news agency
117 Chablis, e.g.
118 Ovid's "Lo!"
120 Brand of athletic shoes
121 "— la vie"
122 Slangy suffix with buck
123 Cup edge
126 ER staffers



NERVE ENDINGS

ONE TOO MANY WAKE-UP CALLS

The San Diego mosque shooting makes white supremacy impossible to ignore

BY LULA DUALEH

Every time Muslims are murdered in this country, America performs the same hollow ritual.

Politicians offer condolences. News anchors suddenly discover Islamophobia exists. People post statements about unity and tolerance. Then the news cycle moves on while the conditions that created the violence remain completely intact.

As a Black Muslim woman living and organizing in the South, born to two Somali immigrants, I am tired of being expected to survive inside a system that keeps manufacturing our dehumanization, then acting shocked when it turns deadly.

The recent shooting at the Islamic Center of San Diego, where three Muslim men were killed protecting worshippers during prayer, was not random. It was not an unfortunate exception to American life. It was America functioning exactly as it was designed to function — protecting power through fear, militarism, racial scapegoating and the constant creation of internal enemies.

Because this country did not accidentally become Islamophobic; it was taught.

For decades, the United States has built an entire political culture around teaching people to fear Muslims. After 9/11, Muslims became the perfect target for an expanding security state hungry for justification.

Surveillance powers expanded. Muslim communities were infiltrated. Mosques were monitored. Children grew up watching their faith associated with terrorism before they were even old enough to understand geopolitics. Entire wars were justified through narratives portraying Muslim lives as disposable.

Americans were told this was about safety, but you cannot spend decades normalizing the idea that Muslims are dangerous then feign surprise when somebody kills Muslims in a mosque. That violence is not disconnected from policy. It is the domestic consequence of it.

We have seen this before in our own state.

In 2015, three Muslim students — Deah Barakat, Yusor Abu-Salha, and Razan Abu-Salha — were executed by their neighbor in Chapel Hill. Muslim communities across the country immediately recognized the atmosphere surrounding those killings because we had already spent years living inside America's post-9/11 culture of suspicion and dehumanization.

But even then, there were attempts to depoliticize what happened, to frame the murders as solely the result of a parking spot dispute, disconnected from the broader climate of Islamophobia shaping this country.

That is what America repeatedly does with anti-Muslim violence: isolate the incident, individualize the perpetrator, mourn temporarily, and refuse to confront the systems that made the violence imaginable in the first place.

The North Carolina Muslim community has not forgotten Chapel Hill because we understood what those murders represented long before much of the country was willing to confront Islamophobia honestly.

We understood that anti-Muslim violence in America does not emerge from nowhere. It grows from years of political rhetoric, state surveillance, war propaganda, border militarization, and media narratives teaching the public who deserves fear and who deserves empathy.

San Diego is not separate from Chapel Hill; it is part of the same political story.

As Muslims — especially Black Muslims and immigrant Muslims — we are expected to navigate this country carrying impossible contradictions. We are told to assimilate while constantly being reminded we do not belong. We are told America stands for freedom while watching our communities get surveilled, detained, profiled and criminalized.

We are told diversity is celebrated while politicians openly campaign on anti-immigrant fearmongering and mass deportation fantasies. And for Somali communities specifically, the hypocrisy is impossible to ignore.

America destabilizes countries through war, intervention, extraction and militarism then criminalizes the very refugees displaced by those same systems. Somali immigrants come to this country seeking survival and are met with suspicion, surveillance and hostility.

Muslim immigrants are expected to constantly prove our innocence while white nationalist violence continues to be treated as an individual problem instead of what it actually is: a political project rooted in white supremacy.

Because white supremacy in America has always required enemies, and if we understand that, then silence is not an option anymore.

Calling out Islamophobia cannot be selective. It cannot only happen after violence erupts. It cannot be reduced to sympathy posts or temporary outrage when the cameras are on us. It has to become something consistent, something practiced in how we speak, how we organize, how we show up for one another when no one is watching.

Because what protects Muslims does not stop at Muslims. What protects Black Muslims does not stop at Black Muslims. What protects immigrant communities does not stop at immigrants. This is shared ground, whether people choose to see it or not.

I call on my neighbors to speak when Muslims are dehumanized in political speeches. Speak when surveillance is expanded in the name of "security." Speak when mosques are treated as threats instead of places of worship. Speak when grieving communities are asked to justify their own humanity.

You do not have to be a community organizer to shift the narrative. Do not wait for another tragedy to make it acceptable to care.

More than speaking, I ask that you act. Stand with Muslim communities not as an abstract idea, but in real solidarity — in schools, in workplaces, in organizing spaces, in your neighborhoods. Challenge the casual Islamophobia that gets excused as ignorance. Interrupt the narratives that make violence feel inevitable. Refuse the language that turns entire communities into suspects.

Because every time Islamophobia is ignored, it becomes easier to repeat. And every time it is repeated, it moves closer to someone else's door. The choice in front of us is not whether this violence exists. It already does. The choice is whether we keep treating it as background noise or whether we decide to name it, confront it and refuse to let it define what safety means in this country.

Stand with Muslim communities. Speak when it is uncomfortable. Speak when it costs something. Speak even when the news cycle has already moved on. Because silence has never been neutral here. And it never protected anyone.

INFO@QCNERVE.COM

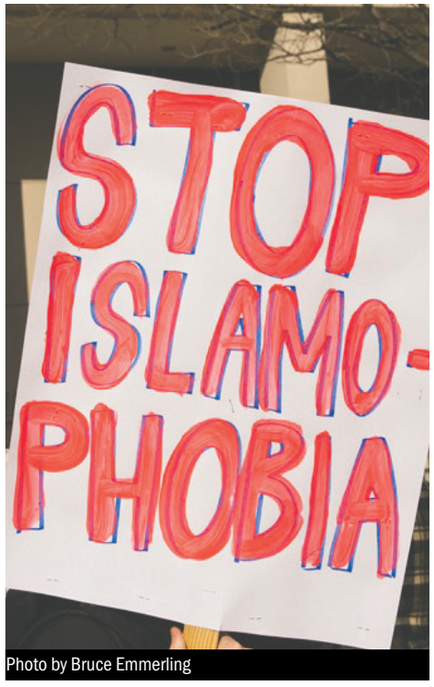


Photo by Bruce Emmerling

PUZZLE ANSWERS

Trivia Answers

1. A vixen.
2. 2007.
3. "Red Dawn," 1984.
4. Wellington, New Zealand.
5. Kentucky.
6. Science fiction and fantasy.
7. 1975.
8. Heptagon.
9. Verona, Italy.
10. Hoboken, New Jersey.

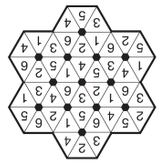
CryptoQuote
answer
Every time I walk on grass, I feel sorry because I know the grass is screaming at me.
— Barbara McClintock

CryptoQuip
answer
If the eighteenth Greek letter had to be worn as a mark of shame, it would be a sigma stigma.

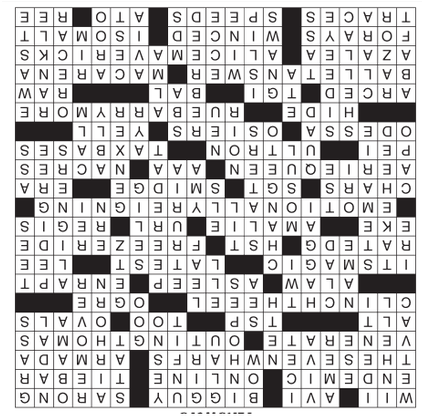
Even Exchange
answers

1. Armor, Arbor
2. Dart, Drift
3. Patron, Patrol
4. Grass, Glass
5. Manner, Banner
6. Holly, Hilly
7. Falter, Filter
8. Horse, Horde
9. Cairn, Cairo
10. Winter, Winner

3	1	6	9	5	7	8	2	4
2	8	5	6	1	4	7	9	3
7	4	9	2	3	8	6	5	1
8	9	3	5	2	1	4	6	7
5	6	7	3	4	9	2	1	8
1	2	4	8	7	6	9	3	5
4	3	1	7	6	2	5	8	9
6	7	8	1	9	5	3	4	2
9	5	2	4	8	3	1	7	6



8	+	3	-	7	=	4		
-		+		-				
6	+	4	÷	5	=	2		
÷		-		+				
1	+	2	×	9	=	27		
=		=		=				
2		5		11				



SAVAGE LOVE

BORDER CROSSINGS

Passing through ports

BY DAN SAVAGE

How do you feel about the rise of "passport bros?" A friend of mine rearranged his life after his divorce and now spends about half the year overseas dating. He insists it's not exploitation or colonialism — just a life hack — since his income goes three times as far abroad. He's basically able to live like a one-percenter when he's overseas. You've often advised callers to move to cities or countries to start fresh and he argues that status matters everywhere, so why not live where your money and status stretch further? He says he's honest with women in that he tells them he's not looking for anything serious, but I still think he's lying to himself about the power imbalance — especially in Southeast Asian countries he visits. He's anti-MAGA, which complicates the stereotype he claims most passport bros fit. He argues that Los Angeles has a huge imbalance between women and men and that women naturally gravitate toward status such as education, career or finances — so why not flip the status equation overseas? Dan, is he an asshole lying to himself or has he found the ultimate life hack?

Dude Unrigs Dating

Your friend isn't flying off to Southeast Asia because he wants to eat in nicer restaurants, DUD, he's going there because his "status" rises along with the relative poverty of local women. The worse off they are, the better off he is. So, while your friend can vote Democratic and be honest with the women he's fucking about his intentions, he knows — and you don't have to pretend not to know — that he's exploiting the women he "dates." While some women may only want him for his body (and I'd need to see some shirtless photos before signing off on that), poor and/or much poorer women fuck him because he lives locally like a member of the 1% … and so do, however briefly, the women who fuck him when he's abroad. He can argue the exploitation is mutual — he's after their bodies, they're after his money — and insist, again, that he's being honest about his intentions, but many of the women who fuck him no doubt hope they'll be the exception, i.e. the woman who convinces him to commit so that he'll lift them out of their (relative) poverty permanently. And there's a good chance your friend behaves in ways that lead each woman he "dates" to think she just might be the exception. So, yeah. I'm putting my money on "asshole lying to himself" and not "dude who found the ultimate life hack," DUD.

P.S. I'm pro sex work, DUD, which means I'm not opposed to sex that is strictly transactional. But I'm anti bullshit, and your friend is bullshitting himself (and you) when he claims that he's "dating" these women. He's employing them, DUD, but paying them less than an honest john would pay an honest sex worker.

P.S. The Economist did a deep (and very disturbing) dive into the culture, intentions and attitudes of passport bros.

I am in a happy marriage. My husband is an attractive, creative, good person that I love to talk to. We are best friends and he's a great father to our two kids. We've been together for 15 years and married for 13. We are both openly bi, but I've never been in a relationship with a woman. About eight years ago, my libido sank and I just assumed it was because of PCOS and getting older. I had no crushes or desires. The only time we really have conflict is when we talk about me not being affectionate or not wanting to have sex. We were having sex maybe once a month. Recently, I started working with a woman. The first time she talked to me, Dan, my body exploded. Exploded! Like my libido was pounding in my pants stronger than it did when I was 20. I've gotten to know her more, hoping it would fade away and we would just end up friending up. It didn't fade away; it got stronger. The more we hang out, the happier I am and the hornier I am. My revived libido has translated into me and my husband having tons of sex. It's also made me realize maybe I'm more gay than I am straight and I'm wondering if I should leave my beautiful marriage and stable family life for the total risk of a new life. I would love to be with the work woman but she is more of a catalyst for a revelation that I should be with women. But maybe I'm being dramatic. What should I do?

A Whole New World

At the risk of letting the mask slip and exposing myself as a conservative plant … I don't think running away and joining the lesbian circus would be fair to your kids. Your marriage sounds like a happy one, your husband sounds like a gem, and it sounds like you and your husband are fucking again. While I don't mean to privilege heterosexual relationships over lesbian ones — or, God forbid, instrumentalize sapphic desire in the service of straight marriage — I think your improved/improving sex life with your husband and, more importantly, the children you had together argue against ending your beautiful marriage.

While you describe you and your husband as openly bisexual, AWNW, you don't describe your marriage as open. If it's not and you're in a risk-taking mood, maybe a conversation with your husband about opening up your marriage — as opposed to ending it — will satisfy your need to take a risk. He knows you're bisexual. Does he know you have a crush on a woman from work? Does he know he has this woman to thank for all the pussy he's getting? If not, maybe you should tell him? If he's as wonderful as you say he is, and if he's always been supportive of your bisexuality — and interested in acting on his own — you might be able to have it all: a wonderful husband, a stable home life and a girlfriend.

My husband and I just started swinging after 20 years together. We found another couple recently that's compatible with us. They are also new-ish to the lifestyle, but they've had more experiences than us. We have hooked up twice so far, everything went awesome. Except I have noticed both times that neither of the men — not my husband nor the other woman's husband — finished (ejaculated) even though we went on for several hours both times. I had three orgasms last time! And the wife is a squirter, so that was fun to watch. I brought up the subject via text when we were making plans for another playdate. Basically, I asked if there was an unspoken agreement I wasn't aware of where the men agreed not to come. With my husband, I know he had a harder time because of the condom, but I make him come at home all the time. So, now I'm on a mission to make the other guy come. I think it's gratifying to see a man come. He gives a lot (oral), I think it should be reciprocal, but he says he enjoys giving me orgasms more than getting them. Also, to make it worse, the other woman says she doesn't actually have orgasms during playdates either, even though she squirts?!? Should I just leave this alone? Or make it a personal mission to make everyone else come?

Completing Orgasmic Mission Eventually

You're new to swinging (are people still calling it that?) — welcome to the lifestyle! (are people still calling it that?) — and it sounds like you're carrying a perfectly reasonable partnered sex assumption into group sex. Namely, that everyone needs or wants to orgasm every single time and that a good partner makes sure their partner gets off.

First off, lots of men — men who are new to swinging, men who are more experienced swingers — don't necessarily need or want to come during group playdates. Some men can't because condoms make it harder, some newbies can't come due to performance anxiety issues (that will resolve themselves in time), and some men find it harder to come when they're being watched. For others, trying not to finish too fast backfires and they "miss their window" and wind up not being able to come at all. Remember: While many women can have more than one orgasm during a session — you had three last time — very few men can have more than one orgasm during a single playdate. Since your husband and this other guy are likely to crash out after they come, it makes sense they'd choose to pace themselves, even at the risk of not coming at all.

Second, it's always good to be invested in your partner's pleasure — there wouldn't be an orgasm gap if all straight men everywhere were as invested in their partners' pleasure as you are — but "making" everyone else at your playdate come because you regard their orgasms as proof they're having fun and/or proof that you're a good fuck isn't the vibe you want to carry into a group sex situation. If you need proof this couple had a great time and that you're a good fuck, COME, the fact that this couple showed up for a second playdate and wants to schedule a third should suffice. (As a general rule, swingers don't keep swinging with people they had a bad time with to be polite.)

TLDR: Leave this alone.

Or look at it this way: Mission accomplished. You let everyone know — you let your husband know, you let this other couple know — that you're ready, willing and able to get them off, COME, which makes you an excellent play partner. If someone wants your help getting off, they'll let you know. If they don't, you can relax and enjoy your orgasms without guilt.

P.S. Pressure — the sense that your partner is going to be disappointed if you don't come — has never made it easier for someone to get off.




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