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QUEEN CITY NERVE



Culinary Cultural Preservation

Jenelle Kellam preserves sacred recipes through Cook. Swap. Repeat.

By Dezanii Lewis

NEWS: City set to impose stricter curfew on teens ◊ pg. 4

ARTS: Rhizome Arts Market puts community first ◊ pg. 6

MUSIC: Singer/songwriter Ashlyn Uribe adapts EP to film ◊ pg. 10

OPINION: Why the state budget was too little, too late ◊ pg. 14

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

NEWS & OPINION

4. Locked In by Ryan Pitkin
City poised to enact stricter curfew in response to teen takeovers

5. Stripped by Christine Zhu & Lynn Bonner
State board approves controversial changes to state election rules in lead-up to mid-terms

ARTS & CULTURE

6. Market Value by Ryan Pitkin
The Rhizome Arts Market places community over everything

8. Lifeline: Ten Cool Things To Do in Two Weeks

MUSIC

9. Soundwave

10. Off Script by Pat Moran
Singer/songwriter Ashlyn Uribe branches out with autobiographical film project

FOOD & DRINK

11. Culinary Cultural Preservation by Dezanii Lewis
Jenelle Kellam preserves sacred recipes through Cook. Swap. Repeat.

LIFESTYLE

12. Horoscope
12. Puzzles
14. Nerve Endings
15. Savage Love



Scenes from a recent Teen Summer Jam at Eastway Rec Center. Courtesy of Mecklenburg County Park & Rec

LOCKED IN

City poised to enact stricter curfew in response to teen takeovers

BY RYAN PITKIN

The city of Charlotte appears poised to enact a 9 p.m. curfew for all minors throughout the city in response to recent incidents that city leaders are referring to as "teen takeovers."

Following incidents at Romare Bearden Park and The Boardwalk at University City that saw between 200-300 teenagers gathering and reportedly disturbing the peace in recent weeks, the city's Safety Committee unanimously voted to support CMPD's recommendation for an earlier curfew during a special meeting called just for the occasion on June 14, sending it to the full Charlotte City Council for approval.

With council currently in summer recess until August, the body may call a special meeting to enact the new measures sooner.

Recent teen takeovers in Charlotte

CMPD attorney Jessica Battle played a video montage of news reports about teen takeovers happening locally and around the country set to dramatic music during Tuesday's committee meeting before leading a presentation on recent takeovers in Charlotte.

Officers arrested three juveniles and cited nine others with curfew violations after a gathering of nearly 300 teens turned unruly on June 11, according to CMPD. The three juveniles who were arrested face charges including possession of a firearm by a minor, carrying a concealed weapon, trespassing, resisting arrest, and assault on a police officer.

Ten parents and guardians were also charged with contributing to the delinquency of a minor as a result of the incident in University City.

CMPD Chief Estella Patterson on Tuesday cited a teen takeover at Romare Bearden Park on June 14 that ended with the double shooting of two teens aged 15 and 18 at the hands of a 16-year-old suspect.

Patterson insisted that an attempted takeover at Romare Bearden on July 4 only ended peacefully because the department had deployed 200 officers to oversee the area surrounding the park and neighboring Truist Field during Fourth of July celebrations. She called that level of police presence "unsustainable."

As it stands now, a curfew is in effect for children 12 and under beginning at 10 p.m. and teens aged 13-15 beginning at 11 p.m. CMPD officials at Tuesday's meeting said the current tiered structure makes enforcing the curfew tougher on officers as many children don't have IDs so are able to give fake names and/or ages.

There would be certain exceptions to the new curfew, similar to the ones that are in place now: youth who are accompanied by a parent, guardian, or authorized person aged 21 or older; running an errand at a parent or guardian's direction; going to or from work or carrying out job-related tasks, attending or traveling to or from an official school, religious or recreational activity; or responding to an emergency.

Council members comment

Following CMPD's presentation on Tuesday, council members had a chance to comment and ask questions.

"This conversation is not about criminalizing our youth, it is about keeping our community safe, especially our youth," said Dimple Ajmera. "It's about preventing violence, supporting our youth, connecting them with the right resources and the right tools before CMPD needs to intervene."

Malcolm Graham said he visited the Boardwalk at University City on June 12 and saw that some of the area businesses had been vandalized during the previous night's incident.

"It's an affront to public safety for those who want a safe and secure environment here in the city," Graham said. "Obviously, when you get a crowd of 200 to 300 [people], there's more than one or two or three bad actors and they bring weapons and they cause death and destruction, so we have to be very proactive in putting an ordinance in place."

Ed Driggs called on CMPD to go after the organizers of these events, which are usually started through a flyer that spreads on social media. A CMPD rep said the department has in certain instances been able to reach an organizer through contact info on the flyer but that's not often possible.

Dante Anderson called on the city to create more spaces for teens to gather.

"Our youth are really crying out for safe third spaces," said Anderson. "Outside of home and outside of school, there's really no place for them to go. I love that they're going outside, I love that they're not indoors, they're getting fresh air, they're getting outside, we just need to have those safe spaces where they can do it in an environment that is protected and that adults have oversight."

Creating opportunities for youth

Officials at Tuesday's meeting highlighted a number of programs and initiatives that are underway throughout the city to provide young people with safer spaces to gather and socialize.

Graham extolled Impact Camp, a free weeklong camp for local boys aged 8-13 launched by developer and community leader Shawn Kennedy where Graham says he'll be helping lead tennis lessons next week.

Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation recently launched its Teen Summer Jam series, happening every Friday night in July at Eastway Regional Recreation Center from 6:30-11 p.m. Teens are invited to hang out, play sports and video games, have some food, make music in a recording booth or any number of other offerings. Registration is required.

"When you hear about teen takeovers, people's thoughts on solving that issue are not, 'Let's throw a party for them,'" said Gabe Hackney, recreation manager at Eastway Regional Recreation Center. "We're showing a different way that can be done — where you engage in a positive way and provide a safe place."

About 200 young people attended the first Teen Summer Pool Jam at Ray's Splash Planet on June 26, with staff transporting participants from six rec centers across the county.

"It's a reflection of retention," Park and Rec superintendent Justin Jackson. "Those kids had a great time going to the pool party, and they're like, 'What's next?'"

Earlier this year, the city of Charlotte partnered with marketing agency CMRignite and local youth mentoring organization My Brother's Keeper Charlotte-Mecklenburg (MBKCM) to launch The 704 Way.

Ricky Singh, executive director with MBKCM, described The 704 Way as a collaborative, youth-led movement designed to disrupt cycles of violence by empowering youths to become the architects of Charlotte's peace-building strategy, according to MBKCM executive director Ricky Singh.

Aiden Treus, a senior at Cato Middle College High School and Youth Advisory Board member with The 704 Way, said he'd like to see young people and adult organizers putting together more events that provide teens with something to do.

"This past weekend, everyone's just in University, no one's really doing anything. They're just walking around," Treus told Queen City Nerve. "Idle time is the devil's hour, so making an event where they're doing something ... that keeps them occupied, that takes them out of trouble."

Treus pointed to collaborative art pop-ups like one The 704 Way hosted at The Archive CLT on July 8, in which teens customized pairs of Vans sneakers, shorts and umbrellas.

"Teens want to gather, adults want to gather; adults end up going to breweries in Charlotte ... but I think for kids we're thinking about, well, what can we provide them creatively?" Singh said. "We know our next generation of youth in our city, our creatives, they're interested in different things ... That pop up wasn't about Vans, it was about the opportunity for them to connect and be with each other and do something cool."

Singh emphasized that it's up to not just city leaders and law enforcement but nonprofits, grassroots organizers and the business community to all come together to provide opportunities and safe spaces for Charlotte's youth.

"I don't think it's a magic wand; it's not going to be one solution," he said. "After all, peace is something communities have been striving for and trying to figure out for thousands of years."

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The 704 Way Vans pop-up. Photo by Ricky Singh



Scenes from a recent NC State Board of Elections meeting. Photo by Lynn Bonner

STRIPPED

State board approves controversial changes to state election rules in lead-up to mid-terms

BY CHRISTINE ZHU & LYNN BONNER, NC NEWSLINE

The North Carolina State Board of Elections has approved a measure to disqualify certain absentee ballots ahead of the 2026 midterms.

Members voted 3-2 along party lines on Monday, July 20.

The measure allows county elections board staff to take further action on ballots with "irregularities." Examples include not properly sealing a ballot or using the wrong type of envelope. Staff should contact voters, but without appropriate action, the ballots may be tossed.

Republicans say the change would enhance election security. Democratic critics say it would disenfranchise legitimate voters, and could be applied arbitrarily with political motives.

"I think it's confusing," Democratic board member Siobhan Millen said. "We're going to lose perfectly sound ballots due to over-fussiness."

"I don't think it's fussy. I don't think it's picky. I don't think it's hard," responded Republican board member Angela Hawkins. Hawkins says voters confused by the container return envelope used in absentee voting may contact their local elections board for clarification.

She pointed out the proposal is legal under current state's laws.

"If the General Assembly wants to change it, then that's fine," Hawkins said.

At the national level, President Donald Trump has slammed mail-in voting, claiming it contributed to "fraud" in the 2020 election. His allegations have not been proven.

North Carolina's Rules Review Commission, made up of Republican appointees, needs to approve the change before it takes effect.

The approval followed a similar vote held on July 16 in which board members also voted along party lines to endorse a rule that will make it easier for voters' ballots to be thrown out if they don't show a photo ID.

As it is now, all five county board members have to agree to throw out a provisional ballot because they think the voter is lying about the reason they do not have photo ID. Under the new rules, bipartisan agreement would no longer be required. Only a majority vote would be needed to throw out a ballot based on belief that the voter lied about the lack of photo ID.

The state board's three Republicans supported the change, while its two Democrats were opposed.

The proposed rule "feeds into the lie that there's a ton of voter fraud," said Democrat Jeff Carmon.

Republican Stacy "Four" Eggers IV said the requirement for a unanimous vote does not comply with state law. "That was something that was invented out of whole cloth by this board," he said.

The board received 161 pages of emailed comments about the rule, and 1,506 comments through an online portal, a board lawyer said. Most were opposed to dropping the unanimous vote requirement.

In a statement, state Elections Director Sam Hayes said he didn't expect more ballots to be rejected under the changed rule.

'What instills faith in elections is adherence to the letter and spirit of the law," Hayes said in the statement. "As counsel for Speakers (Tim) Moore and (Destin) Hall, I defended North Carolina's voter ID law in both state and federal court. The requirement of unanimity to reject a reasonable impediment declaration appears nowhere in the statute. That was the result of a prior board taking license and going beyond the mandate of the General Assembly.

"Today, the current State Board of Elections took action necessary to make our rule conform with the law, and I support that decision. The only basis for rejecting a reasonable impediment is if the county board has grounds to believe the affidavit is false, and nothing has changed in that regard. It is a high bar to meet, and I do not expect that this rule change will result in more ballots being rejected," Hayes said.

The proposed rule now goes to the Rules Review Commission for approval. If the commission approves, the rule would be in effect for the midterm elections.

Last week, the elections board voted in favor of a rule to make it easier to throw out voters' ballots if they don't show photo identification. "

The board also voted on party lines to approve a new rule that would ban amplified sound outside polling places and other noises that can be heard inside.

At a public comment session last month, opponents said the rule would cramp efforts to mobilize Black, brown and young voters. These efforts aim to make voting a celebration and often include music.

"We are feeding into a non-existing problem," Carmon said. "With this rule, we are discouraging people from being excited about voting."

Eggers said the rules give chief judges the means to maintain order within a precinct.

Ban on amplified music outside NC polling places draws criticism

The new rules for disregarding ballots aren't the only changes the NC State Board of Elections has wrought. The board also approved a new rule banning amplified sound outside polling places, one that critics say is aimed at discouraging voting by Black and young voters.

When the state board debated the proposed rule in April, members did not mention any specific complaints about music or bullhorns outside polling places. No one spoke in favor of the rule Monday. Written comments on proposed rules will not be released until the comment period ends.

The idea was controversial before it reached the public comment stage. Democrats on the state board voted against putting the proposal before the public for comment.

Speakers at a public comment session on the proposed rule said it would stifle voter engagement activities such as Stroll to the Polls, Souls to the Polls, organized by Black churches, and DJs at the Polls.

Music outside polling places doesn't disrupt elections, but is a celebration around voting that encourages participation, said Madison Belin of Raleigh, a rising junior at NC A&T State University in Greensboro.

Collective action and civic participation are deeply rooted in HBCU history, Belin said, and events that include music and bring people to the polls are a continuation of that legacy.

No one is asking to disrupt voting or compromise the integrity of elections, she said.

"We are simply asking to preserve the spaces and traditions that make people excited to participate in them. Removing elements that make voting engaging and fun just further inconveniences people and pushes young voters away," Belin said. "I would hope and pray that is not the goal."

The in-person comment session, held on June 29, was one of four on proposed election and ballot-counting rules, including the changes reported above.

Andy Jackson, director of the Civitas Center for Public Integrity at the John Locke Foundation, spoke at all the public comment sessions. He supported the proposed rule changes on photo ID, absentee ballots and recounts but recommended abandoning the rule banning amplified sound.

Jackson did not center his criticism on race or voter age, but said the proposed rule "does not narrowly serve the state's compelling interest" in enforcing peace and order in and around polling places. "If the sound is not audible within the voting enclosure, it should be allowed," he said.

Jackson also recommended rewriting a proposal on when a chief judge at a polling site can tell someone outside to turn down the volume so it can withstand charges of subjectivity.

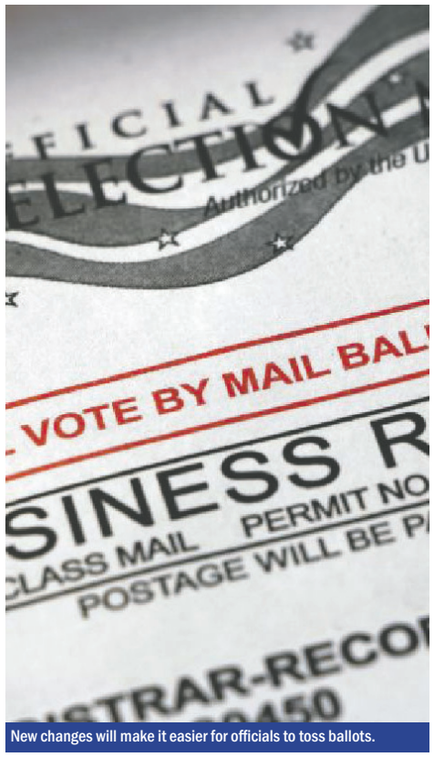
Brian Kennedy, senior analyst with Democracy North Carolina, said the proposed ban on amplified sound is "in the same spirit" as North Carolina's previous voter suppression efforts.

The rule targets community-led voter mobilization efforts that bring Black, brown and young voters to the polls, he said.

"Community mobilization events that use music, energy and joy" strengthen democracy, Kennedy said. "These events are not disruptions to the electoral process. They are an electoral process working as it should."

This article was aggregated from multiple news stories originally published by NC Newsline, part of States Newsroom, the nation's largest state-focused nonprofit news organization.

INFO@QCNERVE.COM



New changes will make it easier for officials to toss ballots.



Rhizome member Courtney Rohan leads a Trashy Art Workshop. Photo by Michael Maxwell

MARKET VALUE

The Rhizome Arts Market places community over everything

BY RYAN PITKIN

In the plant world, a rhizome is an always growing, horizontal stem underground that puts out new shoots.

For April C. Turner, a member of the leadership team with QC Family Tree's Rhizome Coalition, the Rhizome Arts Markets that she organizes in the Freedom Drive/Wilkinson Boulevard corridor are the visible results of that work that's done underground.

"And like rhizomes, we grow steadily outward with intention," Turner said. "We recognize that without the work underground, there is no forward progress for the community."

Speaking in the lead-up to the next market, scheduled for the evening of July 22 at The Arts Factory at West End Studios on West Trade Street, Turner emphasized that the Rhizome Arts Market was created to cultivate a sense of community more than simply act as a place to buy goods.

Drawing from her decades of work as a traditional West African folklorist and dancer, Turner has been purposeful in curating a market based in the African traditions that saw such events as civic rituals.

"These spaces were intentionally designed to slow down time and encourage visits that build mutual trust between community members," Turner said.

The recurring neighborhood marketplace invites the 40 members of the Rhizome Coalition, a cohort of local artists who work collectively to support one another, strengthen the community and create new opportunities through art, to sell their wares free of charge.

Held in partnership with Here for Good Business Cooperative, Turner envisions the market as a space where artists and neighbors can build lasting relationships. By removing barriers for participating artists, the monthly market opens access to a more traditional small business system.

But the monthly events are about so much more than business.

"This is under the umbrella of the Here for Good Business [co-op], and so I'm like, 'Okay, yeah, we want to do business,' but we also want to do it in a way that invites community — between the residents, between the artists, between the merchants, between all the people that have to be a part of community in order for community to be a real thing," Turner told Queen City Nerve. "It can't just be one leg of it; we all have to stand together. All the legs have to come together to stand."

Part of Turner's work with QC Family Tree has been around community engagement, and it shows in the way she has built out the Rhizome Arts Market. Past events have included musical jam sessions with traditional African instruments that Turner brought from home — drums, shekeres, Agogo bells, etc.

Rhizome Coalition member Jasiatic Usher has served food during the markets while fellow member Bunny Gregory has turned her popular arts bus into a space for kids to take part in craft workshops.

For member artist Courtney Rohan, the market represents another rhizome shoot emerging from the coalition's growing network.

At the July market, Rohan will share her self-created spirit card collection, which blends original artwork and written guidance while inviting support for her Kickstarter campaign to bring the full deck to life.

Her participation reflects how the Rhizome Coalition helps artists move new ideas from creation into the community.

"It's provided a place to build partnerships with other artists in community," Rohan said. "Getting to know all the members and participating in events served as a bridge to more creative and professional opportunities, including an artist residency and workshop teaching roles."

Each market brings new vendors and new experiences. The July market will also feature a range of Charlotte artists with practices spanning visual art, storytelling, design and handmade craft. They include Creative Harmony Arts, Ashaki Ali, KelsoMariCo, Kemoy Callaghan, Pura Candelas, Tiffonyé Wilkins, and Tamara Marlene, among others.

For Turner, the market provides neighbors a chance to connect with their community, supporting local artists and vendors in a literal and figurative sense.

"Here in the United States, we think of [vendor markets] as, 'Okay, I'm going to sell some stuff, make some money,' and yeah, you are. That's fine. It's good to be able to be the buyer. It's good to be able to be the seller, the one who's earning. All of those roles have a part in making everything work," Turner said. "But the goal is to be able to do these things in a way that builds community and promotes healthy exchanges. So there are opportunities in a traditional market for us to interact outside of the commercial exchange that's going to happen."

Then there are the interactions that happen within that commercial exchange, which can also be part of the community-building goal.

"People come for the opportunity to go back and forth, or to haggle," Turner said. "We might call it haggling here, to have that exchange. It seems like it's contentious, but there's an understanding that gets developed about what people need and what people can give. There's a learning that happens inside of that haggling; it's not only for, quote-unquote, 'getting the best price.'"

Within that engagement, at a time when affordability is front of mind for so many folks living along the Freedom/Wilkinson corridor and Historic West End, Turner sees art in and of itself.

"We can struggle, but we can struggle joyfully if that's what we've got to do," she said. "There doesn't have to be this heaviness. There's art where art is involved and we can literally make an art out of everything we do, and that includes coming together to have what could be a purely commercial effort and turn it into something beautiful."



A customer shops at the Rhizome Arts Market. Photo by Michael Maxwell

Making room for 'Main Character Energy'

The Rhizome Coalition came together in 2022 as an evolution of QC Family Tree's Culture Bearer arts residency program.

The creation of the coalition was inspired by the Rhizome program originally launched by Alternate ROOTS, an Atlanta-based organization that serves artists and cultural workers throughout the Southeast.

Turner met QC Family Tree co-founder Helms Jarrell while both served as board members with Alternate ROOTS.

The Rhizome Coalition began with meet-ups where artists would share skills and trade advice about creative entrepreneurship. It has since evolved to include workshops that help members grow their business, collaborate on grant applications, and work with each other to improve digital portfolios, Jarrell explained to Queen City Nerve.

"We do all kinds of things to help folks succeed in the art-making, but also in the business of art and being an artist," she said. "And then we also just do fun, supportive community-building types of things together so that we can be attending to each other's work needs but also our own personal and social needs."

Wednesday's Rhizome Arts Market will also mark the opening of the coalition's latest art exhibit, titled Main Character Energy. While most of the Rhizome exhibits are residency shows highlighting coalition members and Culture Bearer residents, Main Character Energy is one of the few exhibits the organization hosts throughout the year through an open-call system.

The exhibit brings together a collection of artists exploring identity, self-expression and the visual languages that define contemporary culture, according to a release announcing the opening. "Inspired by the confidence and individuality captured in the phrase 'main character energy,' the exhibition celebrates work that is unapologetically bold, personal, and visually engaging."

According to Jarrell, who acted as sole curator for the exhibit, the work that came in was not what she expected when she made the open call for art "in a spirit of summer and a spirit of excitement and joy."

"I thought that the work would be kind of like street art and pop art, but what has come is more like, portraits of…" she paused to gather her thoughts. "There's been some that are portraits of angst. Portraits of anger. There have been some of strength. I was kind of thinking it would be kind of like a kitschy and bubble-gum exhibit, and instead what has come across is kind of like the steely stare of resistance. It just feels like a real 'come at me' kind of moment."

While there is a wide range of feelings expressed throughout the exhibit, the submissions did give the exhibit a different type of feel than originally expected.

"I think the main character energy that folks are feeling and then submitting is this moment of staring into the future with strength and resilience and guts," Jarrell said.

The exhibit will be located inside the Arts Factory at West End Studios, which has become a home for the Rhizome Coalition thanks to its relationship with Three Bone Theatre, which currently stewards the space.

QC Family Tree originally began showing art in the space when it was occupied by Wonderworld Studios and now enjoys more regular hours with Three Bone Theatre in the building. The exhibit will be open for viewing during business hours at the facility, located at 1545 W. Trade St.

"We've definitely been able to collaborate in a social way," Jarrell said of Rhizome's relationship with Three Bone. "We've said, 'We're in the same sphere. We have similar challenges, similar good things going on. Let's see how we can work together.' That's been really great because we understand that we share values and we trust each other, so we can move in the space very freely."

The two groups have been brainstorming ways to work in a more collaborative way, blending the mostly visual art of Rhizome members with the live theatre of Three Bone, though some of those ideas are still in the preliminary stages.

As for the Rhizome Arts Market, Turner said she hopes to grow it in the years to come, but only if the same community vibes that have made it special in the first place can be preserved.

"We are envisioning, eventually, this being something that is a lot bigger, but we also are focused on the Freedom/Wilkinson corridor," Turner said. "So we don't want to just kind of jump out and put some big splashy thing out that the neighborhood doesn't see a way to participate in. And when I say the neighborhood, I mean the whole corridor."

And it's likely to work, thanks to the work that's taken root underground.

The next Rhizome Arts Market will take place on Wednesday, July 22, from 6-8 p.m. at The Arts Factory in Historic West End. The event will coincide with the opening of Main Character Energy, an art exhibition curated by QC Family Tree. Parking and admission are free.

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Rhizome member Umayal Annalmalai of Creative Harmony Arts' work at a Rhizome Arts Market Photo by Michael Maxwell

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ART, SPORTS, & SOCIAL CHANGE

July 22 • 6:30 p.m.-8:30 p.m. • Harvey B. Gantt Center, 551 S. Tryon St. • Free • ganttcenter.org

This panel discussion ties in with the Gantt Center's current exhibition Beyond Boundaries, which spotlights art from the Black abstraction movement. Since being launched in the mid-20th century, the Black abstraction movement has faced marginalization in the mainstream art world, arguably because its nonrepresentational work engages with the Black experience and Black people's systemic struggles. Moderated by NYC-based artist Felandus Thames, the discussion will feature Black representatives from sports, arts and culture in Charlotte and beyond including Tyrel Kirkham, chief marketing officer of the Charlotte Hornets; DUPP&SWAT CEO Dr. Davita Galloway and multidimensional artist Kiah Celeste, whose work is featured in Beyond Boundaries.

'REVERSE PSYCHOLOGY'

July 23-Aug. 1 • 8 p.m. • VisArt Video, 3104 Eastway Drive • $30 • paperhouseplus.com

In August, 2024, PaperHouse Theatre brought its production of playwright Charles Ludlam's gothic farce *The Mystery of Irma Vep* to VisArt. That satire of Victorian penny dreadfuls bombarded audiences with vampires, werewolves and cross-dressing. This time out, PaperHouse tackles another Ludlum play, *Reverse Psychology*. The avant-garde farce follows a husband-and-wife team of psychiatrists having affairs with their married patients. Secrets unravel, neuroses collide and therapy sessions spiral into chaos, punctuated with scalpel-sharp wit, campy humor and a flair for the absurd. Managing to be ridiculous and serious at the same time, the show illustrates Oscar Wilde's point about the importance of being earnest.

BUJU BANTON, STEPHEN MARLEY

July 24 • 7 p.m. • TD Amp Ballantyne, 11115 Upper Ave. • $165 and up • tdampballantyne.com

After releasing a string of violent and homophobic singles, Buju Banton converted to Rastafarianism and became a superstar of Jamaican dancehall. With albums like his 1995 masterpiece *Til Shiloh*, the enlightened, raspy-voiced former rude boy revolutionized the genre, fusing blues immediacy and rhythmic dexterity to decry violence and promote hope for the future. Banton has forged bonds with hip-hop artists like DJ Khaled, and his newest LP *Too Too Bad* is topping reggae charts with its mix of hip-hop and dancehall. The second son of reggae legend Bob Marley, Stephen Marley boasts an extensive discography that blends roots reggae with hip-hop, R&B and dancehall.

MIKE EPPS

July 24-26 • various times • Comedy Zone, 900 NC Music Factory Blvd. • $77.38-$101.62 • cltcomedyzone.com

"The motherfuckers Trump's fucking with, half of them voted for him," Mike Epps tells his stand-up crowd. "Drug dealers, they love him 'cause they're crooks, too." The uncompromising comic has generated buzz for his popular comedy specials as well as his dramatic career. Epps played Day-Day Jones in *Next Friday* and *Friday After Next*, and appeared as Black Doug in *The Hangover* and *The Hangover Part III*. Drawing on his working-class background growing up in Indianapolis, Epps also produced and starred in the Netflix comedy *The Upshaws*. The NAACP Image Awards honored Epps as Outstanding Actor in a Comedy Series for the show.

CHARLOTTE PERUVIAN FESTIVAL

July 25 • noon-8 p.m. • Victoria Yards, 209 E. 7th St. • $20 • victoriayardsclt.com

Charlotte's seventh annual Peruvian Festival celebrates the culture and people from South America's third largest country. The vibrant day-long event spotlights authentic Peruvian food, and cultural performances that includes spirited sets by Charlotte's Rumbao Latin Dance Company and Sangre de Campeón Raleigh. Musical highlights include Charlotte's Venezuelan-American indie-pop singer-songwriter James Delco; Asheville-based purveyors of Peruvian psychedelic cumbia and chicha Las Montañitas; energetic salsa orchestra Clave Nova; rootsy rock en español duo Good Hombres; the Andean music and retro Latin hits of The Queen City's Fuzion Latina Mix; and Dayan Aldana, who perform música criolla, a genre derived from Spanish, Andean and African influences.

ANNABELLE DINDA

July 26 • 7 p.m. • Amos' Southend, 1423 S. Tryon St. • $35.09 • amossouthend.com

New York's Annabelle Dinda has been crafting bittersweet, melodic alt-folk tunes with poetic yet trenchant lyrics ever since her 2020 debut *Nostalgion*, which boasts a burnished, bittersweet title track. In 2025, Dinda blew up with her single "The Hand." Harder-rocking than Dinda's previous songs, the tune boasts percolating and sophisticated music that propels and cradles expressionist lyrics that feel like a disoriented midnight trawl through a fractured psyche: "*A hand, a spike, a physical fight/ A flash of light, a curtain...*" It's all delivered in a pop-savvy voice that has mastered the finest keening vocal flip since the glory days of The Cranberries' Dolores O'Riordan.



Mike Epps
Photo by Kristen Wong
7/24-7/26



MLS All-Star Game
Courtesy of MLS
7/29

MLS ALL-STAR GAME

July 29 • 8 p.m. • Bank of America Stadium, 800 Mint St. • $56 and up • mlssoccer.com

Marking its first year in the Queen City, Major League Soccer's All-Star Game pits a 28-man roster of MLS standouts against the 28 best players from LIGA MX, a select squad from Mexico's premier professional soccer league. The MLS All-Stars' roster includes three Charlotte FC players: American defender Tim Ream, the U.S. Men's National Team captain; Spanish midfielder Pep Biel, who leads Charlotte FC in goal contributions and is making his All-Star debut; and English midfielder Ashley Westwood, who has racked up 600-plus professional games. They're part of an international community befitting the sport and our world-class city.

PARK AFTER DARK

Aug. 1 • 7 p.m. • The Spoke Easy, 1530 Elizabeth Ave. • $10 • thespokeeasyclt.com

In addition to being a bike shop, Elizabeth's Spoke Easy has forged an identity as a community hub, and that's partly due to Park After Dark (PAD). Blending culture, connection and live music, PAD offers giveaways, local food trucks, drinks, vendors, interactive games and opportunities to tap into the city's creative energy and discover new artists. PAD is particularly noted for spotlighting resonant and lively performers. With tunes like his smooth, R&B-infused 2026 single "Fly Away," headliner Donny Parks evokes a tropical vibe for the summery event. Soulful and joyful Yung Bizzle and sultry singer-songwriter E Dub contribute to the celebratory sounds.

NODA BIZARRE

Aug. 1 • noon-7 p.m. • Johnston YMCA, 3025 N Davidson St. • Free • noda.org/noda-bizarre

This biannual celebration of art, creativity and community takes place on the lawn of the Johnston YMCA, the "front porch of NoDa." Launched in 2024, NoDa Bizarre reimagines the neighborhood's legendary gallery crawls of the 1990s and 2000s. An open air market brings neighbors and entrepreneurs together, featuring food, handmade crafts, a raffle, a silent auction, immersive activities and more. Musical offerings include singer-acoustic guitarists Tim Hong and Adam Daniel, plus alternative pop troubadour Anna Kimm. This is as close as folks are likely to get to the former mill town where punk rockers, skateboarders, gay bikers, drum circles, fire-eaters and starving artists once proliferated.

JOHNNY MANCHILD AND THE POOR BASTARDS

Aug. 2 • 7:30 p.m. • Evening Muse, 3227 N. Davidson St. • $20.38-$23.69 • eveningmuse.com

Boasting an ever-shifting lineup, Johnny Manchild and The Poor Bastards made a splash on the Oklahoma City music scene with the bouncy, retro-vaudevillian pop gem "One Big Beautiful World" in 2019. Manchild continues to display his elastic range with his 2026 punk pop-meets-Tin Pan Alley single "Stacks!" Formed by Claire Molek and Jason Savsani in 2020, hypnotic duo Friend of a Friend crafts unsettling, swoony and malleable indie rock like the cinematic and hypnagogic "Stay." On "This Song Was Stolen by Pirates," Karma and the Killjoys vocalists Rain Scott-Catoire and Sydni Myers unleash a graveyard-of-the-sea shanty with keyboard-shattering chords and grimy guitars.

SOUNDWAVE

CHARLOTTE'S LIVE MUSIC CALENDAR * JUL. 22 - AUG. 4 *

WEDNESDAY JUL. 22

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
Marty Bush w/ Daisy & the Dead Pines, Outdoor Couch, The Whiskey Predicament (The Milestone)
HIP-HOP/SOUL/R&B
Qveen Herby (The Fillmore)
SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
Greg Steinfeld w/ Anna Kimm (Evening Muse)
JAZZ/BLUES
Bop Theory Jazz Jam (Eighty Eights)*
Wednesday Jazz Jam feat. Lovell Bradford Trio (VisArt Video)*
COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
Backstreet Trio (Comet Grill)
Mikaela Davis w/ Nic Panken (Snug Harbor)
FUNK/JAM BANDS/REGGAE
Pocket Aces (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)*
COVER BANDS
Tom Glynn: Simon, Croce & Taylor (Middle C Jazz)
OPEN MIC
Singer/Songwriter Open Mic (The Rooster)*
Starlight Jams Open Mic (Starlight on 22nd)*

THURSDAY JUL. 23

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
Willis w/ Pretty Jane, The Flooks (Amos' Southend)
Waffle House of 1,000 Corpses w/ Wastoid, Squeamish, January Knife (The Milestone)
POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
Anne Helen Wells w/ Ashley!, Jelly Diver, Sober Dad (Petra's)
SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
Ben Gatlin (Comet Grill)
FUNK/JAM BANDS/REGGAE
Shana Blake's Musical Menagerie (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)*
MUSICAL COMEDY
Tom Lehrer Is Alive and Well and Has Given Away All Rights To His Music (Evening Muse)
COVER BANDS
Dueling Pianos (Eighty Eights)
The Michel Jons Band (Middle C Jazz)

FRIDAY JUL. 24

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
Doll Apartments w/ Oh! You Pretty Things, Colormekrazy!, Black Cherri (The Milestone)
Woody w/ Mantra (Petra's)
Unthreaded w/ Greye, 6 Story Pyramid, Taking November (The Rooster)
Lynyrd Skynrd w/ Foreigner (Truliant Amphitheater)
JAZZ/BLUES
Nero Tindal IV (Eighty Eights)
POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
Earlybirds Club (Amos' Southend)
Green Velvet (Blackbox Theater)
Nils Hoffman (The Music Yard)
Supertaste (Snug Harbor)
Longchild (The Spoke Easy)
Club 90s: Off Campus Night (The Underground)
COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
Coey Redd w/ Kelsey Hickman (Evening Muse)
FUNK/JAM BAND/REGGAE
Five Door Sedan w/ Little Gracie (Evening Muse)
Buju Banton & Stephen marley (TD Amp Ballantyne)
SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
Jarrett Raymond (Heist Brewery)
COVER BANDS
Jamgarden w/ Nate Randall Duo (Goldie's)
Gena Chambers Does Tina Turner (Middle C Jazz)
Badmotorfinger (Visulite Theatre)

SATURDAY JUL. 25

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
Goliath w/ Failing Andrea, Graveyard Boulevard, Jason Moss and the Hosses (Amos' Southend)
Bakalao Stars w/ The Unsustainables, Selector Mikey Tags (Snug Harbor)
World Sauntering Day w/ Lacy Dooms, Trick Threat (Starlight on 22nd)
COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
Charlie Lunsford Band w/ Laine Mansfield (Evening Muse)
Mary English Band w/ Riverstone (Goldie's)
POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
Dayshift (Blackbox Theater)
Resonate Groove (The Music Yard)
Clarity w/ Elora Dash, Sanpriest (Petra's)
JAZZ/BLUES
Javier Pizarro (Eighty Eights)
Gino Rosario feat. Saxl Rose, H'atina (Middle C Jazz)
HIP-HOP/SOUL/R&B
Fetty Wap (The Underground)
Toosii w/ Ann Marie (Ovens Auditorium)
SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
Kelly Zullo (Birdsong Brewing)
Heidi Sidelinker w/ Josh Daniel (Evening Muse)
Kris Hitchcock (Heist Brewery)
COVER BANDS
Blake Anthony & the Campfire (Comet Grill)
Who's Bad (Michael Jackson tribute) (The Underground)
Summer Jam '73 Watkins Glen Revisited (Visulite Theatre)

SUNDAY JUL. 26

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
Shinedown (Spectrum Center)
JAZZ/BLUES
Omari & the Hellhounds (Comet Grill)*
Braxton Bateman (Eighty Eights)*
SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
Lukas Delgra (Heist Brewery)
James Brock & Friends (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)*
COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
Annabelle Dinda (Amos' Southend)
Mike Strauss Band (Free Range Brewing)
HIP-HOP/SOUL/R&B
42 Dugg w/ Babyface Ray (The Fillmore)
COVER BANDS
Elan Trotman (Marvin Gaye tribute) (Middle C Jazz)

MONDAY JUL. 27

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
Reminitions w/ In Gloom, No Sign of Life, Winter's Gate, Return to Glory (The Milestone)
Fudge w/ Winston Avenue (Snug Harbor)
POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
Melanie Martinez (Spectrum Center)
JAZZ/BLUES
Mindi Abair & Kenny Lattimore (Middle C Jazz)
OPEN MIC
Find Your Muse Open Mic (Evening Muse)

TUESDAY JUL. 28

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
Pretty Baby w/ Process Sleep, Ruminations, Marigold (The Milestone)
Toto w/ Christopher Cross, The Romantics (Truliant Amphitheater)
COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
CLT Bluegrass Allstars (Comet Grill)*
JAZZ/BLUES
The Bill Hanna Legacy Jazz Session (Petra's)
FUNK/JAM BANDS/REGGAE
L'Eclair w/ Charlie Chimi, Bravo Pueblo (Snug Harbor)
OPEN MIC
Crown Collab Funk Jam & Open Mic (Crown Station)*
Open Mic Night feat. The Smokin J's (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)*

WEDNESDAY JUL. 29

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
The Dead Bolts w/ Cab Ellis (Evening Muse)
Ma & the Observers w/ The Oyster, Camp Calico (Snug Harbor)
JAZZ/BLUES
Bop Theory Jazz Jam (Eighty Eights)*
Quinn Sullivan (Middle C Jazz)
Wednesday Jazz Jam feat. Lovell Bradford Trio (VisArt Video)*
FUNK/JAM BANDS/REGGAE
Pocket Aces (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)*
SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
Neal Carter (Comet Grill)
OPEN MIC
Singer/Songwriter Open Mic (The Rooster)*
Starlight Jams Open Mic (Starlight on 22nd)*

THURSDAY JUL. 30

FUNK/JAM BANDS/REGGAE
Shana Blake's Musical Menagerie (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)*
HIP-HOP/SOUL/R&B
Ghais Guevara w/ Student 1, Seven Saturdè (Evening Muse)
COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
North State Grass (Comet Grill)
POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
Aurorawave w/ O.N.I (The Music Yard)
John Mellencamp (Truliant Amphitheater)
COVER BANDS
Dueling Pianos (Eighty Eights)
Willie Walker & Conversation Piece (Middle C Jazz)

FRIDAY JUL. 31

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
Felicity w/ Seneca Burns, Between Two Trees (Amos' Southend)
The Lenny Federal Band (Comet Grill)*
Goatse w/ Speedbag, Scrape, The Failure Method (The Milestone)
Tiny City w/ Alla Prima, Warp Street (Petra's)
JAZZ/BLUES
Jazz Alliance (Eighty Eights)
Vincent Ingala (Middle C Jazz)
SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
David Ramirez w/ Thomas Csorba (Evening Muse)
Lisa De Novo (Heist Brewery)
POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
Kream (Blackbox Theater)
Shadow Play (Crown Station)
Le Youth (The Music Yard)
COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
Greenwood Rye (Evening Muse)
Elonzo Wesley (The Spoke Easy)
FUNK/JAM BANDS/REGGAE
Mo Money (TD Amp Ballantyne)
COVER BANDS
Wonder Free w/ Anna J Duo (Goldie's)
Reprise (The Underground)
Stone Temple Project (The Rooster)
Misil Stereo w/ Tres Minutos (Snug Harbor)
Jerry Garcia Band Cover Band (Visulite Theatre)

SATURDAY AUG. 1

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
LANiiDAE w/ American Theory, Enemies & Allies, Ghost Choir (Amos' Southend)
Motocrossed w/ Loose Green, Chore Coat (Petra's)
Graveyard Boulevard w/ October, Self Made Monsters, The Ruff'tons (The Rooster)
Harm w/ Sunshower, The Johnstown Flood, Mindvac (Snug Harbor)
Tame Impala (Spectrum Center)
POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
Eli Brown (Blackbox Theater)
Emo Night (The Music Yard)
Beatfreaq (Starlight on 22nd)
Hillary Duff (Truliant Amphitheater)
JAZZ/BLUES
Al Sergel IVtet (Eighty Eights)
Vincent Ingala (Middle C Jazz)
COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
Chandler Carpenter & the Reckless Souls w/ Bitter Pines (Goldie's)
Soul Creek Revival (Heist Brewery)
LATIN/WORLD/K-POP
Hermanos Espinoza (Ovens Auditorium)
HIP-HOP/SOUL/R&B
Jay D. Jones: Soul of Charlotte (Stage Door Theater)
FUNK/JAM BANDS/REGGAE
Unpredictable Approach (Starlight on 22nd)
COVER BANDS
The Grateful Dudes (Primal Brewery)
Hard 2 Handle (Black Crowes tribute) (Visulite Theatre)

SUNDAY AUG. 2

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
Johnny Manchild & The Poor Bastards (Evening Muse)
Catharsis w/ Overturn, Bible Belt (The Milestone)
Tame Impala (Spectrum Center)
JAZZ/BLUES
Omari & the Hellhounds (Comet Grill)*
Braxton Bateman (Eighty Eights)*
CLT Blues Society (Heist Brewery & Barrel Arts)
David Benoit (Middle C Jazz)
SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
James Brock & Friends (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)*
COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
North State Duo (Heist Brewery)
POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
Bobby Nsenga (Blackbox Theater)
Hazy Sunday (Petra's)
OPEN MIC
Lady like Open Mic (The Rooster)

MONDAY AUG. 3

SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
Kyndal (Amos' Southend)
JAZZ/BLUES
The Bill Hanna Legacy Jazz Session (Petra's)
OPEN MIC
Find Your Muse Open Mic feat. Ross Adams (Evening Muse)

TUESDAY AUG. 4

LATIN/K-POP/WORLD
Evanescence (Truliant Amphitheater)
COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
CLT Bluegrass Allstars (Comet Grill)*
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)*

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

The Soundwave is Queen City Nerve's comprehensive guide to live music happening in Charlotte every night of the week. This list is pulled together by our editorial team every other week from combing through Charlotte music venue calendars and separated by genre. None of these listings are paid advertisements. We understand that many non-traditional music venues offer live music like coffee shops, breweries, art galleries, community events and more.

This list may not have every event listed. To have a venue included in the editorial compilation of this list, please send an email to info@qcnerve.com with the subject "Soundwave."



Ashlyn Uribe Photo by Jill Schellenbach

OFF SCRIPT

Singer/songwriter Ashlyn Uribe branches out with autobiographical film project

BY PAT MORAN

It's a still, muggy July night, but onstage at Starlight on 22nd, a storm is brewing. Accompanied on drums and keyboards by her producer and husband Michael Finster, singer-songwriter Ashlyn Uribe delivers a succession of her playful, seductive dance pop tunes in a warm, rangey mezzo-soprano. Midway through her set, Uribe pivots to the piano-driven power ballad "heat lightning." Like the tune's titular atmospheric phenomenon, Uribe's vivid lyrics build like a gathering, darkening cloudbank lighting up from within. "*I feel so far from me / But it's colder when I wait, I'd rather scream / Through a million little ways I burn and I bleed…*"

The unbearable tension of Uribe's litany of internalized, self-sabotaging stressors is released in a hair-raising vocal crescendo, a tempest of catharsis and resolve.

"*Old habits die hard/ Addiction's a deep scar/ I'd love to think I've come far, so far … from me…*"

The song is one of five on Uribe's autobiographical EP *string of pearls*. The 2024 release aims to exorcise the trauma visited upon three generations of women in Uribe's family by some of its men.

"[I] recognized that I can tell a story that can be heartbreaking and painful, but there can also be renewal, healing and forgiveness at the end of it," Uribe says.

The songs feel universal because Uribe focuses on the emotional impacts of familial trauma, rather than its specific causes. Meanwhile, on a personal level, the EP has proven so successful at fostering healing for Uribe and her family that the singer-songwriter-actor has recently added filmmaker to her list of accomplishments. Uribe is wrapping up production on a short film adaptation of the EP, called *String of Pearls: Unseen*, which started shooting around Charlotte in May 2025.

Uribe is also writing material for her debut full length album, which plays to her other strengths — crafting playful, dancey, yet emotionally rich pop.

"In three words, I'd say [my music is] vibrant, intuitive and fluid," Uribe says.

Uribe had a rocky home life growing up in a strict evangelical Christian family in Matthews. Though her parents divorced when she was 6 years old, they both encouraged Uribe's interest in singing and acting. Her father, a soccer coach, even landed her gigs singing the national anthem before a few matches. Uribe also wrote poetry and music, which she kept to herself.

That wasn't all she hid. Early on, Uribe felt emotionally and sexually attracted to women, but she buried those feelings.

A musical theatre kid in middle and high school, Uribe attended the South Carolina School of the Arts at Anderson University, where she earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts in voice and acting.

In college, she accepted her queerness and began dating women. By then, Uribe had convinced herself that she wanted to go to New York City to break into the musical theatre scene. Saving barely enough money for two month's rent, Uribe moved to NYC in January 2019 and quickly grew lonely and disillusioned by impersonal casting cattle calls.

Her drinking, which started in college, deepened into alcoholism, and by June 2019, she was back in Charlotte, dejected and unsure of her next move. Singer-songwriter Natalie Carr, still early in her own career, befriended Uribe and helped her write the hook for her sultry debut single, "Take Your Time."

Attending Wednesday night karaoke at Petra's, Uribe stepped offstage after singing "God Is a Woman" by Ariana Grande, a key inspiration for her, and met Eli Prier, who writes and performs cinematic pop songs as Eli The Fool. Eli introduced Uribe to her producer, Michael Finster, who was also at Petra's.

"It sounds corny, but Michael and I instantly had this connection," Uribe remembers.

Finster, who cofounded nationally acclaimed indie-rock band Flagship with guitarist Drake Margolnick in 2011, asked to hear Uribe's songs. He liked her material and offered to produce her.

"[Michael] taught me that songwriting is a muscle; you have to work it," Uribe says.

Uribe was exclusively dating women at the time, so she was surprised to feel a growing emotional connection with Finster. The creative collaborators eventually became a couple, marrying in March 2025.

In the meantime, Uribe released a string of singles produced by Finster at Snug Records Studio near Salisbury: "Veils" (2019), "Can't Teach Me" (2020), "Bleed & Bloom" (2021) and "White Noise" (2022). Uribe characterizes the vibrant, bedroom pop and EDM-adjacent tunes as fun, sexy and a little naive.

"[They have] a bitchy kind of aesthetic that I always love," she says.

Uribe's 'pearls' of wisdom inspire a film

Uribe's explosion of creativity culminated in the *string of pearls* EP, recorded in Uribe and Finster's Huntersville home studio.

"I've always had this dream to tell a story conceptually through music about what I went through and what my family went through, especially the women in my family, in a way that sets me free," Uribe says.

The EP follows an impressionistic narrative, addressing the nostalgia and safety of childhood in songs like "peter rabbit." After the instrumental "idlewild interlude," which incorporates the sound of a VHS machine fast-forwarding, Uribe addresses more recent psychological distress and hard-won "pearls of wisdom" in tunes like the slow burning "heat lightning."

During this time, Uribe also confronted her alcoholism and worked towards sobriety. Today, she has been sober for over four years.

Concurrently, Uribe started working on Danny Go!, an educational music video channel tailored for children ages 3-7. Co-launched by Finster, host Daniel Coleman, Coleman's wife Mindy and former Flagship member Matthew Padgett, the Davidson-produced project has spawned touring shows and currently boasts 5 million YouTube subscribers.

Uribe has worked as an actor on the successful series, recently voicing Squeaks the Dragon in *The Bravest Knight*. Finster plays the silly and lovable character Bearhead on the series.

Since the tragic death of Coleman's 14-year-old son Isaac in May, production on Danny Go! is on hiatus, but Uribe says writing and prep for future episodes and tours are proceeding apace.

In the meantime, Uribe has been writing, performing in and acting as assistant director for her passion project, the *String of Pearls* film.

"The film is a hybrid that blends the worlds of songwriting and music videos with narrative storytelling about a family who experiences generational trauma time and time again in a cycle," Uribe offers. "The daughter comes to a fork in the road and must decide if it's possible to break those patterns."

With Waxhaw standing in for 1940s Charlotte and Myrtle Beach providing a setting for the family's seaside sojourns, the production is slated to complete principle photography in August. Uribe has already launched her production company Rabbithole Productions to navigate the distribution process.

Uribe has also turned her attention to creating and releasing more music. With funky beats, bratty lyrics and coquettish lyrics, her June 2025 single "obviously" seems to signal a return of the sexy dance pop of the singles Uribe released earlier in her career, but with a crucial difference. The song's playfulness and erotic charge is controlled by its protagonist, a confident woman fully comfortable in her own skin.

"*Whispers in the corner baby want your makeup on me/ Not to be entitled but I think you only want me…*" she sings.

"I think all of my writing within the indie pop vein is so much richer because of string of pearls and the writing that I did there," Uribe maintains. She hopes listeners encountering her music will embrace its message that encourages self assuredness and self-expression.

That takeaway extends to the deeper, darker emotional currents plumbed by *String of Pearls*, in both its film and music iterations. Uribe stresses that her advocacy for self-love and compassion applies to both men and women trapped in generational trauma.

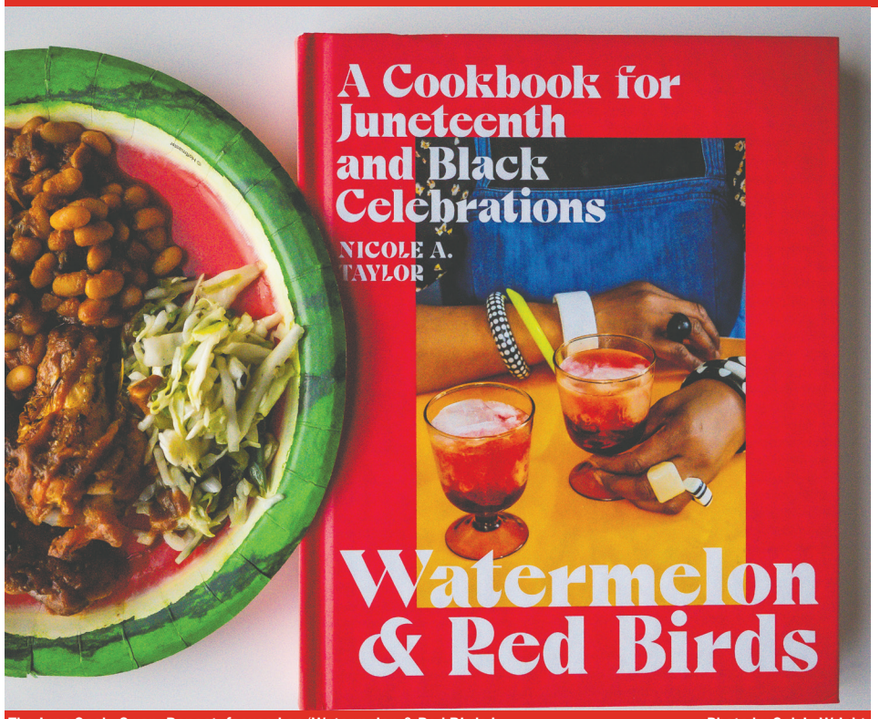
"I don't paint anyone as a villain," Uribe insists."That's not how I see people's souls and their journeys and their pain."

It's a potent message, utilizing art and well-crafted pop music to foster real connections, forgiveness and understanding. Through hard-won healing and insight, Uribe encourages self-love for everyone.

PMORAN@QCNERVE.COM



Ashlyn Uribe performs at Petra's (Jill Schellenbach)



The June Cook. Swap. Repeat. focused on 'Watermelon & Red Birds.' Photo by Calvin Wright

CULINARY CULTURAL PRESERVATION

Jenelle Kellam preserves sacred recipes through Cook. Swap. Repeat.

BY DEZANII LEWIS

Within the Black community, the expression "We're losing recipes" serves as a lament that signifies the ways in which Black people literally and figuratively have lost aspects of their culture over time.

Figuratively, it could be the inability to gather loved ones for a holiday after a matriarch passes on. In a literal sense, it could be the loss of a grandmother's sweet potato pie recipe. Jenelle Kellam has decided she won't let her community lose any more literal recipes.

As founder of Do It for the Bites, Kellam began hosting a cookbook swap called Cook. Swap. Repeat. In Charlotte, doing her part to help keep recipes from being lost.

She got the idea while attending a book swap at ArchiveCLT. She had begun collecting cookbooks from Black authors and chefs during the pandemic.

"I love looking at the cookbook section when I go to thrift stores," Kellam told Queen City Nerve. "I just love looking through old cookbooks just to see how cooking has evolved. My favorites are the binded cookbooks that have like five recipes on one page, and it's interesting to compare those to the cookbooks now where one recipe may span several pages because you have the pictures and the writer's story and just more detailed instructions on how to prepare the dish."

Cook. Swap. Repeat. offered her a way to share some of what she had learned.

The swap is more than just about retaining recipes, though. It's about the community behind the recipes as well. Being able to converse with other people about changes or difficulties in a recipe are what make the event special.

Sometimes the events are less of a swap and more of a "show-and-tell."

"People can just go to the library or go to a bookstore and look at a cookbook, but if you bring a cookbook to a cookbook swap and someone's not familiar with it you can talk to another person about the recipes that you've tried from that specific cookbook," Kellam said. "I know in a lot of my cookbooks I have so many bookmarks, and it's the recipes that I've made more than once or recipes that I really like."

Partnering with Red Rice Books, Kellam hosted her sixth Cook. Swap. Repeat. Event on June 19, highlighting Watermelon and Red Birds: A Cookbook for Juneteenth and Black Celebrations by Nicole A. Taylor, with Chef Quientina Stewart-Morrow concocting spice blends found in the book.

Before the June event, Kellam sat with us to discuss the event and what cooking means to her.

Preservation through archives

While recording and archiving recipes has become more common in our increasingly digital age, for many cultures in past generations, recording recipes wasn't a common practice at all. The recipes were often handed down orally, and when the arbiter of the recipe died so too did the recipe. With that history in mind, cookbooks are more than just cookbooks to Kellam.

"Collecting cookbooks is about preservation," she said. "Just thinking about growing up with my mom, she didn't have cookbooks and I can't remember anyone in my family really having cookbooks, but she did write down recipes and she still does have folders with loose-leaf paper or an envelope with a recipe written on it. And my first memory of a cookbook would be my church's cookbook. So my church that I grew up in collected recipes from each family, and they combined it into a cookbook."

Having heard many stories of family recipes lost when the matriarch died, Kellam wanted to avoid that with her own mother, working with her to record her recipes. Her favorite was her mother's banana pudding recipe.

"With bananas, by the way, because it's not banana pudding if it doesn't have bananas," she laughed.

She's documented the process on her Instagram page, first recording her mom at work on a recipe then tracing her steps. Now, she has her own personal recipe book where she has saved her mother's recipes for future generations, though it's not published yet.

"I've thought about it, honestly," she said. "There are a few recipes in my own personal recipe book that are really good, and I'm thinking, 'Huh, maybe one day.'"

For Kellam, cooking and collecting cookbooks is about more than nourishment; it helps her navigate decisions in her everyday life.

"Cooking is memory, and for me it is a way that I practice trust in myself," she said. "It's very low risk for me. I know it's not that for some people, but to me, I feel like when I'm in the kitchen and cooking, I am able to make mistakes and then correct them. And so that applies to my everyday life and it teaches me that I can make mistakes in my everyday life. And there are corrections that can be made.

"I use my intuition and I know what to do," she continued. "You know, like, whenever I cook something for my family and they ask me for the recipe— and this is another saying, like, 'I'm letting the ancestors guide me when I'm cooking.'"

Adding to the ancestral guides, she said being able to talk amongst peers about recipes allows someone to view it in a different light. The recipes aren't rigid and can be adjusted as necessary.

"Recipes themselves are just a guide," she said.

Black celebrations centering food

Though Juneteenth was only made a federal holiday in 2021, it has been a celebration for Black people and Black culture for much longer. For Kellam, there was a distinct reason for hosting a Cook. Swap. Repeat. event on a holiday that commemorates the nationwide announcement of emancipation.

"When I think of Black celebrations, I think of food," she said. "Like, we getting the menu in order – that's the first order of business. There are certain people who make certain dishes, and you know what to expect from that dish."

What better time to swap cookbooks than when everyone is already celebrating?

Food and celebration are ingrained within Kellam, who grew up in a family that hosted dinners and celebrations. That's a recipe she's not losing any time soon.

"I grew up cooking in a family that cooks, a family that hosts," she said. "As a child my job during the summer was to work in my dad's garden, picking potatoes, tomatoes, green beans, whatever he was growing, shucking corn, snapping peas. That's how I grew up, and so it's just stayed with me all these years."

That's how the cookbook swap has translated so well for Kellam – by combining the nature of celebration, hosting, learning and recipes. It isn't all just about taking home a cookbook.

"That's part of the swap itself because people don't necessarily have to swap the cookbooks," she said. "It's kind of like a show and tell. You can bring your cookbooks to show to people or just have them on display for people to look at."

Guests fill out cards with their name, the cookbook title and perhaps some recommended recipes. After that each cookbook gets tagged with a sticker. Red marks books that aren't available for swapping, yellow means "I might be open to swapping this book" and green means go.

If someone comes and doesn't have a cookbook to swap, they can still get a book to take home. So for those who don't have any recipes to give, there's still plenty to share.

That's where Red Rice Books, a local Black-owned virtual bookstore, comes into play.

"I have a cookbook collection with [Red Rice] and so they bring titles from the cookbook collection that I have with them so that people can shop and potentially buy."

Because if she's going to be successful in ensuring we don't less any more recipes, it's going to take a community.

Look for updates on future Cook. Swap. Repeat events by following @ doitforthebites on Instagram.

INFO@QCNERVE.COM



From a past Cook. Swap. Repeat. event. Photo by Calvin Wright

HOROSCOPE

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JULY 22 - JULY 28

ARIES (March 21 to April 19) Don't be sheepish about asking questions and demanding answers. You not only gain needed information, you also respect your steadfast search for the truth.

TAURUS (April 20 to May 20) A money problem that shows up early in the week is expeditiously resolved by savvy Bovines, who know how to turn a momentary financial lapse into a monetary gain.

GEMINI (May 21 to June 20) It's a good time to shed negative energy-draining forces and develop a positive approach to handling current -- as well as upcoming – personal and/or professional situations.

CANCER (June 21 to July 22) Your urge to do your best on a current task is commendable, but don't let it become all-consuming. Spend some spiritually restorative time with those who love you.

LEO (July 23 to August 22) This could be a good time for all you LEOs and LEOnas to take your bows for your recent achievements. Then go off to enjoy some fun times with your prides and joys!

VIRGO (August 23 to September 22) A negative response to a well-intentioned suggestion could communicate a sense of distrust that you might later find hard to refute. Think carefully before reacting.

LIBRA (September 23 to October 22) Your loving attention comforts a family member who's feeling a bit out of sorts. But be careful to prioritize your time so that you don't neglect your work duties.

SCORPIO (October 23 to November 21) Your curiosity might be resented by some, but those who know you will support your penchant for never settling for less than the truth. So, stay with it!

SAGITTARIUS (November 22 to December 21) A pesky situation from the past recurs, albeit in an altered form. Deal with it promptly before it can go from merely irksome to decidedly troublesome.

CAPRICORN (December 22 to January 19) Don't wait too long to submit your proposals after giving them a last look over. If necessary, you should be able to defend any portion that gets called into question.

AQUARIUS (January 20 to February 18) A bid to use your workplace dispute-settling skills in another situation is tempting. But be careful, as you might not have all the facts you'll need if you agree to do it.

PISCES (February 19 to March 20) A sense of self-doubt is so untypical of you that you should have no qualms in shaking it off. Remind yourself of all you've done and can do, then do it again.

BORN THIS WEEK: Your ability to charm others without sacrificing sincerity is what makes people want to follow your leadership.

JULY 29 - AUGUST 4

ARIES (March 21 to April 19) You face the possibility of raising your relationship to another level. However, your partner might demand that you make promises that you're not sure you're ready for.

TAURUS (April 20 to May 20) As changes continue, expect things to get a little more hectic at your workplace. An unexpected travel opportunity could open up new career prospects!

GEMINI (May 21 to June 20) Confront the person who caused your hurt feelings and demand a full explanation for their actions. You'll not only recover your self-esteem, but you'll also gain the respect of others.

CANCER (June 21 to July 22) A personal problem in the workplace is compounded by someone's biased interference. Stand your ground, and you'll soon find allies gathering around you.

LEO (July 23 to August 22) You don't accept disapproval easily. But instead of hiding out in your den to lick your wounded pride, turn the criticism into a valuable lesson for future use.

VIRGO (August 23 to September 22) A former friend who you thought you'd cut out of your life is still affecting other relationships. Counter their lies with the truth. Your friends are ready to listen.

LIBRA (September 23 to October 22) What appears to be an unfair situation might simply be the result of a misunderstanding. If you feel that something is out of balance, by all means, correct it.

SCORPIO (October 23 to November 21) A stalled relationship won't budge until you make the first move. Your partner offers a surprising explanation about what got it mired down in the first place.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22 to December 21) A co-worker shares some startling news, but before you use it to your advantage, make sure that it's true. Meanwhile, the weekend favors family matters.

CAPRICORN (December 22 to January 19) Your usual conservative approach to family situations might not work at this time. Keep an open mind about developments, and you might be pleasantly surprised.

AQUARIUS (January 20 to February 18) Plans might have to be put on hold because of a family member's problems. Don't hesitate to get involved. Your help could make all the difference.

PISCES (February 19 to March 20) Relationships in the home and in the workplace need your careful attention during this period. Be careful not to allow misunderstandings to create problems.

BORN THIS WEEK: You have a keen, insightful intellect and enjoy debating your views with others who disagree with you. You also love to solve puzzles – the harder, the better.



TRIVIA TEST
BY FIFI RODRIGUEZ

1. ANATOMY: How many vertebrae are in the human spine?
2. U.S. CITIES: Which city is home to the Gateway Arch, known as the tallest arch in the world?
3. TELEVISION: Which 1970s sitcom introduced a neighbor named Phyllis Lindstrom?
4. HISTORY: When was the first heart transplant performed?
5. GEOGRAPHY: Where are the Cape Verde islands located?
6. MOVIES: Which 1991 film featured a villain named Max Cady?
7. MUSIC: When did Taylor Swift's second studio album ("Fearless") win the Country Music Association's Album of the Year award?
8. SCIENCE: What is nephology?
9. MEASUREMENTS: What instrument is used to measure the depth of oceans?
10. ANIMAL KINGDOM: What is a baby deer called?

SUDOKU
BY LINDA THISTLE

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

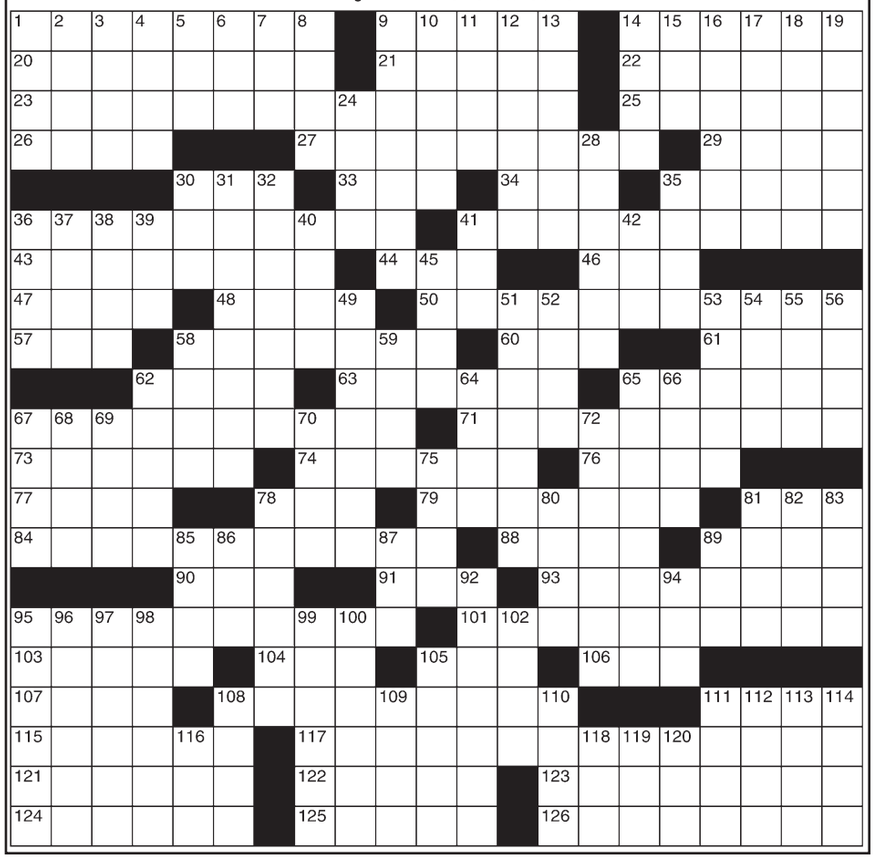
PLACE A NUMBER IN THE EMPTY BOXES IN SUCH A WAY THAT EACH ROW ACROSS, EACH COLUMN DOWN AND EACH SMALL 9-BOX SQUARE CONTAINS ALL OF THE NUMBERS ONE TO NINE.

CROSSWORD
OPENING SEQUENCE

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ACROSS
1 Off-guard way to be caught
9 Bread has a lot of them
14 Anchorage locale
20 Aspire to something specific
21 Love, in Lido
22 Hoped for
23 Founder of the Miracles
25 Lodged
26 Pulley part
27 With long suffering
29 Rajah's wife
30 Alternatives to Cokes or Pepsis
33 — -mo
34 Twice LI
35 Raptor's claw
36 Record player
41 Ape in an arcade game
43 1307-27 king of England
44 Prefix with natal or con
46 Comic book shriek
47 Thick deli cut
48 This, in Baja
50 Olduvai Gorge pale-ontologist
57 Beer cask
58 Removes (oneself)
60 Veteran
61 Europe's "Eternal City"
62 French battle site of '44
63 Doesn't skip, as an event
65 Reagan appointee Antonin
67 Speak frankly
71 Jungle gym
73 Film director May
74 1954-76 Dodgers manager Walter
76 T-man Eliot
77 Outing ruiner
78 "How was — know?"
79 Self-server
81 Some IRA contents
84 Master of the dog Pluto
88 Sundown's direction
89 Accepted
90 China's Long March leader
91 2012 Best Director Lee
93 Alternative to Match or OkCupid
95 It's pushed in an ice rink
101 Tart gin cocktail
103 Once-popular anesthetic
104 Certain pipe shape
105 Maple fluid
106 Tax return ID
107 Tiger's sound
108 Restricting freedom of thought
111 Work site welfare org.
115 Poppas' partners
117 "Arrow's Fall" novelist
121 Of high peaks
122 "Rapture" singer Baker
123 All aspects considered
124 Fitting one inside another
125 A-bomb trial
126 Index entries ... or what 10 answers in this puzzle have?

DOWN
1 KGB's land
2 Lost clown fish of film
3 Sitting on
4 Stir to life
5 Go gray, say
6 Singer Acuff
7 It may get plugged up
8 Pig food
9 Jenner of reality TV
10 Prenatal exam
11 Suitor's flower
12 Rodeo horse
13 Submitted, as an entry
14 Out of whack
15 Taoism's — -tzu
16 Inuit parka
17 Fr. resort port
18 Really into
19 Appending
24 Bottom
28 In this way
30 — Nabisco (old corp.)
31 World Champion Bull of 2009
32 Clip, as a coupon
35 Young kid
36 Study fixture
37 Not in use
38 Gala bagful
39 Hailed car
40 Thing flown in the wind
41 Scooby- —
42 Wiggling fish
45 Otherwise
49 "Still I Rise" poet Maya
51 Until this time
52 Element #26
53 Saudis, say
54 Nut with caffeine
55 Kuwaiti royal
56 Positive votes
58 Env. alert
59 Santa's bagful
62 Short-limbed lizard
64 Urban haze
65 Reel from a wallop
66 Certain skin bulge
67 Time in office
68 Jai —
69 Secular
70 Green Hornet's valet
72 Fried stuffed dumplings
75 Many a new driver
78 "Pass the ball to me!"
80 Crawl (with)
81 Diner worker
82 Concluded
83 Vodka brand
85 Part of ER: Abbr.
86 "Huzzah!"
87 Cinch — (trash bag brand)
89 Sister station of Flix, in brief
92 Give the evil eye to
94 — Tin Tin
95 Politico Cain
96 "Troy" actor Peter
97 Bites, as a horse at the bit
98 Muppet frog
99 Tracey of "Mrs. America"
100 Patron
102 Apple debut of 2010
105 Splinter groups
108 Opposite of new
109 Spreadable cheese
110 It may get plugged up
111 Eight, in Baja
112 Alternative to Heath, candy-wise
113 Clutched
114 Positive votes
116 Netflix's "Anne With —"
118 Opposite of NNW
119 Install, as tile
120 "How cute!"



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. Small river	__ T __ __ __	Shriek	__ C __ __ __
2. Wave summit	__ __ E __ __	Bread edge	__ __ U __ __
3. Poe's bird	__ __ __ __ N	Tangle and snag	__ __ __ __ L
4. Speaker's lectern	P __ __ __ __	Table salt	S __ __ __ __
5. Tonsil location	__ __ __ O __ __	Menace	__ __ __ E __ __
6. Farmyard sound	__ __ U __ __	Use a mouse	__ __ I __ __
7. Keep	__ __ __ __ __ N	Put up for sale	__ __ __ __ __ L
8. Frighten	__ __ A __ __	Tally	__ __ O __ __
9. Blokes	__ __ __ P __	Pandemonium	__ __ __ O __
10. Late morning meal	__ __ U __ __ __	Large twig	__ __ A __ __ __

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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.

VFNKN EVK VKA, BGA CN
XVFOW, RPK OFFAN EVK
XKRRKV RPEW EWU WCLPR
FW RPK RFOW.
— KEVZ ACXXZKN HV.

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GO FIGURE!

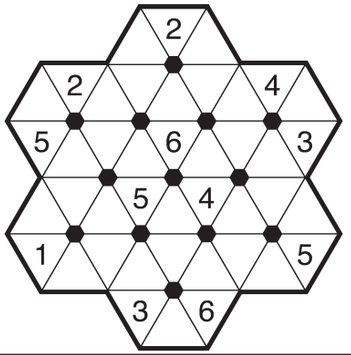
The idea of Go Figure is to arrive at the figures given at the bottom and right-hand columns of the diagram by following the arithmetic signs in the order they are given (that is, from left to right and top to bottom). Use only the numbers below the diagram to complete its blank squares and use each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

	+		×		= 26			
+		-		+				
	-		+		= 14			
-		÷		+				
	-		÷		= 1			
= 10		= 1		= 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.



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: **R** equals **C**

L REXKW FEO OSLFV EJ OSY
FUZY EJ OSUO PUALR
RSYZLRUK AXPAOUFRY.
L SUW UF YKYZYFOUK PKERV.

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NERVE ENDINGS

NOT WORTH THE WAIT

GOP state budget once again comes up short

BY ROB SCHOFIELD

It's not surprising that a lot of North Carolinians have responded to the state legislature's recent and ultra-belated passage of a state budget bill with some sense of relief. As with the relentless climate change-fueled drought and heatwave that have plagued the state this year, there's been a powerful sense in many corners – especially among long-neglected teachers and state employees — that, at some point, things have gotten so bad that any relief is better than nothing.

Unfortunately, as our local meteorologists have been forced to remind us regularly of late, even a handful of welcome cloudbursts will not restore local reservoirs to healthy levels, and so it is right now with the budget.

Sure, it's great that lawmakers stuck a crowbar into their collective wallet and finally meted out some modest and overdue raises to long suffering public servants who've been treated beyond shabbily for going on two decades, but as even a cursory look at the details of the plan reveals, the budget does precious little to slow the ongoing Republican war on public structures and services.

The plan's renewed commitment to still more income tax cuts for profitable corporations and wealthy individuals makes sure of that. As analysts at the North Carolina Budget and Tax Center detailed in a damning July 2 report, tax rate cuts — even if phased in at a slower rate than some extremists on the far right had sought — will cost the state tens of billions of dollars over the coming years.

In other words, the state's destructive fiscal drought will continue.

But wait, it gets worse. While GOP budget writers ensured that funds for core services will remain chronically drought-stricken for years to come, they were more than happy to build on their longstanding practice of showering undeserved downpours of dollars on an array of far-right causes and propaganda efforts.

Take the badly misnamed School of Civic Life and Leadership at UNC Chapel Hill and its new $5 million appropriation. Please.

For several years now, this monument to Trumpian doubletalk — you know, the kind in which wholesome sounding words and concepts are attached to efforts that promote corporate authoritarianism and Christian nationalism — has been a top priority of ultra-conservative activists and funders and their allies in Raleigh.

As NC State Professor Emeritus Michael Schwalbe explained in a blistering and on-the-mark essay for NC Newsline back in 2023, the school's work has little, if anything, to do with its name. Rather, as its supporters have regularly — if sometimes inadvertently — admitted, it's merely a tool for funneling large chunks of taxpayer funds to support far right causes.

As Schwalbe put it succinctly, "The new school was swathed in dishonesty from the start," and "Talk of balance and 'expanding the range of viewpoints' was thus always rhetorical camouflage, not an honest description of what was afoot ... at UNC-Chapel Hill."

Recent controversies surrounding the school — in which even some conservative voices have raised concerns and a taxpayer funded report on the school has been kept shielded from public view — have only served to make plainer its inherent dishonesty and flaws.

And while $5 million in new money is, admittedly, relatively small potatoes in a $34 billion budget, that comes as little solace to any number of underfunded, threadbare and shuttered programs and departments across the UNC system whose leaders have watched helplessly in recent years as talented faculty members have been flat-out defunded and/or lured away to better-paying institutions in other states. The fact that the conservative school has been in a position to lure new students with special scholarships — what one history professor on campus told The New York Times amounts to a kind of bribery — only heightens the injustice of the situation.

But, of course, as noted, the practice of funneling cash to favored but bogus right-wing entities at the expense of truly deserving public programs has long been a tried-and-true Republican budgeting technique in many areas.

See, for example, the latest $11-plus billion cash dump that the budget will give to so-called "crisis pregnancy centers" — private institutions that often masquerade as health providers, but that in fact merely serve as anti-abortion propaganda shops and conduits for funneling money to conservative political causes.

And then there is the new round of dollars, employees and power the budget bestows upon the legislature's go-to right-wing hatchet man — Auditor Dave Boliek — as he and they continue to transform the office of the state's accountant into a powerful, multi-purpose force never contemplated by the state's constitution.

And the list goes on. The budget gifts $750,000 to the pro-school privatization organization, Parents for Educational Freedom even as it slashes funding for civil legal aid programs that sometimes have the temerity to represent poor clients when they're harmed by powerful interests like landlords and big agriculture growers.

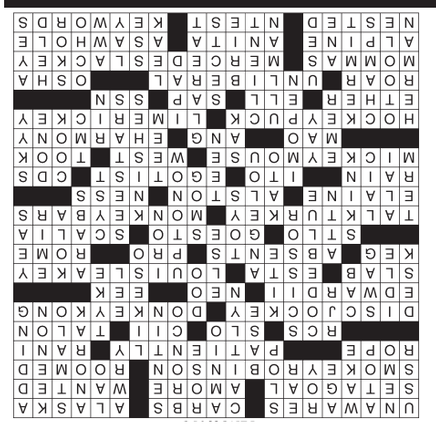
In short, the new budget may have been months/years in the making, but in the end, it's just the latest secretly crafted installment in what's become a very familiar and maddening pattern. Would that the politicians behind it had the courage to engage in open and transparent debate and negotiations over its numerous controversial details.

This op-ed was originally published by NC Newsline, part of States Newsroom, the nation's largest state-focused nonprofit news organization.

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PUZZLE ANSWERS

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



Even Exchange answers

1. Stream, Scream
2. Crest, Crust
3. Raven, Ravel
4. Podium, Sodium
5. Throat, Threat
6. Cluck, Click
7. Retain, Retail
8. Scare, Score
9. Chaps, Chaos
10. Brunch, Branch

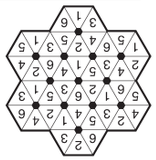
CryptoQuip answer

I could not think of the name of that basic chemical substance. I had an elemental block.

8	+	5	×	2	=	26		
+		-		+				
9	-	1	+	6	=	14		
		+		÷				
7	-	4	÷	3	=	1		
=		=		=				
10		1		11				

CryptoQuote answer

Roses are red, mud is brown, the woods are better than any night on the town.
— Earl Dibbles Jr.



Trivia Answers

1. 33.
2. St. Louis, Missouri.
3. "The Mary Tyler Moore Show."
4. 1967.
5. Off the west coast of Africa.
6. "Cape Fear."
7. 2009.
8. The scientific study of clouds.
9. An echo sounder or fathometer.
10. A fawn or calf.



"A Thirsty Development" by John Cole for NC Newsline

SAVAGE LOVE

CAT RULES

Dude imperfect

BY DAN SAVAGE

I've been with my girlfriend for 10 years. We moved in with each other three years ago. It's not working for me. I love my girlfriend. She's one of the kindest people I have ever met — slow to anger and always listens first. We never fight and I don't want to break up with her. I just want our relationship to look a little different. Three years ago, she suffered a health scare while we were on vacation.

We have not gotten a good diagnosis, so she is doing her best to mitigate her symptoms. Since the scare, she has lost confidence in driving and leaving the house. This has left me doing most of the errands, as even going to the grocery store is daunting for her. Her symptoms — dizziness, lethargy, fear of fainting — coupled with her strict cat rules make it difficult to go anywhere. Specifically, the cat can't be left alone for longer than six hours.

This makes it hard to even go on a day trip. I can easily find cat care if we could go somewhere for a weekend, but she says not being in her bed triggers all her symptoms and it ruins her for her following work week.

When we first met, she was very spontaneous — this was before the cat — and we used to go on long day trips, bar hop, eat whatever. But since her medical issues started, that has all gone away. We no longer go on day trips, we can't do anything spontaneously, and all of my favorite foods are out because they trigger her symptoms. At home, I can't come to bed later than her or get up before her because it ruins her sleep and having her sleep disturbed can trigger her symptoms for days.

I am not a serious person when I don't have to be. I get excited and hyper throughout the day. This part of my personality is important to me since my father constantly yelled at me to not be excited because it made me look gay. So, I spent my childhood suppressing feelings of joy. Now it's my girlfriend telling me to "tone it down" because she can't handle my "energy." I go for days now without speaking unless spoken to. On top of everything else, our sex life has taken a serious nosedive.

We used to have sex three times a week at least. Now I'm lucky if I get it once a month and it's strictly missionary, as all other positions trigger her symptoms.

We are poly. When we moved in together three years ago, I decided to stop dating other women for a while so I could focus on learning to live together, but after her health scare I could no longer date because I always have to be home for her.

My issue here is I don't want to live with her anymore. I want us to go back to where she had her own place and life, and I had my own place and life. I'm ready to start dating other people again. I want more autonomy. I want to be spontaneous and drive to the coast for a night, I want to wake up early and bake (baking is my hobby and starting early helps with the needed proofing time),

I want to stay up late and watch movies she can't stomach. I'm also ready to start dating again. Meeting someone and bringing them home isn't an option, and I can't afford a hotel if the other person happens to be in the same situation.

Asking to move out seems daunting because I know she will take it hard and hurting her is the last thing I want to do.

Am I Being Selfish?

Dude.

I was willing to give your girlfriend the benefit of the doubt — I was willing to accept that she suffers from some mysterious medical condition that makes travel, errands, hikes, staggered bedtimes, your favorite foods, your favorite movies, sex in anything other than the missionary position, your hobbies, your feelings, your personality, etc., etc., etc., impossible and intolerable — and then you mentioned "cat rules."

Backing up: A decade is a long-ass time. We age, our abilities change, and things we loved doing when we were 32 or 42 may not be enjoyable or even possible for us when we're 42 or 52. It goes without saying that a loving and loyal partner doesn't abandon us after we've developed a chronic medical condition.

But love and loyalty are two-way streets, AIBS, and it also needs to be said — your girlfriend in particular needs to hear it — that a loving and loyal partner with a chronic medical condition wouldn't ask their loving and loyal partner to give up everything else they love.

Your girlfriend should be encouraging you to go on hikes and day trips without her, AIBS, and working with you on simple fixes that would allow you to enjoy your hobbies without triggering her symptoms.

(For example, if you had a daybed in your living room, AIBS, you could crash there on those nights you wanted to stay up late and watch your movies or get up early and bake your cakes.)

To be perfectly frank, AIBS, the cat rules make me doubt everything that has come out of your girlfriend's mouth over the last three years. Now, maybe she had a fainting spell — perhaps her initial health crisis was real — but pulling these "cat rules" out of her ass on top of everything else has me thinking your girlfriend is either completely nuts (charitable read) or she's controlling and borderline abusive (uncharitable read).

But instead of controlling you with anger and playing on your fear, your girlfriend is controlling you with her fragility and playing on your sympathies.

To be franker still, AIBS, I think you should break up with your girlfriend. If you don't wanna do that — if you can't bring yourself to do that (so loving, so loyal) — you should definitely get a place of your own. A place where you're free to be your excitable old self, a place where you can stay up late and get up early, and a place where "cat rules" don't apply because there is no fucking cat.

If you two live in an apartment, you could wait until another unit opens up in the building before moving out.

Being in the same building would make it easy to share meals and spend evenings together, AIBS, and you could drop some scones off on mornings when you wake and bake.

Moving out was your idea, AIBS, which means this is permission, not advice. But I would advise you not to ask your girlfriend for her permission to move out (it's permission you won't get from her) but to instead inform her that you've already made the decision to move out.

Your girlfriend is likely to be upset when you tell her — she'll undoubtedly take it hard — but ask yourself what's worse: addressing her hurt feelings and offering what reassurances you can or having to obey cat rules (and only speaking when spoken to!) for the next 30 or 40 years.

P.S. I'll bet you anything — dollars to donuts — that the moment you tell your girlfriend you wanna start seeing/dating/fucking other people again, AIBTS, she is gonna discover that you fucking other people triggers her symptoms.

P.P.S. Maybe you tell your girlfriend you wanna start seeing/dating/fucking other people before you tell her you wanna move out. If she reacts with a few constructive suggestions about how and when you could fuck other people, AIBTS, that's a good sign. (It would also be a sign that your girlfriend isn't the villain I take her for.)

But if she tells you that the thought of you seeing/dating/fucking someone else triggers her symptoms or violates Cat Rule #4612, go and get your own place.

I'm a 37-year-old gay man, a bottom, living in eastern Virginia. I used to be morbidly obese but I've lost almost 200 pounds in the past 15 years. I've only been with a man once during this time — and it was exactly 15 years ago, when I was at my absolute heaviest.

Since then, I've struggled to find men to hook up with, even (especially) within the gay bear community. I'm either too small for chasers or I'm too big (both weight-wise and height-wise) for everybody else. I don't meet the local preferences for Muscle Bears or Twinks.

I'm also sometimes mistaken for being FTM, especially by guys who are DL or closeted. I've tried all of the apps and the bars. And I've even traveled to major cities with no luck. I realize my weight has something to do with it, and I am working out and dieting. But my looks are average.

It's reached a point where the lack of intimacy has me struggling mentally even with the aid of a therapist and antidepressants. How can I break this streak?

Not Enjoying Endless Dry Spell

Dude.

Hire someone. If you can manage to find a sex worker you like and you can afford to see him semi-regularly, NEEDS, not only will you break your sexless streak but you'll also demonstrate to yourself that you can establish a rapport (sexual and emotional) with another human being.

My friends who've done sex work often wind up playing the role of dating/life/sex coach in the lives of their regular clients. So, a semi-regular session with a patient sex worker who's willing to talk — not just fuck — could help set you up for future sexual and romantic success. And a good way to demonstrate to a sex worker that you see him as a person and want to connect on more than just a physical level, NEEDS, is by offering to take him to dinner during your first booking — no sex, just dinner, but still a paid date.

You would be paying for both his time and his meal, NEEDS, but his willingness to accept a dinner invitation would be a sign that he sees you as a person (and not just a hole) and how he behaves during dinner (Is he curious? Is he kind? Does he order the most expensive shit on the menu?) would give you some sense of his character.

Additionally, NEEDS, breaking that long sexless streak of yours — even if you only want to pay for it once — will have the added benefit of making you feel less desperate and anxious. As desperation and anxiety are feelings people intuitively pick up on and neither are qualities anyone wants in a partner, feeling a little less of both could help you attract the attentions of a guy who wants to fuck you for free.

P.S. People looking for sex workers online generally recommend Tryst. I haven't used the site myself — ahem — so this is not a personal endorsement.

Got problems? Yes, you do! Email your question for the column to mailbox@savage.love; or record your question for the Savage Lovecast at savage.love/askdan; podcasts, columns and more at Savage.Love.

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