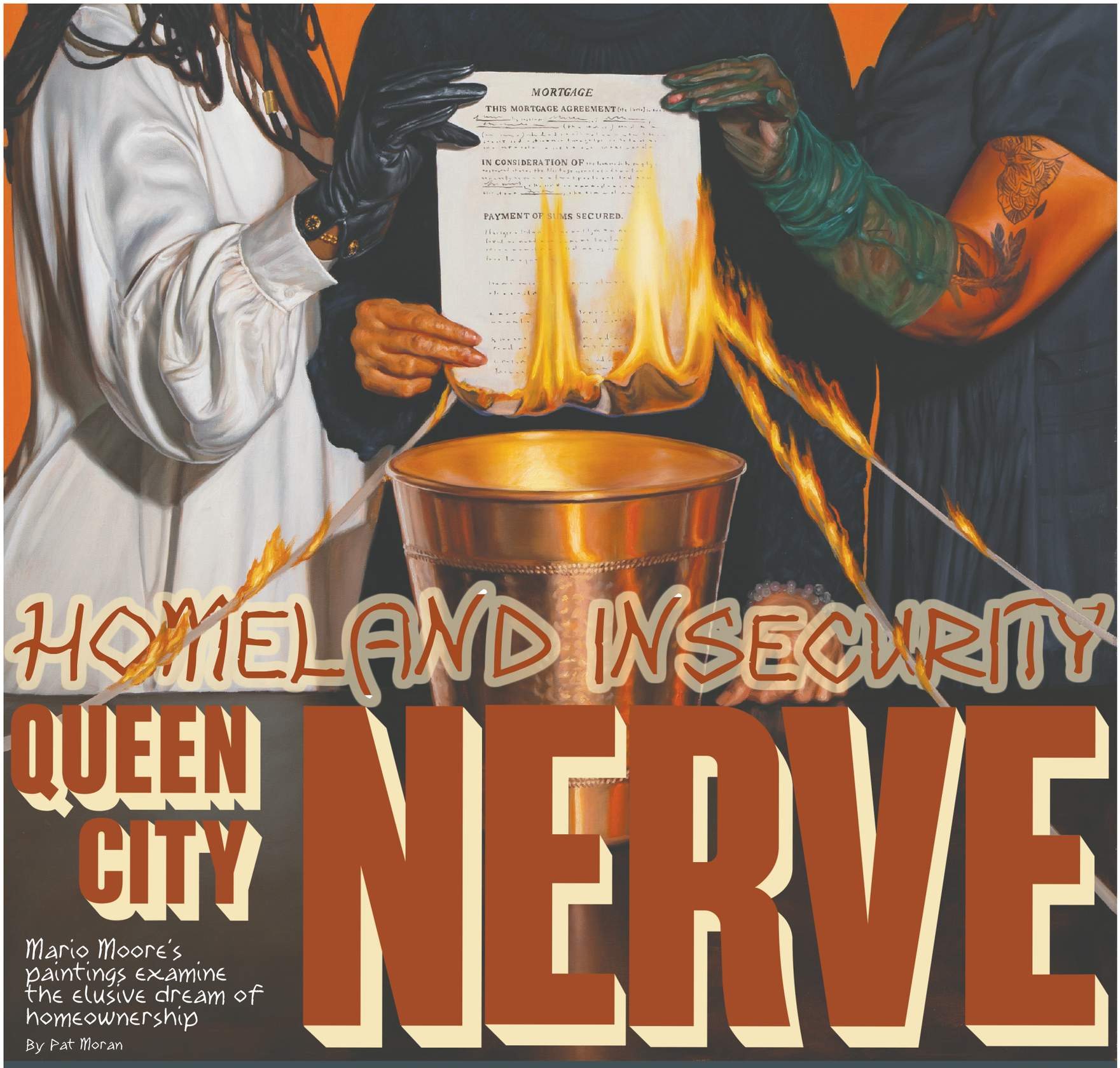
VOLUME 8, ISSUE 5; JANUARY 7 - JANUARY 20, 2026; WWW.QCNERVE.COM



HOMELAND INSECURITY

QUEEN CITY NERVE

Mario Moore's paintings examine the elusive dream of homeownership

By Pat Moran

NEWS: McFadden faces petition for removal ◊ **PG. 4**

MUSIC: Reuben Vincent's homecoming ◊ **PG. 8**

FOOD & DRINK: Fixing Mecklenburg County's food systems ◊ **PG. 11**

NIGHTLIFE: Auld Lang Syne, Tyber Creek ◊ **PG. 14**

Charlotte Symphony Orchestra

25 26 SEASON

SANDRA & LEON LEVINE POPS SERIES

You'll be grooving in the aisles...

The Music of Motown



January 23 & 24

KNIGHT THEATER

Christopher James Lees, *conductor*
Chester Gregory, *vocalist*
Michael Lynche, *vocalist*
Shayna Steele, *vocalist*

Get down to the irresistible rhythms of Detroit's iconic pop-soul sound, featuring smash hits made famous by The Temptations, Diana Ross, Stevie Wonder, and more — that's the magic of Motown!

GET YOUR TICKETS TODAY!

704.972.2000 • charlottesymphony.org

North Carolina Arts Council

IN YOUR CURBSIDE RECYCLING

DON'T JUST RECYCLE, RECYCLE RIGHT

ONLY Recycle these six items

NO PLASTIC BAGS



GLASS BOTTLES & JARS
(Lids On - Okay)



CARDBOARD & SMALL BOXES
(Clean Pizza Boxes - Okay)



EMPTY METAL CANS



MILK & JUICE CARTONS



PAPER & MAGAZINES



PLASTIC BOTTLES & JUGS with Necks

Remember, more items are accepted at the Full-Service Centers.

WipeOutWaste.com

QUEEN CITY NERVE
CHARLOTTE'S ALTERNATIVE NEWSPAPER

MAILING: PO BOX 6007
RICHMOND, VA 23222
INFO@QCNERVE.COM

BUSINESS

PUBLISHER ◇ ART & DESIGN
Justin LaFrancois
jlafrancois@qcnerve.com

SALES

MEDIA SALES DIRECTOR
Renn Wilson
rwilson@qcnerve.com

ADVERTISING SALES EXECUTIVE
Jamie Bluto
jbluto@qcnerve.com

EDITORIAL

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Ryan Pitkin
rpitkin@qcnerve.com

CONTRIBUTORS
Patrick Moran
pmoran@qcnerve.com

Tyler Bunzey, Laura Leslie, Galen Bacharier, Mario Moore, Malik Gist, Nicole Peterson, Colleen Hammelman, Michael Maxwell , James Gaghan, Danielle Lyle, Matthew Murphy, Evan Zimmerman, and Dan Savage.

FIND US ONLINE
www.QCNERVE.com
@queencitynerve

Support Local Journalism in Charlotte: qcnerve.com/memberships

COVER ARTWORK: Mario Moore **COVER DESIGN:** Justin LaFrancois

AAN publishers | Lion PUBLISHERS | NCPA North Carolina Press Association

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

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

GET THE MOST OUT OF QUEEN CITY NERVE BY SCANNING THE QR CODE TO LEARN MORE.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

NEWS & OPINION

4. Head to Head by Laura Leslie & Ryan Pitkin
Embattled NC lawmaker seeks removal of Sheriff McFadden over alleged threat

5 Lifeline: Ten Cool Things To Do in Two Weeks

ARTS & CULTURE

6. Homeland Insecurity by Pat Moran
Mario Moore's paintings examine the elusive dream of homeownership

MUSIC

8. Where the Heart Is by Tyler Bunzey
Reuben Vincent's 'Welcome Home' is a tale of return and rebirth

10. Soundwave

FOOD & DRINK

11 A Critical Discourse by Nicole Peterson & Colleen Hammelman
9 ways to get Mecklenburg's food systems back on track

LIFESTYLE

12. Horoscope
12. Puzzles
14. Aerin It Out
15. Savage Love



Sheriff Garry McFadden (right) swears in Kevin Canty in 2024. Canty would resign later that year. Courtesy of MCSO

HEAD TO HEAD

Embattled NC lawmaker seeks removal of Sheriff McFadden over alleged threat

BY LAURA LESLIE & RYAN PITKIN

State Rep. Carla Cunningham, the Charlotte Democrat who sparked controversy in July 2025 with a House floor speech castigating immigrants, filed a petition on the first Monday of the new year asking a Mecklenburg County judge to remove Mecklenburg County Sheriff Garry McFadden from office.

Mecklenburg County Sheriff's Office (MSCO) spokesperson Sarah Mastouri said the sheriff is aware of the complaint, but declined to comment.

According to the petition, McFadden called Cunningham over the summer to lobby her not to vote to override Gov. Josh Stein's veto of House Bill 318, which requires sheriffs to hold ICE detainees without a warrant for 48 hours.

McFadden had been a vocal critic of the bill, which he said would damage his office's relationship with the immigrant community in Mecklenburg County and lead to higher jail costs.

According to Cunningham's sworn affidavit, McFadden said to her that the people in her district would "come after" her if she voted to override the veto, and said, "I don't want to see you get hurt; you live in my county."

Cunningham, the affidavit says, understood those statements to be "a threat by McFadden to either physically harm her, or to withdraw or refuse her any protection from members of the public who would physically harm her."

The petition alleges that McFadden was attempting to extort or bribe Cunningham to change her vote to override the veto.

NC Newsline asked Cunningham's spokeswoman Kate Payne if the lawmaker had a recording or any other evidence of the conversation. Payne did not immediately respond.

Cunningham's controversial floor speech during the H318 veto override vote angered many immigrants and advocates as well as members of her own party, who accused her of working with Republican leaders to undermine the governor.

Cunningham has said she received violent threats and had to hire private security in the aftermath of her speech. The longtime Democratic lawmaker is facing several primary challengers in March. One of them, Rev. Rodney Sadler, announced Monday he has received Stein's endorsement.

More trouble for McFadden

Cunningham's petition-for-removal lawsuit was jointly signed by several former sheriff's office employees who also accuse McFadden of misuse of resources, retaliation against whistleblowers, understaffing the detention center and other alleged misconduct.

In January 2022, Queen City Nerve published an in-depth story about former MCSO employees who were speaking out against McFadden's policies in the wake of a rise in violent incidents within the Mecklenburg County Detention Center that one former assistant facility commander attributed to an "old-school jail mentality."

Since then, more staff under McFadden have publicly spoken out.

On Nov. 1, 2024, former MCSO Chief Deputy Kevin D. Canty announced his resignation with a scathing letter that accused McFadden of abusing his power and cultivating a toxic culture in the department by way of verbal abuse, retaliatory action and other dysfunctional behavior.

In his 2024 letter, Canty said he was proud to join Sheriff McFadden's office, as he had voted twice for Mecklenburg County's first Black sheriff, but once he joined the department he learned that some of the allegations he had heard about McFadden were "100% accurate," describing how he witnessed McFadden tell effortless lies only to react with anger when confronted with evidence of those lies.

"The MCSO functions like a third-world dictatorship with no one following the chain-of-command, which you openly and repeatedly flaunt and encourage staff not to follow," Canty wrote in his resignation letter to McFadden. "This has resulted in pure chaos. In my thirty-three years of law enforcement experience with now four agencies, I have never witnessed such dysfunction. I have never worked in such a toxic and abusive environment and have never seen an agency head conduct himself in such a classless and abusive manner as you."

Canty was one of five signees of Cunningham's petition for removal from office on Jan. 5, 2026. The petition details ways in which McFadden creates an unsafe environment in the Uptown jail, including by putting inmates above staff members, relaxing or refusing to enforce rules in the facility, and undermining the authority of MCSO detention officers by keeping the jail understaffed.

The 32-page petition also alleges that McFadden makes threats and carries out retaliation against whistleblowers, crime victims and others; misused official resources to benefit himself and his reelection campaigns; and other misconduct.

On Jan. 5, Mecklenburg County District Attorney Spencer Merriweather confirmed receipt of the petition and announced that his office would request that the NC State Bureau of Investigations investigate each allegation in the document and report back to him for consideration.

Mecklenburg leaders target of NCGA probe

The filing of the complaint came the same day NC House Republican leaders announced they subpoenaed McFadden to appear before an oversight committee on Jan. 22 to testify about the killing of Iryna Zarutska on Charlotte transit in August 2025, and to answer questions about allegations that he is still promoting DEI initiatives in defiance of a state law prohibiting them.

In a release on Jan. 5, McFadden confirmed that he planned to testify before the NC House Oversight Committee, of which Cunningham is a member, alongside other county and city officials and intends to fully cooperate with the committee's recently announced probe of Charlotte leaders.

"I respect the oversight process and welcome the opportunity to testify. I have nothing to hide," McFadden stated in that release. "Unlike municipal police departments and most other sheriff's offices across the state, MCSO does not answer calls for service. Our responsibilities are focused on operating the county jail system, courthouse security, civil processes, and detention-related duties. That distinction matters when evaluating policies, resources, and accountability. I will ensure that state lawmakers receive accurate and credible information."

McFadden, a Democrat in his eighth year as sheriff, is seeking a third term in 2026.

In a letter announcing his latest reelection campaign on Nov. 5, 2025, McFadden seemed to reference the repeated allegations that have plagued his tenure as sheriff.

"True leadership is tested not in moments of comfort, but in seasons of challenge — when betrayal cuts deep, loyalty is questioned, and dishonesty threatens the foundation of trust," McFadden wrote. "Real leaders stand firm in integrity, guided by purpose rather than popularity. They refuse to compromise their values, mission, or vision for convenience."

A portion of this article was originally published by the States Newsroom, which includes NC Newsline. Ryan Pitkin with Queen City Nerve contributed additional reporting before publishing here.

RPITKIN@QCNERVE.COM



NC Rep. Carla Cunningham delivers a controversial speech in July 2025. Photo by Galen Bacharier/NCNewsline

50 FIRST JOKES

Jan. 7 • 7:30 p.m. • The Comedy Club at Duckworths, 330 N. Tryon St. • Free • thecomedyclubatduckworths.com

Call it 50 shades of funny. In a striking concept that marks the first anniversary of the Comedy Club at Duckworth's opening, 50 comics will deliver their first joke of the new year. The rapid-fire and energetic gathering is both a tribute to the Queen City's comedy community and an opportunity for audiences to get a behind-the-scenes peek at what it's like to develop a brand new from scratch. A group of New York City comics launched the inaugural 50FJ in 2007 and the concept spread like wildfire. Charlotte's debut 50FJ event joins annual iterations across the country.

TWELFTH NIGHT: SPIRITS OF THE SEASON

Jan. 10 • 6 p.m. • Charlotte Museum of History, 3500 Shamrock Drive • $30-$35 • charlottemuseum.org

On Christmas Eve, three spirits visited Ebeneezer Scrooge. Attendees at the Charlotte Museum of History can outdo Dickens' old miser by visiting seven holiday spirits — including rye, rum and moonshine. The museum's annual celebration of 18th-century holiday traditions is also an exploration of the history of distilling in NC. In addition to tastings from a curated selection of alcoholic beverages inspired by historic winter traditions, the festivities include live cooking demonstrations and a guided tour of Hezekiah Alexander's Rock House, the oldest standing establishment still in Mecklenburg County, where you'll learn more about the origins of Twelfth Night. The evening concludes with the ceremonial Yule log burning, a tradition to usher in good fortune for the new year.

REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS COALITION FUNDRAISER

Jan. 10 • 9 p.m. • Snug Harbor, 1228 Gordon St. • $14 • snugrock.com

In defiance of authoritarian misogynist Republicans, the Reproductive Rights Coalition (RRC) supports bodily autonomy for all women through on-the-ground action, escorting patients into local abortion clinics, and advocacy work centering abortion access, human trafficking and birth control. For this show, four NC hardcore artists stand up for RRC. Charlotte collective Jiu-Jitsu delivers blistering anti-fascist missives like "Stolo." NC's Chained specializes in grindcore assaults like the dynamic "Torn From Memory." Overturn's call to action "Icebreaker" is a conflagration of hope and resistance. Self-described "purveyors of weird Carolinas hardcore," Glamour World brings an experimental, impressionist approach to the battle-ready genre.

LILY HAIN, SHELLEY STAR & THE GALAXY, LENA TRAYNHAM

Jan. 14 • 7:30 p.m. • Evening Muse, 3227 N. Davidson St. • $24 • eveningmuse.com

Charlotte-raised/Brooklyn-based pop-rock singer-songwriter Lily Hain has garnered praise from the BBC and American Songwriter after her breakthrough LP *Fatal Flaws*. The rocking 2024 release boasts standout single "Internalize," where Hain's sweetly menacing vocal builds over chunky metronomic guitars. Hain has since turned to soaring power pop on her 2025 EP *I Never Change*. Fronted by flamboyant Shelley Star, Washington DC's The Galaxy draws from dance music, glam-rock and pop perfectionists ABBA to craft ebullient gems like the new-wave-disco mashup "Battery Baby." Also hailing from DC, singer-songwriter Lena Traynham essays distinctive indie-pop-twang-rock concoctions like the spare, yearning confessional "Stuck Inside."

WDAV'S SMALL BATCH: ANITA GRAEF

Jan. 15 • 7 p.m. • Free Range Brewing, 2320 North Davidson St. • $20 • wdav.org

For many classical music fans the cello occupies a special place. The instrument encompasses the entire range of the human voice, spanning deep bass to high soprano. That means the remarkably expressive instrument can cradle and soothe in one instant then weep and wail in the next. Given that, listeners are in for a treat when acclaimed American cellist Anita Graef makes her Small Batch concert series debut at Free Range Brewing. The award-winning instrumentalist's program will include compositions by Coleridge-Taylor Perkinson, Gaspar Cassadó, J.S. Bach, and more. Pay-what-you-can and free tickets are also available.

JASON ISBELL

Jan. 16 • 8 p.m. • Ovens Auditorium, 2900 E. Independence Blvd. • $106-$128 • boplex.com

Heartfelt alt-country singer-songwriter Jason Isbell has captivated audiences with tunes that highlight his nuanced storytelling. Isbell went solo in 2007 after splitting from Southern rock group Drive-By Truckers, so it's fitting that he's going solo for this show — just him and his guitar, sharing intimate stories. With a backlog ranging from rootsy and swaggering early efforts to his later intimate ruminations on life's tribulations, Isbell is a master. His 2025 LP *Foxes in the Snow* is an acoustic, stripped-down set of songs about the shaded peaks and valleys of human relationships, informed by his split with wife and collaborator Amanda Shires.



50 First Jokes
Photo by James Gaghan
1/7



Monty Python's 'Spamalot'
Photo by Matthew Murphy, Evan Zimmerman
1/20-1/25

'THE CHANGEBAKER'

Jan. 17 • 7 p.m. • Carolina Theatre, 230 N. Tryon St. • $14 • thecarolina.com

The Charlotte premiere of documentary short *The Changebaker* tells the story of local baker and activist Manolo Betancur, founder and owner of Manolo's Bakery. Escaping the violence of war-torn Colombia, Betancur came to America with $100. Starting fresh in Charlotte with a goal to serve his community, Manolo took over the bakery and rebranded it into a hub for activism and opportunity, proudly displaying the message, "Made in America by the hands of immigrants." Recently, Betancur became a rallying figure in the community's resistance to Customs and Border Patrol's incursion into the city. The evening includes live dance by El Alma de la Luna, music by ÚltimaNota and a post-film discussion with Betancur and director Courtney Dixon.

I HATE DAVE, ONCE BELOW JOY, THE GROOVE SKELETONS, GENERAL PURPOSE

Jan. 18 • 8 p.m. • The Milestone, 3400 Tuckaseegee Road • $10-$12 • themilestone.club

I Hate Dave, Queen City Nerve's 2025 Best Rock Band, headlines this eclectic bill. The band's frontwoman Ariel Fisher growls in an exaggerated sex-kitten purr over buzzing bass-heavy tunes like "555." Elsewhere, the combo applies distortion, swagger and malice toward plutocrats on "Billionaires" and crosses glam Bowie-esque cabaret and gypsy stomp on "Matador." NC prog-psych wizards Once Below Joy deliver charging, shape-shifting space anthems like "80 Cycles Around the Sun." Charlotte's alt-retro rockers The Groove Skeletons bang out suitably groovy slabs of psych-garage like "Poseidon." Greensboro prog collective General Purpose essays multi-part, complex compositions like "Marionettes," which incorporates violin, sax and clarinet.

MLK DAY 2026: INSTRUMENTS FOR CHANGE

Jan. 19 • 9 a.m. - 5 p.m. • Harvey B. Gantt Center, 551 S. Tryon St. • Free • ganttcenter.org

This year's celebration of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s civil rights legacy highlights the connection between the arts and activism. Central to that theme is the Gantt Center's exhibition Jazz Greats: Classic Photographs from the Bank of America Collection, which features photos of jazz masters like Louis Armstrong and NC native John Coltrane. The portraits remind viewers that jazz, like the Civil Rights Movement, is rooted in resilience, innovation and the pursuit of freedom. Activities throughout the day include a dance production by JOYEMOVEMENT and two panel discussions featuring artists and thinkers discussing how contemporary creative practices continue to advance justice in Charlotte and beyond.

MONTY PYTHON'S 'SPAMALOT'

Jan. 20-25 • various times • Belk Theater, 130 N. Tryon St. • $47 and up • blumenthalarts.org

In days of yore when Monty Python roved the countryside dressed as knights while banging coconuts together, the comedy troupe members paired off in writing duos, leaving Eric Idle to develop material alone. Fortunately, Idle befriended and collaborated with songwriting royalty, including former Beatle George Harrison. Idle's knack for comic compositions arguably reached fruition on his collaboration with composer John Du Prez for the musical *Spamalot*, a tuneful rip-off of *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* that galloped onto Broadway in 2005, receiving raves and three Tonys. This touring version of the perennial laugh-getter features flying cows, killer rabbits, taunting Frenchmen and the knights who say, "Ni!"



"Can't the New Negro Relax" Artwork by Mario Moore

HOMELAND INSECURITY

Mario Moore's paintings examine the elusive dream of homeownership

BY PAT MORAN

In his painting "Mortgage Burning," Mario Moore captures an unusual and increasingly rare ceremony. Three Black women firmly hold a document that's been set ablaze. The flames, licking the curling black edges of the paper, draw our eyes upward to reveal that it's a mortgage being incinerated above a brass bucket.

The painting seems to depict a magical spell, but it's really a ceremony once customary in Black American communities.

"A large section of the Black community used to have mortgage burnings after they made that last payment," Moore says. "It's something that seems so foreign to me because I never heard of it. It feels like a fantasy when it shouldn't be."

The painting is mysterious because of its unorthodox framing. The women's heads are out of frame because Moore wants the viewer to decide who they are. Are they strangers? Your parents? Yourself?

"Mortage Burning" is one of 15 artworks including sculptures, drawings and Moore's signature storytelling oil paintings that comprise the Detroit-based artist's latest show, In Pursuit of Home, which debuts at the Harvey B. Gantt Center for African-American Arts + Culture this month.

The museum's opening day celebration of In Pursuit of Home features a discussion with Moore and the exhibit's curator Dexter Wimberly at the Gantt at 6 p.m. on Jan. 16.

The show examines Americans' desire to own their own homes and the security, generational wealth and sense of identity that ownership is presumed to bring.

"This idea of an American dream is centered on land, on creating your own space," Moore says.

The exhibit's artworks juxtapose those urges for a home with the increasing unattainability of homeownership. When Moore approached Wimberly with his idea for In Pursuit of Home, the curator, a Black American who has lived in Japan since 2020, was immediately intrigued.

"The spark for this exhibition came from recognizing that the American dream of homeownership, already mythological for many, has become particularly unattainable for younger generations facing unprecedented economic barriers," Wimberly wrote in an email.

Acquisitions of single-family houses in bulk by corporations, which then convert them into rentals, have helped fuel a rise in housing prices that has turned the American dream into a myth. Faced with additional barriers like stagnating wages, onerous student loans, rising rent and grocery prices and skyrocketing health insurance costs, people in their twenties and thirties have come to realize that attaining a home is indistinguishable from fantasy.

This situation is untenable for everyone. Historically, however, it has been far worse for Black Americans — and for much longer.

"For Black Americans, this isn't a new crisis; it's the latest chapter in a deliberate, centuries-long exclusion from the primary mechanism of wealth-building in this country," Wimberly said.

Citing redlining, predatory lending, so-called urban renewal policies and the 2008 foreclosure crisis that disproportionately devastated Black families, he noted that Black people have been structurally, systematically and intentionally denied access to homeownership.

Moore says there is yet another layer interwoven into the fabric of the exhibit, one that may be imprinted in humanity's psyche.

"A lot of [the exhibit] deals with not just homeownership or land ownership but also this idea of searching for your place," Moore offers. "It's something we're all looking for, whether it's an apartment, a country, a state, a city or a job. The idea of looking for a place to exist is really what this show is about."

Looking for a place to belong is as much an experience as it is a physical thing, he says.

Moore tells complex stories through history

Given the complex entwining of land, labor, economics, myth and history in In Pursuit of Home, there may be no better artist to tackle its themes than Moore. His immersive compositions couple figurative realism with folklore, history with the here and now, and sweeping movements and themes with the personal and specific.

He cites the social realism of Diego Rivera murals he saw on childhood trips to the Detroit Institute of Arts as an inspiration, along with the narrative paintings on Renaissance masters he encountered on a trip to the Louvre in Paris.

Moore's focus on history is often informed by what he calls "previously unacknowledged Black history." For instance, the story of his great-great-great-great-uncle Thomas Moore, an enslaved man who subsequently joined the Union Army in the Civil War, prompts troubling questions.

"How do you situate yourself in a country that, historically speaking, doesn't want you there?" Moore says.

Two paintings in the exhibition draw specifically on Moore's family history. His great-grandmother on his maternal side is depicted in "Doll in the Wilderness" while "The Patron Saint of Urban Farming" pays tribute to his wife Danielle's grandfather.

But history is rarely straightforward in Moore's art. It often intrudes unbidden into the present.

"There's moments of the past in my work that seem to come out of nowhere. There are elements of imagination within the work, something that is fantastical or out of place," he says.

Wimberly lauds Moore's facility for depicting everyday aspects of Black life with dignity and detail.

"He paints leisure, rest, domesticity and contemplation as worthy subjects, which is itself a radical act in a culture that has historically either ignored Black interiority or reduced it to trauma," Wimberly said.

"I mainly paint people and places in a way that the majority of the public can understand," Moore offers. "It's like going to a movie theater or going to see a play. I want you to feel as if the figures within the work can step out and talk to you, or that you can step into the painting."

Art runs in Moore's family

"I grew up in a household filled with art," Moore says.

His mother, Sabrina Nelson, is an accomplished painter and educator while his father, Kris Moore, supported Mario's interest in the arts. Urged by his father to learn to paint with oils, a teenaged Mario approached his mother's friend Richard Lewis for lessons.



"Mortage Burning" Artwork by Mario Moore

Lewis, a renowned figurative painter whose work explores the complexity of Black interior life, must have liked the bold high school sophomore, because he agreed. At the same time, Mario started attending protests and marches with his grandmother Helen Moore, an education activist. He credits those activities with spurring his interest in history

"It felt like I was living in historical moments," he says.

Mario's mother is also an admissions counselor for Detroit's College for Creative Studies (CCS), but that's not the reason he attended the prestigious private art school. Instead, he was seeking a challenge, and thought he could find it majoring in illustration at CCS.

There he studied anatomy, sculpture and drawing, graduating with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in 2009. Though he chose not to pursue a career in illustration, Moore says the program gave him the tools he needed to create the art he wanted to make.

From 2011-13, Moore attended Yale University, where he earned a Master of Fine Arts in painting. While attending Yale, he met Wimberly, who had transitioned to the art world after co-founding and running the marketing agency August Bishop from 1995-2008.

After graduating from Yale, Moore moved to New York City and entered the city's bustling art world. In July 2017, he suffered a seizure and underwent brain surgery the following month. As he recovered, Moore was unsure if he had retained his artistic ability.

When a good friend gifted him a sketch book, he at first declined to draw anything, fearful for what it would mean to confirm he had lost his talent. A few days later, Moore started sketching Danielle, then his girlfriend, and realized he still had the capability to produce art.

"It made me appreciate life — family, love and human experiences," Moore says.

While recuperating, he completed his first work post-surgery piece, "Can't the New Negro Relax" The self-portrait, which appears in In Pursuit of Home, depicts the artist resting on a couch in front of a picture of boxer Jack Johnson.

In 1910, at the height of the Jim Crow era, Johnson became the first Black world heavyweight boxing champion. He was seen at the time as the exemplar of the New Negro, a tough Black man who would not bow down to white racists.

"Can't the New Negro Relax" is a silver point drawing, a technique developed in Italy during the Renaissance in which the artist draws on a specially prepared sheet of paper with a piece of silver. Moore liked the softness of the line produced by the technique, which complemented the theme of the piece.

"A lot of times when we talk about Black men in this country, there's a certain hardness and perception of anger, but I wanted to approach [Black masculinity] with a certain softness," Moore says.



Mario Moore in his Detroit studio. Photo by Danielle Lyle

Bringing 'In Search of Home' to the Gantt

In 2020, Moore moved back to Detroit, where he and Danielle married in 2021. Moore subsequently bought a home in his hometown, an action that sparked In Pursuit of Home. He started discussing the exhibition with Wimberly, who has organized similar shows in galleries and museums in Charlotte, New York City, Dallas, Berlin, San Francisco, Tokyo and Dubai.

The two men decided that the Gantt Center would be the perfect place to debut the exhibition.

Moore and his work were the focus of a virtual event that Wimberly hosted for the Center in 2020, which included a tour of Moore's personal studio in Detroit. The museum bought Moore's painting "Gifts Themselves" in 2022, adding the work to its permanent collection.

Moore is also acutely aware that the Gantt Center is a stone's throw from the site of the city's historic Black neighborhood of Brooklyn, largely demolished in the 1960s and early 1970s by whites who banished Black families from the homes and land that could have granted their descendants generational wealth.

Wimberly has been working with the Gantt Center as a consulting curator for nearly a decade. In recent years, he's curated three shows at the Gantt: Seeing Stars: Works from the Fischer/Shull Collection of Contemporary Art (2023), Patrick Alston, Post-Traumatism: In Search of Freedom (2023-24), and A Superlative Palette: Contemporary Black Women Artists (2024).

"The Harvey B. Gantt Center represents something essential in the American cultural landscape, an institution committed to preserving, presenting, and interpreting African American art and culture," Wimberly wrote to Queen City Nerve. "Its position in the American South, a region with its own complex relationship to questions of land, ownership and belonging, made it an ideal location for this project.

"[In Pursuit of Home] ultimately asks visitors to consider home not as a simple consumer good or investment vehicle, but as a fundamental right to self-determination," he added.

The exhibit will be divided into four sections, or "movements" entitled Interior, Land, Labor, and Longing. Beginning in intimate domestic quarters, visitors will pass into more exposed public areas meant to recontextualize the concept of space. Throughout, Moore's detailed, lush yet unsettling paintings are designed to raise questions about the vulnerability and instability of home.

Bucolic backyards barely veil the fact that land ownership is never forever. Tactile sculptures inhabit physical spaces while serving reminders that acquiring any object does not mean you'll possess it for long.

Along the way, visitors will encounter paintings like "The Arrival," Moore's self portrait that renders the slightly disgruntled, skeptical artist in a foyer, clutching an unidentified piece of paper.

"It's what the viewer takes from and adds to a work of art that completes it," Moore says. "That piece of paper is whatever you want it to be. Everybody has opened up their door and had an envelope handed to them that they're not too happy about, right?"

"Doll in the Wilderness" depicts Moore's great-grandmother as a proud, well-dressed woman in a verdant forest. Standing beside a strung-up and gutted animal carcass that Moore says nods to Rembrant's disturbing 1655 painting, "The Slaughtered Ox," Doll holds a daisy in one hand and a rifle slung over her shoulder in the other.

"I heard stories that she would hunt and was this really fierce woman," Moore says. "The idea that this Black woman would be hunting was something that was so foreign in my mind that I needed to see it."

Historically speaking, Moore is also reminding us that we seldom see paintings depicting Black people in the woods — and certainly not armed with rifles.

"The Patron Saint of Urban Farming" captures a grandfatherly city dweller holding a garden hoe and standing astride a row of collard greens, a traditional staple of Black Southern cuisine. Moore says he wants this figure to be a new kind of archetype, a Black farmer that represents something positive, instead of supporting negative stereotypes of downtrodden, struggling Black sharecroppers.

That said, the exhibit is also set in the context of hopes receding for some in his generation or younger to ever find a home of their own. The painter is 38.

"Everybody is feeling the weight on their wallet in some way," Moore says. "There's a level of uncertainty that I think everyone feels across the US. It doesn't matter what race."

He believes that people are growing increasingly aware that systems and institutions are only benefiting a few people at the very top, and that the systems in place are not set up to benefit the majority. Whether it's a perception of revelation, it's a concept that fuels widespread public demand for affordability.

Moore hopes In Pursuit of Home will prompt people to ask questions about why food, health care and particularly a place to call our own, the basic building blocks for a life of dignity and cornerstones of American mythology, are beyond so many people.

If we're unable to ask these questions, or to confront the answers they engender, it may mean that for many there really is no place like home.

PMORAN@QCNERVE.COM



Reuben Vincent will perform with 9th Wonder at Neighborhood Theatre on Jan. 13. Photo by Malik Gist

WHERE THE HEART IS

Reuben Vincent's 'Welcome Home' is a tale of return and rebirth

BY TYLER BUNZEY

Reuben Vincent was ready to come home.

From just a brief glance at his history, it might seem like the young lyricist has gotten quite a lot out of his career without having to go too far. The Charlotte emcee, originally discovered by renowned producer 9th Wonder on Twitter when Vincent was just 13 years old, has had a lifetime of experience in his dozen-year rap career, spanning from adolescence to early adulthood.

He has performed on major stages at Dreamville and MTV events, been mentored by industry stalwarts like Terrace Martin and Young Guru, and became the third North Carolinian to be signed to Jay-Z's Roc Nation label behind J. Cole and Rapsody.

Vincent's name has become almost synonymous with the Queen City's hip-hop scene.

His third studio album under the Roc Nation/Jamla label, recorded in collaboration with mentor 9th Wonder, *Welcome Home* tells a more somber story behind the shine — one about the burdens of expectations and the importance of staying connected to one's roots.

Having dropped a week before Halloween in October 2025, Vincent will finally bring the album home with a Homecoming show, scheduled for Neighborhood Theatre on Jan. 13.

The show will be symbolic of the true journey back to his hometown of Charlotte that sparked the idea behind *Welcome Home*.

Return to the Queen City

While his successes seemed to multiply at home, the idea of home itself seemed to be slipping from him. In 2025, Vincent found himself in his mother's house, experiencing a sort of identity crisis compounded by the hip-hop industry's ever-fickle tastes.

It wasn't just the money drying up that led him to return back to his roots.

"I started my career with a lot of peaks very early, like, super early," Vincent told Queen City Nerve during a recent chat. "I've been under a magnifying glass, whether to the public or to just a certain level of mentorship, guidance, and expertise since I was 13-14 years old."

His deal with Roc Nation at age 23, compounded by a host of other successes, manifested in an intangible weight for Vincent — the weight to make the most of the blessings that few in the industry ever get access to. If he was going to carry this mantle, he needed to perform on the level of his labelmates, who included superstars like Rihanna, Megan Thee Stallion and Lil Uzi Vert.

He felt the burdens of representation that seemed to stack up through the years. To old heads, Vincent symbolized the model rapper for a younger generation that could seem disrespectfully out of touch with hip-hop's elder torchbearers. To Raleigh's JAMLA Records, he was the next artist to emerge into the mainstream following in the footsteps of prolific Snow Hill native and Grammy Award-winning emcee Rapsody.

To some Charlotte hip-hoppers, he was simultaneously the paragon and the blessed figure, practically born with a music industry silver spoon in his mouth due to his early mentorship with 9th Wonder.

To the Charlotte Liberian community, he is one of the most visible representations of the Liberian diaspora.

These overlapping expectations began to suffocate Vincent, making it difficult for him to simply be himself.

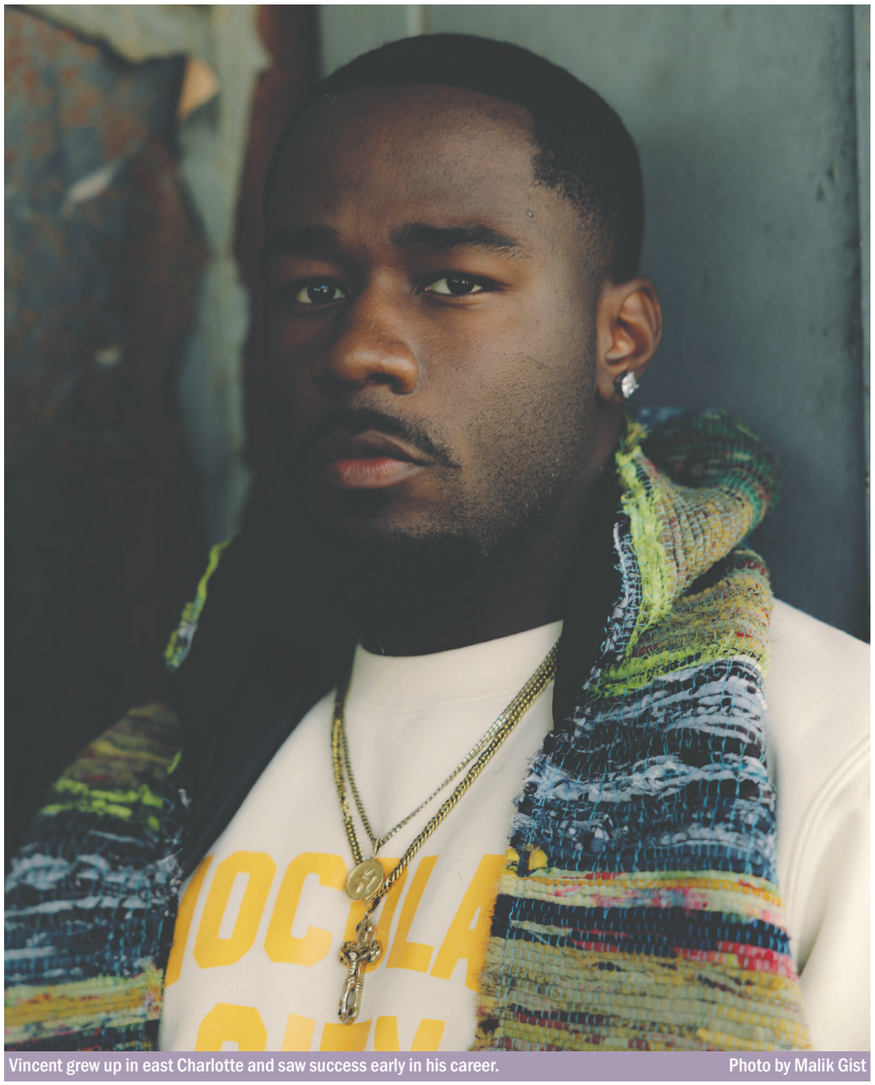
"I had to either sometimes suppress and hide my mistakes because I was ashamed of [them]," he explained.

In the midst of these pressures, Vincent favored Sisyphus to Narcissus, leaning into the high expectations. He wanted to be the best representation of himself in all of these valences rather than remove himself to relish in the vainglories of his already robust career.

The burdens of representation carry a tax, however, and Vincent was paying up too much and too often. The industry had already sapped him of spirit and resource, leaving him emotionally desolate and at a crossroads in his career.

Vincent turned his eyes toward the one thing he knew had and would always remain: home.

"Coming home and being humble kind of allowed me to be like, 'Okay, let me reassess what I want out of this and reassess my relationship with music,'" he recalled.



Vincent grew up in east Charlotte and saw success early in his career. Photo by Malik Gist

His reassessment led him to Raleigh, back to JAMLA's Brightlady Studios, to take some space and find out who he really was. Vincent slept on the studio couch for six months, writing, listening and absorbing lessons from 9th and studio president Kash Norville.

Going on record

The result of Vincent's soul searching resulted in a polished, 16-track collaborative concept album with 9th Wonder titled *Welcome Home*. Spanning 59 minutes, the album dramatizes Vincent's personal and professional crises in the tone of '90s Black cinema classics like *Love Jones, Poetic Justice*, and *Brown Sugar*.

While the album is laden with features from hip-hop behemoths including Ab-Soul, Wale, Terrace Martin and Raphael Sadiiq alongside newer voices like Jalisa, Kelly Moonstone and JAMLA newcomer SWEATA, Vincent's voice is anything but drowned out in the ensemble. Rather, these guests help guide the narrative of his return, in tune with the function of the ancient Greek chorus.

He attributes the clarity of voice to the intention he put into the album's narrative.

"I think the reason why they worked and the reason why I still shine through the reviews, through the observations, and the listening of people's perspective on the album is because I always allowed myself to show up first when it came to the work," said Vincent.

From the first track, "HOMECOMING," we follow Vincent on his airborne descent into Charlotte Douglas International Airport. He narrates the conflicts pushing him back home over 9th's flip of Alexander O'Neal's "If You Were Here Tonight" (1985) cut with Juicy's "Sugar Free" (1985), both of which are tonally indicative of the classic sensibilities that persist across Vincent's body of work.

His reflections on the highs and lows of his career carry through to the third track, "GOD'S CHILDREN," which concludes with Vincent arriving back at his family home. As he gets out of the car, muttering to himself, he runs into his childhood friend, played by JAMLA songstress Heather Victoria, who asks about his return home.

Through the next four tracks, Vincent details the highs and lows of his career, ending with "ISSA DEE." Referencing the title character of Issa Rae's hit HBO show *Insecure*, Vincent explores his own insecurities: "*This life ain't no free throws, defense from all d'evils/ I know it won't be easy, it's harder the more that we grow/ Once you take off, dog, you're gonna start losing migos…*"

The track closes with a conversation between Vincent and his friend, who asks about his love interests while on the road. Here the album picks up another layer in his sojourn home: romance.

While recording the album at Brightlady, Vincent didn't expect to become moonstruck. However, his five-year friendship with DJ, podcaster and radio personality Nyla Simone began to take a romantic shape, an experience that steered much of the album's content.

Following the track "SO I PRAY," the narrative arch bends toward his journey in becoming down bad for a childhood friend, mirroring his own relationship with Simone.



Vincent's album 'Welcome Home' dropped in October 2025. Photo by Malik Gist

Typically quiet about his personal life, Vincent explained his impetus for going public with their love.

"I think it was beautiful for people to see a real representation of a young Black man falling in love," he said.

The video for "DRE & SIDNEY" features Simone alongside Vincent as the two lovestruck hip-hop heads pay homage to the titular characters of the 2002 film *Brown Sugar.*

While Vincent's odes to falling in love are not without hip-hop's usual attention to carnal cravings, his perspective is remarkably tender. "*She likes to talk 'til the sundown/ She likes the way I make her spirit and her heart smile…*" he raps in "SWEET & GOOD."

Referencing bell hooks' 2004 Black feminist essays in *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity*, Vincent reflected, "Patriarchy makes it uncool to be in love and show emotions and to be smitten by somebody … I want to redefine what masculinity looks like for me and what masculinity looks like for the next generation."

This journey is such a particularly powerful throughline in Vincent's album when considering how romantic love often serves as a strong cornerstone to how we define home and why.

The album begins with a sense of regression as Vincent moves back into his parents' house and runs into a childhood friend. By the end, we see that by emulating the pathway of return, Vincent has carved out an entirely new future for himself, one that is just rising over the horizon as he loosens the restraints of representation and begins to define life on his own.

The Homecoming Show

And he's ready to celebrate this homecoming with his upcoming show at Neighborhood Theatre on Jan. 13. Originally scheduled for December, Vincent pushed the show back to accommodate 9th Wonder's schedule and added Brooklyn emcee Jourdan Cox to the lineup.

Vincent and 9th are planning a creative set for the Homecoming Show, playing with samples from the album throughout the set. The gig will mark the first time that Vincent's longtime mentor has ever served as his DJ.

Aside from the titanic features, thoughtful rollout and upcoming live performance, perhaps the most exciting thing about the album for Vincent's fans is the fact that he's finally stepping into a messier and truer version of himself as an artist.

Burdened by expectation and the natural limitations of youth, Vincent at times has struggled to find a voice that is uniquely his in the chorus of cultural and familial expectation. His work has demonstrated his ability to fulfill the rubrics of his mentors and naysayers alike.

Now, Vincent is starting to create a measurement for stylistic success.

"I've been trying to tell myself [the importance of] giving myself the opportunity to make mistakes and being content and being grateful for those mistakes, because those mistakes are just as beautiful as the accomplishments and all the things that I might have been able to do," he said.

Vincent still has work to do in his efforts to stand in a truth uniquely his and express it authentically through the cacophonous din of virtual feedback. It's perhaps ironic that the young rapper had to return to his mother's house, reconnect with 9th Wonder and go back to Brightlady to find himself, as *Welcome Home* is one of the first glimpses we have of Vincent as a self-possessed emcee.

It isn't ironic that Vincent had to return home to begin to grow. It can be instructive to occasionally return to our roots, trod our old paths, reengage our old connections, so as to experience rebirth and renewal.

In many ways, *Welcome Home* is an invitation not only to examine Vincent's own journey but also to reflect on the regenerative power of the return.

INFO@QCNERVE.COM

SOUNDWAVE

CHARLOTTE'S LIVE MUSIC CALENDAR * JAN.7 - JAN. 20 *

WEDNESDAY JAN. 7

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
Creatures of the Sun w/ Lily of The Sea, Ellie K (Snug Harbor)
COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
NC Bluegrass Jam Night (Birdsong Brewing)
FUNK/JAM BAND/REGGAE
Eternally Grateful (Comet Grill)
JAZZ/BLUES
Troy Conn (Middle C Jazz)
OPEN MIC
Singer/Songwriter Open Mic (The Rooster)*

THURSDAY JAN. 8

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
Den of Wolves w/ Noctus, Mourning Lotus, Right Here Right Now, The Johnstown Flood (The Milestone)
COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
Carolina Down Boys w/ Severed Fingers, Wes Hamilton (Petra's)
SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
Abbey Elmore w/ Tyler Tullis (Comet Grill)
COVER BANDS
Heather Hayes: Party Hits Through the Decades (Middle C Jazz)

FRIDAY JAN. 9

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
Apes of the State w/ Clover-Lynn & the Hellfires, The Whiskey Predicament (The Milestone)
Regence w/ Temperance League, Wilde Green (Petra's)
Preacher Stone w/ Project XIII (The Rooster)
The Orderlys w/ Cave Shine, Flannelmouth (Snug Harbor)
JAZZ/BLUES
Java Band (Middle C Jazz)
FUNK/JAM BAND/REGGAE
GNYUS (Evening Muse)
The Jam Crew (VisArt Video)
COVER BANDS
Dead Letter Office (REM tribute) (Amos' Southend)
Hey LA w/ Riverstone (Goldie's)
Abbey Road Live w/ Radio Free Athens (Visulite Theatre)

SATURDAY JAN. 10

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
A Life Worth Taking w/ Frailskin, Sober Dad, Cheer Up! (The Milestone)
Jiu-Jitsu w/ Chained, Overturn, Glamour World (Snug Harbor)
POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
Sundream (The Music Yard)
Ultraviolet Sapphic Dance Party (Petra's)
FUNK/JAM BAND/REGGAE
Celestial Company (Birdsong Brewing)
Red Rocking Chair (Comet Grill)
COVER BANDS
Shot Thru the Heart (Bon Jovi tribute) (Amos' Southend)
Y2K Kids w/ Bald Brothers (Goldie's)
Coconut Groove Plays Steely Dan (Middle C Jazz)
Enrage Against the Machine (Neighborhood Theatre)
REEKO w/Pool Shark, Dead Kenny (The Rooster)
Badmotorfinger (Chris Cornell tribute) (Visulite Theatre)

SUNDAY JAN. 11

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
Wastoid w/ Demons, Consumer Culture, Brick, Lofidels (The Milestone)
JAZZ/BLUES
Justin Varnes (Middle C Jazz)
POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
Super Soul Sunday feat. Guy Nowchild (Starlight on 22nd)

MONDAY JAN. 12

JAZZ/BLUES
The Bill Hanna Legacy Jazz Session (Petra's)
FUNK/JAM BANDS/REGGAE
Gods. w/ Necto, Kouskous Heaven, Froggy Nights (Snug Harbor)
OPEN MIC
Find Your Muse Open Mic feat. Redd & the Paper Flowers (Evening Muse)

TUESDAY JAN. 13

SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
McKinney w/ Shlomo Franklin, Zoe Lemon (Snug Harbor)
HIP-HOP/SOUL/R&B
Reuben Vincent & 9th Wonder (Neighborhood Theatre)
a cappella
The Colgate Thirteen (Heist Brewery & Barrel Arts)
OPEN MIC
Open Mic Night feat. The Smokin J's (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)*

WEDNESDAY JAN. 14

COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
Dale Watson (Neighborhood Theatre)
Joshua Quimby w/ Lightnin' Luke, Nate Hall (Snug Harbor)
SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
Ben Mignogna (Comet Grill)
Coughing Dove w/ Duhl, Candynavia, Amber Waves, Jordyn Zaino (The Milestone)
Josh Daniel, Jim Brock & Kerry Brooks (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)*
JAZZ/BLUES
Buff Dillard (Middle C Jazz)
POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
Lily Hain w/ Shelley Star & The Galaxy, Lena Traynham (Evening Muse)
COVER BANDS
Emerald Empire Showcase (Heist Brewery & Barrel Arts)
OPEN MIC
Singer/Songwriter Open Mic (The Rooster)*
Starlight Jams Open Mic (Starlight on 22nd)

THURSDAY JAN. 15

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
Cassettiquette w/ Local Nomad, Whistler (Evening Muse)
FUNK/JAM BANDS/REGGAE
Shana Blake's Musical Menagerie (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)*
JAZZ/BLUES
The Peace & Love Band (Middle C Jazz)
SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
Josh Daniel (Comet Grill)
CLASSICAL/INSTRUMENTAL
Anita Graef (Free Range Brewing)

FRIDAY JAN. 16

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
The Lenny Federal Band (Comet Grill)*
JAZZ/BLUES
Sean Jones: Dizzy Spellz feat. Brinae Ali (Stage Door Theater)
Kendall Town Social Club (The Rooster)
FUNK/JAM BANDS/REGGAE
Funkwondo w/ Warp Street (Starlight on 22nd)
COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
Laura Vinson w/ String Theory (Goldie's)
The Steel Wheels (Neighborhood Theatre)
Jason Isbell (Ovens Auditorium)
POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
DØMINA (Blackbox Theater)
Del Water Gap (The Fillmore)
Gravitate (Petra's)
briZB w/ Yesterday's Clothes, Fullish, Sean Diaz (Snug Harbor)
CLASSICAL/INSTRUMENTAL
Opera Carolina: Suor Angelica & Gianni Schicchi (Belk Theater)
LATIN/WORLD
Vopli Vidopliassova (Visulite Theatre)
COVER BANDS
The Warped Band (Amos' Southend)
Avery Creek (Heist Brewery & Barrel Arts)
Jay D Jones Salue to The Isley Bros. (Middle C Jazz)

SATURDAY JAN. 17

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
Nothing More w/ Catch Your Breath, Archers, Doobie (The Fillmore)
Punk Angels w/Midnite Massacre, Trailer Park Orchestra, Jund (The Rooster)
POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
Lavern & Alex Lemirage (Blackbox Theater)
Digital Noir feat. DJ Spider (The Milestone)
COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
The Alabama Heathens w/ Bedford (Evening Muse)
Featherpocket w/ Pink Beds, Lil Skritt (Snug Harbor)
SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
Elonzo Wesley (Primal Brewery)
EXPERIMENTAL/MIXED-GENRE/FESTIVAL
The Philharmonik (Booth Playhouse)
CLASSICAL/INSTRUMENTAL
Opera Carolina: Suor Angelica & Gianni Schicchi (Belk Theater)
Interlude: Ambient Listening Session (VisArt Video)
JAZZ/BLUES
Sean Jones: Dizzy Spellz feat. Brinae Ali (Stage Door Theater)
LATIN/WORLD
Tito Puente Jr. & Nestor Torres (Middle C Jazz)
COVER BANDS
The Nashville Nights Band (Amos' Southend)
Jeremy's Ten (Pearl Jam tribute) (Comet Grill)
Unknown Artist w/ Simple Sole (Goldie's)
Hard 2 Handle (Black Crowes tribute) w/ Let Love Rule (Visulite Theatre)

SUNDAY JAN. 18

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
I Hate Dave w/ The Groove Skeletons, General Purpose, Once Below Joy (The Milestone)
POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
Karen Linette (Middle C Jazz)
Hazy Sunday (Petra's)
CLASSICAL/INSTRUMENTAL
Opera Carolina: Suor Angelica & Gianni Schicchi (Belk Theater)

MONDAY JAN. 19

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
Problems w/ Ashley!, Boy A/C, Jelly Diver (The Milestone)
JAZZ/BLUES
The Bill Hanna Legacy Jazz Session (Petra's)
OPEN MIC
Find Your Muse Open Mic (Evening Muse)

TUESDAY JAN. 20

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
Red Rocking Chair (Comet Grill)*
JAZZ/BLUES
Menastree (Evening Muse)
HIP-HOP/SOUL/R&B
24kGoldn (Neighborhood Theatre)
SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
Billy Martin w/ Matt Glassmeyer, Jonathan Goldberger (Visulite Theatre)
OPEN MIC
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

QUEEN CITY NERVE

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."

WHEN KNOWING CHARLOTTE ISN'T ENOUGH...
BECOME CHARLOTTE
qcnerve.com/memberships
Support the future of Charlotte's local journalism and become a member today
QUEEN CITY NERVE
CHARLOTTE'S ALTERNATIVE NEWSPAPER



Wisdom and Cherie Jzar at Deep Roots CPS Farm. Photo by Michael Maxwell

A CRITICAL DISCOURSE

9 ways to get Mecklenburg's food systems back on track

BY NICOLE PETERSON, COLLEEN HAMMELMAN

Early in December, the Charlotte Optimist published an article about Carolina Farm Trust president and CEO Zach Wyatt's struggles in completing his aspirational CFT Market project on Hoskins Road.

Author Michael Graff identified a few important barriers that exist within the Charlotte-Mecklenburg food system. Cherie Jzar of Deep Roots CPS Farm published a response on Substack two days later, adding more important details regarding our local food system challenges, identifying patterns and problems that go beyond Zach Wyatt.

This is an important discourse for our community, and it's one we would like to add to as researchers who have spent years exploring these same issues.

From 2019-2024, funded by UNC Charlotte and the American Heart Association, our team of more than 100 collaborators dug into the challenges of the local food system, putting the results of our direct research dating back to 2010 into the latest State of the Plate project.

We recently shared our recommendations. Here we describe nine central challenges to the Charlotte-area food system that we feel must be addressed before real progress can be made.

Several of these align with those in Jzar's well-written response, and a few corroborate Graff's account of a fractured food system and the broader critiques of Carolina Farm Trust's approach to collaboration.

1) **The Charlotte-Mecklenburg food system currently has few advocates in local government**, leaving this topic usually under-thought and under-funded. Mamie Sackey-Harris, food security program manager at Mecklenburg County Public Health, and the now-retired Tom Warshauer, long-time community engagement manager for the City of Charlotte, have been important advocates for thinking about access and nutrition in the region, but this has not been enough to keep food as a focus for policy, funding or attention.

2) **Expertise and local knowledge about the area goes unrecognized and underappreciated.** The city often brings in external consultants who routinely tell those working in the food system what we already know, and even local organizations often fail to ask those most affected by food system challenges. The KK&P study in 2018 is a great example; organizers talked with 70 leaders in the county only to largely reiterate what was already widely known, leaving without a real plan to implement any recommendations. As pointed out by Jzar, expertise in this area doesn't necessarily mean leaders in the nonprofit sector, but can refer to community members who live every day with the results of a broken food system while rarely having their voices heard.

3) **Nonprofit organizations in the region do not often collaborate.** While there are important exceptions to this, some of which are mentioned by Jzar in her post, nonprofit leaders often prefer to work on their own. Some of this is due to long-standing bad relationships between key leaders, creating a cycle of hero-focused efforts. This is not so much the "clique" that Zach mentioned in the original Charlotte Optimist article, but there are several individual local leaders who have alienated others through their own lack of interest in collaborating or bad faith efforts at such collaboration.

Conversations within the food system are often not rooted in jealousy over funding but in how those funded refuse to really work with others despite often having a veneer of "collaboration." Some of the authors of this op-ed have had their or their organizations' reputations used by others to get funding when they have not been actually involved in any decision-making, which undermines trust. Unfortunately, the challenges facing our food system (and many others around the country) are not solvable by one organization or approach, let alone by one person. Hero-focused efforts are not effective; we must build relationships with trust and "distributed ownership" rather than duplicated efforts. If you're not working with other leaders and organizations, you should not be doing this work.

4) **Funders are partly to blame for the lack of collaboration.** Jzar's title, "Hero funding without systems assurance," highlights that the funding process is often biased towards individuals with a story rather than the messy work that many organizations are doing. As she states, "It's understandable why this happens: it's easier to tell a story about one visionary with a big idea than to narrate the slower, messier work of coalition-building. But this approach concentrates responsibility instead of distributing it, and leaves everyone, including the designated 'hero,' without the support they need." This becomes a vicious cycle of funding individuals who are held up as a hero, rather than a coalition without someone in charge of all of the decisions. Wyatt also suggests that the current funding model "pits us against each other," highlighting the challenges of funding collaborative projects in a context where grants are small and focused on a single leader's idea.

5) **We lack opportunities to collaborate.** There are no cross-county, all-inclusive planning bodies for the food system. In developing the State of the Plate project, we reached out to everyone we could find to invite them to join us for in-person or virtual meetings. We created this space because there was nothing else in place. The county (or region) needs an inclusive commission/committee/organization to address challenges to the food system that meets regularly, focuses on policy goals and finding solutions to the variety of challenges facing the food system. We also need smaller groups that address specific needs. For example, Jzar has built an important growers network that does this for some of our producers, but could be better supported.

6) **Funding in general is a huge challenge for the food system**, which limits how organizations can address needs for the food system. Specifically, funding for space and staff is not often available, nor is long-term sustainable funding. While funders would like to offer seed funding to support new ideas or programs, there is rarely a way that existing programs can run without external funding, leading to often short-term programs with little impact. Organizations rely on philanthropy from businesses or individuals to function. State of the Plate found that spaces, expertise, labor and relationships are all critical needs that funding could support, but rarely does. We need to rethink the funding model for the food system, and potentially for nonprofits in general, to be able to support coalition projects that can lead to real outcomes.

7) **Food systems are not isolated, but work within other systems**. We rarely recognize that the food system is tied to economics, housing, employment, transportation, health care and many other systems. Addressing food access, grower challenges, restaurant supply and other needs will require us to think beyond just the food system to how we create better living conditions for workers and customers, land availability, technical support services and market access. A view of the whole set of systems can suggest how we can better foster upward mobility in general.

8) **We have the opportunity to really address root causes together**. The current political context is not helping any of this (think threats to SNAP and small farmers), but we also have the opportunity to envision how we can build back better in the future. This will take time and effort, which many of us often do not have, but with some support we could create a collaborative, inclusive, representative space to do this work. The SOTP reports suggest some directions, but there are so many options for improving our food system, including addressing the root causes of the problems that would move us beyond short-term fixes like SNAP and other aid.

9) **We must continue to speak truth to power, no matter whose feelings might get hurt**. Jzar suggests that people were asked about CFT, and that she was open in her responses. At least one of the authors of this op-ed was asked to review Zach's project in 2022 before it was funded. Despite questioning connections to the community, accountability and the sparseness of details of the proposal, the county moved ahead with the funding.

We accept that our SOTP recommendations are not perfect; we shared them in hope that as a group, we might improve and implement them.

Addressing the root causes of our food system challenges will take so much more than funding. Getting to a strong system of local and affordable food will take more than one person or one solution, grocery store or food hub. It will take all of us collaborating together. And it starts with leaders in the community, whether politicians, board presidents, heads of nonprofits, or others listening to each other, understanding where we are, and developing a joint vision of where we want to be.

I think we can agree on the end goal: a healthy and sustainable food system. Now we need to work together on how to get there.

HOROSCOPE

2025 King Features Synd., Inc.

JAN. 7 - JAN. 13

ARIES (March 21 to April 19) Careful, Lamb. Don't let your generous nature lead to some serious overspending. Meanwhile, your social life kicks off into high gear by the week's end.

TAURUS (April 20 to May 20) A positive attitude helps you weather annoying but unavoidable changes in plans. Aspects favor new friendships and reinforcement of existing relationships.

GEMINI (May 21 to June 20) The demands on your energy levels could be much higher than usual as you get back into routines after the holiday. Be sure to pace yourself. Friends and family will be happy to help.

CANCER (June 21 to July 22) Don't allow a suddenly icy reaction from a friend or family member to continue without learning what caused it — and what can be done to restore this once warm and caring relationship.

LEO (July 23 to August 22) A relationship seems to be unraveling, mostly from a lack of attention. It might be a good idea to ease up on whatever else you're doing so that you can spend more time working to mend it.

VIRGO (August 23 to September 22) New facts emerge that not only help explain the recent rift with a trusted colleague but might also provide a chance to wipe the slate clean and make a fresh start in your friendship.

LIBRA (September 23 to October 22) A family member's personal situation is, fortunately, resolved in time for you to get back into your hectic round of holiday preparations. An old friend might bring a new friend into your life.

SCORPIO (October 23 to November 21) Pace yourself in meeting workplace pressures and demands to avoid winding up with a frayed temper and a Scorpian stinger that lashes out at puzzled kith, kin and colleagues.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22 to December 21) A financial matter requires close attention. Also, news from a trusted source provides the means to help sort out a long-standing state of confusion and put it into perspective.

CAPRICORN (December 22 to January 19) This is a good time to reinforce family ties. Make it a priority to assess and resolve all outstanding problems. Start the new year with a full measure of love.

AQUARIUS (January 20 to February 18) Don't be pressured into a so-called solid-gold investment. Wait until all the holiday distractions are officially over. Then take a harder look at it. You might find that the "gold" is starting to flake off.

PISCES (February 19 to March 20) A former friend might be trying to heal the breach between you by using a mutual friend as an intermediary. Best advice: Keep an open mind despite any lingering bad feelings.

BORN THIS WEEK: You have a way of saying the right thing at the right time. Your friendships are deep and lasting.

JAN. 14 - JAN. 20

ARIES (March 21 to April 19) Events could inspire adventurous Lambs who are looking to make a major career or personal move. But as always, get all the facts before rushing into any sort of deal or commitment.

TAURUS (April 20 to May 20) What seems to be a great opportunity could cause even usually practical Taureans to ignore their inner caution cues. Best to move carefully to avoid falling into unseen traps.

GEMINI (May 21 to June 20) Need a holiday now that the seasonal festivities are behind you? Good idea! Plan to go to someplace wonderful. You'll return refreshed and more than ready for a new challenge.

CANCER (June 21 to July 22) Progress continues to be made on that pesky workplace problem. Meanwhile, don't assume that a personal situation will work itself out. Best to get more involved earlier rather than later.

LEO (July 23 to August 22) Catnaps are definitely recommended for Leos and Leonas who had been going at a hectic pace over the holidays. Adding relaxation time to your schedule helps restore your overdrawn energy reserves.

VIRGO (August 23 to September 22) Sure, some of the new friends you made during the holidays might move out of your life at some point. But at least one might show significant "staying power" with some encouragement.

LIBRA (September 23 to October 22) Encourage family members to join you in supporting a relative who could be facing a difficult emotional challenge in the New Year. Showing your love and concern helps keep this person's hopes up.

SCORPIO (October 23 to November 21) While a long-deferred decision might suddenly take on some urgency after news on a related matter, you still need to weigh all the factors carefully before deciding one way or the other.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22 to December 21) This is a good time to reassess the earlier plan you made for the New Year. Some elements you felt you could depend on to make it work might no longer carry this assurance.

CAPRICORN (December 22 to January 19) Forming a renewed connection with a former associate is only the first step toward working out your new plans. Be prepared for problems and deal with them as soon as they arise.

AQUARIUS (January 20 to February 18) A romantic situation that was going smoothly not too long ago might take a new turn. Be honest about your feelings before you decide whether to follow it or take another path.

PISCES (February 19 to March 20) The wise Pisces (that's you, of course) will make sure that everyone knows your plan to keep your options open and will listen to all sides of the situation before making any decisions.

BORN THIS WEEK: Your honest approach to life and living is always an inspiration for others who are fortunate enough to know you.

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.

DIFFICULTY: ★★

★ Moderate ★★ Difficult
★★★ GO FIGURE!

	−		×		10
+		÷		+	
	+		−		9
÷		+		−	
	+		÷		6
5		10		7	

2 3 4 5 6 6 7 8 9

© 2026 King Features Syndicate, Inc.

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.

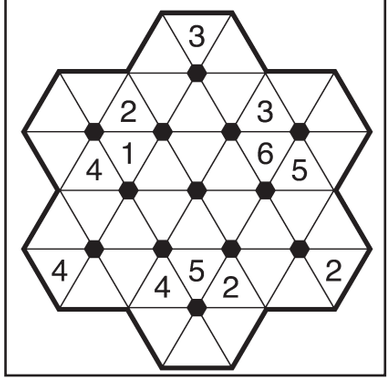
1. Hand warmer	__ __ __ V __	Circular map	__ __ __ B __
2. More lethargic	S __ __ __ __ __	Tulip or gladiola	F __ __ __ __ __
3. Weeping tree	__ I __ __ __ __	Flounder	__ A __ __ __ __
4. Modify	__ __ __ E __	Church table	__ __ __ A __
5. Park seat	__ E __ __ __	Cluster of grapes	__ U __ __ __
6. Wander aimlessly	__ __ I __ __	Gentle wind	__ __ A __ __
7. Perimeter	__ __ __ G __ __	Hemingway's fish	__ __ __ L __ __
8. Hedge plant	__ H __ __ __	Use steel wool	__ C __ __ __
9. Prying bar	__ __ __ __ R	Even	__ __ __ __ L
10. Football takedown	__ A __ __ __ __	Touch with a feather	__ I __ __ __ __

© 2026 King Features Synd., Inc.

SNOWFLAKES

by Japheth Light

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



CryptoQuote

AXYDLBAAXR
is LONGFELLOW

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

QJTM UBNLFMZQ FZBLQCJZT FXM QIL NLFJ B WMAAJR QUJF, JFXMZQ FZBLQCJZT B WMAAJR QUJF NLFJ FXM QIL. — UBGAJ UNHBQQJ

©2026 King Features Synd., Inc.

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: **L** equals **X**

HQGI JNEGAQSID JPKKGIVB DNGJ GLASIYA WNX IN ZOOZXGIA XGZJNI, HQZA ESDQA BNP YZVV AQZA? ONNW NW GLSJAGIYG.

©2026 King Features Synd., Inc.

TRIVIA TEST
BY FIFI RODRIGUEZ

1. GEOGRAPHY: What is the name of the festival of lights that's celebrated in some European countries as the start of the holiday season?
2. MOVIES: Which actor played folk singer Pete Seeger in "A Complete Unknown"?
3. SLOGANS: Which company uses the advertising slogan "The Best a Man Can Get"?
4. HISTORY: What was the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention about?
5. TELEVISION: What is the name of Liz Lemon's show in the sitcom "30 Rock"?
6. SCIENCE: What kind of substance does Boyles' law govern?
7. FOOD & DRINK: What is the primary ingredient in the Italian dish calamari?
8. LITERATURE: Which Shakespeare play introduces the characters Beatrice and Benedick?
9. MATH: What kind of number is pi (3.14)?
10. MUSIC: What is the name of the house band on "The Tonight Show"?

SUDOKU
BY LINDA THISTLE

2025 King Features Synd., Inc.

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

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.

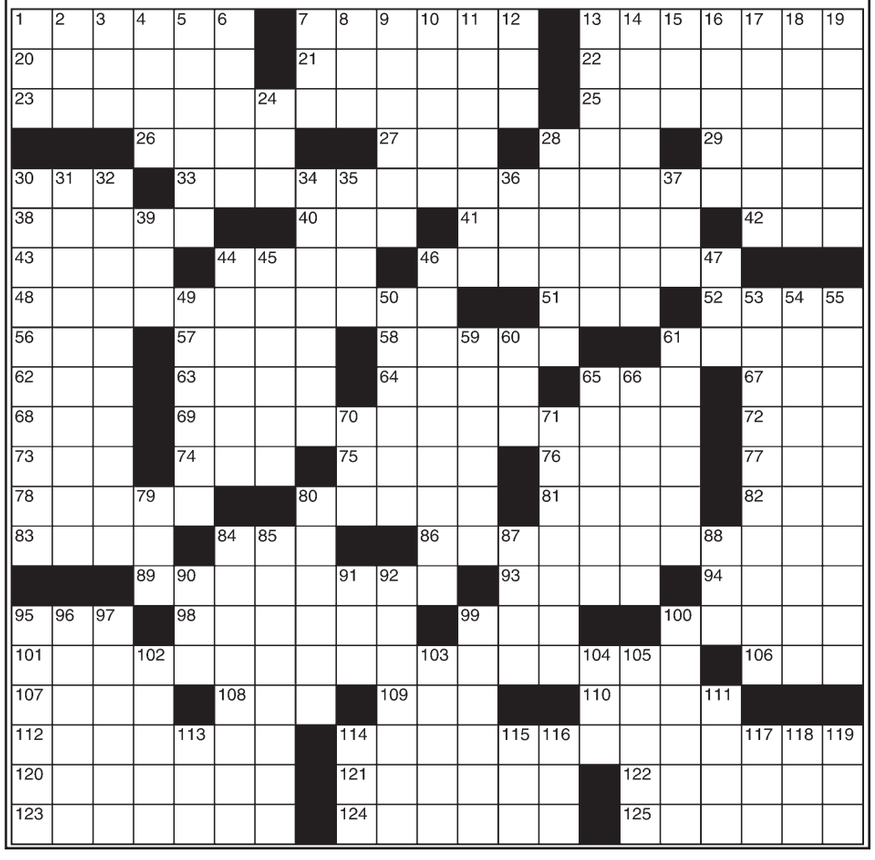


CROSSWORD
FAMILY EXPANSION

2025 King Features Synd., Inc.

ACROSS
1 It turns litmus paper blue
7 Strip a disguise from
13 "— Baby" (#1 U2 album of 1991)
20 Arrive like the tide
21 Savage
22 Less dull
23 Rural lumberjack resting after chopping?
25 Lounged around
26 Dreamcast producer
27 Get as clear profit
28 100-yr. period
29 Heap (up)
30 Trough for toting bricks
33 Extended cloth used for messy cold-weather meals?
38 Hostile force
40 Down food
41 Purple spring blooms
42 Wide-shoe letters
43 Spool
44 Gets firm
46 Produced a napped surface on
48 Chart showing the highs and lows of actress Ellen's career?
51 LP replacers
52 KGB's milieu
56 "— all over!"
57 Asian dress
58 Alex of "The Godfather"
61 Unit of work
62 Orioles great Ripken
63 Gp. for Qatar
64 Sea in 75-Across
65 "Now I see!"
67 Matchstick-removing game
68 Suffix with señor
69 Item pinned on to support a Russian poet's election to office?
72 Sarge, e.g.
73 Abbr. for a handy-andy
74 Mil. missions
75 Qatar locale
76 Lovers' deity
77 Still
78 Revise
80 Prepare to give a ring?
81 Horse father
82 Beijing-to-Shanghai dir.
83 Shot fluids
84 "— see it ..."
86 One of the Skywalkers dressed up as St. Nick?
89 Kind of pear
93 With skill
94 Fir's cousin
95 "Ender's Game" star Butterfield
98 Unmoving machine part
99 Troop gp.
100 They negate deles
101 Afghan-wrapped football?
106 "Help!"
107 Guthrie at Woodstock
108 B-to-F string
109 Thai tongue
110 "Think of — a loan"
112 Foot lever
114 Clean a jack-o'-lantern with a Hoover?
120 More weighty
121 Alicia of ballet
122 Choose
123 Aden citizens
124 French edict site of 1598
125 Nail coater

DOWN
1 Wall St. opportunist
2 Singer Rawls
3 Dutch airline
4 Home to edelweiss
5 Probable
6 Architect Jones
7 Alien craft
8 Writer Anaïs
9 Not be joking
10 "Get Happy" songwriter
11 Highland terrier, briefly
12 Saloon barrel
13 Figured out the value of
14 Stations
15 Hair hider
16 Linda in 1998 headlines
17 "Rabbit, Run" novelist John
18 — Mae (loan provider)
19 Graham or Lorne
24 Sister of Bert Bobbsey
28 Big name in shortening
30 Weedkillers
31 Singly
32 James Fenimore Cooper novel, with "The"
34 Grow wealthy
35 "I — Male War Bride"
36 History unit
37 Suffix of enzymes
39 Monogram in civil rights
44 Grab quickly
45 Departure
46 Most prickly
47 Trio less one
49 Crustacean such as a wood louse
50 Kudos
53 Features of cloudless days
54 Cuts, as pie
55 Far-off distance
59 Jewish mysticism
60 "McQ" actor Gulager
61 Speed skater Dan
65 Of a heart chamber
66 Shout of joy
70 State east of Colo.
71 Nuclear trial prohibition
79 Catch cold
80 Tartan skirt sporter
84 First Constitution section
85 Risen people
87 Galileo's gp.
88 Inclined (to)
90 Petition, e.g.
91 History unit
92 Light refrain
95 Disinterest
96 "No —!" ("Uh-uh!")
97 Glistening
99 Hall-of-Fame footballer Mel
100 Flower organ
102 Dry, white Italian wine
103 Strips for breakfast
104 Currency unit of Laos
105 Musical exercise
111 Lab safety org.?
113 Major racket
114 U-Haul rental
115 Capitalize on
116 Cal. dozen
117 — Jong-un
118 Suffix with chlor-
119 "— Blu Dipinto di Blu" (1958 hit)



AERIN IT OUT

AULD LANG SYNE, TYBER CREEK

New year, new space, same Tyber vibes

BY AERIN SPRUILL

Pulling up to Tyber Creek Pub's new location six months after its grand reopening on the first Monday night of the new year felt like an act of blasphemy for a millennial on a school night — especially when the youth of today have happily settled into their resolutions and performative dry Januaries.

But *they not like us*.

I craved the quiet mercy of a weeknight bar, the kind that separates generations without having to announce it.

I didn't miss the chaos of the OG Tyber Creek, which officially closed its doors in March 2024, but I hadn't forgotten it either. You know those packed, shoulder-to-shoulder weekends that felt slightly forbidden, like a teenage house party that spiraled into legend. A place where the echoes of music sticky with stories echoes in my ears long into the hangover of the next day.

But now, arriving at the corner of South Mint Street and West Summit Avenue, the patio lights twinkled quietly, the overflow tents held a single conversation, and the cornhole boards sat unbothered.

The calm of the night almost concealed the fact that Tyber still pops off like the old spot — and not even all the buildings are open yet. New phone, who dis? Nah. More like, the evidence of the weekend has been concealed and the parental units are home.

I lingered in the window, noticing a tricky little snug, fully aware that many must confuse their exit point after tossing a few back.

The moody lighting and hum of Irish tunes spilled quietly onto the patio, tugging at the few memories I could dredge from the haze of nights past and reminding me that, while I could still taste the many bad decisions, I was so glad we didn't have to say goodbye to this one for good.

I sat down at the now three-sided bar imagining what the space looks like when the anxiety-inducing weekend crowds are swarming every corner and spilling out the seams when I caught sight of a familiar face behind the bar — someone who'd worked Tyber Creek for over a decade in its former life and carried that history into this new location. Yep, ain't shit changed.

"You were going to come through and not say anything?" she asked with a mischievous smile as the bartender placed my usual in front of me, a crisp, cool Magner's.

Funnily enough, I had thought about texting her but assumed she'd be tucking the little ones into bed. Yet, as the luck of the Irish would have it, there she was, the one person synonymous with every memory I'd ever created at Tyber Creek Pub.

She pointed out all the pictures and signage brought over from the old location, explaining that the curation of this first space was meant to mimic the upstairs of the former spot, from the low ceilings down to the wood paneling surrounding the bar.

And while our nostalgic hearts will miss sneaking upstairs even when we weren't supposed to, the new space preserves enough of its spirit to feel like home again.

The second building, which *fingers crossed* will open in the spring, has been designed to pay homage to the more open ground floor of the original location, with taller ceilings and a more expansive feel.

The third building will be reserved for special events — private and otherwise.

One thing's for sure, Tyber Creek may be taking its time settling into their new digs, but that's because they are making sure to get it right. And it's definitely not stopping the party, with two satellite patio bars, a full in-house food menu and a food truck called The Morrison to keep the good times rolling. And roll they do.

Two Magner's in and contemplating a Reuben to go, I knew a potty break would soon be necessary. I stared down the short bathroom corridor opposite the snug.

Somehow, they still held the essence of those I'd once used on South Boulevard and Tremont. I thought, "Nope, that's not a memory I'm ready to revisit."

"Maybe next time," I thought to myself, realizing for the first time in a long while that I'd finally be able to leave Tyber Creek Pub without it being considered an Irish exit.

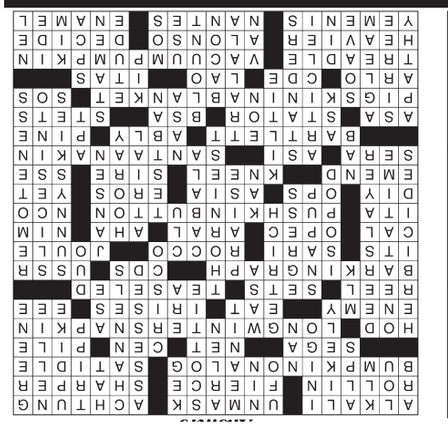
I took a quick loop around the spot with my girlfriend, understanding this would probably be one of the only times I'd get a private tour on a quiet night.

While I couldn't promise her when I'd be back, the new space delivers on its promise, keeping the memory of old Tyber Creek alive and well in South End.

INFO@QCNERVE.COM

PUZZLE ANSWERS

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



Even Exchange

Donna M. Pettman

1. Glove, Globe
2. Slower, Flower
3. Willow, Wallow
4. Alter, Altar
5. Bench, Bunch
6. Drift, Draft
7. Margin, Martin
8. Shrub, Scrub
9. Lever, Level
10. Tackle, Tickle

CryptoQuip

answer

When something suddenly goes extinct for no apparent reason, what might you call that?

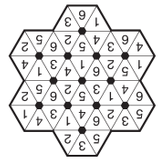
Poof of existence.

CryptoQuote

answer

Some painters transform the sun into a yellow spot, others transform a yellow spot into the sun.

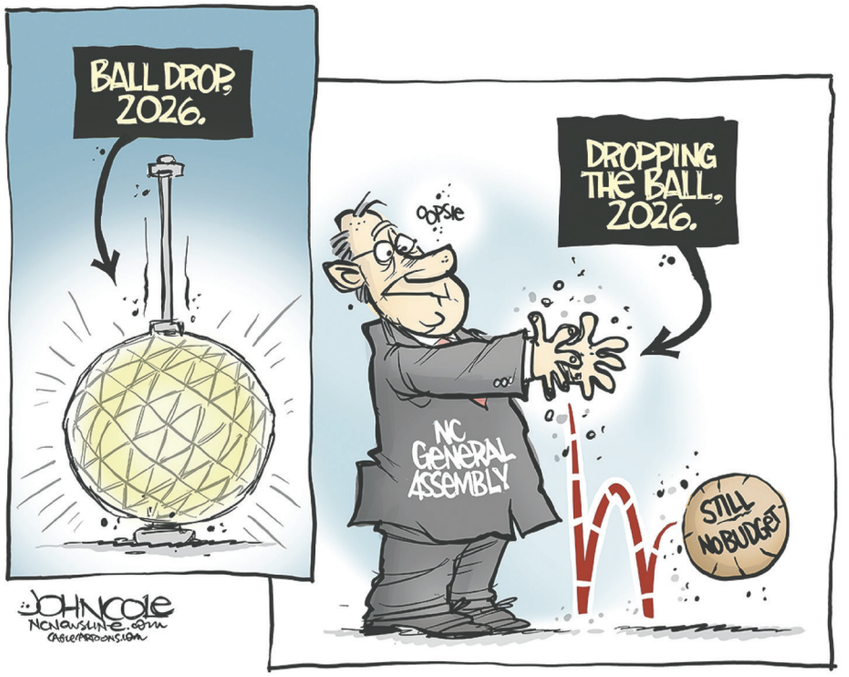
— Pablo Picasso



Trivia Answers

1. St. Lucia's Day.
2. Edward Norton.
3. Gillette.
4. The first women's rights convention in the United States.
5. "TGS with Tracy Jordan."
6. Gas.
7. Squid.
8. "Much Ado about Nothing."
9. Irrational.
10. The Roots.

	7		10		5				
3	+	9	÷	2	=	6			
÷		+		−					
7	+	6	−	4	=	9			
+		÷		+					
8	−	6	×	5	=	10			



"Dropping the Ball" by John Cole via NC Newsline

SAVAGE LOVE

RAPID FIRE

Quickies

BY DAN SAVAGE

What if I'm turned on by my own trauma? What do I do with this?

You do therapy with it. And then, after you've worked through your trauma with the help of your therapist (which includes unpacking your feelings about being turned on by your trauma), you can — taking the tiniest of baby steps — explore these turn-ons to see if they're something you can safely and enjoyably incorporate into your IRL sex life or if they need to remain fantasy material only.

I'm a cis bi female fifty-something subbie in a committed relationship. I enjoy being teased and denied. I wish I could use a cock cage but sadly I lack the proper anatomy. Is there something equivalent for vagina-havers? Preferably something that doesn't require piercings to hold it in place.

Has the insane popularity of male chastity devices in the last decade — cock cages — really obscured the fact that these "chastity devices" had to be qualified with "male" because "chastity devices" (aka "chastity belts") were originally a tool of the patriarchy? If there are women out there who don't know that chastity devices were originally used to deny women control of their own bodies/genitals, I guess that's a sign of progress — and since signs of progress are few and far between these days, I think we should celebrate this one.

You often say that folks routinely send you photos of their rashes/warts/etc., to which your response is "I'm not a doctor; go see a doctor!" Fair enough. But given that you've made a lifelong career out of sex advice, and given that this field is closely linked to genital health, I have to wonder: By now do you think your genital medical expertise approaches that of a urologist/OBGYN?

Absolutely not! While I'm more informed about genital health than the average person (and way more informed about vaginal health than a gay man has any right to be), that's entirely thanks to the actual doctors who've shared their expertise and insight with me over the years. Writing a sex advice column is a lot of things — most of them great — but it's not med school.

We're a lesbian couple, together for 15 years. I'd like to spice things up a bit, so I suggested we watch porn. My wife expressed that as she's gotten older, she's become increasingly uncomfortable with the exploitation she perceives in most porn. I know some people perform in porn who don't want to and who would prefer to make a living in other ways, but I also know that some people choose this as their career. The whole industry can't be exploitative, right? I'd like to find ethical, exciting woman-centered porn to share with my wife. Do you have any suggestions for us?

"There is no such thing as perfectly pure labor under capitalism," said Erika Lust, the award-winning filmmaker who creates sex-positive, indie adult cinema. "But there is a meaningful difference between exploitation and choice. Ethical porn exists because performers and directors like myself demanded better conditions, and because viewers like you refused to accept pleasure at someone else's expense. If porn makes you ask hard questions, that doesn't mean you should turn away. It means you're ready to look deeper and to choose differently. That choice matters."

And the porn Erika Lust creates — which includes amazing lesbian porn (not that you're limited to watching lesbian porn) — is just what you and your wife are looking for. Subscribe and enjoy at erikalust.com.

P.S. Some people do porn because they don't feel like they have another option, and some people choose to do porn as a career — but others do a little porn on the side for the thrill/love/joy of it.

I've been texting with a distant man for about six months. He's moving home soon, and we've been talking about love and marriage. He's ideal except for one detail: I'm a Boomer (71 years old) and he's GenX (43 years old). None of my, "You know, when you're my age, I'll be dead," talks have had any effect on him. He's everything I want, and it would sure make for an active retirement. But am I being selfish here?

I don't think you're being selfish — if you meet this man and you hit it off, feel free to enjoy him as long as it lasts (or for as long as you last) — but there's a good chance you're being foolish. It doesn't sound like you've met this man in person yet, so these talks about marriage are premature. Infatuations are fine, and fantasizing about a future with a hot stranger is wonderful, but you shouldn't be making long-range plans with someone you haven't even smelled yet. And if he's been initiating these conversations — if he's the one bringing up marriage — that's a red flag.

Does Dan have advice on how a lifelong vanilla person moves on from a six-month relationship where they were introduced to kink, power exchange, orgasm denial, edging and more? I can't see how one could be satisfied without kink now. I've just had a relationship like this end, and I feel that if I don't get that again, my sex life will always be disappointing.

You have two options:

Option 1: You can find kinky people on FetLife and Feeld — carefully screen potential new play partners, ask for references, meet in a neutral place for a vibe check before playing, etc. — and at munches and sloshes and other kink community events.

Option 2: You can make kinky people by sharing your kinks with new vanilla-or-presumed-to-be-vanilla partners and asking them if they might be interested in exploring your kinks with you. And you should know that approach works — introducing someone to kink can awaken the kinkster inside them — because isn't that how it worked for you?

Do you have any suggestions for a BDSM-for-beginners book? I'd like one that goes over information regarding both dominance and submission and goes over emotional elements as well as practical how-to information. Thanks!

My top three recommendations: *The Ultimate Guide to Kink* by Tristan Taormino, *Playing Well With Others* by Lee Harrington and Mollena Williams, and *Screw the Roses, Send Me the Thorns* by Molly Devon and Philip Miller.

For a guy so big on dominance, why is Trump so submissive towards Putin?

We shouldn't take the pee tape literally, but we should take it seriously — meaning, even if the pee tape (or worse) doesn't exist, it might as well exist (and be locked in a safe in the Kremlin) given Trump's craven and treasonous submission to Putin. Also: ITMFA!

Secret perving on my hot doctor who is 10 years my junior — that's okay, right?

Given Connor Storrie is just 25 years old and people of all ages are openly perving on him everywhere — the looks, the talent, the glutes — secretly perving on your hot doctor is perfectly fine … so long as your perving is truly secret.

P.S. I know some hot people. In general, hot people know they're hot, and they enjoy being hot, and they aren't offended by other people enjoying their hotness … so long as other people are respectful about it. So, jacking off about your hot doctor after an appointment is fine. Telling your hot doctor during your appointment that you're going to jack off about them after is not.

Best lube for stretching with large silicone butt toys?

I asked a good friend with an amazing collection of silicone butt toys — and an equally amazing butt — for his recommendations and he sent along two: Loovora Long Night Stand and X-Lube.

How do gay guys not get jealous in open relationships?

Gay guys in open relationships get jealous … as do gay guys in closed relationships, bi girls in open relationships, ace they/thems in closed relationships, etc., etc. Basically, everyone experiences jealousy, regardless of their sexual orientation or relationship status. A closed relationship doesn't magically protect you from jealousy, and an open one doesn't magically make you immune to it.

Fifties cis het woman. Many men on kink sites say they want to "push boundaries." Red flag?

On the one hand, playing with someone who pushes your limits — gradually, carefully, consensually — is often how people discover new sexual interests. On the other hand, someone who puts "pushes boundaries" on their profile might think they're entitled to ignore or violate a bottom's boundaries because it said "pushes boundaries" right there in their bio. Before you play with someone with "pushes boundaries" in their bio, ask them what that means to them in theory, what it looks like in practice, and check their references.

Are those foreskin restoration devices legit?

They're legit insofar as they exist — I mean, some circumcised men actually buy them and use them. Do they actually do what they claim to do? Well, skin is elastic, and it can be stretched, which is what those "foreskin restoration" devices do; they stretch the skin of the penis, which can recreate — to a certain limited extent — some of the appearance and functionality of a foreskin. But they can't bring back the nerve endings that were sliced off.

Top two recommendations for getting the spark back?

Fuck someplace else (easily done), fuck someone else (higher degree of difficulty).

P.S. Most answers to this question — which may be the most common question put to sex-and-relationship monkeys — assume mutual interest in reigniting the spark … which isn't always the case. If one person in a couple doesn't want to fuck the other person in a couple (not anymore or not ever), telling that couple to go fuck outside isn't going to solve their problem.

Have you heard that swallowing semen could affect your brain chemistry and change your DNA?

I hadn't heard that, but it certainly jibes with my lived experience.

How do I find bodybuilders to worship in Minneapolis?

Look for bodybuilders in your area on Instagram and Reddit forums, lurk in the comments, and observe how they interact with their followers. If they seem to welcome being objectified, you could risk sliding into their DMs and asking if they're into (presumably paid) muscle-worship sessions. Be prepared to apologize and gracefully accept the block (don't re-follow under a different account and ask again later).

P.S. A friend who's into muscle worship recommends TheBestFlex.com, a site where muscle guys sell their content.

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.*

THE TONY WINNING BEST MUSICAL IS BACK!

MONTY PYTHON'S SPAMALOT™

Book & Lyrics by
Eric Idle

Music by
John Du Prez & Eric Idle

Directed & Choreographed by
Josh Rhodes

PNC Broadway Lights SERIES

JAN. 20-25
BELK THEATER
AT BLUMENTHAL ARTS CENTER

BLUMENTHAL ARTS

BlumenthalArts.org • 704.372.1000 • Groups: 704.348.5752