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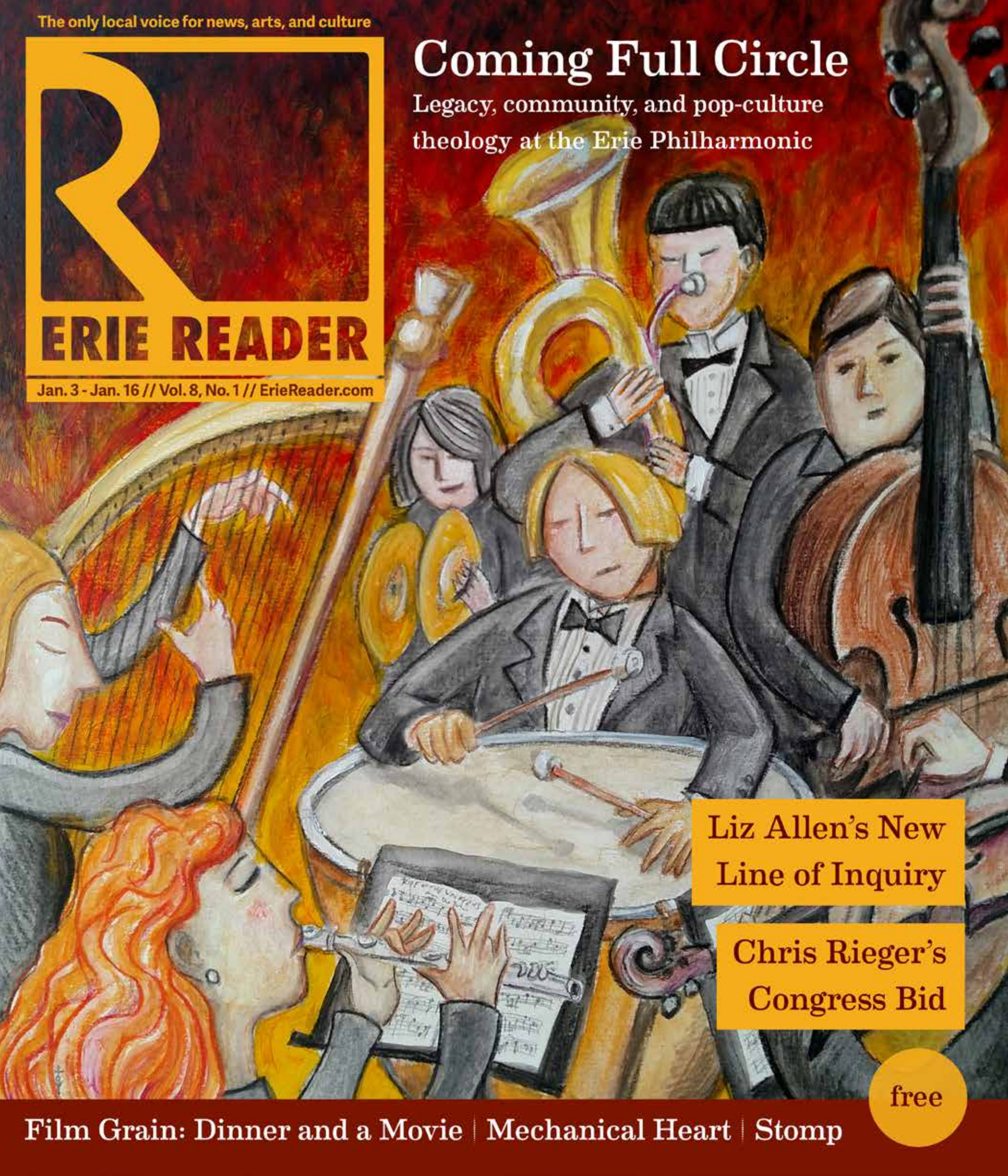
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## ERIE READER

Jan. 3 - Jan. 16 // Vol. 8, No. 1 // ErieReader.com

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theology at the Erie Philharmonic




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Brian Graham &amp; Adam Welsh

**Managing Editor:**

Nick Warren

**Copy Editor:**

Matt Swanseger

**Contributing Editors:**

Ben Spегgen

Jim Wertz

**Contributors:**

Maitham Basha-Agha

Mary Birdsong

Charles Brown

Tracy Geibel

Lisa Gensheimer

Tommy Link

Aaron Mook

Dan Schank

Tommy Shannon

Ryan Smith

Jen Sorenson

Ti Sumner

Cara Suppa

Bryan Toy

**Cover Art**

Bryan Toy

**Photographers:**

Maitham Basha-Agha

Ryan Smith

**Publisher's Assistant:**

Emily Hanisek

**Intern:**

Libby Rosequist

1001 State St. Suite 901

Erie, Pa., 16501

contact@eriereader.com

The Erie Reader is the local voice for news, arts, and culture, and is Erie's only independent, alternative newspaper. Founded in 2010, the Reader has quickly become the region's award-winning source for arts coverage, a strong cultural compass, and a dynamic resource for news and opinion. With a dedication to long-form journalism and a commitment to provoking thoughtful discussion, the Reader tells the stories of the people and places making and shaping Erie, while highlighting the events and issues influencing life in northwestern Pennsylvania. The Erie Reader is published every other week and distributed at over 250 high foot-traffic locations in Pennsylvania from North East to Girard to Edinboro. In addition to appearing in print, Erie Reader adds new content daily at ErieReader.com as well social media sites. All rights reserved. All content © Flagship Multimedia, Inc. 1001 State St., Suite 901, Erie, Pa, 16501. No part of this publication may be reproduced without permission. The opinions of our columnists and contributors are their own and do not always reflect that of the editorial board or organization. Direct sales inquiries to 814.314.9364. For editorial inquiries, email contact@ErieReader.com.

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**From the Editors****A Year of Potential Energy**

Now's the time. Time to harness every one of those good intentions that come springing forth as the new year begins, and actually do something with them. With 2017 in the books, 2018 (so far) remains a blank slate. The opportunities are endless. We have nearly an entire calendar year left to go before 2019 begins, and we all start getting retrospective again.

When next year does come around, where do you want to be? Do you want to be stuck making excuses for why things didn't go the way you wanted them to in 2018? Do you want to keep blaming those same things — everything but yourself — for why nothing has changed for the better? Will you lament, rationalizing that you set your goals too high, that you over-reached for something that could never possibly be done?

Let's not make more excuses. We do, of course, have to be realistic. Not *everything* can be done in one year, but *some* things can. Just think of how much in 2017 spun out of control and went oh-so wrong. If that many things can be undone in a single 365.25-day span, then certainly the inverse is possible. Granted, it's always easier to knock something down than it is to build it up, so the herculean efforts that some people make to progress things forward can't be understated. As frustrating as it is, "two steps forward, one step back," is still progress. That step back might feel like a mile. Hell, it might even be more than that. It might be painful, and probably bring more than its share of tears, feeling like more of an avalanche sometimes. The important thing is: keep going. We need to take those two steps, and you, along with the world around you, will be better off because of it.

This year has been referenced constantly since the election results in 2016. "Midterms — there will be a pushback, just you wait." Some version of that has been uttered nearly every day. Now, it's right in sight. We talk to one of the Democratic candidates looking ahead, candidate for US House of Representatives Chris Rieger. The Butler County lawyer announced his run in August (and was the second Democrat to do so, after Hermitage's Brian Skibo) against incumbent Mike Kelly, first elected in 2010.

With her own well-versed report on things, another politician — newly elected Erie City Councilwoman Liz Allen — offers her unique point of view, coupled with decades of journalistic experience with the *Erie Times News*. Her transparent, first-person take on the workings of local government will certainly be something special to look forward to in the coming year.

Also seeking to harness that special energy is the Erie Philharmonic. The organization — over a century old — still continues to do positive things in our community, bringing music, education, and outreach to the Erie area. Find out what's behind the music, driving the group to forge ahead into the new year and beyond.

It's a new, fresh time, the light of unbridled possibility lighting our way. It's in these first few desperate hours in the dawn where we feel invincible. That feeling isn't a naive shroud influenced by a couple of presents and champagne toasts, it's something real. It's the motivating spirit that drives us to get things done. It's that spark, that can set a warming fire ablaze even in seven feet of snow.

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## Stepping Into a New Line of Inquiry

Asking questions, and lots of them



MAITHAM BASHA-AGHA

By: Liz Allen

As Curtis Jones Jr. said his goodbyes during the Dec. 20 City Council meeting, he mentioned that when he won the first of his three terms in 2005, he was the youngest person ever elected to council.

A few minutes later, Jones corrected himself after getting a text from his “historian friend,” Carl Anderson Jr., who was in the audience. Anderson, newly elected to Erie County Council, told Jones that Brian Dougherty had actually been the youngest person ever elected to Erie City Council. That would make Jones, who just turned 42, the second-youngest person ever elected to City Council.

I enjoyed those lighthearted moments for two reasons. First, at age 66, I suspect I’m the oldest person ever elected as a first-time council member.

Secondly, I liked the fact that the affable Jones fixed his mistake from the dais. I’m a lifelong journalist and fact-checking is part of my DNA, but I’ve wondered how my penchant for asking lots of questions to determine the facts will play out in the political arena.

I already have an inkling. Before I was even sworn in on Jan. 2, a City Hall veteran offered me a bit of advice: “Remember, you have two ears and one mouth.” That advice came from the same person who feared I had

committed a big blunder two weeks before the Nov. 7 election. After I posted on Facebook that George H.W. Bush had touched me on the butt when we posed for a photo in 2004, Erie Times-News reporter Kevin Flowers interviewed me. The advice-giver and two political strategists chided me. Better to be seen and not heard so close to the election, they said.

Their intention was honorable and their gut was right. On social media, people called me a liar, a “ho,” fat, ugly, a political opportunist and a money-grubber. It was a rude introduction to incivility at a time when I chose to run for public office as part of my civic duty.

My fleeting #metoo moment did come back to haunt me on Election Day. Outside a polling station in southeast Erie, an elderly woman with a beaming smile said that she had intended to vote for me until I used “poor judgment” by “writing a letter to the editor” about my encounter with Bush. My effort to explain the difference between a letter to the editor and a news story failed, and I was left to wonder why I was the one with “poor judgment” when it was the former president who had pinched me.

I told the voter that I’m a journalist who believes in reporting the truth, and I’d apply the same standard for vetting things if I were elected to City Council. But I had already lost her

After spending decades as a journalist, newly elected City Council member Liz Allen carries a penchant for inquiry into her new office.

vote.

One way to determine facts is to ask questions, and I asked a lot of them at council’s three budget sessions. Kathy Schaaf, also newly elected to council, and I were invited to the budget meetings as a courtesy. Word spread about my inquisitiveness.

But I had read the proposed budget cover-to-cover, made lots of notes and felt compelled to educate myself. Why had the amusement tax declined from \$367,613 in 2015 to a projected \$316,100 in 2018? Why was revenue from parking fines expected to increase from \$843,500 in the 2017 budget to \$874,831 in the new year? How does the Office of Police Civilians use its \$254,215 in overtime? What kind of wellness program does the city offer to hold down healthcare costs? And why does one councilman insist on referring to police officers and firefighters as “policemen” and “firemen?”

OK, that last question wasn’t budget-related, but journalists have used gender-neutral terms to refer to occupations for years. It’s spelled out in our “Bible,” the Associated Press Stylebook. In fact, I first advocated for inclusive language in 1972, when I served as the student representative on an all-male search committee for a new journalism school dean. Every time a male professor said the committee was looking for “a man” with a certain pedigree, I’d quietly interject, “or woman.”

My protests fell on deaf ears; it would be 16 years until a woman was named dean of my alma mater. But I can’t complain about the guy who got the job in 1972 – George Reedy, former press secretary to Lyndon Johnson and author of *The Twilight of the Presidency*.

Reedy had been a reporter for UPI before he went to work for LBJ. If Reedy were still alive (he would have turned 100 this year), I would have loved to pick his brain about his transition from journalism to politics, then his return to journalism to finish out his career.

I’m certain he would encourage me

to keep using my journalism skills to ask questions at City Hall. It’s hard to turn off the interrogative sentences when you’ve been doing it since age 18, which is when I began my first reporting job, at the former Morning News.

It was May 1972 and I had started my summer internship at the old Times Publishing Co. building at East 12th and French streets. A few weeks later, the newspaper would move to its current location at 205 W. 12th St., but I got to launch my career in a setting straight out of the *Front Page*, with clanging teletypes, ringing phones, yelling reporters, chain-smoking editors and papers flying off the hot-lead press.

After I made my first-ever set of “police checks” to scrounge up news from the tri-state area, I banged out a brief about a man who had been arrested with gun.

I yanked the copy paper out of the typewriter roller and took my story up to the city editor. Peering over his glasses, he handed the story back and barked: “Was it a handgun or a rifle?”

With a red face, I went back to the desk, called the police station and asked about the type of gun. Handgun, the police officer told me.

I did a rewrite, said that the suspect had been arrested with a handgun and trotted my story back to the city desk.

The city editor frowned, then demanded to know: “What kind of handgun? Was it a .38? A .45?”

Dejected, I picked up the phone and called the police officer again.

I learned a valuable lesson that night. Never be afraid to ask questions, even if you have to repeat them or rephrase them, until you nail down the details.

I don’t remember the diameter of the gun from that long-ago crime, but I hope to bring a high caliber of questions to my new job on City Council. And if I’m not the oldest first-time council member, let me know. I’m happy to stand corrected.

*Liz Allen retired from the Erie Times-News after nearly 32 years as a reporter, editor and columnist. You can follow her rookie adventures on City Council in the Erie Reader.*

## Erie At Large

Meet Chris Rieger, Democrat for Congress



**Chris Rieger, a 33 year-old lawyer from south Butler County, believes his youth will be an asset — not a hindrance — as he campaigns for a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives.**

serve what's left of the Democratic agenda in Washington to the benefit of the rather homogenous and sprawling 3rd Congressional District, which includes western Erie County, as well as parts of Armstrong, Butler, Clarion, Crawford, Lawrence, and Mercer counties.

Rieger ran unsuccessfully for a seat in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives in 2012. He's been active with groups advocating for the preservation and expansion of the Affordable Care Act, as well as Fair District PA, which lobbies to dismantle the gerrymandered political districting in the Commonwealth that has turned PA-3 into a bastion of white conservatism — nearly 95 percent of the electorate in this district is white and less than 5 percent of voters are black or Hispanic.

We met when Rieger came to town for a regularly scheduled meeting of the Erie chapter of Keystone Progress, a grassroots organization that supports myriad progressive issues across Pennsylvania. We talked about his motivations, his priorities, and his plan to unseat a four-term conservative incumbent in the era of Trump.

**Jim Wertz:** Let's talk a little bit about how your work has affected your decision to run for the 3rd Congressional District.

**Chris Rieger:** When I ran for public office, for State House, against Daryl Metcalfe last year in south Butler County, I wanted to find a way to get more involved in my community, so it was a very local level

of thinking at the time, which is why I ran for a smaller office.

The morning after the election, I didn't wake up and say "okay, well that was great, so now I'm going to go up against the car salesman from Butler." That thought didn't register, but based on what happened on November 8th of last year, I knew I wanted to stay visible and stay involved, however I could.

I got a call from a friend of mine down in north Allegheny County who said "we need speakers for Fair District PA," which led into me doing presentations here and there throughout Butler and Lawrence counties, for fair districts, because the gerrymandering issue is big with me as well. This is around the time the healthcare issue really took off, based on the Affordable Health Care Act vote last May. We put on a couple of in-person town halls that I moderated — one was in Cranberry Township, one was in New Castle. So, when I've been doing my stump speech, I've been talking about how I've now conducted more in-person town halls in the last five months in front of Representative Kelly's constituents than Representative Kelly has in the last six years.

**JW:** Tell me about the composition of that team, and how that's helping you to mobilize here in the early stages of the campaign.

**CR:** We're basically organized by regions, largely throughout the 3rd, so many of them were involved in my State House campaign last year. The majority of them actually are not part of any official Democratic party apparatus. Some are, obviously — the Butler County committee, which I'm very close with, is working with me down my way. But I'm working with

Lawrence County Action in New Castle, the Democratic Women of Mercer County has a number of activists who are getting behind our campaign, and of course, Keystone Progress Erie is going to be enormous in our efforts up in Erie because this is the highest concentration of voters that we want to get out. I think the next stage in the game is to get all these groups coalescing and working together. I think that's the next challenge, right when the primary season kicks off.

**JW:** You're a young guy. You're a smart guy, but you're a young guy. You've got a youthful appearance to you.

**CR:** I'm older than I look [laughs].

**JW:** But the fact remains that Dan Lavalley has mounted the only significant challenge to Mike Kelly in 2014, and one of the biggest hurdles he faced was his age, and the lack of political experience, and he was hammered for that, in the Erie Times News in particular, in their endorsement of Mike Kelly.

**CR:** I met Dan a few times last year — I think he ran a fantastic campaign, and I think what he had going against him wasn't his youth at all; what he had going against him was a matter of timing. I think 2014 was a rough year for Democrats up and down the ballot nationwide, and for Pennsylvania, minus [Governor] Tom Wolf. But when people meet me for the first time, they're genuinely excited that we have a new, fresh young face coming in. I'd like to think I'm bringing a youthful energy to the district. But I still think my experience in the private sector, my experience in my private practice, and my work with the kind of clientele I have, and throughout my volunteer work, gives me a number

By: Jim Wertz

In the wake of the 2016 presidential elections, Democrats, in particular, focused their attention toward the 2018 midterm elections. Their hope: to make 2018 a change year on par with the three most recent midterm elections.

In 2006, Democrats gained 31 seats in the House and six seats in the Senate. Four years later, Republicans picked up 63 seats in the House and took back the six Senatorial seats lost in 2006; and in 2014, Republicans added 13 more seats in House and nine more seats in the Senate.

These swings are largely seen as electoral backlash toward the party which holds, and the President who resides in, the White House. Historically, since World War II, the

party in power in the executive branch loses 25 seats, on average, in the House of Representatives as a result of Congressional midterm elections, according to analysis by Vox Media. In fact, the president's party has lost Congressional seats in 16 of the last 18 midterm elections.

Pennsylvania Democrats would like to see this trend continue in 2018 as they search for a candidate that is both wonkish and charismatic enough to take on Republican Representative Mike Kelly, who was first elected to Congress in the change wave in 2010 unseating then Congresswoman Kathy Dahlkemper.

Chris Rieger hopes to be that candidate. He's a 33-year old lawyer from south Butler County hoping he can convince voters that he can pre-

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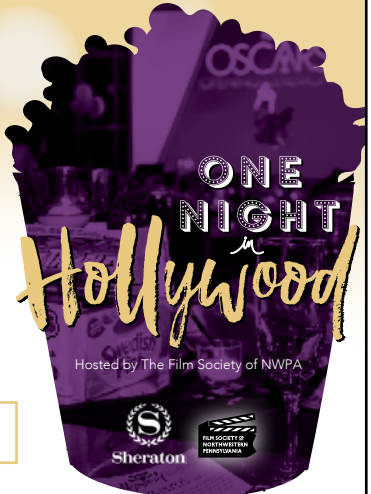
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of great life experiences and great relationships that can help me with this race.

**JW:** This seat has historically been controlled by Erie County politicians, Republican or Democrat, up until Mike Kelly. Erie voters are clamoring for a candidate from a northern part of the district to run. Your experience is primarily in the southern part of the district and you live at the southern point of the district. What's your answer to Erie voters, Erie Democrats in particular, but Democrats and Republicans who are looking for someone to represent the needs and the challenges of Erie in Washington?

**CR:** My answer to the people of Erie, is that we're trying to bring a positive, progressive, economic message to the 3rd district. I think that's a message that still resonates with voters in the city of Erie, who

feel like their voices have been shut out for a while because of both gerrymandering and the fact that they feel that their representatives, particularly Mike Kelly and Glenn Thompson, aren't as successful as they need to be. If you look at Erie County, Barack Obama won Erie County by about 16 or 17 points in 2012, Trump of course won it by two; it was a 10,000 vote swing. Those are primarily Democrats, the Obama coalition Democrats. So, I think the question our campaign, and many campaigns are trying to answer is "how do you win them back?" I think you win them back with those grassroots economic issues, things like a living wage, healthcare for every American, and getting private money out of politics, which is an idea even many independents and Republicans can get behind. We're trying

to bring that message everywhere.

**JW:** One of the challenges Dan Lavalley faced was that 3 out of 4 voters had no idea who he was, according to a Mercyhurst University poll in October of 2014. You've got

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**"I'm not going to let the voters forget about the healthcare vote last May. I think it was immoral. The Congressional Budget Office's estimates were very clear about what that bill would have done to people in PA-3 as well as nationwide."**

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a few months to make that up, and you're likely — I think — to have a Democratic challenger in the primary.

**CR:** Well that's one reason

we announced when we did. We announced comparatively early. We announced back in the third week of August, and we were able to build a grassroots organization immediately, like I said, with all of these groups we've reached out to. And one thing I've been saying is, "Are we going to outspend Mike Kelly?" Of course not, it would be naive to think that. But we are going to outwork him.

**JW:** We talked about your broader issues, but if you had to carry a single drumbeat through this election, what's it going to be?

**CR:** I'm not going to let the voters forget about the healthcare vote last May. I think it was immoral. The Congressional Budget Office's estimates were very clear about what that bill would have done to people in PA-3 as well as nationwide. And

we're not letting people forget about that. The issue of healthcare is not going away. The Affordable Care Act is far from perfect as most people know — and everyone wants to make it better, but the issue is how do we make it better? So that started the drumbeat I think, with a lot of these groups I've been discussing with, that's what got us to organize the healthcare town hall. And again, it's an issue that's personal to me, based on the people I represent as legal counsel. So that, and income inequality, I think are issues that resonate with many Americans, because they're low-level, local issues. They're national issues, but they affect everyone individually.

*Jim Wertz can be reached at [jWertz@ErieReader.com](mailto:jWertz@ErieReader.com), and you can follow him on Twitter [@jim\\_wertz](https://twitter.com/jim_wertz).*

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# Coming Full Circle

Legacy, community, and pop-culture theology at the Erie Philharmonic



MAITHAM BASHA-AGHA

By: Jim Wertz

Walking into the stage door of the Warner Theatre is an exhilarating experience, whether the stage is empty and dark or whether stagehands and roadies are bustling under the lights, setting the stage for one of the many rock and roll bands that have come and gone or a traveling Broadway production that utilizes all of the stage at the soon-to-be 87-year old movie house-turned-performing arts theater.

There's an energy that permeates the theater anytime, curtain down or up, footlights dark or aflame. But there's a particular energy that permeates the Warner stage when it's filled with 60 professional musicians, many of whom travel to Erie to join their local peers in the Erie Philharmonic. Musicians in rehearsal have a particular anxious ease to them as each note they play bounces back at them from the distant walls of the empty house. It's a sound they can appreciate at dress rehearsal, but it's a

sound they loathe on performance night.

Erie Philharmonic Executive Director and Erie Reader "40 Under 40" alum Steve Weiser understands this. "I know what it's like to be a musician and look out to see that the hall is only half full of people and I don't want that feeling to pass on to any other musician," says Weiser. "I take it personally."

Weiser's been leading the business end of the 104-year old orchestra since 2015. Prior to that he played percussion for both the Erie Chamber Orchestra and the Erie Philharmonic. As a musician who moved into the management of a large organization, he appreciates the tension that exists between an organization which literally performs its basic function hoping that seats will be filled and the

expectation that an organization like the Philharmonic will continue to build an audience as it meets its mission and builds its brand.

For the past two years, Weiser and the staff of the Erie Philharmonic have re-tuned the mission and work of the orchestra by engaging in community outreach and programming world class performances, which has led to record ticket sales and na-

tional recognition for the orchestra and the organization.

"The Philharmonic has always engaged in various forms of outreach," says local attorney W. John Knox, who has been involved with the Erie Philharmonic for more than 30 years and now serves as president of the organization's board of directors. "However, the outreach that's being done now is much broader, much more robust, and in many ways has become the focus of the organization on par with giving incredible symphonic and pops concerts. It's much more involved with the community than it ever has been."

Among its myriad community outreach projects, the Philharmonic offers master classes for young musical standouts to work with artists like renowned pianist Emanuel Ax and Broadway star Lisa Vroman, among others. But Phil outreach isn't just focused solely on those hoping to one day accompany such virtuosos. It's more often about introducing new audiences to orchestral music and enriching the lives of those in a community that is

too often recognized for the negative effects of economic downturn and the trials of postmodern life.

That's why the Phil orchestra in 2017 played free youth concerts for nearly 6,000 Erie County elementary and middle school students, offering free busing to all public schools in the city of Erie. Those concerts are the culmination of an academic curriculum designed by Weiser & Co. and delivered to area music teachers at the beginning of the school year so that, by the time these students arrive at the Warner Theatre, they know the instruments that comprise the orchestra, they've built an appreciation for the music they will hear and, perhaps most importantly, they are offered ways to connect the musical performance they hear to some other aspect of their life. The curriculum is rooted in common core standards and includes pre-test and post-test materials as well as interdisciplinary lesson plans and listening guides.

When the kids aren't coming to the Phil, the Phil goes to them with visiting artist



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

**[top left] The Erie Philharmonic ably fills the Warner Theatre with sound; under the directorship of Steve Weiser they have also put a concerted effort into filling the seats via community outreach and engagement. [bottom right] A view from the Warner Theatre balcony reveals the venue's ornate detail and splendor.**



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

[top left] Music director Daniel Meyer has been instrumental in bringing world-class talent to Erie, such as renowned pianist Emmanuel Ax [top right] for a four-day residency last March. [bottom right] Executive Director of the Erie Philharmonic Steve Weiser, formerly a percussionist with the orchestra, demonstrates a Puerto Rican guiro for elementary school students at Early Connections, Inc.

programs and long-term residencies in community centers across the city. Between August 2017 and February 2018, teaching artist Melany Myers will visit classrooms at the Early Connections Learning Center more than 60 times fostering musical skills and appreciation in preschool students, which research has shown to impact cognitive development in other areas, including speech and reading as children prepare to enter kindergarten.

"The only caveat of bringing in Emanuel Ax for five days was basically that we had to abuse him," Weiser quips. "We had to show him that if he was going to come to Erie for no money, that we were going to effectively utilize his time."

Ax is one of the most sought-after and renowned pianists in the world. He came to Erie for a week last March for no fee as part of a community outreach program that ultimately led to the Philharmonic's first symphonic sell-out in 26 years and a \$100,000 gift from Erie Insurance Chairman Tom Hagen.

Less than an hour after arriving in Erie, Ax found himself inside Emerson Gridley Elementary School, which wasn't necessarily a forgiving environment for a classical pianist. He played there for 200 kids in a wrestling gym on an upright piano that had just been donated to the school

by the Erie Phil the month before.

"Here you have a living legend playing on a crappy upright piano to a gym full of kids," Weiser remembers. "He had a bandage on his face because he had cut himself shaving, he had the flu, and his nose was running. He goes to play something to get everyone's attention in a room full of mostly minority students, who definitely have no idea who he is, and he asks, 'Who has a birthday today?' It instantly disarmed the crowd. Then he plays variations of 'happy birthday' to get everyone involved. They were hooked. Then he went into a Mozart variation. When the class was over he came off stage and asked, 'Do you think that was okay?'"

The Ax tour of Erie schools last March, Lisa Vroman's equally well-received visit this fall, and Grammy Award-winning guitarist Sharon Isbin's arrival later this spring are the outgrowth of a larger success matrix that Weiser and his team have forged during his tenure as executive director.

"Steve and his staff don't hesitate to think 'why don't we ask the best piano player in the world to come to Erie and see if he will do it for free?'" says Knox. "It's these almost crazy 'you're too big for your britches' ideas that have really panned out. And I think it works because a lot of these

big name guest artists get a sense of the outreach efforts and what is trying to be done here."

And that "crappy upright piano" that Emanuel Ax played — crappy only in comparison to the Bösendorfer or Steinway Ax might be accustomed to — was donated to Emerson Gridley as part of a piano donation program that brought refurbished pianos into public schools and community centers across the city of Erie and to any other organization that needed one. The program was so successful that, having met its mission to serve the schools, it has expanded the program to deliver donated pianos to individuals, mostly elementary and middle school-aged children who take piano lessons but can't necessarily afford to have a piano at home.

Two years ago, Wattsburg Elementary fifth grader Taylor Balogh received an electronic keyboard as a gift from her grandfather. It was the impetus for her to take piano lessons from her school's music teacher, Leslie Lopez. But Taylor's keyboard didn't have the range of a traditional piano.

"Taylor had just started to use the foot pedals at her lessons, but she didn't have that to practice on at home," recalls Taylor's mom, Sarah. "So I started to look for pianos, but it wasn't really in our future financially to buy a piano. Then Taylor's teacher sent me

an email about the piano program at the Erie Phil."

Sarah says she emailed Weiser about the piano donation program and information about Taylor's lessons. Less than two hours later he replied and asked what size piano she had room for. "By the end of the day," she says, "I had to go home and tell my husband we were getting a piano and we needed to start making space for it."

The piano donation program covers the cost of delivery and the first tuning of the piano as well as a guide that tells the now owners how to properly care for their new old piano.

"In an ideal world, these kids will fall in love with the piano and even if they don't go into a career in music lat-

er in life, music will always be a part of their lives," says Weiser. "Whether or not they become a huge benefactor, a board member, a volunteer, a ticket buyer or a subscriber, you guarantee that music will always be a part of their life."

"It's kind of like the line from *Terminator 2*," he chuckles. "'There's no fate but what you make.' If we want an audience, why aren't we building it ourselves? If we give a kid a piano, we're building that audience. One way or another a kid in that family will always remember what you did."

That pop-culture theology infuses much of what's being done at the Philharmonic these days. Weiser is never short on references to *Star Wars* or comic books to undergird his professional philosophy or the direction of his organization. It's a common trait for those of us of a certain age and it helps to explain some of the bravado that



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Knox alluded to when talking about the chutzpah it takes to pick up the phone and ask the world's best musicians to travel to a town they've likely never heard of to feed the cultural appetites of a diverse cross-section of stakeholders.

"It used to be said that 'I'm going to the Philharmonic' as if it was some lofty Victorian high culture event to go to," Knox remembers. "Steve has, in essence, flipped that script and taken it to the people. The Philharmonic has literally gone to the streets on a number of occasions with free concerts and other events that are so much more connected to the community. We've broadened the base without cheapening the product."

Despite his success, Weiser humbly references his accomplishments — the broadening of the Philharmonic base, ongoing community impact pro-

grams that are recognized by the National Endowment for the Arts, and the cavalcade of stars that have come to Erie for the benefit of ticket holders as well as the community at large — and notes that although he produces most of the organization's marketing and social media content, redesigned the Phil website, developed a smartphone app, and works in a seemingly tireless cycle of promotion and production, it is in fact the team that surrounds him that keeps him honest about his work and the future of the Phil.

"I remember at the beginning someone in the orchestra saying, 'Oh, you're going to be hands on.' Well, I don't know how to not be that way. In the same way that being a musician with the orchestra first meant that this had always been a passion of mine," he says.

"Also having a staff around you that is as crazy as you are, but is also not afraid to be 'no' men. I don't want 'yes' men. When George Lucas made *Star Wars* episodes 4-6, he had Steven Spielberg over his shoulder saying, 'Come on, you can't do that because...' But when he did episodes 1-3, no one would tell him he couldn't or he shouldn't. You don't want to be in that position."

According to Knox, the Philharmonic staff is "kind of this street gang of musical people who really love their job. It's a unique blend and it really works. Steve and his staff do everything together. They go out together, they're friends. It really has become this project that they all enjoy working on instead of a job that they don't want to do anymore at 5 o'clock."

It's a closed circle philosophy that prior Phil staff didn't nec-

essarily share. But by the time Weiser and company took the reigns, the organization was in need of a distinct mission that could be articulated and carried out. That's translated to the work being done in and out of the office as well as the music being performed with music director Daniel Meyer at the baton.

"Before it was as good as any similar orchestra doing similar things," Knox says. "Now, it's really become quite remarkable."

The night before the Erie Philharmonic Christmas Concert, I met Steve Weiser in the semi-lit lobby of the Warner Theater to discuss the recent past and future of the Erie Philharmonic. We sat and talked at a table situated amid the darkened ornamentation of the historic landmark discussing what might come next, the sounds of the orchestra in

dress rehearsal echoing with pleasant eeriness throughout the cavernous halls. That night the rehearsal included the General McLane High School vocal ensemble, which had been a part of a master class offered by Lisa Vroman just weeks before. The students were returning the Phil's favor by participating in this year's holiday show. As they rehearsed their songs, Weiser told me about their experience with Vroman and the work she had done with these students.

"It's kind of come full circle," I said in reply.

He smiled.

"It always comes full circle," he said. "Luke always meets his father."

*Jim Wertz can be reached at [jWertz@ErieReader.com](mailto:jWertz@ErieReader.com), and you can follow him on Twitter @jim\_wertz.*

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Photo Credit: A local student tie-dyes at Erie Arts & Culture's booth during JUMP! Back to School Expo 2016

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The New Year is the perfect time to make fascinating new friends.





By: Ellen Paquette

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# Spotlight on Erie

January 3 – 16, 2018

**Saturday, Jan. 6**

## Jam Out with Digging Roots Band



Yes, we are all shell-shocked here in Erie from our humble town turning into The Wall, the mythical, frozen border in *Game of Thrones* responsible for (mostly) keeping the white walkers out. So, no snow talk. Instead, this January we're going to rediscover that music has the power to warm the heart and soul — and whatever it can't warm, some whiskey will. Start your defrost cycle at the Kings Rook Club as Digging Roots Band with Peddlers Moon heat up the stage.

Digging Roots frontman Toby Lindberg explained that the band came together in 2012 through a shared love of music, particularly American roots sounds. While they have been known to genre-hop, the outfit remains true to its Delta blues and jam roots. Expect to hear hints of rock, soul, R&B and gospel in their set.

In keeping with the jam band theme, Lindberg mentioned his band will incorporate a tribute to the Allman Brothers Band. They will also sneak in songs from their albums *Muddy Water* and *Bring it Home*.

Perhaps most significantly at this early 2018 gig, they also aim to bring their unifying sentiments to Erie. The band firmly upholds the belief that music brings everyone together. It's something that transcends age, race, geographical location and generations. "Music just makes everyone feel great and can be therapeutic," said Lindberg.

If there is anything that can start off January in the right way, it's a stellar show from Western New York neighbors at the Kings Rook Club. So, come together and hear some great tunes. — Miriam Lamey

10 p.m. // 1921 Peach St // (814) 456-6439 // memberships available

**Friday, Jan. 12**

## Gardell Good'ens: a TV Star with Street Cred



Although he's best known as the titular "Mike" alongside mega-star Melissa McCarthy from the CBS sitcom *Mike & Molly*, comedian Billy Gardell is an incredibly hardworking comedian with deep roots in western Pennsylvania. Born in Swissvale, just outside of Pittsburgh, Gardell lived around the city until his family moved to Florida while he was in high school. His Steel City origins are immediately apparent when you try to place Gardell's subtly biting yinzer accent. In Florida he quickly broke into comedy, starting when he was 17. Gardell returned to the Keystone State every summer, landing his first Pittsburgh gig in Monroeville at an Al Monzo-run comedy club in the basement of the Parkvale Bank Building.

He's been on the road ever since. Working clubs large and small, the fast-talking, well-seasoned professional has honed his talents to a razor's edge. He respects the lifestyle of a working comedian and openly acknowledges how fortunate he's been in his career. In 2014 he presented a comedy special named for what he and his fellow traveling performers refer to themselves as: *Road Dogs*.

If you're having any trouble placing Gardell from television, try picturing him in police uniform. Between multiple appearances on *My Name is Earl*, and 127 episodes of the aforementioned *Mike & Molly*, portraying a lawman on both (not to mention a memorable scene as a security guard in *Bad Santa*), Gardell is certainly no stranger to uniform.

His quick wit and snarky observations will quickly get you howling

whether you recognize him or not. Decades worth of experience will insure that each of these performances will be a riotous good time. — Nick Warren

Friday and Saturday 6:45 and 9:30 p.m. // 1402 State St. // \$30 // (814) 461-0911 // jrslastlaugh.com

**Friday, Jan. 12**

## Prog Forces Reawaken at the Rook



There'll be a heartwarming around-the-holidays reunion — plus a sweet sonic revival, and an Erie all-stars' public reveal of sorts, too — come mid-January at the King's Rook Club.

On Friday, Jan. 12, club members are invited to a first-(and-second)-time-ever get-down with two jamtastic supergroups — Cauliflower Ninja and the Paulsabilities — for FREE.

Headliner Cauliflower Ninja is comprised (as those in the know may have already guessed, or at least suspected) of current and former members of Cleveland-based prog-jam powerhouse Broccoli Samurai. Cauliflower Ninja is a just-for-kicks reformation of the band's 2013-14 era lineup, which Broccoli fans will agree (and newcomers will see) was one helluva tasty period for one of the region's favorite live performing acts.

And ah, the Paulsabilities: Performing live on a public stage for only the second time ever, they're an all-star collection of some of Erie's finest live musicians, led by renowned local guitarist Paul Schillinger (Shotgun Jubilee) and joined by Justin Tapper and Chris Head of The LEC and Joe Cieslack (Eric Brewer & Friends, Sule Tahirovic).

Whoa.

With all that, there's surely bound

to be some real-deal sound-sorcery kickin' about.

And did we mention it's free?

Happy holidays, indeed. — Ryan Smith

10 p.m. // 1921 Peach St. // facebook.com/kingsrookclub

**Saturday, Jan. 13**

## Homeless Gospel Choir a Glove for Sore Thumbs



Take a step through the front doors of Basement Transmissions at any given show and you may notice more than a few sore thumbs sticking out from the crowd. Whether it's in the way they're dressed, the color of their hair, or simply the fact that they're in an intimate setting witnessing loud obnoxious music up close and personal while mainstream entertainment suggests that they spend their time in the club or bar scenes, each person at BT has their own reason why being "normal" doesn't cut it for them.

Pittsburgh based folk-punkers The Homeless Gospel Choir address the unifying feeling of going against the grain that is felt by everyone who is part of any underground music scene in their latest album *Normal*. The anthemic centerpiece and title track of the album couldn't portray that message any clearer with the lyrics: "You're never gonna be normal, because you're a punk." The statement isn't meant as an insult, but rather a term of endearment. The song lets the listener know that outcasts and oddballs aren't shunned, but instead welcomed in this scene, because it's not just made for them, but also by them.

Playing alongside The Homeless Gospel Choir are fellow Pittsburgh punkers Lawn Care, who despite having a horns section insist that they aren't a ska band. Cleveland punks Two Hand Fools are the only non-Pa. band on the bill. Indie dream-pop collective

# CALENDAR

Cult Classics, punk rockers Wasted Info, and the acoustic punk stylings of Britches comprise the Erie-based opening acts. — Tommy Shannon

6:30 p.m. // 145 W. 11th St // \$10 advance, \$12 doors // [thehomelessgospelchoir.com](http://thehomelessgospelchoir.com)

## Tuesday, Jan. 16

### Stamp on downtown for 'Stomp' at the Warner



When *Stomp* first premiered on stages in 1991, it created a sensation. The eight-member ensemble performed shows unlike anything ever seen before, with percussive "songs" played out using ordinary household items like brooms, trash cans,

matchboxes and Zippo lighters. These were fused with innovative, imaginative choreography. Since then, the UK-based show has reached iconic, instantly recognizable status worldwide. It was featured in the 2012 London Olympics closing ceremony, and has played continuously in London's West End for the last 15 years, garnering handfuls of major awards along the way.

Now it is pulsing its way into the renovation-enhanced Warner Theatre as part of the Broadway in Erie series, giving music lovers in this small city something worth braving the frosty January temperatures and heading downtown for. This ensemble is part of the latest North American tour, and while the thumps, scrapes and brushing are as lively and unchanged as ever, the show boasts two brand new routines that add even more unexpected props into the mix.

Theatergoers who cannot make the Tuesday night performance will have a second opportunity to catch the one-hour and forty-five minute show on Wednesday. *Stomp* provides an excellent opportunity for parents who want to infuse a little culture into their kids' lives, as the envelope-pushing yet accessible act runs much briefer than most Broadway shows (by

comparison, *Les Miserables* clocks in at almost three hours), yet promises to hold the entire audience rapt with technically impressive beats, sounds, and motions — all of which seem impossibly cool. — Cara Suppa

7:30 p.m. both Tuesday and Wednesday // 811 State Street // \$43.75-53.75 // [erieevents.com/events/stomp](http://erieevents.com/events/stomp)

## Tuesday, Jan. 16

### Save the Date, Save the Viaduct



Cyclists and pedestrians who frequent the McBride Viaduct have walked the walk, now it's time to talk the talk for those who would prevent its planned demolition.

The Jefferson Educational Soci-

ety will host a neutrally-moderated Viaduct Town Hall to discuss the planning, cost, and safety issues surrounding the structure's removal. The project is currently slated to begin in late winter or early spring and conclude this fall. When completed, East Avenue will be sealed off with fenced cul de sacs on either side of the CSX Railroad Lines, which would force foot and bike traffic to redirect onto the bustling Bayfront Connector (although sidewalk/accessibility improvements are planned to that end). This would pose a major inconvenience to the East Side communities affected.

ErieCPR: Connect+Respect President Adam Trott, Vice President Beary Clark, Spokesperson Micheal Keys, NAACP President Gary Horton, and Rev. Charles Mock of the African-American-Concerned-Clergy echo their community's conviction to save the bridge and hope to convince PennDOT and City of Erie leadership of the viaduct's continuing viability. They invite you to join the conversation, because healthy dialogue between government and the governed is the path democracy ought to walk. — Matt Swansperger

6 to 8 p.m. // 3207 State St. // free

## MUSIC

### Cult Classics

Jan. 3 — 8:30 p.m. to 2 a.m.  
Scotty's Martini Lounge, 301 German St. [facebook.com](http://facebook.com)

### Deven Shah

Jan. 5 — noon  
WQLN Studios, 8425 Peach St. [wqln.org](http://wqln.org)

### Electric Orange Peel

Jan. 5 — 8 p.m. to 2 a.m.  
Kings Rook Club, 1921 Peach St. [facebook.com/kingsrookclub](http://facebook.com/kingsrookclub)

### Hydrashock

Jan. 5 — 10 p.m. to midnight  
Sherlocks, 508 State St. [facebook.com](http://facebook.com)

### Diggin' Roots Band and Peddler's Moon

Jan. 6 — 10 p.m. to 2 a.m.  
Kings Rook Club, 1921 Peach St. [facebook.com/kingsrookclub](http://facebook.com/kingsrookclub)

### Daytona Beach 2000

Jan. 6 — 10 p.m. to 2 a.m.  
Sherlocks, 508 State St. [facebook.com](http://facebook.com)

### Uncharted Course

Jan. 7 — 1 to 4 p.m.  
Arundel Cellars & Brewing Co., 11727 E. Main Rd.

[arundelcellars.com](http://arundelcellars.com).

### Electric Sensi and Wave Trails

Jan. 12 — 9:30 p.m. to 1 a.m.  
Scotty's Martini Lounge, 301 German St. [facebook.com](http://facebook.com)

### Cauliflower Ninja and The Paulsabilities

Jan. 12 — 10 p.m. to midnight  
Kings Rook Club, 1921 Peach St. [facebook.com/kingsrookclub](http://facebook.com/kingsrookclub)

### The Homeless Gospel Choir

Jan. 13 — 7 to 11 p.m.  
Basement Transmissions, 145 W. 11th St. [facebook.com](http://facebook.com)

### Wanyama

Jan. 13 — 10 p.m. to 2 a.m.  
Kings Rook Club, 1921 Peach St. [facebook.com/kingsrookclub](http://facebook.com/kingsrookclub)

### Sam Hyman

Jan. 14 — 1 to 4 p.m.  
Arundel Cellars & Brewing Co., 11727 E. Main Rd. [arundelcellars.com](http://arundelcellars.com)

### Just Dance Snowball with Matt Texter and Sandra Schuschu

Jan. 14 — 7 to 11 p.m.  
Scotty's Martini Lounge, 301 German St. [facebook.com](http://facebook.com)

## FOOD & DRINK

### Instant Pot (Electric Pressure Cooker) Demo

Jan. 6 — 1 to 3 p.m.  
Whole Foods Co-op, 1341 W. 26th St. [vegancheers.com](http://vegancheers.com)

### Mind, Body, Beer

Jan. 9, 23 — 7:30 to 8:30 p.m.  
Erie Ale Works, 416 W. 12th St. [eriealeworks.com](http://eriealeworks.com)

### Bare the Barrels

Jan. 12 through Jan. 15  
Various Locations, [lakeeriewinecountry.org](http://lakeeriewinecountry.org)

## FILM

### Aircraft Carriers

Ongoing — 11 a.m. & 2 p.m. & 5 p.m.  
Tom Ridge Environmental Center, 301 Peninsula Dr. [biggreenscreen.com](http://biggreenscreen.com)

### Prehistoric Planet

Ongoing — noon & 3 p.m.  
Tom Ridge Environmental Center, 301 Peninsula Dr. [biggreenscreen.com](http://biggreenscreen.com)

### Flight of the Butterflies

Ongoing — 1 p.m. & 4 p.m.  
Tom Ridge Environmental Center, 301 Peninsula Dr. [biggreenscreen.com](http://biggreenscreen.com)

### Mechanical Heart Film

## and Music Premiere

Jan. 5 -- 5:30 p.m. to midnight  
PACA, 1505 State St. [facebook.com](http://facebook.com)

### Wonder Woman

Jan. 10 — 6 p.m.  
Bourbon Barrel, 1213 State St. [filmsocietyynwpa.org](http://filmsocietyynwpa.org)

### Dunkirk

Jan. 17 — 6 p.m.  
Bourbon Barrel, 1213 State St. [filmsocietyynwpa.org](http://filmsocietyynwpa.org)

## THEATER

### Stomp

Jan. 16, 17 — 7:30 p.m.  
Warner Theatre, 811 State St. [erieevents.com](http://erieevents.com)

## VISUAL ARTS

### Sensing the Unseen

Ongoing through Jan. 3  
The Kada Gallery, 2632 W. 8th St. [kadagallery.com](http://kadagallery.com)

### Tin Plated Dreams: Sculptures by William Brady, Jr.

Ongoing through Jan. 7  
Erie Art Museum, 411 State St. [erieartmuseum.org](http://erieartmuseum.org)

### Rachael Burke, Recent Paintings

Ongoing through Jan. 10

Glass Growers Gallery, 10 E. 5th St. [glassgrowersgallery.com](http://glassgrowersgallery.com)

### Ancient Ink: Mark Perrott

Ongoing through Jan. 28  
Erie Art Museum, 411 State St. [erieartmuseum.org](http://erieartmuseum.org)

### Tattoosday

Ongoing through Jan. 28  
Erie Art Museum, 411 State St. [erieartmuseum.org](http://erieartmuseum.org)

### Annual Faculty, Staff, and Alumni Art Show

Ongoing through Feb. 8  
Penn State Behrend, 4701 College Dr. [sites.psu.edu](http://sites.psu.edu)

### Mark Weber: Animals

Ongoing through Feb. 11  
Erie Art Museum, 411 State St. [erieartmuseum.org](http://erieartmuseum.org)

### Daniel Burke: Callings

Ongoing through Apr. 8  
Erie Art Museum, 411 State St. [erieartmuseum.org](http://erieartmuseum.org)

### Look & See: A Portrait of Wendell Berry

Jan. 12 — 7 to 9 p.m.  
The Vukovich Center for Communication Arts at Allegheny College, 520 N. Main St. [facebook.com](http://facebook.com)

### Second Sundays

Jan. 14 — 2 to 4 p.m.

Erie Art Museum, 411 State St. [erieartmuseum.org](http://erieartmuseum.org)

### Watercolors on Paper

Jan. 15 through Feb. 11 (Reception Jan. 18 — 5 to 7 p.m.)  
Mercyhurst University Cummings Gallery, 501 E. 38th St. [miac.mercyhurst.edu](http://miac.mercyhurst.edu)

## THEATER

### Jesus Christ Superstar

Jan. 12, 13, 19, 20, 26, 27 — 7:30 p.m. & Jan. 14, 21, 28 — 2 p.m.  
The Academy Theatre, 275 Chestnut St. [theacademytheatre.org](http://theacademytheatre.org)

## COMMUNITY

### Great Lakes Shipwreck Exhibition

Ongoing through Apr. 13, 2018  
Tom Ridge Environmental Center, 301 Peninsula Dr. [trepci.org](http://trepci.org)

### DiscoverE - Fish

Jan. 3 — 10:30 to 11:30 a.m.  
Tom Ridge Environmental Center, 301 Peninsula Dr. [trepci.org](http://trepci.org)

### Wellness Wednesdays: Qi Gong Classes

Jan. 3, 10 — 1 to 2 p.m.  
Lincoln Community Center Library, 1255 Manchester



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**SAT 01/06** DIGGIN' ROOTS BAND + PEDDLER'S MOON  
**FRI 01/12** CAULIFLOWER NINJA + THE PAULSABILITIES  
**SAT 01/13** WANYAMA  
**FRI 01/19** LITZ  
**SAT 01/20** PERSONAL BLEND + ELI FLYNN  
**FRI 01/26** PA LINE  
**SAT 01/27** AFTER FUNK

**ERIE OTTERS**




**WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 3**  
Vs. MISSISSAUGA STEELHEADS



Game time: 7:00 PM

**SATURDAY, JANUARY 13**  
Vs. NIAGARA ICEDOGS



Game time: 7:00 PM

**SUNDAY, JANUARY 14**  
Vs. FLINT FIREBIRDS



Game time: 5:00 PM



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Must See Shows

Mechanical Heart premiere and arts education benefit at PACA



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

FRIDAY, JAN. 5TH

Before we get to the plot of Jack Rys' fourth feature film, *Mechanical Heart*, he wants you to know that this premiere is different. The event doubles as an arts education benefit, where Rys hopes all proceeds will go toward future artists who are struggling to find the resources or encouragement to tell their story.

Arts education is an unsurprising cause to attach to the young filmmaker,

who is quick to bring up the role community plays in his work.

"It's about community, it's about performance and it's even about Erie a little bit," says Rys of his new film. "I don't make any secrets of it; the film is set in Erie, shot in Erie, acted by Erieites. That's what the film is about to me. But that could be different for a lot of people."

Outside of this glimpse into his relationship with his hometown, Rys shies from giving away details, a firm belief-

Local filmmaker Jack Rys' latest movie, *Mechanical Heart*, is "set in Erie, shot in Erie, [and] acted by Erieites," like Ken Brundage, seen here.

er that his intent matters far less than how an audience interprets his work. But here's what we know about *Mechanical Heart*: it's the story of a stage actor that has a surgical accident, leaving his voice heavily damaged. During our discussion, Rys cites David Lynch as his biggest influence, but compares the film to Fredrico Fellini's *8½* — another piece about an artist's frustration that tempts Rys to call his latest a black comedy.

Rys is eager to elaborate on his relationship with local collaborators.

"The music and theater communities in Erie are the two communities that I feel most rooted in, and this film is about theater, so I collaborated heavily with the Erie Playhouse," says Rys. "I collaborated heavily with PACA. The theater community is vital to this film. People like Mark Tanenbaum, Charlie Corritore and Richard Davis play caricatures of themselves or people they know. I wanted this to be a film not only about the theater community, but by the theater community."

This relationship with local music also shows in the benefit's opening acts, some of which have contributed to Rys' films; the bill includes Cult Classics, Wave Trails and Elias, If Only while *Mechanical Heart* features a local cast, including Ken Brundage and Luke Weyland among others. The film is not rated, but according to its content warning, "would likely garner an R rating due to heavy language, disturbing images, brief drug use, mild violence and brief nudity."

If these aspects of the benefit weren't already enough to classify it as a "Must-See Show," Rys' pure confidence in his work should certainly do the trick.

"Every film I've done builds upon itself, from my work sophomore year [of high school] to *Mechanical Heart*," says Rys. "There's more concise storytelling, more concise acting, production value...I hope the next film I do is better than this one. It's a credit to yourself as a creator that you're continually growing. I hope I peak when I'm 80. I hope the greatest film I make is my last. I doubt that will be the case, but I think that's the goal." — Aaron Mook

5:30 p.m. to midnight // 1505 State Street // \$8

Rd. erielibrary.org.

**Yoga Class for Kids**

Jan. 3 — 4:45 to 5:45 p.m. & Jan. 10 — 5:45 to 6:45 p.m.

Tumble 84, 4504 W. Ridge Rd. apluseventsforkids.com.

**Erie Otters vs. Mississauga**

Jan. 3 — 7 p.m.

Erie Insurance Arena, 809 French St. erieevents.com.

**Zumbini**

Jan. 5 — 10 to 10:45 a.m.

Lincoln Community Center Library, 1255 Manchester Rd. erielibrary.org.

**Erie BayHawks vs. Raptors**

Jan. 5 — 7 p.m.

Erie Insurance Arena, 809 French St. erieevents.com.

**Erie Warhawks Battle On The Bay**

Jan. 6, 7

Bayfront Convention Center, 1 Sassafras Pier erieevents.com.

**Coloring for Grown-Ups**

Jan. 6, 13, 20, 27 — 10

a.m. to noon

Millcreek Branch Library, 2088 Interchange Rd. erielibrary.org.

**Winter Survival Skills**

Jan. 6 — 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

Asbury Woods Nature Center, 4105 Asbury Rd. asburywoods.org.

**Cross Country Ski Clinics**

Jan. 6, 13 — 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

Asbury Woods Nature Center, 4105 Asbury Rd. asburywoods.org.

**Snowshoe Clinics**

Jan. 6, 13 — 1:30 to 3 p.m.

Asbury Woods Nature Center, 4105 Asbury Rd. asburywoods.org.

**Master Builders**

Jan. 6 — 2 to 3 p.m.

Lincoln Community Center Library, 1255 Manchester Rd. erielibrary.org.

**Erie BayHawks vs. Long Island**

Jan. 6 — 7 p.m.

Erie Insurance Arena, 809 French St. erieevents.com.

**The Power of Human Touch**

Jan. 8 — 10:30 to 11:30 a.m.

LifeWorks Erie, 406 Peach St. lifeworkserie.org.

**Presque Isle History Series**

Jan. 8, 22, 29 — 6 to 7 p.m.

Tom Ridge Environmental Center, 301 Peninsula Dr. trecpi.org.

**Read to a Therapy Dog**

Jan. 9 — 4:30 to 5:30 p.m.

Lincoln Community Center Library, 1255 Manchester Rd. erielibrary.org.

**Gentle Yoga & Meditation: Level 1**

Jan. 9, 16 — 6 to 7:30 p.m.

Edinboro Branch Library, 413 Plum St. erielibrary.org.

**Read to a Therapy Dog**

Jan. 10, 17 — 3:30 to 4:30 p.m.

Edinboro Branch Library, 413 Plum St. erielibrary.org.

**Mind-Behavior Connection with Shireen**

**Hoover, DPT, LECOM**

Jan. 11 — 12:30 to 1:30 p.m.

LifeWorks Erie, 406 Peach St. lifeworkserie.org.

**ScienceGo!**

Jan. 11, 25 — 6 to 7 p.m.

Tom Ridge Environmental Center, 301 Peninsula Dr. trecpi.org.

**The German Cultural Society Monthly Meeting**

Jan. 11 — 7 p.m.

Erie Maennerchor Club, 1607 State St. gcsoe.org.

**Stars and Stripes Gymnastics Invitational**

Jan. 12 through Jan. 15

Bayfront Convention Center, 1 Sassafras Pier erieevents.com.

**P.O2.NY International Basketball Showcase**

Jan. 12, 13, 14

McDowell High School, 3580 W. 38th St. eriesportscommission.com.

**Billy Gardell**

Jan. 12, 13 — 6:45 p.m. & 9:30 p.m.

Jr's Last Laugh, 1402 State

St. jrslastlaugh.com.

**Fireside Talk - Owls**

Jan. 12 — 7 to 8:30 p.m.

Rotary Pavilion at Presque Isle State Park, 1 Peninsula Dr. trecpi.org.

**How to Meditate: It's Not What You Think**

Jan. 13 — 10 a.m. to noon

Plasha Yoga Studio, 3330 W. 26th St. plashayoga.com.

**Coloring for Grown-Ups**

Jan. 13, 20, 27 — 10 a.m. to noon

Iroquois Avenue Branch Library, 4212 Iroquois Ave. erielibrary.org.

**Refreshing Salt Scrubs**

Jan. 13 — 11 a.m. to noon

Lincoln Community Center Library, 1255 Manchester Rd. erielibrary.org.

**Board Game Event: Game On!**

Jan. 13 — 2 to 4 p.m.

Lincoln Community Center Library, 1255 Manchester Rd. erielibrary.org.

**Erie Otters vs. Niagara**

Jan. 13 — 7 p.m.

Erie Insurance Arena, 809 French St. erieevents.com.

**Erie Otters vs. Flint**

Jan. 14 — 5 p.m.

Erie Insurance Arena, 809 French St. erieevents.com.

**Tots in Nature Class: My Many Colored Day**

Jan. 15, 18 — 9 to 10 a.m.

Asbury Woods Nature Center, 4105 Asbury Rd. asburywoods.org.

**Preschool Nature Discovery Class - All the Colors of the Rainbows**

Jan. 15, 18 — 10:30 to 11:30 a.m.

Asbury Woods Nature Center, 4105 Asbury Rd. asburywoods.org.

**DiscoverE - Flurries**

Jan. 17 — 10:30 to 11:30 a.m.

Tom Ridge Environmental Center, 301 Peninsula Dr. trecpi.org.

**5 Ways to a Younger You**

Jan. 17 — 6 to 7 p.m.

Millcreek Municipal Building, 2301 W. 12th St. lifeworkserie.org.

## Film Grain: Dinner and a Movie

Film Society of NWPA's new series off to a "Wonder"-ful start



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**The critically acclaimed superhero flick *Wonder Woman* launches the Film Society of NWPA's new "Film Grain" series, taking place Wednesdays through April at the Bourbon Barrel.**

*Wonder Woman* and continuing into April, the Film Society of NWPA, in conjunction with the Bourbon Barrel, will present a series of nights focused on fabulous food and film. The series, entitled "Film Grain: Dinner and a Movie," represents part of what John C. Lyons, Executive Director of the Film Society of NWPA, views as his organization's commitment to bringing high-quality film to the downtown area, on the heels of the popular "Film at the Erie Art Museum" series.

"We found a new partnership in Derek Smith and the Bourbon Barrel. I've quickly learned the Bourbon Barrel is always looking for new ideas to improve the downtown experience and are very supportive of regional non-profits and causes," Lyons said.

The bar will be transformed for these Wednesdays, with admission entirely limited to filmgoers. There will be a 16-foot screen, a variety of seating options and a buffet-style dinner provided before the showing, which is included with the admission fee.

"Chef Ashley Sayre de Rivas is going to provide us with a tasty meal each night — including vegetarian selections," Lyons enthused. Options for the first viewing include fresh-dough

pizzas, a taco and nacho bar, and popcorn and candy (no movie in this town would be complete without it). Even better, moviegoers will be able to take advantage of Bourbon Barrel's well-stocked bar (not included with admission).

While the film line-up includes critically acclaimed blockbusters like *Wonder Woman* and *Dunkirk*, smaller, quieter films like *Lady Bird* and *The Big Sick* will no doubt draw crowds as well. Lyons remarked about the movie choices, "It's the heavy hitters, from various genres — drama, comedy, action, thriller — with a couple fun ones thrown into the mix." Both he and the lead staff plan on polling attendees for feedback about the entire experience.

The series is sponsored by the *Erie Reader* and WQLN Public Media (as well as the Cultured Pearl for this flagship event). Memberships to the Film Society are available for purchase, and the organization also encourages sponsorships by the many businesses in Erie, as "sponsor groups receive great perks." Lyons and the Film Society hope to see these events grow because, as Lyons remarked, "...a successful series like this definitely plays into our big economic development goals for the region." — Cara Suppa

5:00 p.m. doors, 6:00 p.m. dinner, 7:00 p.m. Intro and Movie // 1213 State Street // [filmsocietynwpa.org/screenings.html](http://filmsocietynwpa.org/screenings.html) // \$12

### WEDNESDAY, JAN. 10

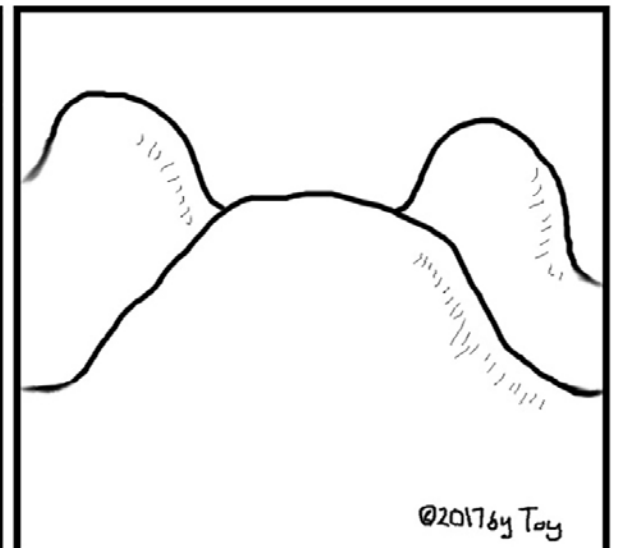
There was a time when the go-to date was simply "dinner and a movie." You went and had dinner and then you headed to your local cinema and caught a flick. It was comfortable and reliable, yet this date night idea is like an old-timey movie that doesn't quite meet "classic" standards. It's a little

boring. It's black, white, and blah. You could start a nap halfway through and not feel you missed much.

Leave it to the Film Society of Northwestern PA to give the tired old "dinner and a movie" concept the reboot it — and the people of Erie — so desperately needed.

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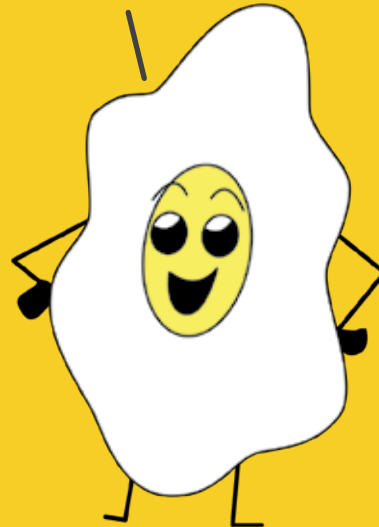
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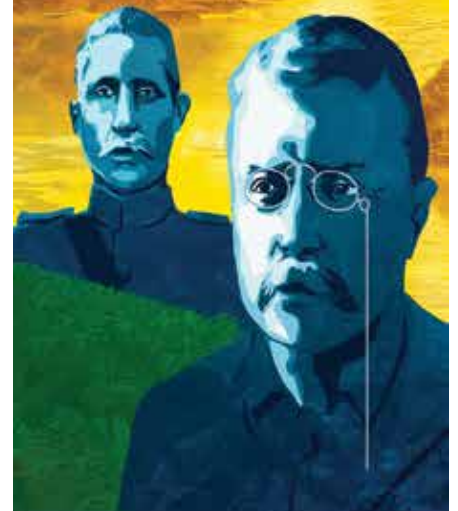
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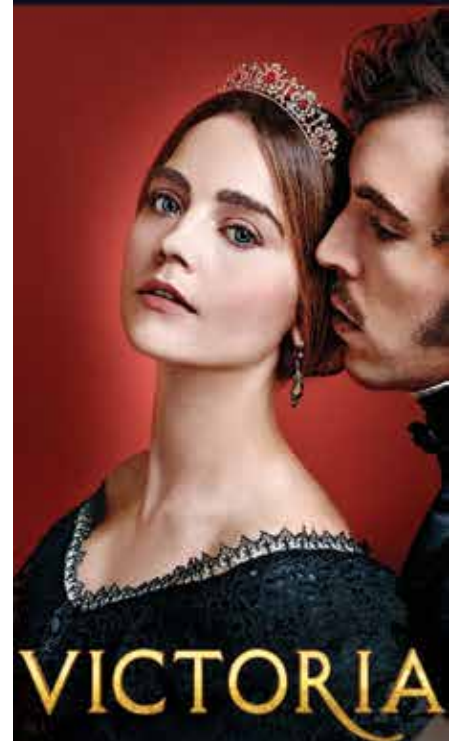


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When a pilot crashes and tells of conflict in the outside world, Diana, an Amazonian warrior in training, leaves home to fight a war, discovering her powers and true destiny.  
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PG-13

**DUNKIRK (2017)**  
JAN 17 | 6PM DINNER, 7PM MOVIE  
Allied soldiers from Belgium, the British Empire, and France are surrounded by the German Army, and evacuated during a fierce battle in World War II.  
*Sponsored by Veterans Miracle Center Erie*

PG-13

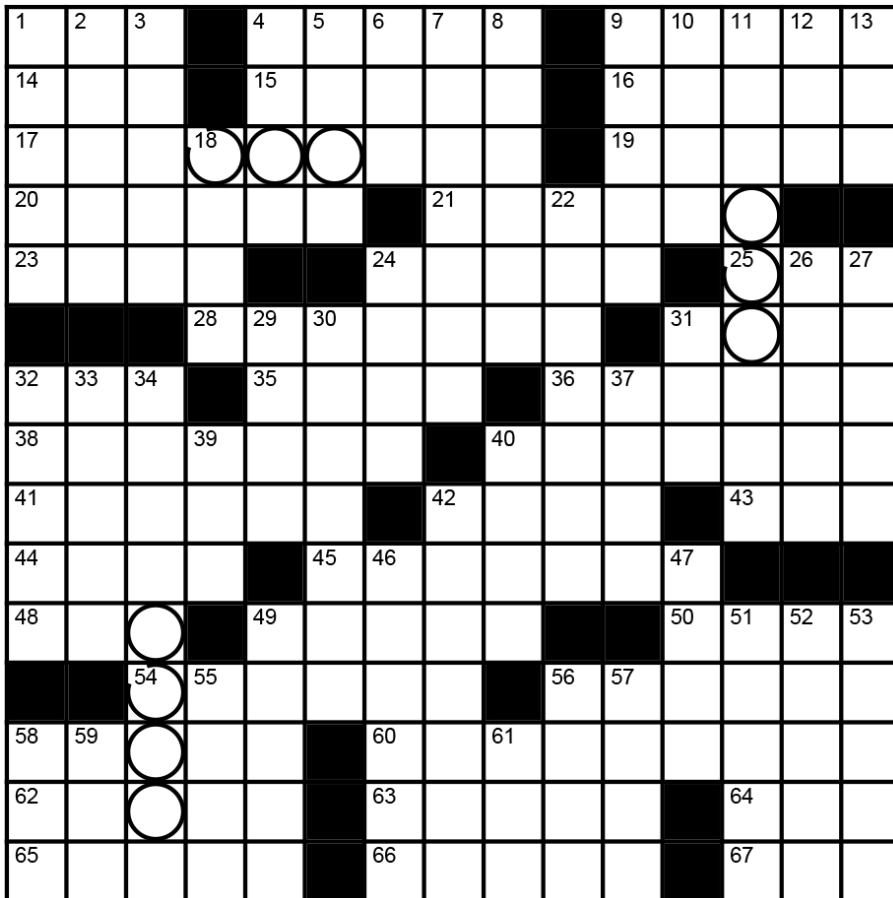
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Answers to last issue's puzzle

E	H	S	J	A	M	S	S	A	F	E	T	Y
Y	E	A	O	L	I	N	A	N	E	M	I	A
E	A	T	N	A	N	A	F	T	R	O	O	P
F	R	E	E	Z	I	N	G	R	A	I	N	
U	S	E	M	E			O	R	U		E	P
L	E	N	S		W	E	D	D	I	N	G	D
					T	H	E	O		I	N	I
					F	R	E	A	K	I	N	G
A	G	A	P	E			D	A	R	N		
M	A	K	I	N	G	L	O	V	E		S	T
C	L	E		D	O	O				B	E	A
					D	R	E	S	S	I	N	G
C	O	B	R	A	S		I	D	E	A		I
A	P	L	O	M	B		N	O	R	M		S
N	E	T	P	A	Y		O	L	D	E		M

# CROSSWORD



## Across

1. Half a school yr.
4. Landmark tech product of 1981
9. 2008 Pixar robot
14. When a plane is due in, for short
15. Jason's wife in mythology
16. Be of use
17. TV slogan famously voiced by James Earl Jones
19. Country music's LeAnn
20. Dangles a carrot in front of
21. Beer can feature
23. Otherwise
24. Bullfighters wave them
25. Byways: Abbr.
28. Wife of John Jr.
31. "Stop procrastinating!"
32. Mo. when Earth Day is celebrated
35. Persians, e.g.
36. Visit a bloodmobile, e.g.
38. Oatmeal topping
40. Engage in an extreme winter sport
41. Golden Arches buy
42. Word with exit or express
43. Laser \_\_\_\_
44. Oral grimaces
45. Like some tour buses
48. Collected works
49. Send over the moon
50. Worker protection org.

54. "Deliciously Different" sloganeer
56. Hundreds
58. Bat one's eyelashes, say
60. Person unrepresented by the words featured in this puzzle's circled letters
62. Counting rhyme start
63. 1970 Led Zeppelin hit "Whole \_\_\_\_ Love"
64. Jeff Lynne's band, for short
65. More than willing
66. Discombobulated
67. "... or \_\_\_\_ gather"

## Down

1. Number of giorni in a week
2. Waters who sang "Am I Blue?"
3. Hurts badly
4. "You're looking at your guy!"
5. "Porgy and \_\_\_\_"
6. Year in Elizabeth I's reign
7. Foreign correspondents?
8. Shade provider
9. Targets of salicylic acid
10. New Balance competitor
11. Traditional Easter entree
12. "Bald-faced" thing
13. Golfer Ernie
18. What many writers write on
22. Locket, often
24. Gear teeth
26. Chicago Bears coaching legend Mike
27. Old New Yorker cartoonist William
29. Diva's solo
30. What your blood may do when you're frightened
31. Part of a modern police database
32. Diane with a camera
33. Negro Leagues legend Satchel
34. Conservatives, politically
37. "Twist, Lick, Dunk" cookie
39. Texting format, for short
40. One getting framed
42. Turndown to the suggestion "We should ..."
46. Bribery of a sort
47. Bear of children's lit
49. Stage direction
51. Total messes
52. "Is anybody listening ...?"
53. "Me, too"
55. Cleveland's lake
56. Cell suffix
57. March Madness org.
58. Something that's charged
59. Michele of "Glee"
61. Sulu and Uhura on "Star Trek": Abbr.

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## MOVIE REVIEWS

*The Shape of Water*: Sally Hawkins Falls in Love with a Fish Monster ... and it is Beautiful!



I've always wondered about the story of the regular workers in some vast, secret facility in movies. What do the janitors on the Death Star think of the Empire? Does a Bond villain's evil lair have a front desk receptionist? Lucky for me, Guillermo del Toro (*Pan's Labyrinth*, *Pacific Rim*) has finally produced a spy film seen through the eyes of blue collar workers in *The Shape of Water*.



TWENTIETH CENTURY FOX

The film is about Elisa Esposito (Sally Hawkins), who works as a cleaning lady in a secret government building during the height of the Cold War. She soon discovers that this facility is housing a captured aquatic creature that the military is studying and performing cruel experiments on. Feeling pity for the creature, she takes it upon herself to rescue him and the two must flee from both American and Russian goons as their feelings for one another begin to grow.

The film takes place in 1963 and does an excellent job lampooning the big Hollywood movies of the era, taking elements from Cold War spy movies as well as monster flicks. There's even a big musical number thrown in there for good measure. But at its heart, the film is really a love story between two lost, lonely souls. Elisa and her friends are all people who (literally and figuratively) have no voice in this world and watching them stick it to the forces of institutional power makes for a story we can all take enjoyment from. — Forest Taylor

*Directed by: Guillermo del Toro // Written by: del Toro and Vanessa Taylor // Starring: Sally Hawkins, Michael Shannon, Octavia Spencer, Richard Jenkins, Michael Stuhlbarg and Doug Jones // 123 minutes*

*A New Hope?: Star Wars: The Last Jedi is an Ambitious Failure*



*Star Wars Episode VIII: The Last Jedi* has proved to be the most polarizing of all the films in the saga. Director Rian Johnson (*Looper*) has attempted to take the series in some new and interesting directions, which have left some fans elated and others furious. In my opinion, though, Johnson has left us with an ambitious, well-meaning mess.



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The film continues the struggle between the heroic Resistance and the evil First Order, but then splits the plot between three separate and barely related stories which give the characters very little time to interact and surprisingly little to do. Poe Dameron (Oscar Isaac), after a thrilling opening action scene, spends the entire film on a ship complaining to his commander (Laura Dern) in a subplot that could've been resolved if the characters had just sat down and talked with each other. Finn (John Boyega) and newcomer Rose Tico (Kelly Marie Tran) are given a little more to do but most of their scenes are unnecessary as they don't connect to the plot in any meaningful way.

So all that we're left with is Rey (Daisy Ridley) and her quest to learn from Luke Skywalker the ways of the Force. This is the only time the film ever really comes alive. Mark Hamill is terrific as an older, bitter Luke, who is reluctant to teach Rey. The scenes in which Rey and villain Kylo Ren (Adam Driver) interact are the highlights of the film. Ridley and Driver have a real chemistry and their scenes together are filled with a dramatic tension that is lacking in the rest of the feature.

Ultimately, *The Last Jedi* is admirable for trying to go in a new direction, but it lacks the romantic drive and sense of adventure that really make *Star Wars* so special. — Forest Taylor

*Written and directed by: Rian Johnson // Starring: Daisy Ridley, Adam Driver, John Boyega, Oscar Isaac, Kelly Marie Tran, Laura Dern, Benicio Del Toro, Mark Hamill and Carrie Fisher // 152 minutes*

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## MUSIC REVIEWS

### Eminem

*Revival*  
Interscope Records



If there's a single redeeming quality to Eminem's *Revival*, it's that it has more heart than the MC has shown in almost a decade. Unfortunately, intentions, and technical ability only go so far. Outside of a number of self-aware throwbacks (particularly the album's closing run, "Castle" into "Arose"), *Revival* is a bloated, indecisive, 76-minute slog that places Marshall Mathers miles behind the artists that are currently dominating the political-pop landscape. As many thinkpieces have been quick to point out, Mathers simply refuses to age alongside the genre. The shots he takes at Donald Trump are grin-inducing, but ultimately surface-level; the album is largely split between the old Eminem ("Offended") and the new Eminem, which either relies on radio-ready collaborations with the likes of Pink and Ed Sheeran or places Rick Rubin behind the boards, utilizing an unfortunate number of rap-rock samples (Seriously, Joan Jett and The Cranberries deserve much better). Still, *Revival's* failures should hardly be enough to keep fans away as he's well earned our attention, even if his post-2010 output continues to lack the confidence and identity that defined his early work. — Aaron Mook



### Serpent Power

*Electric Looneyland*  
Skeleton Key Records



Here's a little secret that music critics have become well-aware of: nothing really comes out between the middle of December and the middle of January. Sure, there might be the occasional outlier, a *Run the Jewels 3* (released last Christmas Eve), or a *Blackstar* (released on January 8, two days before David Bowie's death). Much like Oscar season has done for film, album release schedules have grown in bonsai fashion around the popularity of "Album of the Year" lists. This leaves critics large and small at a relative loss. The upside is sometimes your search for the right record cover leads you to a gem like *Electric Looneyland*. A glance at its savagely neon cover, and it's easy to imagine thousands people getting the wrong impression, despite its tongue-in-cheek nature. The band (not to be confused with the similarly named '60s San Francisco septet, or the Kundalini yoga book) consists of duo Ian Skelly and Paul Molloy, of the Coral and the Zutons respectively. Each track is fuzzy, garage rock delight. The hypnotic, psychedelic riffs swirl around each track, never losing steam for all of the record's quickly-passing 34 minutes. — Nick Warren



### N.E.R.D.

*NO\_ONE EVER REALLY DIES*  
i am OTHER



With an all-star cast that's virtually a who's who of today's best pop and hip-hop artists, this album is a persistent party mix from front to back. Past its bombastic, dance-friendly exterior, *NO\_ONE EVER REALLY DIES* (a nice, almost eponymous backronym) finds the producer-laden supergroup finding a much needed sense of relevance. The group – led by the iconic Pharrell Williams – had an undeniable watershed moment way back in 2001 with their debut album *In Search of...* Since then, things have been slipping, until now. The group's fifth LP in 16 years, *DIES* find the band making all the right, albeit easy decisions. It's protest music lite. In its defense, the album doesn't shy away from present-day social concerns (the tracks aren't the ostrich-headed jubilation of Williams' "Happy"), most evident in "Don't Don't Do It!" the first of two collaborations with the ever-pertinent Kendrick Lamar (who returns with M.I.A on "Kites"). Beginning with Rihanna and closing with Ed Sheeran guest spots, the album is an unrelenting string of high-energy cuts, each one a potential hit. It's music you can feel good about, between the uptempo beats and well-meaning messages. — Nick Warren



### Glassjaw

*Material Control*  
Century Media



Glassjaw is technically the second outfit of Long Island legends to rise from the dead in 2017, but due to the entertainment industry's current purge of abusers in positions of power, they'll likely be the only one you read about on 2017 End of the Year lists. *Material Control* is the Glassjaw's first full-length album in 15 years, and following the release of two groundbreaking EPs, a single in 2016, and rumor after rumor of contract obligation to Warner Brothers Records, I'm pleased to report that the album is everything that post-hardcore fans in 2002 and 2017 alike could have wished for and more. The strongest aspect of *Material Control* is the fact that it somehow manages to introduce new sounds to Glassjaw's repertoire while simultaneously being their most streamlined release yet. It is an album that both feels familiar and like a update to the band's unique, bass and drum-driven riffage. There's a duality and balance between the chaos of guitarist Justin Beck's chops with the Deftones-esque choruses provided by frontman Daryl Palumbo (particularly on stand-out single "Shira") that only a veteran band could pull off so seamlessly. — Aaron Mook



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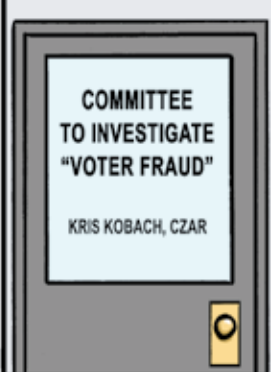
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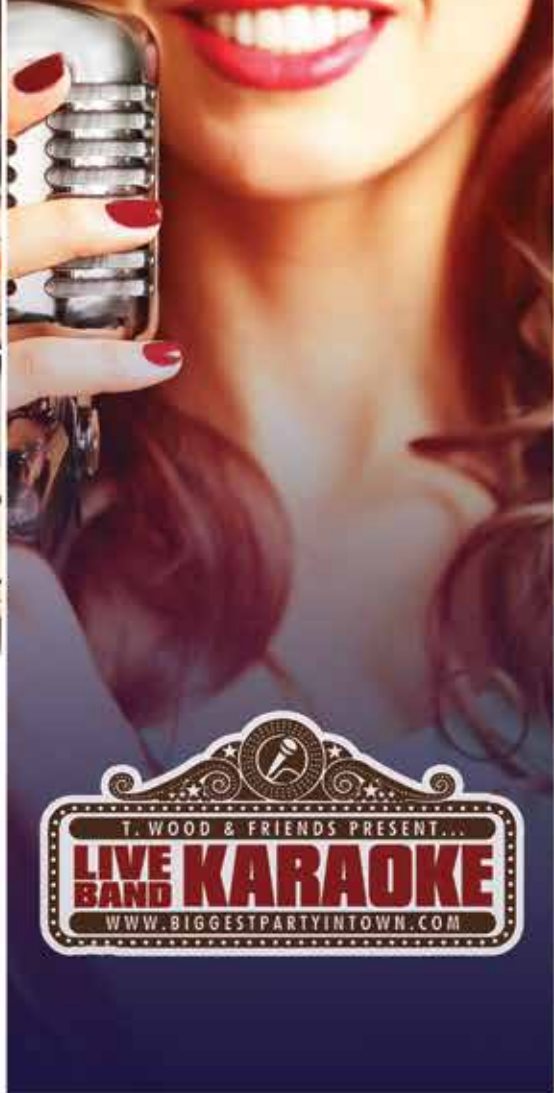


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