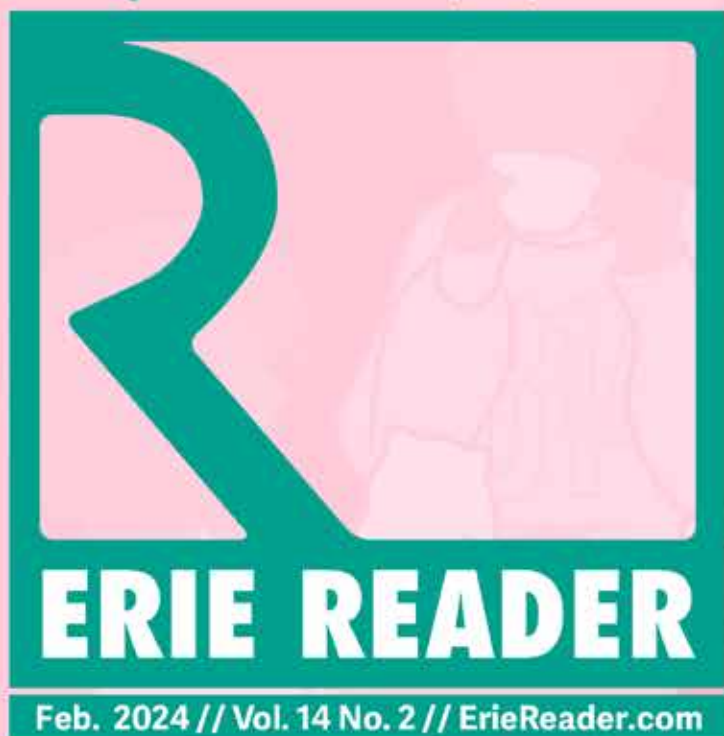


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# Stephen Galloway: A Study in Seamlessness

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**W**hat does it mean to be comfortable in one's own skin? It is to acknowledge the self but not be overwhelmed by it; to let go of what is in need of letting go and carry the rest with grace. It is both intentional and effortless; equal parts self-regard and self-erasure. It is to exist freely regardless of setting. It is confidence without context.

Unfortunately, that level of comfort has historically proven much more elusive for those with *brown* or *Black* skin.

The Black experience has been marked by both societal hyper-awareness of "Blackness" and systemic under-valuation and neglect. It's weighed down by centuries worth of trauma, stereotypes, and subjugation. Long-entrenched power structures continuously outline and reinforce "appropriate" settings for Black individuals. Black Americans must remain ever-conscientious about context, because Blackness has been attached to a set of roles, rules, and expectations.

One way to begin to dismantle those stereotypes is representation — in our governments, economies, communities, and media. Observations like Black History Month *intend* to showcase the contributions, talents, names, and faces of Black America. But as activist Marty Nwachukwu notes, representation does not equal change. It is one thing to be seen, another to be heard, and quite another to be *listened* to — and afforded the agency to make the changes necessary.

As a media outlet, we can *represent* the Black experience as more multifaceted and diverse (Precious Thompson's beautiful cover art portraying Black women as "soft, cozy, feminine, and classical" versus the aggressive, "exotic," and unappealing stereotypes that predominate). We can profile fascinating individuals that have had an impact or influence in their respective fields (Stephen Galloway). We can provide a platform for African Americans to be potentially *seen* and *heard*, but Nwachukwu is right. Mere visibility is not enough.

These issues are about more than lip service or cover treatment — it's about pulling those relegated to history's margins and footnotes (such as Erie's Emma Howell) into a total re-drafting of the story, hopefully one with a much more uplifting message to tell.

Until then, may we all learn to love the skin we're in.

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# The Erie Spiritual Coalition

## A call to action for housing reform

By: Susannah Faulkner and Melinda Hall

How does one combine politics, human-flourishing, and spirituality in constructive ways? A year after we met through the Jefferson Civic Leadership Academy, we found ourselves reflecting on this over coffee. We knew many spiritually-grounded folks who wanted to work for effective political change, but not, up until now, through partisanship. Did we need a new organization in a city already so full of them? Who might be interested and should we convene them? What started as the spark of an idea between two new friends at Pressed Books & Coffee, has since birthed a new movement in Erie.

Founded last summer, the Erie Spiritual Coalition (ESC) utilizes models from across the country and throughout history, from current California-based NGO human service coalitions, to interfaith councils from the Civil Rights Era. Grounded in spiritual principles, ESC strives to bridge the gap between people, organizations, and government by advocating for policies that foster human flourishing and thriving communities. Before officially going live, we took that mission statement back to organizations and leaders in various constituencies, who gave us the green light. ESC is the area's newest group, and as a first action, aims to tackle the causes and symptoms of systemic housing injustice in our local neighborhoods.

Even from our initial conversations about local issues, it was clear that housing needed to be in focus. The crisis is palpable: 44 percent of our youth are growing up in poverty, in homes that are often dilapidated, and household environments in need of social services (U.S. Census, 2020). We believe, as a coalition, that housing is a human right and that we must change the trajectory of these harrowing statistics. For example, Erie has seen a 15 percent increase in homelessness since 2018 and only two percent of all homeowners in the county are Black individuals or families.

Rather than innovate new solutions, we aim to provide the will and determination to turn plans into action. Possible solutions to our most per-

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**Tackling housing issues like safety, accessibility, affordability, and tenants' rights – the newly formed Erie Spiritual Coalition hopes to bridge the gap between people in need within the community and the various organizations and government programs already in existence.**

sistent problems are already available. Our community has no shortage of thoughtful plans, from Erie Refocused to a newly approved Comprehensive Housing Study. In the early days of the coalition, we studied Court Gould's blueprint to reform our housing crisis and looked at solutions that were working in other cities.

After speaking with leaders from service organizations, formerly homeless residents, staff and residents in public housing, elected officials, and many more, we decided to lean into working on issues related to housing, particularly those most vulnerable to losing their housing. Guided by their input, ESC would collectively draft a Tenants' Bill of Rights for the City of Erie and raise awareness about Erie's use of federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) grant funds. Both initiatives lay a foundation for our longer-term goals of advocating for a community-driven housing plan, improving code enforcement, and increasing

conversations about a housing court for landlord-tenant disputes.

The coalition waded through the waters of existing tenants' rights at the local and state level, and followed guidance from the published White House Blueprint for a Renters' Bill of Rights. With expert input from Dr. Verna Ehret, director of the Evelyn Lincoln Institute for Ethics and Society at Mercyhurst University, research by several graduate students, and comments from other community leaders, we finalized a draft focused on protecting the safety, health, stability, and overall well-being of both renters and landlords.

We took this proposed bill of rights to the public at ESC's first event, a presentation at Mercyhurst University on community housing solutions. This living document serves to provide renters and landlords with a one-stop shop for accessing and understanding critical legal protections. These include the Right to Transparent and Fair Utility Costs, which is granted in the state-

wide Utility Service Tenants' Rights Act. Another is the Right to Adequate Notice of Rate Increases or Eviction, in which tenants should receive at least two month's notice of any rental rate increases or the possibility of lease non-renewal, providing enough time for the tenant to find adequate housing solutions. This is a newer protection only extended to renters in the City of Erie, passed in the Erie Rental Housing Ordinance by Erie City Council last October.

An additional core component of the coalition's first public event was discussion on the usage of HUD grant funding. Received by both the city and county, these funds are administered by respective Departments of Community and Economic Development (DCED). Focusing specifically on the City of Erie, this annual allotment of more than \$4 million from the federal government is spent on the Community Development Block Grant Program, the HOME Investment Partnership

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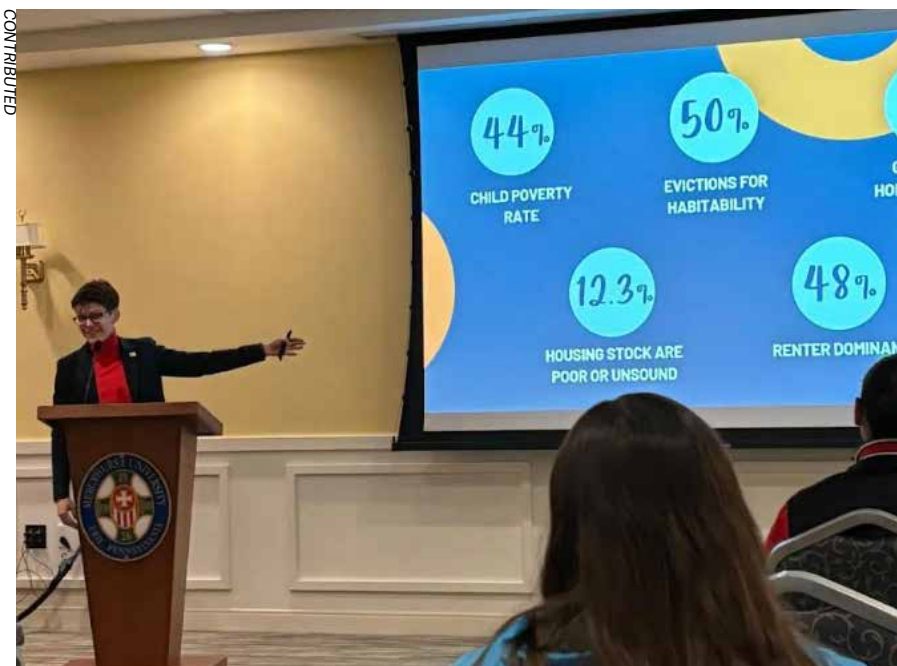
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**NEWS & VIEWS**



Melinda Hall (a 2023 40 Under 40 Honoree, along with Susannah Faulkner) presents on behalf of the Erie Spiritual Coalition at Mercyhurst University. The group's initial task at hand is tackling systemic housing injustices in our local neighborhoods.

Program, and the Emergency Solutions Grant Program. Some examples of how we see these dollars in action are through home repair grants administered by the Redevelopment Authority of the City of Erie, general salary

support to organizations like the Erie City Mission and St. Martin's Center, and youth programming at community centers and the Police Athletic League.

Our DCED office does a tremendous

job at public awareness and outreach, and we are advocating for greater public input as a coalition. However, questionable decisions have historically been made by City Hall to repurpose unspent HUD grant dollars. As recently as last April, Erie City Council approved a transfer of \$900,000 from unspent HUD grant funds to street reconstruction and paving. The coalition is raising awareness, hoping that community understanding will ensure more of this money directly benefits the organizations and homeowners who need it. We urge city residents to mark their calendars and attend the only public input session of the year on this issue at City Hall (626 State St.) on Monday, March 4 at both 10 a.m. and 6 p.m.

*ESC is interested in community solutions that work. Will you join us? We are re-presenting our first event and we welcome all to join in the conversation on Feb. 22 at 6 p.m. at the MLK Center (312 Chestnut St.) and Feb. 27 at 5:30 p.m. the Multicultural Community Resource Center (554 E. 10th St.).*

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## NEWS & VIEWS

### Misrepresentation and Marginalization

How representative politics ignores Black women's well-being

By: **Marty Nwachukwu**

In 2020, when Kamala Harris became vice president-elect, and the first African American woman to reach the vice presidency, I was interviewed by the newspaper on my thoughts about the historical moment. For the first time in our nation's history, Black women would have "representation" in the White House. In my interview, I told the reporter that without centering on the political issues of Black women in America, Kamala Harris' win would be meaningless to their everyday lives.

Representative politics has failed Black Americans, and especially Black women. What "representation" has given us, is decades of electing people who look like us, or share our gender, into office who rubber stamp the unending targeting and oppression of our people and other people of color. African American women suffer from higher rates of gendered violence, job discrimination, and food insecurity and only a few people in government care about our issues.

Misogynoir, "[the] hatred of, aversion to, or prejudice against Black women," is an endemic American problem that creates a quality of life crisis for African American women. We wither away as institutions and the people behind them create policies that assault Black liberties, while touting racially destructive stereotypes. As one of the most marginalized groups in America, representative politics has failed to protect Black women's mental health, healthcare, and wages. Black women are no longer tolerating our self-interests and political power being ignored.

For almost 60 years, Black women voters have shown up for the Democratic party and we have little material good to show for it. Since the Voting Rights Act of 1965 passed, the Democratic party has relied on Black women voters as a reliable base. In 2020, African American women were lauded online for "saving America" when post-election polling was published. In that election, around 46 percent of white women voted for former President Trump, whereas almost 90 percent of Black women voted for President Biden (Chapin, 2020). The Biden and Harris re-election campaign are

expecting African American women to hold the line this November. We are not a monolith, and they should not be so confident.

Black women are not going to "save" America this election year. We have to focus on saving ourselves, because we're tired of voting for the illusions of progress. The lack of political and economic security for African American women is making us reevaluate our relationships to academia, the workforce, and the two-party political system. For us, the personal is political, because our lives depend on it.

On Jan. 8, 2024, after months of disregarded complaints of alleged harassment at the hands of her university president, Dr. Antoinette Bailey, vice president at Lincoln University of Missouri (a historically Black university) took her own life. Just days before, Harvard University President Claudine Gay, Harvard's first African American female president, resigned from her position. Stories like these, family histories, and personal experiences inform the world view of young Black women like myself who are disenchanted by local and national policy choices because we see that even the most decorated of us can be assaulted and no one but ourselves will care.

Society's neglect of Black women's issues have deadly consequences, "CDC data show that Black women are two to three times more likely to die from pregnancy-related complications than white women, with most maternal deaths being preventable. The heightened risk spans all income and education levels" (Bervell, 2023). This dissonance of care causes mental distress in Black women and allows undetected medical issues to persist to the point of irreversible damage or death. If we lived in a society that took Black women's mortality rates and mental health seriously, women like Dr. Antoinette Bailey would still be alive today.

With the Biden administration seemingly ignoring the calls for a ceasefire in Gaza and underwhelming in their efforts to restore abortion care access and Affirmative Action, African American women are receiving the message that Democratic (and Republican) policy interests reflect an investment in



maintaining America's racial capitalist caste system. A caste system where Black Americans sit at the bottom: "Caste is insidious and therefore powerful because it is not hatred, it is not necessarily personal. It is the worn grooves of comforting routines and unthinking expectations, patterns of a social order that have been in place for so long that it looks like the natural order of things" (Wilkerson, 2020).

All Americans are taught to observe, maintain, and protect the American racial caste system, and it starts when we're small children. A recent law study found that, "adults believe Black

America's unaddressed racist and genocidal roots show up everyday for African American women. For us the Civil Rights Movement never ended. "Median wages for Black women in the United States are \$36,303 per year, compared to the median wages of \$57,005 annually for White, non-Hispanic men. This amounts to the difference of \$20,702 each year" (Heckstall, 2023). No matter how well-behaved we are, now matter what heights we raise ourselves to, Black women remain second-class citizens. The long existing wage gap is characteristic of our abandonment and tokenization. Instead of

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**African Americans recognize that representative politics is performative and does nothing to protect their livelihoods. Young Black women like myself are leaving the Democratic party, and as long as the racial wealth gap exists, our mental health crisis is ignored, and medical racism exacerbates our health problems, Black women will continue to look for ways to build ourselves and our community outside of white party politics, government, academia, and business institution**

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girls ages five to 19 need less nurturing, protection, support, and comfort than white girls of the same age, and that Black girls are more independent, know more about adult topics, and know more about sex than white girls" (*Research Confirms that Black Girls Feel the Sting of Adultification Bias Identified in Earlier Georgetown Law Study*, 2019). These racist notions follow Black girls all their lives from the classroom to the workroom.

tangible material change and resources, African Americans are expected to be content with electing Democrats, or people who look like us regardless of party, into office while receiving no benefits. The era of representative politics, where African Americans tolerate the lack of substantive change and policies is ending.

For decades, neo-liberal politics have pivoted Black liberation efforts away from empowerment and mutual aid,



**Dr. Antoinette Bailey, vice president at Lincoln University of Missouri, took her own life after months of harassment. The lives of Black women are undervalued and their needs are not truly represented by representative politics.**

towards identity politics and electoral cycles. Instead of addressing the economic and political wealth chasm caused by wealthy elites, politicians from both major parties focus public attention away from the profiteering of their corporate sponsors, toward the labels, or identities, of the people allegedly running this country into the ground. It is a farce in a country where anyone can be bought, to care if the person robbing you blind is white or Black.

African Americans recognize that representative politics is performative and does nothing to protect their livelihoods. Young Black women like myself are leaving the Democratic party, and as long as the racial wealth gap exists, our mental health crisis is ignored, and medical racism exacerbates our health problems, Black women will continue to look for ways to build ourselves and our community outside

of white party politics, government, academia, and business institutions. We will not sit in quiet reverie this Black History Month. We will not indiscriminately give our votes away to any party or candidate, no matter their race or gender. This month, and for the rest of the year, we will be actively raising our voices and doing the work to uplift ourselves and our communities. It's time for a new way of doing politics, one that does not abandon Black women's well-being.

"The most disrespected person in America is the Black woman. The most unprotected person in America is the Black woman. The most neglected person in America is the Black woman."  
— Malcolm X

*Marty Nwachukwu is a community organizer and chapter director for Erie County United. She can be reached at [biblioblackgirl@gmail.com](mailto:biblioblackgirl@gmail.com)*

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## A Study in Seamlessness

One-time Erieite Stephen Galloway recounts a career of creative movement

By: Jonathan Burdick

Stephen Galloway has never been one to shy away from an opportunity. He is a creative movement director, a dancer, a choreographer, an art director, a costume designer, and an organizer of fashion shows. To say that he is singular would not be hyperbole. Galloway is also easy to talk to, a trait likely very useful in his line of work. Although we've never met, we slide with familiarity into conversation as I ask him about his life, his career, and his humble beginnings in Erie when he was merely a neighborhood kid learning not to ignore his curiosities and how to recognize when an opportunity was presenting itself.

"I just remember Erie being the gateway," he says, reflecting on his long career in the arts. "It was just incredible."

He's been described as an "artistic polymath" by *models.com*, someone whose unique skills have "allowed him to work across creative disciplines like ballet, fashion, and rock n' roll." The *Wall Street Journal* nicknamed him "The Model Whisperer." Just this past year, *Wallpaper Magazine* included him on a list of people "defining America's creative landscape" by "contributing to the aesthetics of popular culture."

Speaking with him though, Galloway is humble. He clearly enjoys conversation. He listens intently and laughs often. Each time that I bring up one of his accomplishments, he pivots to the people who helped get him there: family, friends, and mentors who influenced, inspired, and encouraged him at different points throughout his life. Despite having worked with the likes of Oprah Winfrey, Mick Jagger, Eddie Murphy, and Naomi Campbell, he not even once namedrops during our conversation — although fortunately, when I do it for him, he's happy to share his memories and experiences.

The conversation frequently returns to his roots. In a 2016 interview with *Erie Times-News*, his mother, Gwendolyn Galloway, noted how proud she was that anytime her son was interviewed, he made sure to mention his childhood in Erie. Galloway was born in Columbia, Tennessee, but he moved to Erie at a young age when his mother accepted a position as a school teacher. His parents were separated, something his

mother viewed as tragic, but she also reflected later in life how the move to Erie changed her son's entire life trajectory.

Galloway stayed close to his Tennessee family. He visited often. His dad, Ronald, was a musician. He's described him as personable and very funny. His Aunt Melba, with whom he was very close, was also a visual artist who traveled the world and disclosed to him the wonders of *Soul Train*, Prince, and more. "That side of the family was hyper, *hyper* creative," Galloway says. "There was always music, there was always art. We were also encouraged. We weren't pushed away in any shape or form from that artistic side."

His grandmother and great-grandmother were seamstresses, so the garage was full of their work. Galloway would raid the garage and organize fashion shows with the neighborhood kids for his grandparents to watch.

"I'd dress all the kids up in my grandmother's clothes and we would have fashion shows in the backyard," he says. A cobblestone path served as the runway. He says he ran a tight ship and would get upset if kids showed up late or if they left the cobblestone during the show. "My grandfather and dad used to say, 'You'd be so mean to those kids!' ... It's kind of embarrassing and crazy, but it still warms my heart."

Meanwhile, back in Erie, Galloway's introduction to dance was serendipitous. At 10 years old, he began spending a significant amount of time at the Martin Luther King Center, specifically for their Culture House, an artistic space designed for city children. He was initially focused on painting. Dance hadn't crossed his mind. Then one fateful day, the dance program needed a few boys for a short performance at downtown's Perry Square. The role was simple: walk out, lift the girls, and walk off. It was enough for the dance teachers to notice.

"One thing led to the next," he said. Before long, he was excelling as a dancer. He was still dabbling in painting, drawing, photography, ceramics, and acting, but dance, specifically ballet, began to take up more and more of his time.

"I think that really did plant in me this curiosity that I've been able to nurture ever since," he says, adding with a

SYDNEY DANCE COMPANY



Stephen Galloway has worked intensively with Hollywood mega-superstars like the Rolling Stones, Miley Cyrus, Taylor Swift, and Oprah. He got his start in dance in his hometown of Erie while, as a child, participating in creative programs offered through the Martin Luther King Center.

laugh that he was there so much that he might as well have been ordained King of the Culture House. "[The Culture House] provided so many opportunities to so many kids."

These were formative years. He recently reconnected with Marta Peluso, a former photography teacher from the Culture House. Their conversations made him recognize how important those years were, the countless hours spent with all of these incredibly creative and curious young artists, many who had moved from all over the country to teach these neighborhood kids of Erie.

Their wanderlust must have been infectious too. Galloway increasingly had the desire to get out and experience the world. It wasn't about leaving Erie. He loved Erie and had a great childhood. He never found it uninteresting or boring. "I just had such distinct dreams," he explains. "It was like, 'OK, I gotta do whatever it takes to get to these dreams, to get to New York, or to get to

Europe, or to get wherever I needed to go to get to that next step."

He emphasizes the trips arranged by the MLK Center. "Those field trips that we used to take, you know, putting 12 neighborhood kids in a van to go to — as exotic as it sounded then — Cleveland for four days, you know what I mean? To see the ballet and museums and to stay in hotels. My first trip to New York City was courtesy of the Culture House and King Center."

As a performer, he danced with the Erie Bayfront Ballet under Charron Battles, Kathleen Green, and Barbara Priestap. Battles immediately noticed how much control he had over his body. She, like many others, knew he was destined for greatness in the dance world. Galloway also began working with Jean Marc and Dafna Baier at Mercyhurst College. In many interviews over the years, Galloway has praised the joy and love that they all led with in their teaching. In a 1993 interview, he noted how these mentors not only instructed

him in dance, but also encouraged the curiosity that he now nurtures. He was further also reminded that change is good, not something to be feared.

That change was about to occur for Stephen Galloway.

In the mid-'80s, at age 17 and freshly graduated from Strong Vincent High School, Galloway used an art scholarship to purchase a one-way ticket to Europe. He planned to audition for numerous ballet companies. One of those was Frankfurt Ballet in Germany under American choreographer William Forsythe. In a 2015 interview, Galloway said that he didn't even know who Forsythe was at the time, but he was known as "the bad boy from America who was shaking everything up" with his unique approach to ballet.

dinator. In 1993, his resume expanded when he was hired as creative director for fashion house Issey Miyake. Soon after that, he began staging runway shows for Versace, Yves Saint Laurent, and Costume National. Then in 1997, The Rolling Stones came knocking. Mick Jagger wanted to hire Galloway as a creative consultant working with him directly on dance moves, staging, and even music videos. He also found the time to record two albums, something he's described as a "very brief (but successful) summer fling" in the German music industry. Eventually, he left the Frankfurt Ballet in 2004, but maintained his connection with Forsythe, his "creative father," as he entered this next phase in his career.

I bring up a recent Instagram post of

The title change [from choreographer to creative movement director] made it easier for people to grasp [Galloway's] role. "What I do as a movement director is much more nuanced." Movement, he believes, is itself a form of communication. While every individual has a physical vocabulary, there is also the need for play and improvisation. The nuance is about capturing the snapshot of a moment that will never be replicated.

Galloway was initially uncertain. At first, Forsythe was rarely even present. Galloway was frustrated and was only going to give it one more day. That next day though, Forsythe arrived, viewed the rehearsal, and asked Galloway to stay afterwards. Soon, he had a contract in hand and was officially the youngest principal dancer in the Frankfurt Ballet. Forsythe quickly became one of his most important mentors and collaborators. In a 1989 profile, Galloway said he connected with the "maverick" choreographer due to both being proponents of "ballet without rules." The two simply clicked. Galloway would dance with the company for the next two decades.

"My work with William Forsythe with the Frankfurt Ballet truly made me the man I am today," Galloway reflects, then adds, "That and my foundations in Erie, Pennsylvania."

Early on, a Frankfurt arts magazine called Galloway "elegant and charismatic." By 1992, he had performed all over Europe and was the company's head costume designer and style coordinator.

his. "Everything is an opportunity," it read. That mantra seems to be the trajectory of his entire career, I say.

"I've always had a very strong inner voice, for some bizarre reason, and I do listen to it," he admits. "Of course, at times throughout life, it can become more and more challenging to listen to that as your circle and your work expands and everyone has an opinion on how you should do things." He pauses. "But I've had some of the best teachers and examples placed before me."

I'd watch a Stephen Galloway biopic, I tell him. He's had quite a journey.

"It's been kind of incredible," he acknowledges. He laughs and adds with an air of surprise: "It just keeps getting better too. That's what's so exciting about it. Each year, the world expands and I just keep listening and the universe keeps talking."

I bring up *Vanity Fair's* 2020 Hollywood issue photoshoot for which he was the creative movement director. Just a few of the names involved include Alfre Woodard, Antonio Banderas, Daniel Kaluuya, Da'Vine Joy



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Randolph, Eddie Murphy, Florence Pugh, Jennifer Lopez, Jennifer Hudson, Laura Dern, Renee Zellweger, Taika Waititi, and Willem Dafoe.

“That’s one of the highlights,” says Galloway. As for Eddie Murphy? “Mr. Murphy is the coolest,” he confirms. “He’s so smooth.”

It’s important to note that this particular job — officially called a “creative movement director” — really didn’t exist before him. “We kind of came up with it in order to justify my day rate,” he says. We both laugh. He’s also not really joking either. He credits acclaimed and iconic Dutch fashion photographers Inez van Lamsweerde and Vinoodh Matadin for welcoming him into that world. They were already mutual fans of each other’s work and when the photographers were hired for a Calvin Klein campaign, they had the idea to work together. Soon, this concept of the *creative movement director*, someone who could work in tandem with the photographers and the models, was born.

“Now, it’s incredible, it’s everywhere,” he explains. At first, he just used the term choreographer, but producers wondered why a choreographer was needed for a still photoshoot. But Galloway would show up, they’d see what he brought to the table, and they’d understand. The title change made it easier for people to grasp his role. “What I do as a movement director is much more nuanced,” he adds. Movement, he believes, is itself a form of communication. While every individual has a physical vocabulary, there is also the need for play and improvisation. The nuance is about capturing the snapshot of a moment that will never be replicated.

He’s since acted as creative movement director for Miley Cyrus, collaborating on music videos such as “Flowers,” “River,” and “Jaded.” He described her to *Billboard Magazine* as endlessly curious, incredibly bright, and someone who is always questioning. He’s collaborated on photoshoots, advertisement campaigns, videos, and other creative ventures with artists as wide-ranging as Adriana Lima, Björk, Elle Fanning, Elton John, Emma Stone, Erika Alexander, Gisele Bündchen, Issa Rae, Kate Moss, Lady Gaga, Lil Nas X, Lupita Nyong’o, Monica Bellucci, Rihanna, Tracee Ellis Ross, and Zendaya.

Before long, he was involved in so many projects that there simply weren’t enough hours in the day. While working on the music video for Tay-

lor Swift’s “The Man,” for instance, he collaborated with Spenser Theberge for the movements. In the video, Swift portrays a man, a full beard and muscle suit included, so nailing the mannerisms was important. “I was so stoked to have a movement coach help me with things,” Swift later said, adding in a tweet: “Stephen Galloway and Spenser Theberge ... taught me how to smoke, slouch, walk and act like a toxic bro.”

As the demand of creative movement directors increases across industries, Galloway finds himself mentoring more and more “acolytes,” as he calls them, who understand the nuances of the job. He also notes that, if he and they do their job well, nobody should even notice them in the final product. The movements should be seamless and refined. “Some of my favorite images or favorite videos are when you don’t even know I’m there,” he says.

I bring up a video that I saw of him directing Oprah Winfrey and Gayle King. He recalled running into Winfrey later at a gala. “We didn’t even know that job was in existence,” she told him. She asked for his business card and was shocked when he didn’t have any.

“Don’t you know, the next week on Monday I had business cards made up immediately,” he jokes. “When Oprah Winfrey asks for your business card and you don’t have one, something’s wrong.”

I say that I’m not one to get starstruck, but I imagine that I just might if Oprah Winfrey was asking for my business card.

“I say this in the most honest way possible, we’re all just trying to do a job,” explains Galloway. “I think some of the reasons I’m hired are because of what I can do and what I can give, but I also think I have continued relationships with my clients and companies because I *don’t* get starstruck.”

At this point in our conversation, he gets a push notification on his phone: Broadway icon Chita Rivera died. Once I process what he said, it shifts the conversation. Hilton Battles, the original Scarecrow on Broadway’s *The Whiz*, had died the previous night too, he says. So many of these communities are connected, he continues, and it can be intense and overwhelming when you hear about so many deaths across the industries, especially when the news comes at you so abruptly on a device.

“When people die, it gives me an



**This photo, tweeted by music superstar Taylor Swift (pictured center) in February of 2020, shows Stephen Galloway (left) along with Spenser Theberge (right) on the set of her music video for the song “The Man.” She tweeted, “Stephen Galloway and Spenser Theberge were my movement coaches and taught me how to smoke, slouch, walk and act like a toxic bro.”**

immediate confirmation about how important it is to actually *live*,” he reflects. “Whenever I think about this, it’s nothing but a reaffirmation about how important it is to continue to make the best of this life that we’re living right now.”

It’s been a challenging few years in that regard. His mother Gwendolyn passed away in 2017. His father, Ronald, passed away in November. At one point during our conversation, he says he’s looking at a photograph of dad. They look a lot alike, he says.

“The older you get — and I’m about to turn 56 this year — the more you are able to make it a habit to not look over your shoulder. I’m always just looking forward,” he continues. “I always say, I’m closer to 100 than I am to zero. It’s always important to look at those things [from our past], but it’s more important to look forward. But there’s a joy in glancing quickly over your shoulder, because often you learn so much about where you want to go by looking where you came from.”

Galloway still gets back to Erie and Tennessee when he can. His younger sister Lenita lives in Tennessee and his younger brother Scot is in Erie. This past October, he was invited to speak at the Community Health Net gala in Erie, where his mother was honored. After teaching, his mother was employed there as the director of administrative services.

Since 2018, he’s been living full-time in Los Angeles. Before that, he was bouncing back and forth between Los

Angeles and Germany. His Aunt Melba was living there and they’d discussed it many times. Sadly, she too passed away shortly after he moved.

“I just fell in love with the city,” he says. “I was always coming here for work. Everybody loves to shoot in L.A., so I was here quite a bit. Every time [that I visited] I was like, ‘this is so magical.’”

As I reflect on our conversation, I’m reminded of something he told *Dance Magazine*. “Always ask questions. Know everything and nothing at the same time,” he’d said. “That’s where my happy spot is: right in the middle.”

All these years later, he’s still driven by that curiosity. He still knows when an opportunity has presented itself too, whether it’s choreographing a rock ballet set to The Rolling Stones for the Boston Ballet (the first and only of its kind), on set for a music video shoot, or, as he did for the recent Grammy Awards, working with Miley Cyrus on her live performance of “Flowers.” This act, as fate would have it, had even Oprah Winfrey out of her seat and singing along.

“Things happen the way they’re supposed to,” believes Galloway. “If you listen to yourself and your heart, it leads you in the direction of where you’re supposed to be.”

Stephen Galloway, it seems, is exactly where he’s supposed to be.

*Jonathan Burdick runs the public history project Rust & Dirt. He can be reached at [jburdick@eriereader.com](mailto:jburdick@eriereader.com)*



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## Growing Community and Cultivating Change

Kristen Weeks of Erie's Grow and Glow Collective is planting seeds about urban farming

By: Amy VanScoter

It is difficult to go anywhere lately without hearing a conversation about the rising cost of groceries. With healthier options like fresh produce becoming more expensive and harder to come by, many are returning to the once common practices of gardening, canning, and foraging. Kristen Weeks, owner and operator of Erie's only Black-owned urban farm, Grow and Glow Collective, located at 2304 Parade St., believes that community building through urban farming could be one answer to a myriad of issues facing Erie's most vulnerable populations.

As we sat down to talk during a brunch at Erie's 10/20 Collective, Weeks began the story of how her farm began at the Food Policy and Advisory Council of Erie's first food summit at Edinboro University in 2022. She says she just showed up because of her interests and that she had been looking for land.

"It's very difficult to get land in Erie, and in order to have a community garden you have to have a fence and water and that is like \$10,000 right there," she said. "Gretchen Durney of the Sisters of Saint Joseph Neighborhood Network happened to hear me talking about the challenges and called me the next day. She told me they were thinking about using the incubator space within French Street Farms and although I've been farming a long time, it's a farm incubator space that needed to be utilized and so, I was able to get the land," she said.

Through local women listening to and helping to elevate other women, the Grow and Glow Collective Parade Street farm was born and a grant was received to pay for the water. The farm has been so successful, Weeks is currently looking for a larger space that can feed many more people.

"When I started, the land had never been tilled or cultivated at all, so I did it all by hand. I made the beds by hand in a fashion that's very African-centric. I was able to get eight beds done by May then I had to tarp the land and let it sit for a month and so I grew food out of those beds and worked on the back beds because dirt and compost are expensive," said Weeks. Blighted property is often filled with concrete chunks and not the best dirt for farming.

"I'm always thinking about wholeness and community, and when I see empty lots, I start thinking about how we could farm that, we could build a food forest, because if tomorrow all of the grocery stores closed down, 99 percent of us would be screwed and to me that makes no sense," she explained. "I really wanted to keep the food I was growing in that community as much as I could."

Weeks began working with Stephanie Ciner of Wild Field Urban Farm at the "Pay What You Can" markets distributing some of the harvest. She explained that through consistently showing up with food and being available, more people are likely to get curious and try new and different foods. "Through storytelling someone might say, 'oh here's what I do with Brussels sprouts, this is how I like to cook them,' and that may encourage someone to try it. When there is no judgment on food it creates an expansiveness so someone might say, 'okay, I trust this neighbor or this person and so I think I'll try these Brussels sprouts.' It's about getting to know people and showing up consistently in the neighborhood," said Weeks.

When she is not farming, Weeks is still using storytelling in her work for the Erie Center for Arts and Technology (ECAT), cooking meals after school for the students, educating them on healthy foods, and encouraging them to try different things. "There is so much food in Erie that people don't even know is there, so I'm also really into foraging. We have all these vulnerable communities within our city and learning how to gather these foods, or even creating a task force to gather the apples for example, could make a big difference."

There are many challenges to creating more fresh food. "Erie has no urban agricultural systems or push for sustainable local food in our area, so we don't have growers," said Weeks. "There are three urban farms in Erie; how can that support a market? The family unit is also changing. People aren't eating together or in the same ways."

There is also the ongoing discussion about food deserts. "People on the east side experience more food insecurity, which is also a part of redlining. You can get an apple, a banana, a potato and maybe some tomatoes at the corner store but, that's about it for healthy pro-



This plot of land on 23rd and Parade streets has become known as the Grow and Glow Collective, and the urban farm has been so productive and plentiful, that owner Kristin Weeks is currently looking for more land in the city to expand.

duce. People consistently shop at Dollar General on the east side and the community is always asking for more places to access food on every survey that's been done. Remember the inaccessibility is not having a car and having to walk everywhere. For many families it's just much quicker to go to Family Dollar."

Cultivating more green space is not difficult or expensive to do, according to Weeks. "You can throw some wildflowers on it and start supporting the local pollinators," she said. "There have been so many studies — green spaces have been proven to uplift urban landscapes by shifting the energy within the space. If you put a greenspace in one of the most violent parts of town, what starts happening is the energy starts shifting around that space within a couple of years. The green spaces bring opportunities for people to be on the earth, they bring opportunities to grow food, they provide beauty to the landscape of an impoverished area, and then maybe that also provides inspiration to the people who live in that neighborhood that they are worthy and also have

beauty," said Weeks.

At the end of this month, Weeks says she will be starting her seeds. She hopes that by continuing to educate others on the importance of urban agricultural development in Erie, she will also be planting seeds that encourage the growth of new systems around food and community in Erie. "If you want Erie to flourish you need to come back to the community, the roots, and make it a healthy foundation for the people who are at the heart of it."

*Erie's Grow and Glow Collective provides local vegan catering, urban farm consulting, foraging and food sovereignty education, and community herbalism. For more information, follow on Instagram @growandglowurbancollective, email eriegrowandglowcollective@gmail.com or reach out by phone at (814) 566-5787*

*Amy VanScoter works in community development and communications and is a local business owner. She can be reached at avanscoter@gmail.com*

# The Emma Howell Family: Their Life Stories Are Erie History

## Connecting the dots to discover Erie's first Underground Railroad station

By: Erin Phillips

There is one major event that is a thorn in the side of any local Erie history researcher, and that event happens to be where this story begins. In 1823, there was a fire that destroyed the Erie County Courthouse, and along with it, the official records of very early Erie pioneer history and the people who created it. The stories of people of early prominence, wealth, and status in Erie had the luxury of having their history recreated, retold, and re-recorded in the Erie history books — people whose names will pop up throughout this story like Daniel Dobbins, John Grubb, and William Wallace. However, all the people who simply lived, worked, and helped create a community in Erie's dirt road days have been almost totally erased.

It takes a very special person to take the time and effort to connect the dots of a life from those days, and to the benefit of the entire Erie community, Kevin Johnson is that person in the case of a long-forgotten key player in Erie's history: Emma Howell.

Emma Howell's recorded, referenceable history was all but erased in that aforementioned fire, but it was actually due to a footnote that the spark of discovering her story was initially fanned. While reading a book about the Underground Railroad in 2019, Johnson (a mechanical engineer by trade) noticed a footnote mentioning the name Amy Martin. The footnote referenced the book *The Refugees From Slavery In Canada West*, which was published in 1864 by Dr. Samuel Gridley Howe (who was a representative of the American Freedmen's Inquiry Commission).

Within that book is a testimony of Mrs. Amy Martin, the daughter of James Ford and Emma Howell. In it she retells the story of her family: "When we were in Erie, we lived a little way out of the village, and our house was a place of refuge for fugitives — a station of the Underground Railroad. Sometimes there would be 13 or 14 fugitives at our place. My parents used to do a great deal towards helping them on to Canada. They were sometimes pursued by their masters, and often advertised, and their masters would come right to Erie. We used to be pretty careful and never got into any trouble on that ac-

count, that I know of. The fugitives would be told to come to our house."

This connection of Martin to Erie — and the mention of an Underground Railroad station — spurred Johnson on a years-long research project that ultimately resulted in the self-publication of a nearly 300 page-long book entitled *The Short Story, Big Life of Emma Howell, the Ford Family, and Erie's First Underground Railroad Station*.

Within this book, Johnson makes an impressive effort to connect any relevant dots to eventually draw out the life and timeline of Erie's earliest Black history. Every reference is meticulously cited and transcribed, including census documents, wills, deeds, goods transfers and ledgers, diary pages, maps, newspaper articles, and other historic documents.

Emma Howell, who was brought to Erie with her mother and sister (making her part of the first Black family to live in Erie), was initially enslaved by early pioneer and surveyor of Erie County John Grubb, and was eventually sold by Grubb to William Wallace. When Wallace, who was Erie's first attorney, moved to Harrisburg some years later, he gave Emma Howell her freedom, along with a large swath of land which would have been on the outskirts of the city at the time. It is thought that she met and married James Ford (a runaway slave from Canada) after she was free.

Johnson cites an Erie Gazette article from Sept. 15, 1874 that reads: "William Wallace Esq., owned the greater part of the real estate on both sides of Parade Street, from Ninth Street to 17th Street. When he left Erie and removed to Harrisburg in 1811, he emancipated a black woman named Emma Howell, who had been brought to this country by the Grubb family, and afterwards sold to Mr. Wallace by them. Mr. Wallace not only gave her her freedom but also a life estate in real estate on both sides of Parade. 'Old Ame,' (as she was generally known), married James Ford, a colored man, and built a log house east of Parade, north of 10th, in 1811, which was the first dwelling erected on that street. They long resided there and raised a family of children ... The second house was built in 1821, by a colored man, at the corner of Parade and 12th



This corner at 13th and Parade streets is, according the HANDS CEO Matthew Good, "the only remaining source of blight in this section of Parade in Erie's East Side Midtown Neighborhood." It will soon be adaptively reused as affordable housing and will be dedicated as the "Emma Howell Apartments" in a partnership with historian Kevin Johnson and Preservation Erie.

streets, east side, and occupied by different families several years, and was a very popular resort in 1827 and 1828." This "second house" was likely the Underground Railroad station to which Amy Martin was referring in her testimony to Dr. Howe.

So from at least 1821 to 1836 (when Emma and James, in their old age, went to live with their daughter Amy in Canada), this "second house" was active as an Underground Railroad station — dating its existence *before* any other previously documented stations or activity was happening in Erie, making it the *first* Underground Railroad station in Erie County and making history as such.

Johnson's book makes connections between the Howell-Ford-Martin family to major historical figures like Harriet Tubman, John Brown, and Frederick Douglass, making this early Erie history significant not only to people living in our county, but to all of Black history nationally.

It is for his extensive research and dedication to uncovering this story that Kevin Johnson recently received a Greater Erie Award for Education and Advocacy from the local nonprofit group, Preservation Erie. Within his acceptance speech for this award, Johnson details some of the motivation behind continuing his work and research, "The people of Erie should know how Erie started. A lot of people know about Daniel Dobbins and Oli-

ver Perry and Harry Burleigh, but they don't know about the *first* people who came and laid out Erie and they don't know that there were important Black people who were a part of that team, and who were treated as equals, who put as much effort as anyone else into laying out Erie."

Melinda Meyer, president of Preservation Erie, comments on the decision to give an award to Johnson: "Many of Preservation Erie's Greater Erie Awards recognize historic properties and the people who care for them, but in Kevin Johnson's case, he's the steward of a story that has long lost its physical evidence. As with so many historic buildings and sites that once stood as documentation of Erie's thriving African American community, the home and business of Underground Railroad station operators Emma Howell and James Ford at East 12th and Parade streets vanished long ago, and with them the story — the story of an enslaved woman turned property and business owner who helped others find freedom."

Meyer continues, "Because the current streetscape bears no reflection of this history, and yet it is such a significant part of the city's story and worth preserving, it was important that Mr. Johnson's discovery and stewardship of the Howell-Ford story be recognized."

However, the fact that the streetscape isn't reflective of the Howell-Ford



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**FEATURE**



The Crowley House in Lawrence Park was built in 1832 and was previously believed one of the first Underground Railroad stations operating in Erie – shuttling fugitive enslaved people via nearby Fourmile Creek to the lake and on to Canada. The recently discovered Howell-Ford station predates this Underground Railroad station by at least 11 years.

story is about to change.

Housing and Neighborhood Development Service (HANDS) of Erie has recently decided, through conversations with Preservation Erie, Kevin Johnson, and neighboring property owner John Vanco, to dedicate their latest adaptive reuse affordable housing project to the Emma Howell legacy. CEO of HANDS Matthew Good comments, “Every building has a unique history. When HANDS and our team began the development process for the abandoned building at 1319 Parade St., little was known about the site other than appreciating that the structure was built in 1912 and that it has seen more than 110 years of Erie’s history.”

Good continues, “We were excited about the work of local historian Kevin Johnson that made us realize the history of the land where the building stands runs much deeper. The land was once owned by Emma Howell-Ford and was part of her Underground Railroad operation. She owned the property from Ninth Street to 15th Street on the east side of Parade (where 1319 Parade St. now stands). HANDS feels the name ‘Emma Howell Apartments’ is a great way to memorialize this history.”

While the project is still in its very early stages, HANDS has also committed to placing the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission Marker commemorating the Howell-Ford Underground Railroad station within that building’s footprint. Johnson succeeded in procuring the marker from the state last year and, up until now, has struggled to find an appropriate

public space to display the marker.

Good reflects on the Howell apartment dedication and Emma Howell’s legacy on Parade Street, “Although on a much smaller scale of magnitude, HANDS also feels providing affordable housing to low income residents in need, including homeless and special needs populations, has some charitable parallels to the work Emma did on this same very same land. She truly helped and housed people facing staggering challenges during her time in Erie, at a time when slavery was still legal.”

Thanks to Kevin Johnson and his community partners, the long-lost story of Emma Howell and Erie’s first Underground Railroad Station has been discovered, retold, and re-recorded so that it can now belong to all of us as part of Erie’s history.

*Kevin Johnson makes a point to note that additional research for his book was contributed by Tracy Johnson and Debbi Lyon.*

*If you would like to read Johnson’s book, The Short Story, Big Life of Emma Howell, the Ford Family, and Erie’s First Underground Railroad Station, a copy is available in the Heritage Room on the second floor of the Blasco Library.*

*Erin Phillips, who serves on the board of Preservation Erie, can also often be found in the Heritage Room on the second floor of the Blasco Library. She can be reached at erin@eriereader.com*

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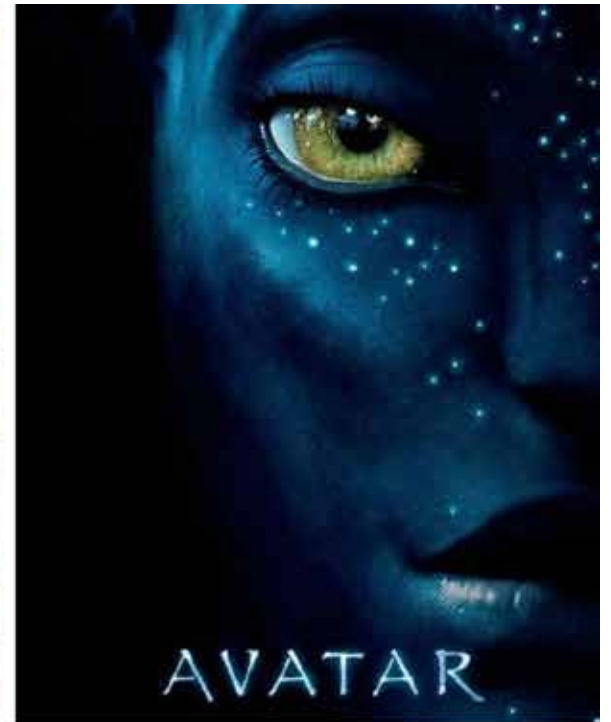
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## Ethnic Heritage Ensemble To Perform at City Gallery

Celebrate the indomitable spirit of jazz and the profound legacy of Black History Month

SUNDAY, FEB. 11

Kahil El'Zabar's Ethnic Heritage Ensemble is set to grace the stage at City Gallery. Embarking on their 50th annual February North American Tour, the legendary jazz ensemble is commemorating this milestone in conjunction with the release of their upcoming album *Open Me, A Higher Consciousness of Sound and Spirit*, slated for release on March 8 by Spiritmuse Records.

Established by Kahil El'Zabar in 1974 as a quintet, the Ethnic Heritage Ensemble has remained a stalwart force within the realm of Black music. Now pared down to a dynamic trio featuring El'Zabar on vocals and percussion, Alex Harding on bass, and Corey Wilkes on trumpet, the ensemble continues to captivate audiences with their unparalleled artistry and unwavering dedication to musical

innovation.

"Kahil has been making his way to Erie for over 30 years, from the Erie Art Museum Days to our present Harmony & Blessings Music Series, which celebrates legendary performers who enrich our city's cultural tapestry," says Stephen Trohoske, owner of City Gallery.

"City Gallery knows that art itself is diverse and cultural, and we support the mission of these artists, always. Being Black History Month, February has always been when we hold our concerts with the Ethnic Heritage Ensemble. It's always been a very important month to us."

Join us as we honor the rich legacy of jazz and celebrate the profound contributions of Black artists at City Gallery with Kahil El'Zabar's Ethnic Heritage Ensemble — a transcendent musical



**Kahil El'Zabar's Ethnic Heritage Ensemble will perform at City Gallery for their 50th annual February North American Tour. The jazz trio has been playing to Erie audiences for over 30 years.**

journey that embodies the spirit of resilience, creativity, and cultural heritage. — Aaron Mook

4:30 p.m. // City Gallery, 1503 State St. // \$25 // Tickets and info call: 814-218-4185 or visit [facebook.com/citygalleryerie](https://facebook.com/citygalleryerie)

## Same Time, Next Year Sets a Valentine's Date at PACA

Adele Crotty and Ken Brundage star in a one-night-only holiday production

WEDNESDAY, FEB. 14

Valentine's Day is a tricky one. It's a day we build hope and expectations onto and one that can often elude even the most romantic among us. Pressure, timing, and sentimentality are hard at work, both on Valentine's Day and in the riveting script of Bernard Slade's *Same Time, Next Year*.

Perhaps best known for the 1978 film adaptation starring Alan Alda and Ellen Burstyn (one that is tragically un-streamable currently), *Same Time, Next Year* will be staged by the Performing Arts Collective Alliance (PACA) for a special Valentine's Day performance directed by Betsy Butoryak and starring Adelle Crotty and Ken Brundage. It's a hybrid staged reading performance, one complete with scene changes and set dressers, with off-book moments from two of Erie's most talented actors. Tickets for the performance include an opening reception with hors d'oeuvres catered by Cali's West, with wine, Blind Tiger spirit-free cocktails, and more taking place at City Gallery next door to PACA. There will also be an art exhibit by Lara Schaaf in PACA's second-floor gallery, and a dessert served at intermission.

Not unlike last year's special *Love Letters* event, this play illustrates a thoroughly unconventional love story, but

DIGIT/DAVE SCHROEDER



**Ken Brundage and Adele Crotty will star in a one-night-only Valentine's Day performance of *Same Time, Next Year*, which explores the complex annual affair of two people who are happily married to other people.**

one that is overcome by heart and honesty.

At a seaside resort, George (Brundage) and Doris (Crotty) meet and hit it off and sleep together. The problem? They're both married with six children between them. Butoryak describes the characters "having a one-night stand, which turns into 25 years of one-night stands." She clarified that "every year, they come back and for 24 hours, they have one day together every year. And they're both in happy marriages. But they just have a really deep connection. They talk about their spouses, they talk about their kids. So what starts out to

be just a sexual affair really turns into something much deeper."

The story joins the characters in five-year increments, each of them weaving in and out of each other's lives. While George and Doris diverge ideologically over the years, they ultimately care about each other very much. The crux of the story is how they deal with the moral conflict of what they've done without denying how they feel. — Nick Warren

Reception at 6 p.m.; show at 7:30 p.m. // PACA, 1505 State St., Second Floor (elevator operator on staff all evening) // \$45 // Mature themes // Tickets and info: [tickets.eriereader.com](https://tickets.eriereader.com)



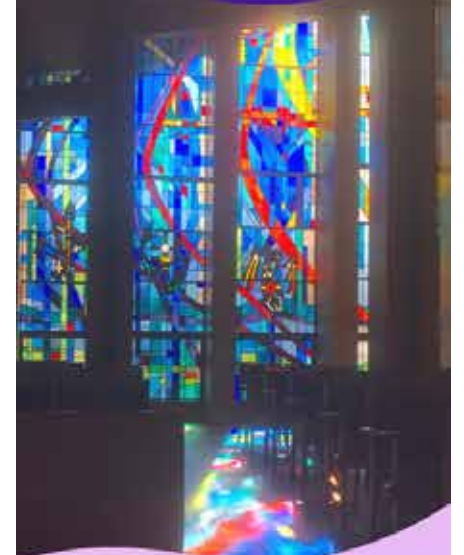
## Lent Vigils

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On March 9, join us at 4:00 pm for a guided tour of the monastery, followed by supper with the sisters before the evening Lent Vigil. RSVP through [eriebenedictines.org](https://eriebenedictines.org) or call Michelle (814) 899-0614 ext. 2507

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Sisters of Erie



## EVENTS

### **Tethered: An Immersive Theatrical Experience**

Project brings together more than 50 Erie creatives

**PREMIERING FRIDAY, FEB. 16**

A unique and interactive theatrical experience inspired by a true story is opening in Erie for one weekend only. *Tethered* is Erie's first immersive theater experience, created by the storyteller Nikki Behr. *Tethered* is a year-long collaboration featuring over 50 Erie-based actors, dancers, and musicians. The experience of *Tethered* conveys the demise of relationships and touches on themes of addiction, codependency, domestic violence, rehabilitation, therapy, and hope. Creator and writer Nikki Behr spoke on the show, saying it was "inspired by a real story that explores the disintegration of a codependent relationship and the role addiction, alcoholism, and trauma play in its demise." Even though the themes of the show are heavy, the producers hope to create a vision of light and hope, and intend for the audience to feel and heal through their experience.

Behr explains, "As our guests arrive, they will initially be dropped off in different parts of the building where they can see pieces of the story performed by actors and dancers, synchronized to a musical score composed by local jazz musician Tony Grey." Behr went on to say that attendees "can choose to be drawn into the story by the performers or they can simply be a witness."

The length of the show is around one hour, however the performance will be repeated three times, back to back, to allow the audience to spend as much (or as little) time as they want in each space. Attendees will be able to go from scene to scene or follow a specific

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*Tethered* is "inspired by a real story that explores the disintegration of a codependent relationship and the role addiction, alcoholism, and trauma play in its demise," says show creator and writer Nikki Behr.

---

character. Behr says, "The choice is theirs; they create their own version of the story." Producers know that the topics are heavy, but hope that each character will show redemption throughout their journey. Folks from SafeNet will be on hand to provide safe rooms for the guests if they should feel triggered or need to step away from the experience. Behr understands the nature of these topics, "We realize these themes can be difficult for some and it is vital we take care of all those in attendance who feel strong emotions as they journey through the show."



*Tethered* is a one-of-a-kind immersive theatrical experience that has been a year in the making. Multiple spaces within the PACA building will be transformed into a walkable stage-set where stories of addiction, trauma, and, ultimately, hope will be portrayed through multiple performances.

Behr comments on potential future iterations of *Tethered*: "Our hope is to keep the momentum rolling into our next endeavor and to continue telling stories that bring people together, reminding them they are not alone in life. We are all *Tethered*." Advance tickets required; no tickets will be available at the door. — Larry Wheaton

Friday, Feb. 16 and Saturday, Feb. 17 // Doors at 5:30 p.m., performance begins at 6 p.m. // PACA, 1505 State St. // \$35 // For tickets and info: [tickets.erieviewer.com](https://tickets.erieviewer.com)

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## ExpERIENCE Comedy at the Children's Museum

An adults-only event filled with laughs in a whimsical space

FRIDAY, FEB. 22

The expERIENCE Children's Museum is best known for its interactive exhibits for children of all ages, but the museum has some fun in store for the grown-ups, too.

On Feb. 22, the Children's Museum will host a 21+ Comedy Night from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. The lineup includes Bill Squire of the *Alan Cox Show* on 100.7 WMMS (Cleveland) as the headliner, Buffalonian Liz Reaves, and Anthony Morelli of Erie (a 2022 40 under 40 honoree). Erieite Brian Bailey will be the host for the evening. The event will also feature local beverages from Mazza Wines and Erie Beer Company.

Olivia Wickline, director of marketing and communications at expERIENCE, said that their last adults-only event in November was their first one since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and the museum's expansion. "We sat down and

we decided we really wanted to make these 21+ nights special, because we got huge feedback from the very first night that we hosted," Wickline said.

In the old museum, the events for adults were primarily geared towards providing networking opportunities, however, Wickline explained that the museum's new vision for 21+ nights will focus more on entertainment. "This is a chance for adults to have fun, right? You don't have to try and impress anyone, you're coming and you're having a good time." It is also a chance for adults to experience a playful and unique space with other adults. "Normally when an adult would come here you're chasing around your children, you are making sure that they aren't getting drenched at the water table," Wickline said.

In the future, the museum is looking forward to hosting more events for adults. "We're really excited to see the



CONTRIBUTED  
The expERIENCE Children's museum isn't just for the kiddos anymore. The organization is holding a 21+ comedy night after finding great success in hosting events for adults in the past. Expect hilarious out of town headliners alongside local talent.

reception of this 21+ Comedy Night because then that'll give us even more traction to say we can do even bigger and better things," Wickline said. — Alana Sabol

6 to 8 p.m. // expERIENCE Children's Museum, 420 French St. // \$30 // 21+ // For tickets and info: [eriechildrensmuseum.org](http://eriechildrensmuseum.org)

## Downtown Erie Winter Carnival Returns for 2024

Chase those winter blues away with lots of fun coming in hot

BEGINNING THURSDAY, FEB. 22

At this point in the year, most people are wishing for warmer weather and waiting for those gray winter days to end. But with the Erie Downtown Partnership's (EDP) annual upcoming Winter Carnival, we're looking forward to cooler temps for just a bit longer.

Now in its third year, the Winter Carnival is bringing back all the fan favorites, offering a fun weekend out for the whole family. Expect lots of live music in the downtown restaurants and with use of the former Erie Co-Op space for some of the programming, there's sure to be something for everyone to enjoy.

Live ice carving has been a mainstay of the event, and Dave Tamulonis, EDP's events and marketing manager, recommends not missing out on the experience: "A team of professional carvers will be doing large-scale carvings live during the festival Friday night and Saturday morning, so be sure to get there early," he said. "A lot of people enjoy watching the sculptures come to life."

Another highlight is the fire dancing performance put on by Jennifer Dennehy and Friends. Local to Erie, Dennehy has showcased her talents through performances and workshops at events like Discover Presque Isle



ERIN PHILLIPS  
The third annual Winter Carnival presented by the Erie Downtown Partnership offers local families an excuse to get out and enjoy Erie at the peak of winter. Expect dazzlingly impressive ice sculptures, live music, vendors, family activities, ice skating, and more.

and Celebrate Erie. "It's amazing to see the crowd that comes out in the cold to watch," said Tamulonis. "Each year they put on a fantastic show!"

Also included this year will be vendors in the Perry Square shops, curling demonstrations on the Perry Square Stage, and your last chance to skate

at the Downtown Community Skating Rink.

— Ally Kutz

Thursday, Feb. 22 and Friday, Feb. 23 from 4 to 7 p.m., Saturday, Feb. 24 from noon to 7 p.m., and Sunday, Feb. 25 from noon to 5 p.m. // Perry Square, 601 State St. // Free // For more info: [eriedowntown.com](http://eriedowntown.com)

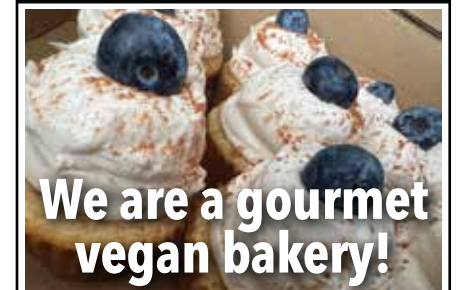
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## Erie Philharmonic Transports Audiences With *Greatest Fantasy Hits II*

Orchestra brings sci-fi and fantasy's most imaginative scores to life

SATURDAY, FEB. 24 - 25

The Erie Philharmonic is moving audiences to worlds beyond our own with *Greatest Fantasy Hits II*. Delving into iconic scores from film and television, the Erie Philharmonic and Philharmonic Chorus will create fantasy and science fiction magic with a repertoire spanning over 50 years of music.

"From the sweeping melodies of epic fantasy films to the haunting themes of popular television shows, each piece will be brought to life by the powerful performance of the Philharmonic," the Philharmonic describes. "This concert offers a unique opportunity to experience your favorite fantasy and sci-fi music in a whole new light, amplified by the grandeur of a live orchestral performance."

With musical performances from eight different fictional worlds and 13 different composers — below we break down the scores from the upcoming concert, giving a glimpse into the inspiration behind the music and stories.

### Halo

First released on Nov. 15, 2001 for the Microsoft Xbox, *Halo: Combat Evolved* launched a franchise that has enticed gamers from around the world. The music for the original *Halo* trilogy was composed by Martin O'Donnell and Michael Salvatori, and the first soundtrack was released in 2002. O'Donnell wrote the iconic theme featuring a chanting choir and thunderous percussion in only three days, and took inspiration for the melody from the Beatles song "Yesterday." Still recognizable to this day, the *Halo* soundtrack remains one of the most iconic video game scores of all time.

### Star Trek

Space may be the final frontier, but it has also inspired the music of *Star Trek* and continues to captivate audiences to this day. The Philharmonic will be playing scores from a vast array of *Star Trek's* catalog, starting with the original theme from the 1966 series by Alexander Courage. They move through the soundtracks as fast as the *U.S.S. Enterprise* — from Jerry Goldsmith's scores on *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*, *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, and *Star Trek: Voyager* to Dennis McCarthy's work on *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* and *Star Trek: Generations*. Finally, Michael Giacchino's score to the Kelvin timeline film *Star Trek: Into Darkness* puts a final note on Star

Trek's musical history.

### Stranger Things

The latest season of *Stranger Things* introduced a new generation to the music of British singer-songwriter Kate Bush with her 1985 single "Running Up That Hill (A Deal With God)." First released on her 1985 album *Hounds of Love*, Bush wrote the song in a single evening with the main riff being played on a Fairlight CMI Synthesizer. She was a fan of *Stranger Things* and allowed the show to use her music. The song soon went to number three on the Billboard Hot 100 and Bush received her second number-one hit on the UK charts after *Wuthering Heights* was released in 1978.

### Lord of the Rings

Transporting audiences to Middle-Earth, Howard Shore's score from *The Lord of the Rings* film trilogy creates emotional and tension-filled moments throughout the series, particularly in *The Fellowship of the Ring*. Shore began work on the score in 2000, writing over four hours of music for the film and over 50 leitmotifs over the course of the trilogy to represent the Fellowship, characters, cultures, and locations of Tolkien's world. Howard Shore won an Oscar for Best Original Score for his work on *The Fellowship of the Ring*.

### Avatar

James Cameron's vision for Pandora couldn't have been complete without the music from the late James Horner. This was his third collaboration with Cameron, as he also composed the music for *Aliens* and *Titanic*. Working with ethnomusicologist Wanda Bryant, Horner took a different approach by writing two scores for the film: one focusing on the Na'vi sound along with a traditional film score. Combining the two scores into one, the soundtrack received critical acclaim and was nominated for Best Original Score at the Oscars.

### Aliens

James Horner's first collaboration with James Cameron was on the sequel to Ridley Scott's *Alien* after they had met while working on a Roger Corman film. The score was composed in three weeks instead of the six Horner was promised, and recorded in a short time at Abbey Road Studios. Cameron disliked the score as he couldn't make the last-minute changes he had done previously on *The Terminator* with Brad Fiedel. Combining the pieces of



The Erie Philharmonic gets epic this February as they present their *Greatest Fantasy Hits* – a melange of various scores from sci-fi and fantasy favorites including *Star Wars*, *Halo*, *Lord of the Rings*, and more.

Horner's score that fit the scenes he filmed with the work of Jerry Goldsmith and numerous unknown composers, Cameron finished work on the film and it was released on July 18, 1986.

### Blade Runner

After winning the Oscar for Best Original Score for *Chariots of Fire*, Greek composer Vangelis collaborated with Ridley Scott to create the music for *Blade Runner*. Drawing from traditional orchestra composition, ambient sound, and nine synthesizers along with numerous percussion instruments, the score received commercial acclaim and was nominated for Best Original Score for the BAFTA Awards.

### Star Wars

The music of *Star Wars* is considered one of the most iconic film scores in history, and many composers have added to its legacy. The Philharmonic will be performing John Williams' scores for *The Return of the Jedi* and *The Phantom Menace*, along with Ludwig Goransson's theme for *The Mandalorian*. Jon Favreau wanted the music for the show to reflect Williams' score, but have a different tone for the show, which was inspired by Westerns and samurai films. The theme's opening was played on a bass recorder, and the score received critical acclaim. Goransson would go on to work with director Christopher Nolan on *Tenet* and would receive an Oscar nomination for Best Original Score for *Oppenheimer*. — Thomas Taylor

Saturday, Feb. 24 at 8 p.m. and Sunday, Feb. 25 at 3 p.m. // Warner Theatre, 811 State St. // \$14-\$60 // For tickets and info: [eriephil.org](http://eriephil.org)

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## Hands-On Learning Running Full-STEAM Ahead at Penn State Behrend

The family friendly fair returns for its ninth year

**MONDAY, FEB. 26**

“Research shows that kids will actually make a decision in around second grade whether or not they like math and science,” says Melanie Ford, director of youth education outreach at Penn State Behrend. “Being able to engage kids with something hands-on is so much better than telling or lecturing ... the interactions are going to spark joy or interest.” Ford adds.

Ford, who is also a faculty member in computer science and software engineering, is coordinating the ninth annual STEAM Fair at Behrend’s Junker Center, which will bring together local organizations and businesses, each of which will present an activity geared towards kids of all ages. This year over 70 businesses or organizations have already signed up to participate.

According to the Institute for Arts Integration and STEAM, STEAM Education is “an approach to learning that uses Science, Technology, Engineering, the Arts, and Mathematics as access points for guiding student inquiry, dialogue, and critical thinking.”

Each organization or business that registers for a table at the fair will bring an activity of their choosing — there is always a wide variety. The event will also include some Penn State student groups. The activities available to attendees range in theme and have, in the past, included examples such as nursing students explaining heart and lung function, dental offices showing how to make toothpaste, chemistry principles demonstrated through various experiments, a blow-up planetarium where kids



**Get the kids out of the house and into some science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics at Penn State Behrend’s ninth annual STEAM Fair, taking place at their Junker Center.**

can go in and make their own celestial show, civil air patrol, robotics teams, and more.

The main sponsors of this year’s fair are WQLN and Wabtec, who will also each have a prepared activity. “It’s hard to say what will be new this year but I will tell you that it’s always engaging,” says Ford. “We see a lot of families, certainly, but we also see tons of scout groups and troops, so it’s a convenient way for groups to get kids in front of this kind of material,” Robb Frederick, office of strategic communications at Behrend, adds.

Ford says her favorite thing about the event is “seeing kids light up and get excited when they get to walk around and see what’s going on. It’s a nice relaxing, fun evening for the whole family.” — Edwina Capozziello

5:30 - 8:30 p.m. // Junker Center, Penn State Behrend, 5103 Station Rd. // All ages // Free // For more info visit: [behrend.psu.edu](http://behrend.psu.edu)

## Stay Golden: Jessica Vosk’s *My Golden Age* at Mercyhurst University

Broadway superstar shines her light on Erie

**THURSDAY, FEB. 29**

Every so often a star comes along that shines a little brighter than all the other lights in the firmament. Jessica Vosk is one such star, a darling of the stage and doyenne of Broadway — if it weren’t for an anxious tussle with impostor syndrome following several promotions at a Wall Street investor relations firm, it might never have happened.

At 27, Vosk left her 9-to-5 and decided to pursue her dreams of singing and performing, and Broadway has been better for it ever since.

The singer and actress, who is perhaps best known for her turn as Elphaba in *Wicked*, both in the Second National Tour and at the Gershwin Theatre, is bringing her delightful talents to the Mary D’Angelo stage on the campus of Mercyhurst University, as part of the Mercyhurst Institute for Arts and Culture’s (MIAC’s) 2023-2024 Live season.

*Jessica Vosk: My Golden Age* is 90 minutes of electric singing, and witty, sometimes laugh-out-loud storytelling (including personal anecdotes).

Said Dr. Brett D. Johnson, artistic director of MIAC, “I cannot think of a better way to launch our spring 2024 series than with another Broadway luminary — the sensational Jessica Vosk, whose powerhouse voice, magnificent interpretive skills, effortless humor, and charismatic presence are certain to dazzle Erie audiences.”



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Dr. Johnson concludes, “Jessica Vosk’s upcoming concert epitomizes what MIAC brings to the Erie region: dynamic performers, both familiar and new, in a beautiful venue that enhances the energy and intimacy of live performance.”

MIAC, in bringing Vosk to Erie, is yet again giving this city and its inhabitants a delectable taste of the Great White Way right in our hometown. — Cara Suppa

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## From the Water Tower to the Reg Lenna: *Animaniacs* in Concert is Totally Insaney

An interview with prolific voice actors Rob Paulsen and Maurice LaMarche on their upcoming performance with original songwriter Randy Rogel

By: Nick Warren

If it's the first Saturday in March, and you're asking "what are we going to do tonight?" then we have the answer for you. And no, we're not trying to take over the world ... this time.

That question kicked off nearly every short for Pinky and the Brain on *Animaniacs*. Arguably the apex of the '90s cartoon boom, the Steven Spielberg-produced cartoon anthology combined quirky, intelligent writing with the best animation and voice acting in the business, along with dozens of unforgettable songs.

The man behind most of those songs is Randy Rogel. The multi-talented composer was actually a writer for *Batman: The Animated Series* (the other best animated series of the 1990s) before moving on to *Animaniacs*. His first songwriting idea set the bar pretty high too. It is perhaps the quintessential patter song of the 20th century, "Yakko's World."

The real voices behind many of these songs and characters are Rob Paulsen and Maurice LaMarche. Together they are landmark talents in the world of voice acting. They're also Pinky and the Brain.

For one night at the Reg Lenna Theatre in Jamestown, New York, Paulsen, LaMarche, and Rogel will perform some of their beloved songs, sketches, and behind the scenes insights on *Animaniacs* for an all-ages extravaganza fit for newcomers and fans alike. I was lucky enough to talk to Paulsen, LaMarche, and Rogel prior to their performance. My childhood is soaring right now.

**Nick Warren (NW):** So what brought this tour together?

**Rob Paulsen (RP):** Actually it started as a result of me doing a podcast years ago. That morphed from doing interviews, like going to Moe's [Maurice LaMarche's] home and talking to him, to doing live events. And then ultimately, I was doing a podcast once a week at the Jon Lovitz Comedy Club, which was a venue that Jon owned at the Universal CityWalk. And people love *Animaniacs*, so I said [to Rogel] 'hey man why don't you come down and sing a bunch of songs' and everybody loved it. There was some kind of little electric keyboard thing on the stage. And then it kind of morphed into a labor of love. And then Randy went on and did a ton of work and got a hold of the Warner Brothers licensing, and Am-

blin. So we got their blessing. And Maurice was kind enough to join the little dog, pony, and brain show. It is an absolute gas. And we've got, I don't know, 20 gigs between now and the end of May.

**Randy Rogel (RR):** We've had, since last July, 43 symphony gigs. We're now booked all over the country. We're going to the Toronto Symphony then the Schenectady symphony, plus all the individual gigs. So the show's really grown. It's a really great evening.

**NW:** Besides some of the classic songs, the favorites that we might expect to hear, what else would fans kind of be surprised by at this concert?

**Maurice LaMarche (MLM):** They might be surprised at the fact that I can almost sing [laughs]. No, but we do a couple of comedy sketches in there, and a couple of them are us doing our voices from the other shows we do, but it's very rapid fire and we meet not only Warner Bros. characters, but also characters from *Futurama* and characters from *The Simpsons* and *Ghostbusters*. Towards the end of the show, we do a Pinky and the Brain take on the countries of the world by way of Abbott and Costello. So it's very fun. So there's comedy involved as well as music.

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For one night at the Reg Lenna Theatre in Jamestown, N.Y., [Rob] Paulsen, [Maurice] LaMarche, and [Randy] Rogel will perform some of their beloved songs, sketches, and behind the scenes insights on *Animaniacs* for an all-ages extravaganza fit for newcomers and fans alike.

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**RR:** Maurice has a solo.

**MLM:** Yeah, there's a whole solo song and it's just a lot of fun. And it's an 'inside baseball' evening too. You get a lot of behind the scenes stories of how the songs came to be, and it's just a really, really great evening.

**RP:** You'll see that the mean age of the audience will probably be around 40 to 45.

**NW:** Yeah, that's exactly my age [laughs].

**RP:** And it's their kids, sometimes people our age with their grandkids and



The Reader's Nick Warren sits down with the creators, voices, and the composer from the '90s animated series *Animaniacs* for an interview ahead of their upcoming stage performance in nearby Jamestown, New York.

their kids. It is, as they say, a show for kids of all ages. It's not a not a bunch of people running around in *Animaniacs* costumes.

**RR:** If I can make that point, you don't need to know *Animaniacs* in order to enjoy the show, and you don't need to be a kid to enjoy the show.

**NW:** So you guys brought up some of your very, very many credits. I think the two of you had almost 1,000 IMDb credits combined. Obviously, you've got the heavy hitters. You know, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. You mentioned *Futurama*, and *Ghostbusters*, obviously, *Animaniacs*. What are some of the more obscure ones that fans come up to you and say, 'Oh, I love you in this?'

**MLM:** Gosh, like *Captain Simian and the Space Monkeys* [laughs], which was a brilliant show that never got its due. But it was really science fiction. We had Michael Dorn in the cast and Malcolm McDowell. And it was created by the late Gordon Bressack. Who wrote a lot of the very, very funny *Pinky and the Brain* [episodes]. The more high-concept ones. And, and so that's one that people hit me with. *Taz-mania*.

**NW:** Oh, yeah. I loved that show!

**MLM:** The story of the Tasmanian devil. We were both on that. Really good show. We'll occasionally get requests and bring in our film work too like *Frozen* and *Zoo-*

*topia*.

**RP:** And Moe is pretty much *the guy* on *Futurama*. I mean, he's done, yeah, how many cases do you have?

**MLM:** 72 [laughs]. But you know, it's Billy West that is the central core of the show. I'm just in the orbit. I'm the Hank Azaria [laughs].

**RP:** It's really remarkable what Moe does, that really adds a whole different dimension. Because as you suggested, between Moe and me, we have a lot of characters, both sort of on the first string and the second string that people recognize. And then Randy's music is ultimately the star of the show. And when people hear songs that didn't make it, then they start to kind of understand that, you know, this guy goes to sit in an office and the producer says, 'Yeah, I'm not crazy about that. Go write something else, we've gotta ship next week.' You can't wait for the muse to hit you. So it's a pretty remarkable skill set that Randy possesses. And the audience sings, they sometimes cry, their children sing. It's unbelievable.

*This interview was edited for length and clarity and was a dream come true for the interviewer.*

Saturday, Mar. 2 // 7:30 p.m. // Reg Lenna Center for the Arts, 16 E. 3rd St., Jamestown, N.Y. // All ages // \$19-\$52 // For tickets and info: [animaniacs.live.com](http://animaniacs.live.com)

## Gem City Style: February 2024

An interview with artist Precious Thompson

**By: Jessica Hunter**

I recently sat down with local artist, muralist, and mental health advocate Precious Thompson to talk about artistic influences, inspiration, and motivations.

**Jessica Hunter (JH):** Precious tell us a little bit about yourself and how you first got introduced to the art world.

**Precious Thompson (PT):** I've always dabbled, since I was a child. I think the pivotal moment for me, however, was getting my first sketchbook at school in sixth grade. I really struggled that year and art was my release. I spent so much time reading webcomics on DeviantArt and looking at tutorials — I dreamed of illustrating comic books when I got older. I've never really had any classical training, but I started assisting with murals a few years ago. For my first mural, I worked under Mwanel Pierre-Louis and he taught me a lot. This opportunity was thanks to DaVona Pacley; she really pushed me to take that next step in 2021. Now I'm here! So exciting!

**JH:** You designed the cover for this issue of the Erie Reader. It is stunning and shares a beautiful message. What was your inspiration behind the design for this specific piece?

**PT:** Portraying Black women as soft, cozy, feminine, classical. This is a common theme in my work. Historically, these words have not been associated with Black women. In honor of Black History Month and Valentine's Day, I was inspired to make a very pink, sweet piece about self-love and self-care. I always see those little cozy illustrations of women wrapped in blankets, reading books, drinking coffee — but they're never Black women. I saw something I thought the world needed and I made it. Representation is so important. I know how good it feels to see myself in art, in video game characters, in government, etc. I want to help other women like me feel that way too.

**JH:** We have seen your artwork displayed throughout the city of Erie. What is the process like creating these large scale murals?

**PT:** Like I said before, I've assisted on a few murals. I've worked with Mwanel, Nicole Salgar, Ana Balcázar — all extremely talented and supportive. And all of their processes were very different. So, I took what I learned and I made it my own. After talking with the client about what they want, I usually am hit with a bunch of ideas. I often consult my friends and family (even if I'm just talking at them, haha) to try and solidify an idea. I illustrate digitally, right on my iPad mini. I use Procreate — a really awesome app. I try to keep in mind the space I am painting because that can really affect the layout. Flexibility is important — sometimes I get out there and start painting and a color I chose just doesn't look right and things need to change. Depending on complexity, size, subject matter, I will sometimes use a projector to create an outline on the wall. I'll just project my digital illustration right on the wall and do some sketching with a small paint brush. Prepping the wall is an important part, especially on interior murals. Taping, removing outlet covers, stuff like that. Other than all that, it's just like painting a canvas. Ya know, just a really



Local artist Precious Thompson talks with Jessica Hunter about her inspiration for the art she created for this month's Erie Reader cover, her experience in creating a public art mural at 10/20 Collective, and about her growth and vision as an artist.

big one. There are things like polytab, and I've attended a workshop on those but I have yet to try that method.

**JH:** Who are your biggest artistic influences? What motivates you to create?

**PT:** I really love pop art and comic book art. Fiona Staples illustrates the comic book series *Saga* and she is just incredible. The way she communicates through

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**"Art is important for so many reasons, but these are the reasons most important to me: dispelling stereotypes, representation, advocacy, destroying stigma — all to encourage a more accepting, loving, and inclusive world."**  
 — Precious Thompson

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her work, it's so immersive. I'm thinking specifically of this scene she illustrated where a train was passing by a few characters having a conversation. I could hear the train, hear the characters yelling, feel the wind as the train passed — that's talent. I also follow a lot of artists on Instagram like Sydney Irvine (@sidthevisualkid), SSEBONG, Teddi Parker (@teddiparkerart), and so many more. I appreciate different things about each of them — their technique, their characters, their style, their eye for color.

I'm really motivated by a desire to make people feel

good. And sometimes to make them a little uncomfortable. I love seeing people smile and laugh at the art I create. I love portraying underrepresented ideas and people in ways they aren't usually imagined. I think there is a need for it. It's my niche.

**JH:** How do you think art is important to society?

**PT:** At the risk of sounding repetitive, here is the short answer: representation. And here is the long answer: rep-ruh-zen-TAY-shun. Haha!

But seriously, I think it's so important to expose people to different ideas and ways of life. Especially when it comes to Black women. There are some other themes I like to focus on, like menstrual health and women's sexuality. Things that are kind of taboo, but really shouldn't be. Art is important for so many reasons, but these are the reasons most important to me: dispelling stereotypes, representation, advocacy, destroying stigma — all to encourage a more accepting, loving, and inclusive world.

**JH:** If you could tell younger Precious anything you have learned along the way, what would you tell her?

**PT:** "Leave that boy alone!" Haha!

Ugh, there are so many things I would tell her if I could. But I also think it's good that I can't, and that she didn't know the things I know now. All of that — the experiences, the trial and error — she went through that so I can be the person I am now. And I'm happy there was a point in time where I didn't know all this stuff. I got to be a kid.

*Precious Thompson can be found on Instagram @preshatostart or at preshatostart.myshopify.com*

*Jessica Hunter can be found at jessicahunterphotos.com*



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## The 96th Academy Awards Are Both Surprising and Predictable

The more things change...

By: Forest Taylor

Once again, another year of great films is behind us and, once again, a bunch of them are now competing to win a little golden man. This list of nominees somehow gives us both unexpected twists and business as usual. There were some surprises (*Barbie* both over-performing and underperforming), disappointments (Todd Haynes' brilliant *May December* almost completely shut out), and causes for celebration (we now have our first ever Oscar-nominated *Godzilla* film). So now, let's move to the major awards and some other categories that I feel compelled to talk about.

### Best Picture

With *Barbie* getting eight nominations but nothing for directing, editing, or cinematography, its chances of a Best Picture win are now slim. I expected it to be a clear challenge to *Oppenheimer's* dominance, but now that distinction has seemingly gone to *Poor Things* which may end up being the ultimate upset and take it all. That said, Christopher Nolan's epic is that rare feat in Hollywood: a critical darling that also made absurd amounts of money, and I can easily see the Academy honoring that fact by giving *Oppenheimer* the big one.

### Best Director

Greta Gerwig continues to follow in the footsteps of her mentor Steven Spielberg by directing the biggest box office hit of the year and *not* getting a Best Director nod for it. With her out of the running, this really comes down to Nolan and *Poor Things* director Yorgos Lanthimos. Although a part of me would love to see Martin Scorsese get another one for making one of the best films of his career well into his 80s, I know it's a race between these two. While everything is telling me Nolan has this in the bag, it's possible that Lanthimos could be a big upset. But I still think Nolan has it.

### Best Actor

Months ago it seemed like this category was Bradley Cooper's to lose for his six-years-in-the-making passion project *Maestro*, but hype for that film has almost completely fallen off and Cooper's nomination feels more like a formality with Cillian Murphy and even Paul Giamatti surpassing him as the clear front runner. At this point, Murphy has all the

momentum behind him and his win is all but guaranteed. Sorry, Bradley.

### Best Actress

This could be the hardest to predict. Even with Margot Robbie's surprise snub, there are strong contenders all around. The two frontrunners are clearly Lily Gladstone for *Killers of the Flower Moon* and Emma Stone for *Poor Things* with a dark horse in the form of Sandra Huller for *Anatomy of a Fall*. Honestly, this one could go either way, but I'm going to vote with my heart and predict Gladstone will become the first Indigenous woman to win an acting Oscar.

### Best Supporting Actor

There are plenty of strong performances here (although excluding Charles Melton's quietly sad performance in *May December* is a tragedy), but it really comes down to Robert Downey Jr. and Ryan Gosling. Given the Academy's track record for ignoring comedies, this should be an easy win for Downey (*Oppenheimer*). That said, I feel like the Academy is going to throw some love to the biggest movie of the year and this may be where they do it. I predict a Ryan Gosling upset. He just has that Kenegy.

### Best Supporting Actress

This category is the polar opposite of Lead Actress as this one is the easiest to predict. Da'Vine Joy Randolph's funny, empathetic performance in *The Holdovers* was one of the best of the year and her momentum has not slowed down this entire awards season. She has this one in the bag.

### Best Screenplay

After it was revealed that *Barbie* was ineligible (since it's adapted from a toy line), the Original Screenplay category is wide open for some surprises. Great scripts like *Anatomy of a Fall*, *Past Lives*, and *May December* (can you tell I love *May December*? Review coming soon) all have a shot, but the strongest contender remains *The Holdovers* which I think will win, but this one could go several different ways. As for Adapted Screenplay, after a snub for *Killers*, this one is a dead heat between *Oppenheimer* and *Poor Things* with a possible *Barbie* upset. I think *Poor Things* has the best chance in this category.



Last year, Forest Taylor correctly predicted seven out of 10 Oscar winners. Let's see how his forecast pans out in 2024 with a year full of blockbuster hits alongside more subtle arthouse favorites.

### Best International Feature

Although it did very well in nominations, I think Jonathan Glazer's *The Zone of Interest* will only win in this category. I'm a little disappointed that Aki Kaurismäki's *Fallen Leaves* didn't get any love.

### Best Original Song

This one will most likely go to "What Was I Made For?" from *Barbie* but I'd much rather see it go to the fist-pumping, show-stopping anthem "I'm Just Ken." Why does the best song always have to be so weepy? I'm just going to assume they didn't nominate "Camp Isn't Home" from *Theater Camp* to keep things competitive.

### Best Visual Effects

Surprisingly, the two favored nominees are the films with the lowest budgets. Gareth Edwards' underrated *The Creator* and unexpected hit *Godzilla Minus One*. I hope Hollywood realizes that films don't need to have enormous budgets to achieve amazing special effects. I would love to

see *Godzilla* get this one and give some love to the Japanese effects industry.

The 96th Academy Awards will air on ABC at 7 p.m. on Sunday, Mar. 10.

### Forest's Predictions

**Best Picture:** *Oppenheimer*

**Best Director:** Christopher Nolan - *Oppenheimer*

**Best Actor:** Cillian Murphy - *Oppenheimer*

**Best Actress:** Lily Gladstone - *Killers of the Flower Moon*

**Best Supporting Actor:** Ryan Gosling - *Barbie*

**Best Supporting Actress:** Da'Vine Joy Randolph - *The Holdovers*

**Best Original Screenplay:** David Hemingson - *The Holdovers*

**Best Adapted Screenplay:** Tony McNamara - *Poor Things*

**Best International Feature:** *The Zone of Interest* (United Kingdom)

**Best Original Song:** "What Was I Made For?" from *Barbie*

**Best Visual Effects:** *Godzilla Minus One*

## Fresh Romance Novels for Your Valentine's Day

Treat yourself to these five favorites

By: Ally Kutz

**A**h, Valentine's Day: a time to celebrate love — whether with a partner, friends, or just yourself, it's the perfect occasion for special treatment. One of the best forms of that is curling up with a new book — better yet, a romance book. Check out some of these recent romance titles to immerse yourself in the season of love.

### Plot Twist by Erin La Rosa

When romance author Sophie Lyon's ironic secret that she's never been in love goes viral, her reputation takes a nosedive. A looming manuscript deadline paired with writer's block leads her to the interesting yet ambitious plan to reunite with her exes to figure out why she's never fallen in love. Oh, and she'll be documenting it for her millions of new online followers. She enlists the help of former teen heartthrob turned reclusive landlord, Dash Montrose, whose social media prowess is thanks to an anonymous persona he leads online. As they grow closer, conflicting emotions arise as Sophie realizes she needs to learn who she is outside her relationships before she can know how to fall in love.

### The Gentleman's Gambit by Evie Dunmore

Catronia Campbell is dealing with a lot at the moment: being a suffragist during a tense time in England's women's rights campaign, an ailing estate, and academic writer's block have all kept her busy. The last thing she needs is to be tasked with hosting Elias Khoury, one of her father's young (and attractive) colleagues. But Elias is keeping a big secret — he didn't come to Oxford to classify ancient artifacts, he came to steal them back for

his homeland in the Middle East, and Catronia may be the key to his success. As they grow closer thanks to their proximity, what follows are risks that force them both to face truths that will have them both putting their hearts and dreams at stake.

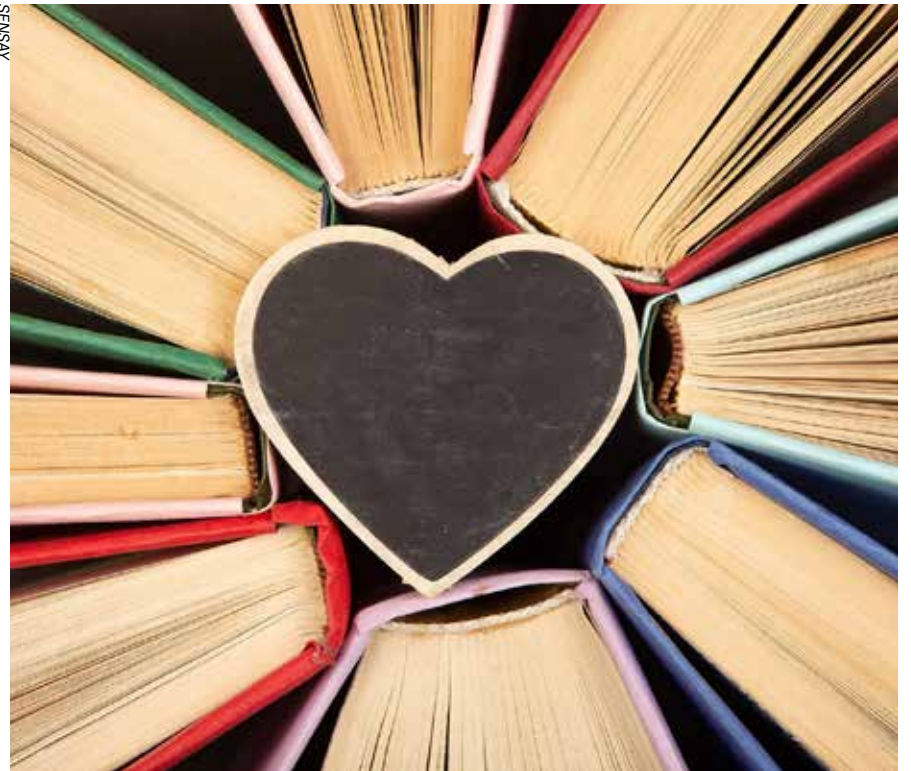
### Ready or Not by Cara Bastone

When Eve Hatch finds herself pregnant after an uncharacteristic one-night stand, her contented Brooklyn life is flipped upside down. Things that once seemed stable are now unsteady — her tight-knit friendship with best friend Willa feels off at a time when she needs her most; Willa's brother Shep is suddenly present in her life, stepping up to help; and the baby's father is supportive but conflicted — leaving Eve rethinking everything she thought she knew about both herself and everyone around her. The next nine months prove to be a struggle for Eve as she tries to figure out the next steps to take toward her new reality.

### The Seven Year Slip by Ashley Poston

When the worst day of Clementine's life happens, she's determined to stay busy, work hard, find someone decent to love, and try to remember to chase the moon — the last thanks to her aunt, who always told her you need one big dream to keep you going. But finding love is harder than it seems, as she doesn't want to get too close to anyone in case her heart can't handle the heartbreak. When she finds a strange man in the kitchen of her late aunt's apartment, she knows he's the kind of guy that the "old her" would've fallen for, head over heels. The biggest problem, though? He exists sev-

SENSAY



If you'd rather not spend Valentine's Day fighting the crowds for a romantic dinner date, consider snuggling up with one of these non-traditional romance novels, hand-picked for you from our resident bookworm, Ally Kutz.

en years in the past, while she lives seven years in his future. When her aunt told her the apartment was a pinch in time, she didn't realize she meant it so literally. Clementine must now decide how to protect her heart while also knowing that love is never a matter of time, but a matter of timing.

### Hello Stranger by Katherine Center

When artist Sadie Montgomery winds up in a hospital bed diagnosed with the "probably temporary" condition known as face blindness, the timing couldn't

be worse: she's just placed as a finalist in the North American Portrait Society, but now every face she sees is a jumble of disconnected, unrecognizable features. Coping with this new diagnosis while trying to hold on to her artistic dreams and deal with major family issues, she falls for two men who are very different from each other, throwing things even further out of focus. What Sadie needs is clarity, something that comes at times when we least expect it, and with people we least expect to bring it.



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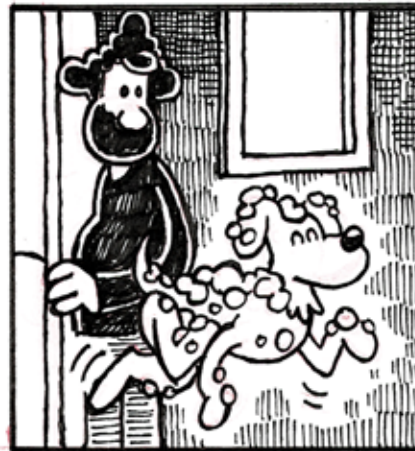
# FRIDGE COMICS

By Anthony @ants art house



# CHILLY DOG

BY BRAD PATTULLO ©2024 bradpattullo.com



# JUST TOYIN' WITCHA — BY B. TOY



# Fish that Talk in: The BIG ZOOLANDER



**Kali Uchis**  
*Orquídeas*  
 Geffen Records  
 ★★★★★

Kali Uchis' latest record further cements the Colombian American singer's penchant for releasing excellent albums. Coming less than a year after her third studio album *Red Moon in Venus*, *Orquídeas* could be considered its Spanish-language sibling.



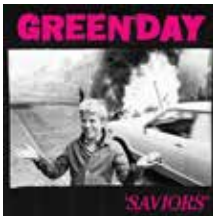
This record is not Uchis' first foray into Spanish-only albums; however, it is her most authentic. On her previous effort, *Sin Miedo* (released in 2020), Kali sang in Spanish over American pop and R&B standards. *Orquídeas* pivots away from the American music scene with a full embrace of urbano (aka Latin urban) music.

Out of this experimentation come some of the most infectious bops in recent musical history. The sounds of reggaeton, dancehall, and flamenco fit excellently with Uchis' beautiful singing voice. Fitting with the shifting soundscape, the range of guests on *Orquídeas* come from all walks of the Latin music scene. From Mexican singer Peso Pluma on "Igual Que Un Ángel" to Colombian reggaeton artist Karol G on "Labios Mordidos," the album's guests are as varied as the songs they are showcased on.

Uchis' most musically adventurous album to date, *Orquídeas* is an early contender for pop album of the year, arriving just a month into the calendar. — Nathaniel Clark

**Green Day**  
*Saviors*  
 Reprise Records  
 ★★★★★

There's a certain stage that legacy acts reach in their career that makes it difficult to succeed, and Green Day has officially reached that stage. Sure, they could tour on 20 years of *American Idiot* and 30 years of *Dookie* and make out like bandits, which they are, but one look at their creative direction of the past near-decade shows a band stuck between a rock and a hard place. Go back to basics (2016's *Revolution Radio*) and face critical accusations of becoming stale, or do what you want creatively (2020's *Father of All...*) and get swept up in fan backlash.



Just like last year's *One More Time* by their peers in Blink-182, *Saviors* seems to straddle that line almost perfectly. A lengthy tracklist packed with relatively short bursts of power-pop, the album borrows the blueprint for 1997's *Nimrod* but plays more like a career retrospective. There's well-intentioned and questionably executed political discourse ("The American Dream is Killing Me") and *Warning*-esque doo-wop-adjacent numbers ("Suzie Chapstick"). Sure, you may still have to stomach mentions of "rock and roll" from 50-year-old punk rock vocalists, but on the Weezer-inspired "Bobby Sox" and "Dilemma," the band sounds more energetic than they have in 15 years. — Aaron Mook

**21 Savage**  
*American Dream*  
 Epic Records  
 ★★★★★

Jokes about 21 Savage have long defined the rapper, at least for those that don't give him a chance. Known for his monotone voice and ad-libs, he's the kind of artist that can be hard to convince real hip-hop heads to listen to — until he puts out a song like "a lot." Suddenly, the trap rapper best known for a Post Malone radio feature ("Rockstar") was delivering personal bars over one of the best soul beats in recent memory, complete with an unforgettable J. Cole verse. Savage's prior album, *I Am > I Was*, largely held to that standard, offering shocking introspection over largely gritty beats and, yes, plenty of ad-libs.



We should consider ourselves lucky that the rapper continues to mature. Hinting at 21 Savage's largely publicized immigration issues, *American Dream* largely picks up where its predecessor left off. While it doesn't quite replicate the hook from "a lot," opening track "all of me" serves as one of the rapper's best tracks yet, sliding directly into the menacing single "redrum." But among the soul-inspired beats and harrowing raps comes a positive message on closing track "dark days: "I know it might sound lame, but just stay in school/They got a place that they put people who don't follow rules/You probably got your mama scared, don't wanna watch the news/Ready to risk your life and freedom for a pair of shoes." — Aaron Mook

**Machine Elvis**  
*Dog Gods*  
 Self-released  
 ★★★★★

The sophomore solo album from local multi-instrumentalist Brent Knight (under the moniker Machine Elvis) highlights his skill as a musician who blends prog, folk, psychedelia, and indie dream pop into his own unique sound. Knight is also known for his work with *Optimistic Apocalypse*, *Re\$inate*, and *This American Song*, but Machine Elvis doesn't sound like any of his other projects.



The follow-up to 2017's *Darkness of Death*, *Dog Gods* moves his sound from a primarily softer and airy style into a fuller and broader soundscape. Only accompanied by his partner Mackenzie Sprague (*Optimistic Apocalypse*) on harmonized vocals, *Dog Gods* highlights Knight's diverse playing ability. The album starts out with the Beck-esque song "Ordinary Fire" and takes you on a journey through genres like the laid back jam "Carnival of the Sun," the prog opus of "Moment of Sade," synth-rock "Ash and Black," and the album closer "Reburn," which would feel at home on any '80s Pink Floyd release. The lyrics are both catchy and meaningful — touching on life, nature, and how they are intertwined in all of us. It's not often that an album can lift you up while also letting you rock out, however *Dog Gods* manages to be one of those rare gifts. — Larry Wheaton

TOMMY IN TOON — BY TOMMY LINK





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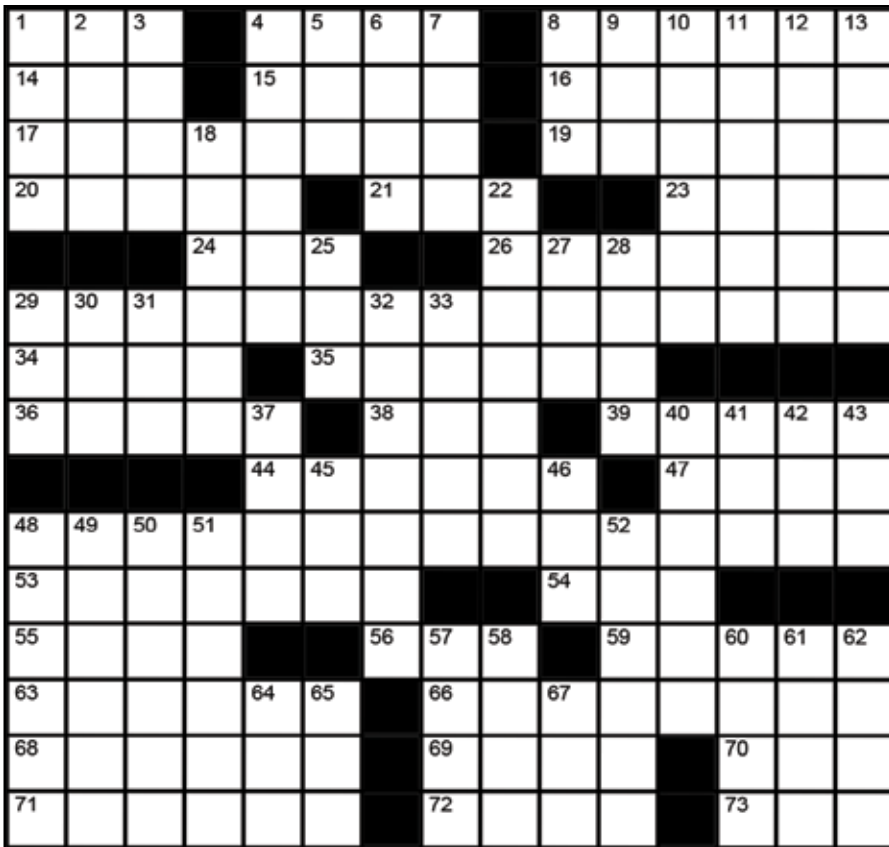
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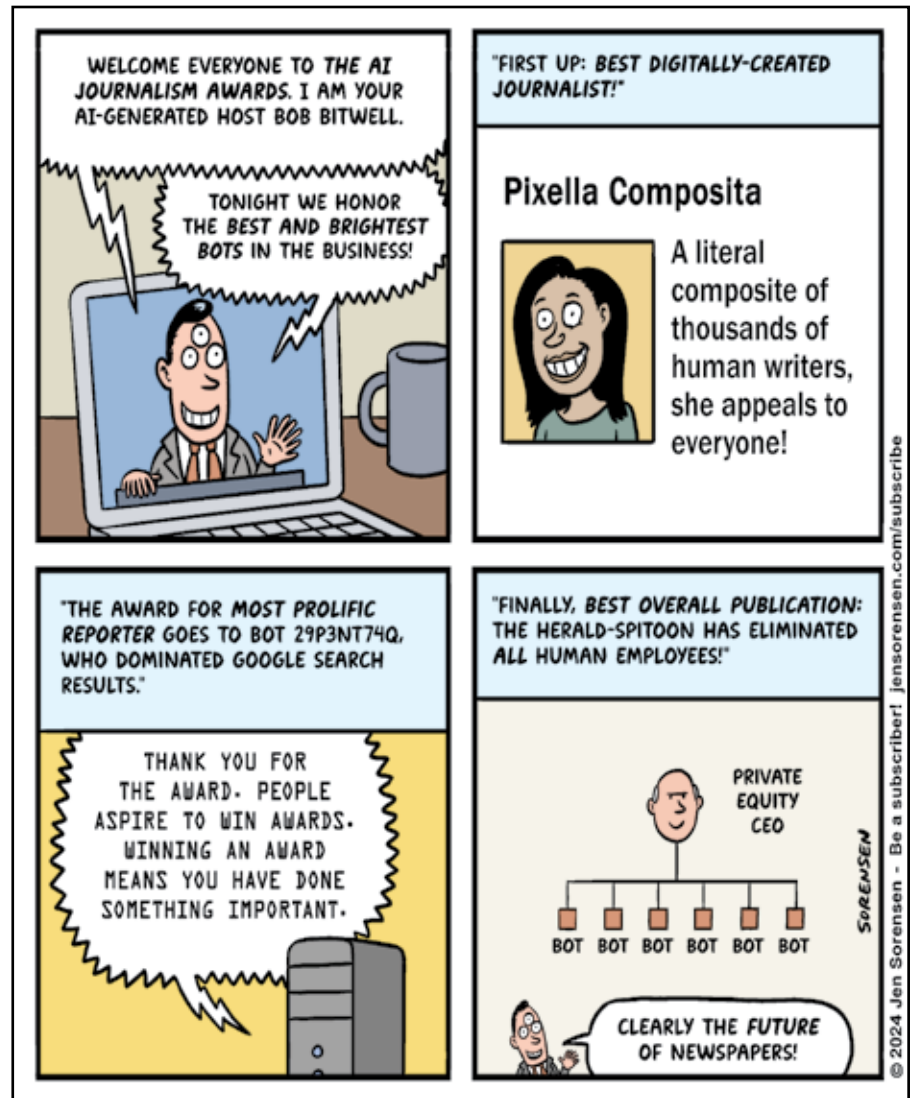
## Across

- 1. Bush who debated Trump in 2016
- 4. Persian for "king"
- 8. City across the Rio Grande from Ciudad Juárez
- 14. \_\_\_ Dhabi
- 15. "Teenage Dream" singer Perry
- 16. Actress Tracy who married Michael J. Fox after playing Alex P. Keaton's girlfriend on "Family Ties"
- 17. Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday are each named for one
- 19. "Summer's joys are \_\_\_ by use": Keats
- 20. Super Bowl III winner, for short
- 21. Mastermind game piece
- 23. Sch. with the fight song "The Mighty Bruins"
- 24. Angel dust, briefly
- 26. Slow musical movements
- 29. Bird of prey listed a "priority species" by Audubon Minnesota
- 34. Language of Pakistan's Daily Khabrain
- 35. Guy of "Memento"
- 36. Je t'aime : French :: \_\_\_ : Spanish
- 38. Teddy's neighbor on Mount Rushmore
- 39. Battling
- 44. Hopped around on a stick

- 47. Hum from a fan
- 48. Food and clothing, for two
- 53. Boomer on "The NFL Today"
- 54. Goal
- 55. Flows back
- 56. Classic distress call
- 59. Pack tightly
- 63. Exercise at a Y, maybe
- 66. "Afraid that ain't happening" (or a hint to solving 17-, 29- or 48-Across)
- 68. Starr of old comics
- 69. J.B. Smoove's character on "Curb Your Enthusiasm"
- 70. Sports rep
- 71. Being
- 72. Eyelid affliction
- 73. December 31, for short

## Down

- 1. Rolling Stone magazine co-founder Wenner
- 2. Goth-like aesthetic of some TikTok guys
- 3. Dubai's \_\_\_ Khalifa
- 4. Courtroom art
- 5. Crone
- 6. On
- 7. Murderous alter ego of fiction
- 8. Mini albums, for short
- 9. Hack (off)
- 10. "The \_\_\_ and the Stars" (1937 Barbara Stanwyck film)
- 11. Keys on a keyboard?
- 12. Sickly-looking
- 13. Getting the job done
- 18. Place for a nasal
- 22. DVD blooper collection
- 25. \_\_\_ rally
- 27. OB or ENT
- 28. Out of port
- 29. Wackadoodle
- 30. Resource in Catan and Minecraft
- 31. Amt. on a vitamin bottle
- 32. 1980s First Family
- 33. Bigwig
- 37. Magnum \_\_\_ (masterpiece)
- 40. Like some saws and bobsleds
- 41. "Do I know that person?"
- 42. Financial assistance
- 43. \$200 Monopoly buys: Abbr.
- 45. Riches of El Dorado
- 46. Org. with sniffer dogs
- 48. Necessary
- 49. Green Goblin alter ego Norman \_\_\_
- 50. Corn kernel, e.g.
- 51. Poland Spring competitor
- 52. 1997 film that won Demi Moore a Razzie
- 57. Massage therapist's substances
- 58. "Ignore this," in proofreading
- 60. Sound of pain or pleasure
- 61. Pop of punk rock
- 62. Jot down
- 64. West Coast summer hours, in brief
- 65. Utter
- 67. \_\_\_ latte



## Answers to last puzzle



# CALENDAR

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## Fri 2/09

### Featured



**Weird Romance**  
@ 7:30pm / \$20  
PACA, 1505 State Street



### Featured



**Erie Otters vs. Niagara IceDogs**  
@ 7pm  
Erie Insurance Arena, 809 French Street Erie



### Featured



**Tethered Immersive Theatrical Experience**  
@ 6pm / \$35  
PACA, 1505 State Street



### Featured



**Little River Band**  
@ 8pm  
Warner Theatre - PA, 811 State St.



## Thu 2/15

### Featured



**Annie**  
@ 7:30pm  
Warner Theatre - PA, 811 State St.



## Sat 2/10

**Weird Romance**  
@ 7:30pm / \$20  
PACA, 1505 State Street

## Sun 2/11

**ERC Valentine Prediction Run**  
@ 10am / Free-\$20  
8271 Barker Rd, Girard

**Weird Romance**  
@ 2pm / \$20  
PACA, 1505 State Street

## Wed 2/14

### Featured



**Same Time Next Year**  
@ 6pm / \$45  
PACA, 1505 State Street



## Fri 2/16

### Featured



**Perspectives on Space: A Storytelling Event Celebrating the Opening of "Eclipsing Stars"**  
@ 5:30pm / \$5-\$15  
FEED Media Art Center, 1307 State Street



**Stars, Stories, Goddesses and Grand Openings**  
@ 7pm / \$5-\$5  
FEED Media Art Center, 1307 State Street

## Sat 2/17

**Tethered Immersive Theatrical Experience**  
@ 6pm / \$35  
PACA, 1505 State Street

**Eclipsing Stars Trivia Night @ Lavery Brewing Co**  
@ 7pm / Free  
The Bunker at Lavery Brewing Company, 128 West 12th Street

**Erie Otters vs. Oshawa Generals**  
@ 7pm  
Erie Insurance Arena, 809 French Street Erie

## Sun 2/18

### Featured



**Winter Fun Run 4 Miler**  
@ 1pm / \$30  
5774 Sterrettania Road, Brown's Farm Barn, Fairview



## Sat 2/24

**Erie Otters vs. Guelph Storm**  
@ 7pm  
Erie Insurance Arena, 809 French Street Erie

## Sat 3/02

**Disney On Ice: Mickey's Search Party**  
@ 11am  
Erie Insurance Arena, 809 French Street Erie

**Disney On Ice: Mickey's Search Party**  
@ 3pm  
Erie Insurance Arena, 809 French Street Erie

## Sat 3/09

### Featured



**Experience Curling!**  
@ 5pm / \$30  
LECOM Sports Park, 8159 Oliver Road



### Featured



**Erie Otters vs. Owen Sound Attack**  
@ 7pm  
Erie Insurance Arena, 809 French Street Erie



Calendar information is provided by event organizers. All events are subject to change or cancellation. This publication is not responsible for the accuracy of the information contained in this calendar.