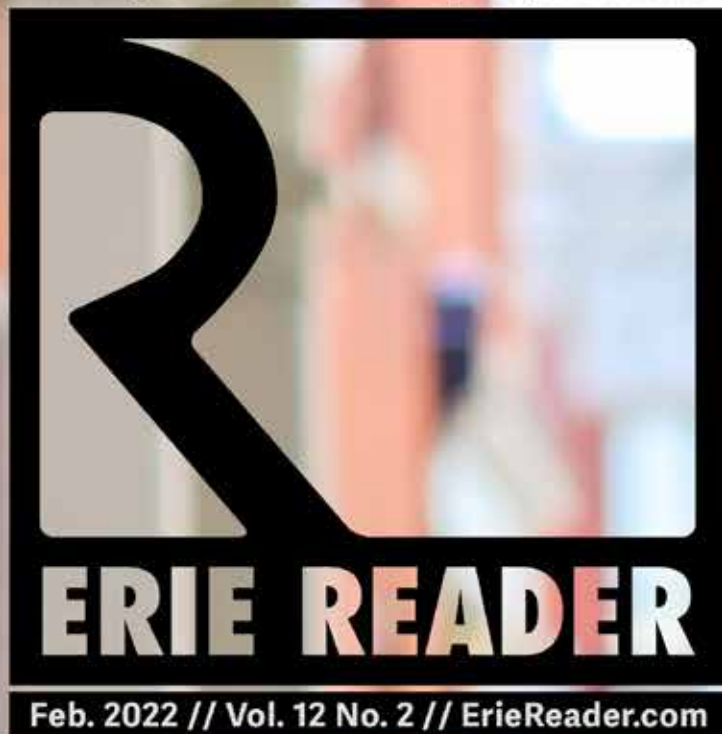


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SPEAKING FROM THE HEART

CHARLES "CEE" BROWN

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SHARED HERITAGE**

**EXPLORING THE
SPACE OF 10/20
COLLECTIVE**

**THE CREATIVE
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From the Editors
Stepping up to the mic

For as long as humankind has been around, we’ve striven to be heard both near and far. Before the microphone’s invention and broadscale adoption in the late 19th century, we had little means of projecting the voice besides the acoustic megaphone, resonant architecture, and speaking from the diaphragm. The first commercially viable (loose-contact carbon) microphones were introduced to the U.S. in the late 1870s, at the tail end of the so-called Reconstruction Era, an extremely volatile period in American history concerned with picking up the pieces after the Civil War.

According to mainstream historians, Reconstruction is said to have concluded in 1877, nearly 150 years ago. But if you’ve been paying any attention whatsoever, it’s evident that the country *still* isn’t truly whole — especially for African Americans, the descendants of former slaves, who are *still* trying to construct an identity and position of equal standing in society’s eyes after all this time. It’s something that should be a given, but nonetheless continues to be repeatedly and egregiously taken or withheld, whether it’s failings with the justice system, educational opportunity, employment practices and compensation, voting rights, or even finding a safe place to live. How can a reality that never resolutely existed be rebuilt?

Even before the first mic dropped, the halls of Black History echoed with the words of powerful orators, with names such as Sojourner Truth and Frederick Douglass delivering impassioned pleas for the abolition of slavery. In the aftermath, however, the concerns of Black America have echoed even stronger. We can count speeches by pivotal figures such as Ida B. Wells, Marcus Garvey, Malcolm X, Angela Davis, and Martin Luther King, Jr. among the most memorable in *any* history, never mind Black or white. One caveat, though — did we *listen*?

Beginning with Grandmaster Flash’s “The Message” in 1982 and continuing with groups such as N.W.A., Public Enemy, A Tribe Called Quest and others, socially conscious hip-hop took a more direct approach, painting a stark picture of Black America’s reality through millions of stereotypes and headphones — of course, aided by catchy hooks and irresistible backbeats. Erie’s Charles “CEE” Brown carries on that legacy, as does any rapper to have ever stepped up to the mic. For a people whose agency is so often blunted, the microphone is a sword that cuts through ignorance and indifference, delivering pointed commentaries on society’s not always united state of affairs.

It is no small thing to have a voice — whether it’s outside, intended for the ears of many, or inside, intended for the ears of that one special someone captivated by what we have to say, no matter how seemingly insignificant or mundane. As we continue to trudge through Erie’s coldest, grayest months, let us not forget the role our voices play in carrying us and our fortunes.

Meet Martha Higgins

Her story is part of Erie's Black history



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

By: Liz Allen

Martha Higgins, who turned 91 on Martin Luther King's birthday, lives at a veterans' home in Norman, Okla., nearly 1,200 miles from Erie.

Yet time and distance haven't dimmed the happy memories of her time in Erie decades ago, when she lived with her sister Doris' family at the Britton Funeral Home at 1524 Peach St., one of the first Black-owned funeral parlors in Erie.

After graduating from Florida A&M College, she had to adjust to life in Erie. For one thing, she had never ridden a city bus. "In Clearwater, we walked everywhere with our friends. We walked to school, to shopping, going to church," she said in a recent phone interview.

She fondly remembers the warm welcome she received from her Erie relatives, and the good fortune that she moved here in June, rather than winter.

Her brother-in-law, Robert Bradley Britton, taught her how to catch the bus at 16th and State, near the funeral home. He also accompanied her to multiple job interviews. She finally landed work through Kelly Girl but was disappointed that the temp agency withheld so much of her pay as a fee.

One day in 1951 as she walked past the Federal Building across from Perry Square, she saw signs and flags promoting military service. "Tell me something about the military," she asked the man who greeted her.

"He went on explaining the benefits and all the travel and education I would get," she recalled. "You've got to pass a written test, pass a physical, and go to basic training before you get these benefits. Still interested?" he asked. "Yeah! Sign me up!" she replied.

Martha is fearless and funny. She learned computer skills at the library, and her interest in history and literature keeps her sharp. She counts Nathaniel Hawthorne and Maya Angelou among her favorite authors. "I read most of her books," she said, referring to Angelou. "The government just honored her with a coin."

Martha's story about a creative, well-lived life would be worth sharing at any time. But it particularly resonates in February, during Black History Month, when we cram centuries of neglected African-American history into 28 days.

Her memories add context to stories about forgotten Black entrepreneurs and the Erie neighborhoods that were razed for "redevelopment" and "progress," including the Peach-Sassafras

Martha Higgins, who once lived above a funeral home in Erie, plays some of her own compositions at her 91st birthday party in Oklahoma on Jan. 15.

area near the Britton Funeral Home.

Her story is also about a strong woman who treasures her military experience. "You form a sisterhood. You need each other in the military," she explained.

After enlisting, she took the train to basic training at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas. Her sister was sad to say goodbye, but Martha was happy about the opportunities that awaited.

She has detailed recollections of surviving bootcamp, because not all enlistees did. "A lot of the girls didn't make basic training. They couldn't adjust to roll call every morning at 500 hours," she said. "There were girls that were there one day and the next day they were done."

Following graduation, she worked in finance at the air defense command base in Colorado Springs, Colo., and later at a U.S. air base in Turkey.

Her military pride runs deep. Her late husband, Harvey, was an Air Force sergeant, and two of their sons are veterans: Steven is a retired Army lieutenant colonel and son David is a

Normal College for Colored Students.) She is well-versed in the story of Harry T. Burleigh, the famed Erie-born composer and arranger of Black spirituals, and she is a composer herself. Her Gospel hymn, "O Lord, Hear My Prayer," can be purchased at sheetmusicplus.com.

Returning to Erie after her military service, she studied at Mercyhurst College under the GI Bill and successfully auditioned as an alto for the Erie Philharmonic Chorus. Later, she would treat her sister Doris to season Philharmonic tickets. "Take a friend with you," she'd urge her sister. "You can discuss it and have someone to talk to. And don't take the same friend all the time. Move it around!"

Raised Baptist, she also played the organ at St. James AME Church and at Episcopalian, Lutheran, and Catholic churches in Erie, in addition to playing for funeral home services.

Interviewing for the organist job at Erie's Immaculate Conception Catholic Church, a Black parish, she told the priest, "Father, I have a Protestant background. I would have to have someone guide me through the order of the Mass." To that audition, she brought along "Lead Me, Guide Me," a Catholic African-American hymnal

Like barber shops and other businesses, Black-owned funeral homes are part of the social fabric of Black life in Erie, Rob [Britton] said. People here know the names of Erie's Black preachers, but other stories "haven't been told."

retired U.S. Marine warrant officer. Their son Timothy owns a contracting business in Oklahoma.

In 2018, she was selected to join other veterans on an Honor Flight to Washington, D.C., to tour the war memorials. She has also recorded an interview with a Library of Congress oral historian for its Veterans History Project.

Music is as much a part of her life as the military. At her mother's insistence, she studied piano as a child and majored in music at Florida A&M. (Now a university, the college was founded in 1891 in segregated Florida as the State

whose songs include many Burleigh arrangements. She still has the hymnal today.

In 2009, Immaculate Conception Catholic Church, at East 16th and Division streets, merged with St. Mary Church on East Ninth Street. When that combined parish closed in 2015, it merged with St. Stanislaus, another example of how Erie's Black history can fade away.

Today, there's a parking lot in the 1500 block of Peach Street where the funeral home once stood, just north of the ACL Lab in the former Central

NEWS & VIEWS

Mall, and across from the Charter School of Excellence in the former Professional Building.

Rob Britton, 67, Martha's nephew and the son of the funeral home owner, has assembled artifacts to document his family's funeral home business. In May 2021, he asked Erie City Council for help to commemorate his family's funeral home, with a plaque or a mural. Or perhaps the Britton story could be explored on a larger scale, to document the history of Black-owned funeral homes in Erie, including those owned by the Taylor, Law, Mason, and Pitts families, he said.

A retired lawyer and one-time Erie mayoral candidate, Rob lives in Pittsburgh, where he hosts a prayer line for Greater Allen AME Church. Rob's request caught my attention because I've known him since we were Erie neighbors and his daughter attended St. Andrew's School at my Catholic parish.

Like barber shops and other businesses, Black-owned funeral homes are part of the social fabric of Black life in Erie, Rob said. People here know

the names of Erie's Black preachers, but other stories "haven't been told," he said. For example, the Britton Funeral Home served those who could not afford Erie's more well-known funeral homes, Rob said. Others have confided to me that bereaved Black families weren't welcome at some Erie funeral homes.

His aunt urged him to take on the project to memorialize his family's funeral home business. "Aunt Martha said, 'Robert, this is what I want,'" he said.

Thanks to support and interest from the Hagen History Center and the city of Erie's new Historic Review Commission, the funeral home project is moving forward.

When the marker is ready, I look forward to meeting Martha. If we are lucky, we will get to hear her play her own hymns, as she did at her 91st birthday party on Martin Luther King's birthday.

Liz Allen, who sang alto in various church choirs, can be reached at lizallenerie@gmail.com

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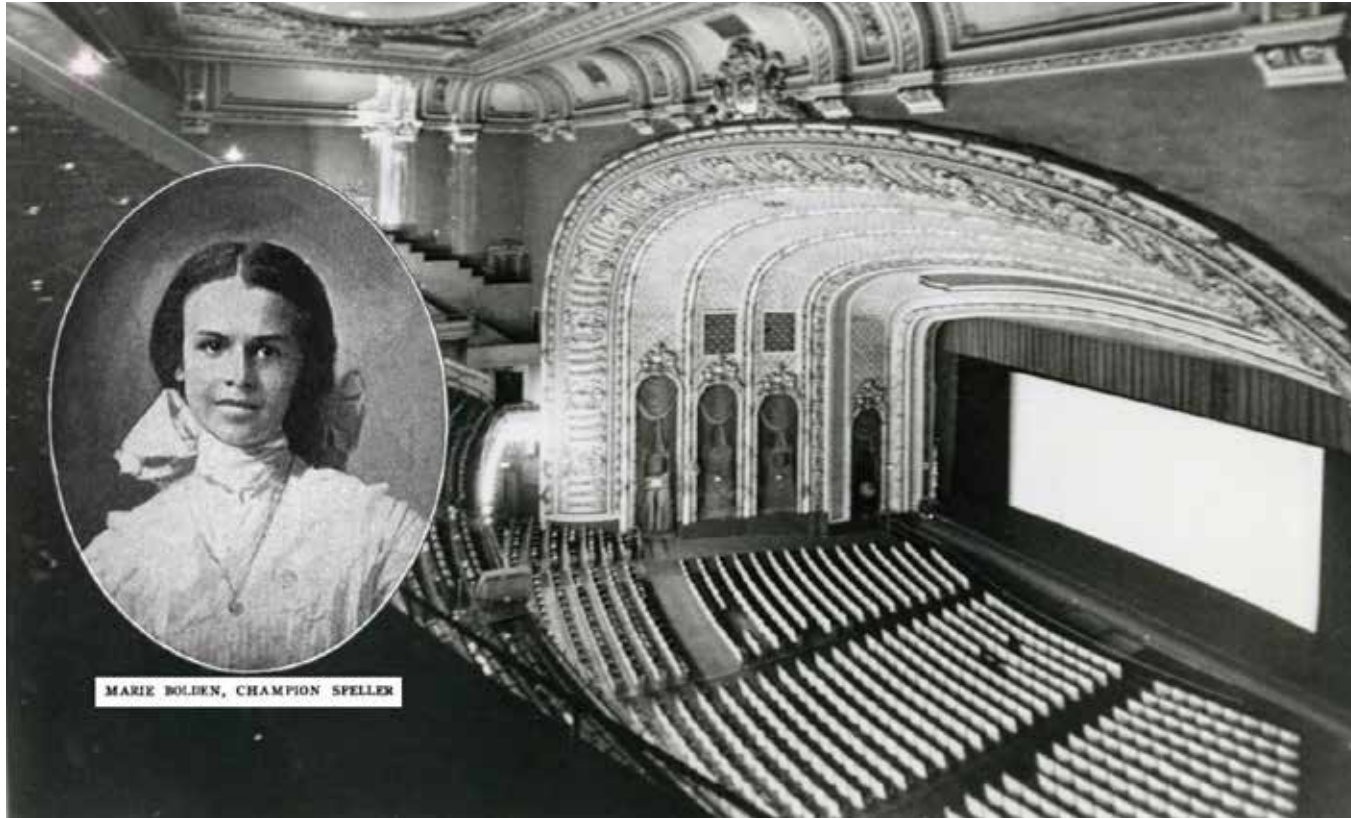


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Spelling Out a New Narrative

Despite racial threats, Black student wins first-ever national spelling bee in 1908



The Hippodrome Theater in nearby Cleveland, Ohio played host to the first national spelling bee in 1908, featuring teams from Cleveland, Pittsburgh, Erie, and New Orleans. Thirteen-year-old Clevelanders Marie C. Bolden — an African American — won it all, stirring indignation and disbelief among racist commentators, especially in the highly segregated Deep South.

one board member replied, “Knock the n—— out.” The New Orleans team, who was favored to win, almost backed out of the competition altogether when they learned about Cleveland having a Black student on their team. Warren Hicks, the assistant superintendent of Cleveland’s schools who was organizing the event, stood firm when they threatened to withdraw. Hicks stated that Bolden had earned her spot. Although the New Orleans superintendent was frustrated, he decided against withdrawing.

So, the students from Erie, Pittsburgh, and New Orleans made their way to Cleveland by train that June.

“The Erie boys and girls who go to enter the big spelling bee at Cleveland, O. today, left this morning with the good wishes of all Erie for their success,” the Erie Daily Times reported on the morning of the events, noting that Erie was “well represented.” Maria Farley, the principal of Erie’s School No. 2 (aka Jones), and superintendent H.C. Missimer accompanied the students.

The competition took place at Cleveland’s Hippodrome Theater, which had only opened on Euclid Avenue that previous December and had one of the world’s largest stages. As competition time neared and the students waited anxiously backstage, each of the 3,500 seats were filled. Thousands more stood to watch. The papers estimated 6,000 total people in attendance.

The 60 students entered the stage to thunderous applause, many visibly nervous as they approached their seats, but described by a reporter as a “bright looking lot of youngsters.” The spelling bee commenced with the written portion. This consisted of 100 words, carefully selected by a committee and, as was standard with spelling bees of the era, they were commonly used but misspelled words.

“I was trembling all over when the spelling began,” Marie, who had nev-

By: Jonathan Burdick

With 14-year-old Zalia Avant-garde’s widely celebrated victory at the Scripps National Spelling Bee this past summer, journalists and historians were quick to address the systemic barriers which often excluded Black students from such competitions. This was not lost on Avant-garde, who afterwards said she hoped her win would motivate more young girls who looked like her to compete in these spelling bees.

Despite these past barriers, nearly two decades before the first Scripps competition in 1925, Avant-garde’s home state of Louisiana played a much different role in the story of the nation’s first ever national spelling bee, when a Black 13-year-old student from Cleveland, Ohio named Marie C. Bolden won.

It was the summer of 1908 and the 46th annual convention of the National Education Association was staging in Cleveland. The teachers’ union, which was chartered by Congress only two years earlier, had an eventful schedule for the week.

“Cleveland bristled with entertainment,” the New York Times reported.

“The streets and buildings are gaily decorated. The school teachers and Clevelanders filled the streets and public places. ... Thousands of Cleveland homes were thrown open to entertain the visitors.”

The convention opened with a chorus of 500 students. Talks were given by esteemed university presidents. Yearly resolutions were passed. There were discussions and debates over how to solve the teacher shortage, the profession’s low pay despite high qualifications, and perhaps the most important question: How could public education be made more useful for all students?

“What can the school do to make life worth living during the hours in which the individual is not engaged in the struggle for bread?” one featured speaker wondered, adding that he feared schools were becoming too industrial-minded. A public education, he argued, should help young people “enjoy the things of the mind” rather than merely prepare them “for work in a silk mill, a tobacco shop, a caramel factory and the other industries.”

Other educational leaders stressed the importance of ensuring all public schools had libraries as well as art

and music programs. “America will become the greatest singing nation in the world within the next decade,” one music teacher contended. Booker T. Washington, who was in attendance, spoke concerning inequities in public education, pointing out how northern students received *ten times* the per pupil spending of Black students in the South.

Much of the anticipation, though, was for the first ever national spelling bee set for the convention’s second day. Leading up to the event, schools held spelling competitions to select representatives for the national contest. Eventually, four teams of 15 eighth grade students were selected representing the cities of Cleveland, Erie, Pittsburgh, and New Orleans.

In many cities, spelling contests were segregated along with their schools and Black students were often not eligible for entry in the larger competitions. This was the case in deeply segregated New Orleans. As such, when the superintendent of the white New Orleans schools inquired of the school board what he should do if their white students had to share the stage with a Black speller from a northern team,

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er been in front of such a crowd, later said. "I knew that wouldn't do, so I just twisted my thumbs in the belt of my dress and steadied up." Whatever nerves she had, when she handed in her paper for the written portion, she knew she had them all correct.

After the written portion, the competition moved to the oral segment. A public speaking professor from Chicago University had been selected to pronounce the words. Before he began though, he gave a "wholly uncalled for and out of place" speech, according to reports, although it's unclear exactly what was said. This noticeably made the already nervous children even more uneasy.

"Ten at a time the children stood up," described the Erie Daily Times. "The words were given one at a time to the children in sequence. A committee composed of one representative from each city having a team wrote down the words as the children spelled them."

As the contest continued, the professor was frequently facetious with the students. The children didn't seem to know how to respond to his comments. He told one boy he'd pay for him to get a haircut. To another, he cracked a joke that his trousers were too big. At one point, he mocked the contest itself, saying, "I can imagine members of the National Association of 2008 looking over its archives and wondering why children ever had to spell words like these."

"There must be good men in that institution and it is unfortunate that it is so widely advertised by the other kind," an editor for the Western Teacher journal later penned. "A worse choice for this occasion could hardly have been made."

The journal noted how he made numerous mistakes, in one case unable to distinguish *exercise* and *exorcise*. When murmurs of dissent began, he became confrontational, stoutly declaring, "That is the way to pronounce it."

"But it isn't," the journal noted.

Nonetheless, the contest continued. The professor's antics did not seem to distress Marie either, who continued to spell every word correctly. When it was over, the team results were tallied. Out of 500 total words, Erie's team missed 85. New Orleans missed 66. Pittsburgh missed 47. Cleveland only missed 40 and was declared the winner.



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Erie, it was explained later, hadn't held any preliminaries like the other cities and instead had relied on teacher selection. In Pittsburgh, the loss was blamed on Andrew Carnegie, who in 1906 had founded and funded the Simplified Spelling organization which lobbied to make the English language more phonetic and, in turn, confused the city's students. In Louisiana, the white-owned newspapers alleged that the students of New Orleans had simply been thrown off by having to compete on stage with a Black student.

This student was, of course, Marie C. Bolden. She had spelled every word correctly and was proclaimed the individual winner of the entire spelling bee. After the declaration of Cleveland as the winning team, Marie was called to center stage to a "storm of applause." A gold medal was pinned to her dress and she was swarmed by hundreds who offered handshakes and their congratulations. This included her competitors, even some students from New Orleans.

Booker T. Washington, who had been in the audience, said on stage later that evening to laughs and approving applause, "You will admit that we spell out of the same spelling book that you do. And I think you will also admit that we spell a little better."

"I did not enter the spelling contest for personal glory, but to try to help bring honor to my teacher and my school," Marie told the New York Times modestly, adding that reading the newspaper every day had helped her with her spelling.

"I studied my spelling every day," she told another reporter, explaining that her father, a Cleveland mail carrier named John, helped her daily and that she must have memorized 10,000 words. "It seemed spelling came natural to me, but I wanted to be positive I knew every word. I drilled through the spelling book and the dictionary."

"I could not find a word she could not spell correctly," her father confirmed. Although he had been worried about the mental stress of her preparations, he was proud of her commitment and recalled how Marie would have him quiz her from Webster's Dictionary cover to cover.

A parade was held in Cleveland in her honor and she was invited to numerous events over the following days. On July 3, the Erie Daily Times reported on Bolden visiting Erie.

"Marie is a little girl endowed with a

wealth of common sense, those who know her state," the Erie Daily Times published, adding that despite winning, she demonstrated only humility and grace. "[M]any Erie people will doubtless endeavor to make the acquaintance of the young scholar."

She stayed as a guest of Mr. and Mrs. Richard Coppar of 305 Chestnut St. in Erie's New Jerusalem neighborhood. She was also the guest of honor at the St. James African Methodist Episcopal Church.

Despite Marie's success and the positive reception that she received at the convention, there was also immediate and fierce backlash. Many white Americans maintained that an integrated spelling bee should never have been permitted in the first place. New Orleans's Picayune newspaper referred to

Bolden's remarkable achievement, insisting that it "was probably an accident pure and simple" that she won. They also said that most northern whites felt the same as southern whites about segregation. "Of course, there, as in every community, are light-headed, addle-brained men and women who, for the sake of fancied notoriety ... advocate social relations between the two races."

In Seattle, a popular Black-owned newspaper satirized this outrage, joking that the "irrepressible, ubiquitous, mysterious Negro has butted in again." They then, more seriously, pointed out that had the competition barred Bolden from competing, then the "championship" wouldn't have been "worthy of the name." They then observed that it was interesting how when Black chil-

In Louisiana, the white-owned newspapers alleged that the students of New Orleans had simply been thrown off by having to compete on stage with a Black student. This student was, of course, Marie C. Bolden. She had spelled every word correctly and was proclaimed the individual winner of the entire spelling bee. After the declaration of Cleveland as the winning team, Marie was called to center stage to a "storm of applause." A gold medal was pinned to her dress and she was swarmed by hundreds who offered handshakes and their congratulations. This included her competitors, even some students from New Orleans.

Bolden derogatorily and in published letters to the editor white New Orleanians demanded that the superintendent be fired. The New Orleans school board members were infuriated, passing a resolution condemning the choice to participate, stating that "it is the sense of this board that we deeply deplore and regret the unfortunate occurrence at Cleveland and the pitting of our children against a Negro." They censured superintendent Warren Ellis for being "unwise."

In Thomas K. Black III and Marsha E. Ackermann's 2014 history on American spelling, they quoted a southern newspaper that said Cleveland was as a "Negrophile city ... where public schools are mixed ... and social equality is taught" and that "Negroes and carpetbaggers" were trying to "force mixed schools" on them. "[It is] not likely that the school children of New Orleans will ever again compete in a northern spelling bee," the article concluded.

A Mississippi newspaper downplayed

dren were allowed to participate in such events, these students won with increasing frequency.

"It certainly appears that we get our share of the honors considering the number entered into the contests," they wrote. "Let us receive this victory with modesty and with encouragement."

The Black-owned Nashville Globe pointed out that this contest demonstrated "plainer than words" that white southerners devote too much time teaching their children race prejudice. "[L]et it be said that the Negro is going to stick to his purpose and upon the anvil of endeavor is going to hammer out a glorious destiny."

A few months later in New Orleans, the Black YMCA organized a spelling bee at a church in honor of Bolden's accomplishment. They opened it to public and private school students of all races between the fifth and ninth grades. This decision faced hostile backlash from the white school board president and the city's Board of Education, who

claimed that the celebration was "an attempt to inflame race prejudice."

"[T]he negroes of New Orleans simply showed their inability to comprehend and appreciate familiar conditions when they issued the ridiculous invitation," a newspaper editorialized, claiming that the invitation of white students was an insult. "The negroes who signed the invitation have thereby proved the contention of the white south, that the negro is incapable of self-government. These men, supposed to be leaders of their race, should have known existing conditions, but they did not." The paper further stated that the Black leaders who made the invitation should "vacate the south" and that it "should be made plain so that such stupid instances of self-assertions may not occur again."

The New Orleans mayor refused to issue a permit for the spelling bee. He demanded a squad of policemen go to prevent it, stating that it would cause a "race riot," a common euphemism of the time for when whites would violently invade and attack Black neighborhoods. Lynching was still common. Ultimately, due to threats of violence and promises of "a hot time in old town tonight" if they went through with the event, the spelling bee was called off.

The Erie Daily Times reported on this cancellation, stating that the white residents of Louisiana were "still indignant because New Orleans school children had been compelled to participate with the negro girl at Cleveland." In Milwaukee, a newspaper lambasted these Louisianans as pitiful. "The haughty Caucasian race can not get much glory out of what occurred at New Orleans last night. ... So New Orleans avoided disorder, but ... New Orleans cannot boast very highly of the sense of justice which dwells in the breasts of its white inhabitants."

As for Marie C. Bolden, she continued with her education in Cleveland and although much of her later life is not known, she would occasionally appear in city newspapers for musical performances on stage. She also carried with her the knowledge that, as Booker T. Washington had pointed out the evening of her win, the absurd and racist outrage was because she, a young Black teenage girl from Cleveland, could simply spell better than everyone else.

Jonathan Burdick runs the historical blog Rust & Dirt. He can be reached at jburdick@eriereader.com

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Critical Race Theory a Distraction from the Real Issues

A conversation with Dr. Parris Baker refuting claims about CRT



CHLOE FORBES

By: Chloe Forbes

Known as “Black Magic” or “Buckeye Bullet,” Jesse Owens won four gold medals at the 1936 Olympic Games and is widely regarded as one of the greatest athletes in track and field history. It was a moment of awe as he broke from behind and shot to the front, crossing the finish line in first place.

And for that moment in Germany, America embraced him.

Then, he came back to his country and was inferior again — an oxymoron.

“If we’re winning, you’re on the team; but if it’s you and I, there’s not equality. There’s not equity,” said Dr. Parris Baker, a social work professor at Gannon University and prominent voice in Erie’s Black community. “And it’s a very confusing thing to untangle. Critical Race Theory (CRT) says let’s take a critical look at that.”

Being so fluid currently, CRT has no set definition, but rather provides a lens through which to examine a situation.

Why was Jesse Owens placed on a pedestal in Germany, yet when he returned to the United

States, he and every other Black athlete was not invited to the White House the way the white athletes were? CRT asks why these inequalities occur and what systems are in place that sustain that pattern.

CRT seemingly dominated headlines in 2020 when state legislators from Tennessee to Idaho lobbied for a ban on the practice being taught in classrooms.

So far, CRT has been outlawed in 19 schools, but it begs the question — when has CRT ever been used? In Erie County, CRT has never been taught or used in curriculum.

“CRT is not the issue,” Baker said. “There are other things going on, other things much more deeply rooted. CRT is a distraction to the real problems.”

The death of George Floyd caused outrage as people asked themselves, “How could that happen in our America?” As the sobering truth about our racial reality grew closer, people began to divert the conversation.

Baker said it takes courage to face that truth, and rather

than admit something that might take away an oppressor’s superiority, they stay quiet.

In a speech prior to Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have a Dream,” Rabbi Joachim Prinz said, “The most urgent, the most disgraceful, the most shameful, and the most tragic problem is silence.”

The speech, referring to the rise of the Nazis in Germany, indicates that silence and “a nation of onlookers” is what led to one of the worst periods in history, and what doesn’t addressed gets repeated.

“There’s a lot to be learned if we studied what it’s like to be Black and American,” Dr. Baker said. “Not talking about how horrible white people were. That’s not what I’m talking about at all.”

“How a group of people survived, and in some cases, thrived, under some of the worst conditions ever in America. We need to tap into that kind of intellect and intelligence and tenacity.”

Under oppressive laws, a group of people continued to find ways to create science,

Scholars such as Dr. Parris Baker, a social work professor at Gannon University and prominent voice in Erie’s Black community, disagree that Critical Race Theory is the biggest issue at hand in America’s fraught and tangled history of race relations. “Just teach American history. Don’t call it Black or white, call it history. All of it. Just teach history.”

math, and language without access to technology or schools. They sang songs praising the Lord as they were treated so poorly. In the case of Baker’s grandfather, he was made to dance at gunpoint.

Baker re-emphasized that CRT is not the issue. CRT can assist in seeing systemic oppression, but it is serving as a distraction from contempt that is deeply rooted in America’s history. Policy plays a large role in this conversation.

For instance, Mississippi legislators didn’t motion to abolish slavery until 1995 — 130 years after the passage of the 13th Amendment which made it federal law— but the state law wasn’t ratified until 2013 (because the U.S. Archivist was never notified). CRT can help identify that until 2013, African Americans still were not equal citizens in America despite the Declaration’s claim that “all men are created equal.”

Asking why it took 18 years to make that law actually legal is part of the larger conversation to be had.

Looking at past policies, it’s evident that there was never equality. A large factor in today’s inequality can be attributed to property ownership.

Laws like the GI Bill and the Homestead Act of 1862 were used to amass wealth and distribute more property to white people.

A prevalent issue in Erie, redlining is the root of many environmental and consequent health injustices faced

citywide, with Black citizens historically refused home loans and insurance in more desirable neighborhoods creating a form of de facto segregation.

Not only can Americans learn from their history, but Dr. Baker says it is important to learn *about* history.

“Just teach American history,” Baker said. “Don’t call it Black or white, call it history. All of it. Just teach history. And there are a number of different narratives that can contribute to that history, so let’s take a look at each of them.”

Baker came up with what he refers to as the AAA membership — *acknowledge* what happened, *apologize* (not for history but for the times we withdrew from conversations), and become an *advocate* for change. He calls for all people to be AAA members.

He also stated that the conversation that needs to be had is between white people. That serious dialogue needs to happen, addressing the full spectrum of history and how their lineage let that happen.

“How does one become a Christian? Believe in your heart and confess with your mouth,” Baker said. “It’s the belief and the confession. This transformation is a heart transformation ... We need the same heart transformation to say, ‘I’ve been born in a racist society that has benefited me.’ And until we get to that point where we do self-examination, we’re gonna be stuck right here.”

Hear Dr. Baker speak about CRT at the Jefferson Educational Society Tuesday, Feb. 8 from 7 p.m. - 8:30 p.m. as he presents “Critical Race Theory Is Not the Issue: Claims, Fears, And History.”

Chloe Forbes can be reached at cforbes@eriereader.com

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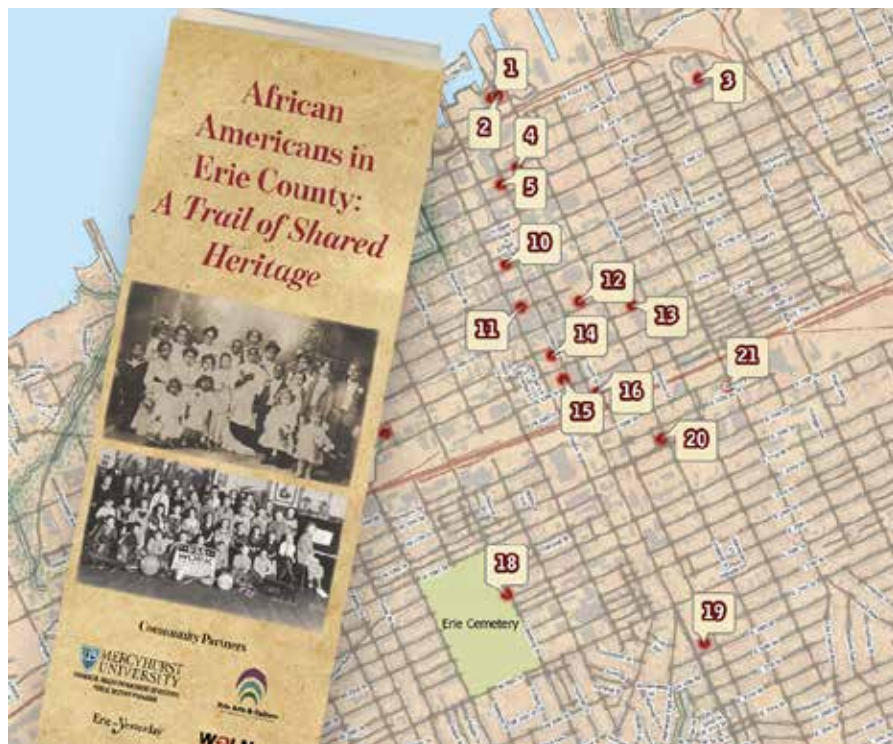
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A Trail of Shared Heritage

Learning more about Erie's Black history firsthand



By Liz Allen

The effort to recognize the Britton Funeral Home and other Black funeral businesses in Erie comes at a time when “African Americans in Erie County: A Trail of Shared Heritage,” a community project, is broadening its reach.

In December, the Pennsylvania Humanities Council awarded a \$16,000 grant to the project to install markers at 10 of 29 historic sites listed on the trail's website, sharedheritage.org. The sites are documented in the project's four-fold brochure.

Chris Magoc, Ph.D., history professor at Mercyhurst University, has been involved from the beginning with “African Americans in Erie County: A Trail of Shared Heritage,” a collaborative effort of Mercyhurst, Erie Arts & Culture, Erie-Yesterday and WQLN.

He explained the project's origin in this question-and-answer, lightly edited for clarity.

Liz Allen: How did you originally get interested in the Shared Heritage project?

Chris Magoc: It began in the 2011-12 school year. The Edinboro Area Historical Society received a grant from the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission to put together an exhibit on the civil rights legacy of Leroy and

Beatrice Smith.

The other piece of the grant was to develop a draft of a countywide trail of African-American history. Our public history student, Adriana Houseman, did a wonderful job doing just that — working with retired Erie teacher Johnny Johnson and drawing on *Journey from Jerusalem, An Illustrated Introduction to Erie's African American History, 1795-1995*, by Sarah S. Thompson with Karen James, to develop the brochure that was Adriana's senior project.

There it sat for five years, until the Erie Times-News needed a Black History Month story in February 2017. Our PR officer, Debbie Morton, reached out to me. Well, I've got this tour, I said. Next thing we know, we have the front-page story and I had a chance to meet Johnny, through Melinda Meyer. (Melinda is president of Preservation Erie and chair of the city of Erie's Historic Review Commission.)

From that point, we — Johnny, Melinda, Sarah Thompson initially, and me — started meeting to lay out the project. A \$3,000 grant from Erie Arts & Culture in fall 2017 got us moving.

It took nearly three full years to get the project completed, including working with Johnny at WQLN to record the five oral histories in 2018, some of

[left] This brochure documents 29 sites related to African-American history in Erie County. The information can also be found at www.sharedheritage.org. [bottom right] Debbi Lyon, library assistant in the Heritage Room at Blasco Library, is one of many people who contributed to the “Shared Heritage” community project. She's holding *Journey from Jerusalem, An Illustrated Introduction to Erie's African American History, 1795-1995*, by Sarah Thompson with Karen James.

the most remarkable oral histories I have ever had the honor to be part of.

Then I was able to engage another of our students to help develop the website. Content came from Johnny's Lawrence family archives, from *Journey from Jerusalem*, and from Erie County Library Assistant Debbi Lyon's wonderful collection at the Heritage Room at Blasco Library, truly a collaborative effort.

LA: What keeps you engaged?

CM: The history itself is so richly fascinating and magnetic for anyone with an interest in American history — stories of courage and heroism and expanding American freedom, stories of entrepreneurial innovation, of interracial progress. My wife Mary Ellen grew up on the land once owned by a former enslaved person, Boe Bladen. That just blew my little mind. We never know what history is under our very feet. Ada and Earl Lawrence and the Pope Hotel and Pontiacs perhaps and on to Celestine Davis fighting to

celebrate the King holiday in the Erie School District years before it was a federal holiday.

The Gospel Hill Cemetery is so moving. So many of the sites and stories are just endlessly interesting, enriching of — and inextricably entwined with — the overall history of the Erie region.

And then there is this: This project has unfolded over a decade of increased racial division, hate crimes, the licensing by an American president of white grievance and open expressions of racial resentment, the ugly resurgence of white supremacy, and an assault on voting rights the likes of which we have not seen since the end of Reconstruction.

The value of this project has been heightened immensely over the past few years. It was perhaps fortuitous that the completion of the brochure/website was delayed until the summer of 2020 in the wake of the murder of George Floyd and the attempt at a national reckoning with historic systemic racism in America.

It is our prayerful hope that the history that so many — Ada Lawrence, Celestine Davis, Johnny Johnson, Karen James and Sarah Thompson, Melinda Meyer, Debbi Lyon — have worked to research and document, and that we now have written up in brochure and website form, will help inform ongoing conversations about to how address



contemporary issues of poverty, education, criminal justice, and other insidious issues of structural racism that persist in the city and throughout the region.

LA: Any advice for people who want to share their own stories, either with the public or within their families?

CM: Record your family members' oral histories. Today. Before it is too late. We are hopeful that other oral histories can be recorded and added to the Shared Heritage site over time.

Coming up

At its 9 a.m. meeting on Feb. 9, Erie City Council will vote on a resolution for an honorary street renaming in the 100 block of West 20th Street for the late Thelma "Celestine" Bell-Davis, who died at age 91 in 2020.

Bell-Davis earned her bachelor's degree in English at age 45 and then her master's degree in education with a concentration in reading. She retired as an Erie School District teacher after 45 years of service.

She advocated for equity in education and was a strong supporter of establishing a Black history curriculum in Erie schools, according to her daughter, Selestine Davis.

Did you know?

The Heritage Room at Blasco Library now offers access to 19 volumes of "Erie, Pa., African American Resources," including newspaper clippings and other documents dating to 1792. Library Assistant Debbi Lyon has been assembling the project, with encouragement and advice from retired Erie teacher Johnny Johnson.

Lyon said her own interest in documenting Black history in Erie was sparked when she began working on the first of two books she has written about the history of Wesleyville. "Be sure to include the Black people who lived there," Karen James, who worked on *Journey from Jerusalem, An Illustrated Introduction to Erie's African-American History, 1795-1995*, told Lyon.

Lyon dug deeper into Wesleyville's history and discovered a Black neighborhood on Otto Street; the street doesn't exist anymore.

Journey from Jerusalem and Lyon's books, *Greetings from Wesleyville*, volumes I and II, are available for research in the Heritage Room and also for checkout at the library.

A Date With The Best of Erie

A distillation of reader-sourced romance



BRO VECTOR / ERIE READER

By: Matt Swanseger

We've got to give you credit. You've really been giving this dating thing your best. Your best pickup lines, dad jokes, and celebrity impressions. Your best ever commitment to physical and mental fitness, to personal grooming and hygiene. Your best pair of socks and underwear, so intact and hole-less not even a government nanobot could slip through. We respect the glow-ups.

But have you been giving it your Best of Erie? Whether you're single, taken, or beautifully and ambiguously in-between, our annual readers' poll is juicier than **The Juice Jar** (voted Best Place for Vegan or Vegetarian Food) when it comes to romantic inspiration. No matter what it is, it would seem that, collectively, we know a place.

Was your last relationship a wreck that not even **Bonnell's Collision Center** (Best Auto Repair Shop) could fix? It's time to look beyond the damage and see yourself for the Best Locally Made Product you are (no shade on **Smith's Hot Dogs**). Have you and

your better half been an item so long you could find it at **Claudine's Consignment** (Best Antique Shop)? Perhaps it's time to make like **J.J. Agnello Heating & Cooling** (Best HVAC) and get some airflow.

Worse comes to worse, you could always head to the **ANNA Shelter** (Best Place to Adopt a Pet) if your heart is led astray. Now that we're feeling at home, let's scratch some surfaces.

Disclaimer: *The date ideas that follow are based exclusively on the 2021 Best of Erie Awards' top vote-getters — if a particular favorite is not mentioned, it's because it was not a category winner or runner-up, not necessarily because it's not worthy.*

Best of Erie Advice for Romantic Outings

For the hungry and/or thirsty

Drinks and/or dinner — the most classic of date nights. It may not be the best in terms of originality, but in terms of scheduling, it's often one of the easiest to metabolize. And let us not neglect its oft-underappreciated antimeridian counterpart, the coffee (try **Tipsy Bean**, **Ember + Forge**, or

Brew Ha Ha at the Colony) and/or breakfast date (**Flip Cafe**, **Gem City Dinor**, or **Panos' Restaurant** all offer plenty of excuses to disappear off the griddle).

First, we'll broach the beverages. For a quaff to remember, you'd be well-advised to drop into the **Erie Brewing Company**, **Voodoo Brewing Company**, or **Lavery Brewing Company** — through the years, they've proven good companies to keep. For more potent potations, a Prohibition-style cocktail in the swanky confines of **Room 33** speakeasy may suit your fancy — otherwise, a concoction from any of Best of Erie award-winning distilleries (**Altered State Distillery**, **Luminary Distilling at Fuhrman's Cider Eatery**, or **Erie Distillery**) could generate a buzz about your future together.

But what to eat? Well, if you're hungry for pure hot, sizzling, unadulterated romance, you're in luck — we had an entire category dedicated to just that. With breathtaking views of the Gem City's ultimate thirst trap (Presque Isle Bay and Lake Erie) **Oli-ver's Rooftop** was hard to top in the Best Romantic Restaurant category (the immediate runner-up and Erie's Best New Restaurant, **Pier 6 Rooftop Bar & Grill** came close in both this and the Best Waterfront Dining categories), although **The Cork 1794** and **Pineapple Eddie Southern Bistro** (again named Erie's Best Restaurant overall) are not without their attractive qualities.

If you're not craving romance *specifically*, the cupboard is definitely not bare either. Whatever cuisine you're in the mood for, there's a Best Of category winner out there to seduce you. So if you're comfortable with your special someone seeing your bare face and hands helplessly slathered in wing sauce (e.g., at **Odis 12**, **One Way Inn**, or **Park Tavern**), go for it. True love is all about vulnerability.

For the artsy and cultured

Mutual mastication is so gauche. Why not feed your brain instead? With an eye-catching rotation of exhibits from premier regional, national, and international artists spread across three floors, **The Erie Art Mu-**

seum is a feast for the eyes and the cerebrum. They also host a number of unique events throughout the year, including the popular Gallery Nights, when you and your art nouveau have a unique opportunity to explore many of the dozens of other gallery spaces (such as Best Of Erie winner **Glass Growers Gallery**) around town all during a single three-hour time slot.

Perhaps the subject — *not* object (they're not just a piece of **Urbaniak Bros. Quality Meats** from Erie's Best Neighborhood Grocer) — of your affections is partial to the theatrical arts. Well, we're happy to report that Erie has a certain flair for the dramatic. The **Erie Playhouse** has staged

many memorable evenings over the past century plus and is consistently voted Erie's Best Community Theater. That's not to say there isn't plenty of talent elsewhere in our hometown theater scene — **PACA** (i.e. Performing Artists Collective Alliance) productions repeatedly push the envelope, and its historic building holds potential for other unique date nights (e.g., Erie ClaySpace pottery classes, PACA Movement Center dance lessons or yoga).

For the outdoorsy and adventurous

What do you say we get out of here? [winky face] If you're like a lot of people, you may have difficulty

sitting still. Loosening up the body often helps loosen up the mind and spirit, and that's one reason why **Presque Isle State Park** is perennially voted the Best Place for a First Date. This is not to mention its gorgeous scenery and scintillating sunsets, which is why PI is also usually a shoe-in for the overall Best Park category (although **Wintergreen Gorge**, **Frontier Park**, and **Asbury Woods** are also great if you want to — or have been told to — take a hike).

The recreational and romantic possibilities of Presque Isle are robust year-round, even in the so-called "dead of winter." Have you ever walked hand-in-hand over the frozen bay or peered out over the ice dunes during a midwinter's twilight? If not, you probably like being warm (but you're nevertheless missing out). Doubtlessly, though, spring will return and you and your boo will again be able to snoop exotic wildlife at the **Erie Zoo** — perhaps inspiring your own arboreal feats at **Peek'n Peak Outdoor Adventures** (until then, it also functions quite capably as a ski resort).

Best of Erie Advice for Romantic 'Innings'

By romantic "innings," we're not talking about pretending you're on kiss cam for the duration of an **Erie SeaWolves** game at UPMC Park, although the Best Team to Root For runner-up certainly deserves your adoration (as do the category-winning **Erie Otters** — their games make for a great first date during hockey season, too).

It's just that dressing nicely and going out and doing all the things can sometimes prove *exhausting*. We understand that "relax" can be a dangerous word when levied toward a significant other, depending on the context. But there is absolutely nothing wrong with a lazy evening at home. Perhaps you might pick up a bottle of wine from **Arundel Cellars & Brewing** (or Best Winery runners-up **Mazza Vineyards** or **Heritage Wine Cellars**) along with some incense and candles and see if you might generate a little electricity that way.

But if candles don't reilluminate your passion, here are a few things that might serve as a **Church & Muddock Electric**-caliber emergency

backup generator to your flailing love life:

1. A couple's massage at **Coventina Day Spa**, **Panache Salon and Spa**, or **Ambridge Rose Spa & Salon**.
2. A romantic staycation at the **Victoria Inn Bed & Breakfast**, **Grape Arbor Bed and Breakfast**, or **Spencer House Bed & Breakfast**.
3. Flowers delivered from **Potratz Floral Shop & Greenhouses**, **All-burn Florist**, or **Gerlach's Garden & Floral** (scale to your level of feels and/or guilt).

Try as we might, though, things always don't work out. And that's often when we as individuals get the motivation to start. Our voters like **Planet Fitness**, the **YMCA of Greater Erie**, and **Iron Oxygen** in particular for their #RevengeBod needs. But we're truly hoping you don't end up calling **MacDonald, Illig, Jones & Britton LLP** or **Agresti Real Estate Agency**, although our readers consider them the best at what they do!

Best of Erie Advice for Romantic Giving

As we've touched upon, flowers are a sweet gesture on many occasions — so are chocolate-covered strawberries from **Romolo Chocolates** (winner of the Best Chocolate and Best Dessert categories), cupcakes from **Icing on the Lake** (a Best Dessert and Best Bakery runner-up), cookies from **Ye Olde Sweet Shoppe** (the other runner-up in those two categories), or perhaps even a pie for your sweetie pie from **Art's Bakery** (you *lattice* know they're the upper crust of Erie bakeries every year).

It's a little cliché, but if you're thinking of popping the big question on Valentine's Day — *will you get tacos with me?* — **El Amigo** is your best friend. But then again, maybe so is she (or he). In that case, pay a visit to **Dahlkemper's Jewelry Connection** or **Breakiron Jewelers** and put a ring on it. With any luck, you'll be planning a date at one of the area's best wedding venues — **Peek'n Peak Resort**, **Port Farms**, or **Whispering Trees Manor** — in no time.

Being a man, Matt Swanseger (mswanseger@eriereader.com) claims no liability for the outcomes of any of the date ideas above.

Charles “CEE” Brown Speaks His Heart

Breaking through barricades in hip-hop



The grandson of local jazz legend Mary Alice Brown, Charles “CEE” Brown grew up around music, learning to play piano and keyboards at the age of eight and dabbling with drums at 10. Although he had long been a fluent writer of poetry, he did not start rapping until he was into his late teens and early twenties, a decision that ultimately served the six-time Best of Erie Award winner of Best MC well.

also not be around those who aren't as passionate as me, as well as [those who are too] controlling, in order to get to this mental place that I'm in now where I can create freely and uninterrupted. I love it. I'm finally home,” said Brown.

During the past few months he has released a new single and video, “The Barricade,” as well as the “7am on Bridle Path Remix” video on YouTube. “‘The Barricade’ was just a single. I wasn't trying to hint at a future project upon releasing it. It was just me being creatively free and wanting to give the people something even if they don't want it. I love doing random songs and music videos,” said Brown.

His latest release, due out soon, is a sequel to his popular 2011 *Love Tales* project. “I didn't expect to go in this direction but I started getting that old groove back with certain themes and I can't stop. Another project might be on the way too. As long as I stay away from people who don't care about music, people who want to try and control me musically, and other distractions, this could possibly be my best year as an underground artist,” said Brown.

Known for his creative story-telling and introspection, Brown is a conscious rapper, and his music often features deep emotional subjects such as suicide, heartbreak, and loss. He has addressed losing both of his parents, police brutality, his experience with homelessness, and other pressing societal issues that many artists tend to shy away from. “The beauty of being an independent artist is that you call the shots,” Brown said. “There is no one over you trying to take creative control. I keep my artistic integrity.”

He writes many of the treatments to his videos in a cinematic style, tak-

By: Amy VanScoter

When it comes to Charles “CEE” Brown, his musical and creative talent is only the beginning of the story. Those who know him best describe Brown as an artist, entrepreneur, and Renaissance man. From writing, producing, and creating music, to directing videos and performing, Brown has a clear vision of who he is and what he wants to say. And he finds plenty of avenues to speak his heart. Active in the community, advocating for mental health, uplifting other artists through journalism, and modeling for local clothing companies, it's clear Brown is not afraid to love Erie — or hard work. And his perseverance, drive, and determination, keep him propelling forward in a tough industry.

Brown first gained traction as an artist by transforming his poetry into songs and making hip-hop beats. The grandson of local jazz legend Mary Alice Brown, music became part of his life at a young age. He began playing keyboard and piano at the age of eight, which he still plays to cre-

ate music today. Drums started later at 10 years old, but Brown says he never took them seriously. He credits his best friend Jeremiah (Jerry) Mook, a former rapper he met when he was eight years old, with encouraging him to start rapping. “He really pushed me into rapping and for that alone, I thank him,” said Brown.

Mook and his cousin Sean Knox were actively rapping and needed original beats. Brown became their beat maker and producer at the age of 12. Fast forward years later, Mook and Brown started writing a song together just for fun. “I could always write, but I was scared to rap,” said Brown. “Jerry insisted that we recorded the song at Sean's that night. After that session, I fell in love with rapping.”

Legendary local rapper Hectic (Hector Perez), asked Brown to be on one of his singles in 2010, which pushed his name to more people before he began releasing his own projects. “When my first two CDs dropped in 2011, I was doing whatever to get those mixtapes out to people. I used to leave a stack of them in the men's

bathroom at Blasco Library. I would go to other artists' shows to have people familiarize themselves with me and network. And I was a frequent collaborator. I would hop on a track with damn near anyone to tap into their fanbase,” said Brown.

Brown began marketing and promoting himself across town by attending open mic nights at places like The Crooked I, a former State Street hot spot. He collaborated with bands outside of the genre such as Teatime For Three, This American Song, Six Year Stretch, The Trohoske Trio, The Galactic Duo, Falling Hollywood, and others. He began building a fan base that crossed all ages and genres. Brown credits Iggy of 2189 and Jon Box of The Box as two people who booked him for multiple shows that allowed him to have more recognizability in the city.

While many artists have struggled during the pandemic, Brown had planned to step away from the stage and has used the time away as an opportunity to thrive, often retreating into his studio for hours to create. “I had to sacrifice some things and

JESSICA HUNTER



Over the past several years, local MC Charles "CEE" Brown has had the opportunity to collaborate with some of the biggest names in hip-hop, including Ja Rule, Meek Mill, Ras Kass, RJ Payne, and Inspectah Deck (of Wu Tang Clan). He is currently at work on a sequel to his 2011 release *Love Tales Vol. 1: Love Hard to Lose Hard*.

Since 2011, Brown has released numerous singles, videos, and ten projects (mixtapes and EPs). "I've never done an album before because I've always been scared to, honestly. An album is a well thought out project both lyrically and sonically. I would hate to call something an album and it doesn't reach the standards of what an album should be," said Brown. Ever humble, he attributes his success to hard work, his love of music, and the ability to market and promote himself well, especially in a town that is not always easy on independent, original artists. Brown says he has no plans on slowing down and is really just getting started.

"I am who I am. I have embraced the fact that I'm an artist. I've been one since I was a child when I used to do illustrations in my sketchbooks. I create. No more shying away from that. So, to the reader, you shouldn't shy away from who you are either."

To keep up with CEE Brown, subscribe to his YouTube page and follow him on Facebook, Instagram: @ceebrown88, Twitter: @CEEBrown814, or log on to his website at ceebrown.com

Discography

- The Conviction (2011)
- Love Tales Vol. 1: Love Hard to Lose Hard (2011)
- Delirium (2012)
- Delirium: Revelation (2013)
- The Charles Brown Project EP (2014)
- Looking Down at the Sky (Collaboration with PA. Dre, 2014)
- The Feels EP (2016)
- The Evaluation EP (2018)
- Sunset: The Charles Brown Collection (2020)
- Note 2 Self. Note 2 You. EP (2020)

Amy VanScoter is a certified yoga and meditation teacher at PACA and SchoolHouse Yoga in Erie, and a marketing and communications professional. She can be reached at avanscoter@gmail.com

ing you on a journey full of rich symbolism, much like a movie. "Brooklyn videographer Howard Glover, also known as ThreeGloves Productions, took my visuals to another level. I waited around two years to get a video done by him because he was in high demand, but I knew that we had to work together at some point. Now, I believe that we have the most videos together in the area," said Brown.

He's also working on his own movie, a documentary of his life, with Xhibit One Productions of Erie. "So far, we've captured a lot but we haven't gotten into the meat and potatoes just yet. But, it's been fun. I didn't want to do a documentary because who am I? But, I have accomplished a lot and I have interesting perspectives on life. I guess this is a good time to do one," Brown said.

Working with some of the biggest names in the rap business, Brown has opened for Ja Rule, Meek Mill, and collaborated with Ras Kass. Through his long-time close friendship and working relationship with Erie native and producer PA. Dre, Brown has most recently contributed to several projects with RJ Payne, a Brooklyn-bred, Philly-groomed battle rap legend who has been co-signed by Ice-T and Eminem. Brown also contributed to the highly anticipated upcoming solo alb

um of Inspectah Deck of Wu Tang Clan, though many of the specific details are under wraps.

"When I do work for people such as RJ Payne and Inspectah Deck, I'm using other talents aside from rapping. I'm usually asked to sing a hook or create a skit/intro. It's a true blessing, but I'm really waiting on that text or phone call saying 'We really need a verse.' After all, that's what I'm here to do — rap! At the same time though, I don't let any of these opportunities get to my head because I still work regular jobs and it's so frustrating knowing that you've worked with someone legendary but still have to 'push a mop.' It's a tease. But definitely be on the lookout for what I did for Deck. I played a few different roles in his album. I'm super grateful," said Brown.

Not only has Brown created for some big names, he is also a big name in his own right. Due to his relentless work ethic, Brown has garnered many local music awards and accolades, becoming the only Erie hip-hop artist with 13 music awards (including Best MC in our Best of Erie Awards each year from 2015-20). He performs as a solo artist and with his band, The CEE Brown Experience, with whom he plans to do more. Throughout the years, he has acted in movies and

commercials, performed voiceover work, produced music for commercials, hosted events, and is also a public speaker. Brown has worked with the Erie Philharmonic for their youth concert and was a co-writer and main narrator to the short film *This is Our Erie*. Living an entrepreneurial life, Brown works several jobs that allow him the flexibility to work on his music and take on creative projects. He is also a freelance journalist and regular contributor to the Erie Reader, Erie Times, and *Validated* magazine.

"I look at my life now and realize that I don't want this to be it forever, juggling certain jobs that I don't necessarily like, dreading to go into work, boss calling you about bullshit, trying to manage money that isn't enough, living unfulfilled, etc. I'm in a better emotional state than before but I'm not completely happy with my life. I love music! I'm an addict for it and that should be my main profession. I'm not here to be employee of the month or work a bunch of hours to receive vacation time and my vacation time at that. Some of these jobs don't care about us anyway. My callings are these rhymes and beats. If I don't push for it, then I'll always live a life where I'm borderline miserable and regretful. I would rather die than not live out my dreams," said Brown.

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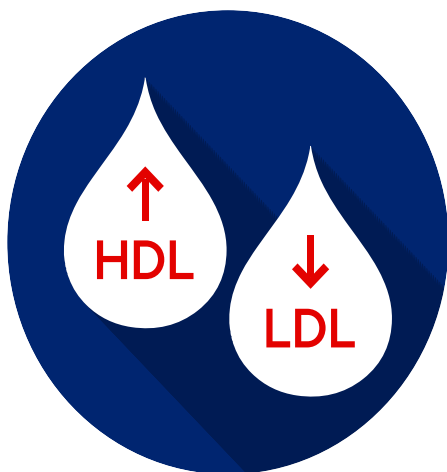
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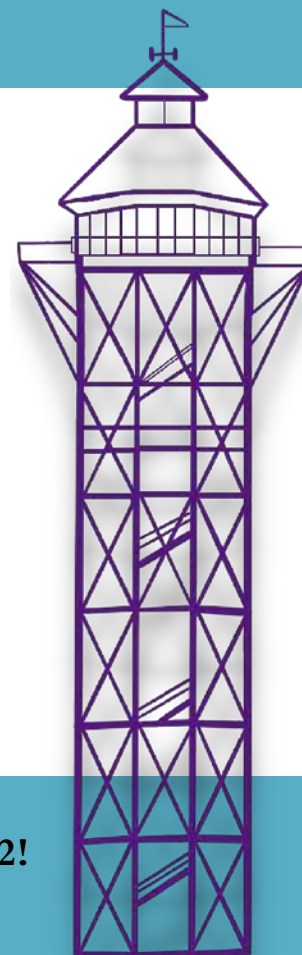
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Exploring the Space of 10/20 Collective

A Q&A with Rick Bowser and Sarah MK Moody



JESSICA HUNTER

By: Jessica Hunter

As a burgeoning art and multi-use event space, 10/20 Collective is growing, owning its space in the community. Leading this growth is Rick Bowser, the collective's director, and Sarah MK Moody, the director of programming, art, and community. From its days as a studio space, to housing the Lake Erie Ballet, to its time as the Ballet Haus music venue, 10/20 Collective continues to find its identity. After the onset of the pandemic in 2020, they, like many businesses, found themselves at a crossroads. As 2021 progressed, though, their vision coalesced, serving as home to myriad community events, performances, and exhibits. I sat down with Bowser and Moody at the venue, aptly named for its location at 1020 Holland St., to talk about what got them there and where they're headed.

Jessica Hunter: Can you tell me about yourselves, and how the space has evolved?

Rick Bowser: So, rewind back to 2006, 2007. This building was purchased by my father Jon Bowser and Tom Ferraro, and they actually did the original renovations. This was Tom's studio for a number

of years, up until 2015, when it was sold to the Lake Erie Ballet.

The ballet was here for a few years. And then this building went up for sheriff sale. So it's always been on my radar. And I've always loved it. It's been an option and I've always been passionate about the space. I was here when I was super young, like 10 years old, when it was in need of revitalization, basically. I've always had these dreams about it and sketched up a whole floor plan for it when I was in high school. And then I thought the dream was dead. I thought that it was over. I was set to work in transportation. I was going to move to Memphis, Tennessee. This was after I graduated from Gannon. I went there for marketing. But it all fell into place. And when it went up for sheriff sale, we came in and got it. So that was the end of 2019. Right before COVID [laughs].

JH: We looked at the space with the Erie Reader around that time. We were going to do our 40 under 40 Experience party there. But then it was going up for sheriff sale, and there was a lot of uncertainty around it at the time [laughs].

RB: Sorry for blowing that up. The opportunity is back again. But I'm a musician, multi-instrumentalist, and produc-

er and always had a dream of building a music studio. So that's my passion behind those walls there. And then I envision it being a gallery space, a community space, with plans for a community garden, all of these things.

JH: You've got lots of space out there.

RB: Yeah! We had like 10 to 15 concerts planned for 2020 and had to cancel them all, because of COVID. But then in July of 2020, we had an art show here with Tom Ferraro, Ron Bayuzick, and Brian Pardini. And that was kind of the kickoff to being back here.

Sarah MK Moody: "Barracuda."

JH: We did a nice piece on that at the Reader, Mary Birdsong did.

RB: Yeah, and that's actually how I met Sarah. That's part of the tie-in, because she came and saw "Barracuda." Then the NPAA was doing a show here after that, "Sense of Place," and Sarah was the curator. So that was kind of our introduction to each other. She was also selling bread here. And we chatted for a while because Sarah walked in, and she was like, "this is my dream space. This is everything I've been looking for. I have been dreaming about building a space like this." And, you know, having a community space with a dark room and

Rick Bowser and Sarah MK Moody have transformed the former Lake Erie Ballet building at 1020 Holland St. into a burgeoning art and multi-use space, serving as home to myriad community events, performances, and exhibits.

a clay space and a store and to promote Erie-based artists. So then she ends up going back to Florida, and we kind of slowed down at the end of the year. We had Alexa Potter here [with the "I Found it on the Ground" exhibit]. Then we had an exhibit with the Fiber Arts Guild in November and Dafmark Dance.

JH: So with the community events, I think that that's what's bringing a lot of your people in for all the different things. Can you talk about that?

SM: Sure. When we put up "Expressions," which was a solo show of work that I made, new work that I made primarily in 2020-2021. Paintings I made with my daughter, works I made on my own alongside her. So kind of a new way of showing my work, which is photography, clay work, and painting. Part of the purpose of it was to talk about creative expression and invite others to express themselves. And to show the ways in which they express themselves that lights them up, and to give them a

platform to come here and do that. So we invited at that time Mabel Howard to do “Express Yourself” on the mic. Stevie T. Stahlsmith, aka the Lake Erie Medium — we invited him here to do his readings. And I taught weekly yoga classes and meditation classes, as well as art classes for adults and kids.

It was a lot of “look at this work, play with this work, make your own work,” there’s really not a lot of limits. And at the same time, lots of different friends — I grew up in Miami, Florida — were passing through. We had a concert with Afrobeta, who’s based out of Miami, and they came and then they taught a music workshop as well during that time; it was very playful, very fun. And while that was happening, Rick and I continued to speak about our shared vision for the space, our shared vision for Erie, and our shared vision for creating this independent art space, which is a space for the community to freely express their passion and their creativity. And so we’ve continued with the poetry nights, which happened really most Fridays. We’ve had several different live music events during that time and invited many differ-

ent people to share what they like to do. Singing bowls, sound baths. What else am I missing? Different yoga classes ...

JH: Cooking? The pop-up dinner?

SM: Yes, the dinners came from that too, which is a long-term vision and dream of Rick. And together, we worked on that. We’ve had five dinners. That’s giving a platform for local chefs and food enthusiasts to share their food with the community. And we set up the tables in the middle of the gallery with candlelight. And it’s activating the space and the gallery and the art in a different type of way. You’re experiencing live piano while eating a delicious meal that’s cooked on site. And engaging with new people. And every dinner has been exciting because people have never been here before. And they come for the dinner and then they’re sharing because I have one long table they’re sharing with each other.

JH: Food always gets me. I remember when I was really starting to pay attention to this space, along with the yoga and poetry and a lot of your music events, I thought it was so beautiful. It’s something that gathers people. It defi-

nately caught my eye when you started doing that and posting the photos of people in here enjoying the art and the space together as strangers.

SM: Definitely. And bringing people in that may not come for a gallery opening, but will come for a six-course meal. And then enjoy the work and ask questions about the artwork and learn about their local community, or different types of art-making. Where all those things intersect has always been my passion as an artist and as an event producer and as a curator, and it’s the type of thing that I like to do. It is important to us that every time someone comes to the space, there is a new experience, a new feeling, and you’re learning something new, even if the exhibition has not changed.

JH: So that leads me into, what’s next? Any other new exciting things coming?

RB: Musicians and podcasters can book studio time through our shop page on our website. We have just started recording local musicians and it has been thrilling.

SM: We’re launching our membership program, then our space will be available for the community to come and work

together to learn together. That will be launched soon, with all the details of what that means. We have a couple of art shows in the pipeline that will be announced later. The Recording Studio is a really big deal. And we’re working on our upcoming photography darkroom that has been long-awaited. As well as offering the space for event rentals, for photographers to use the walls. And the dinners are an inspiration. But we’re really excited to have large and small events going on inside of this space. And there’s that plus we have some live music shows that are coming as well.

JH: You guys are busy. I love it [laughs].

SM: Our art classes will resume, our yoga classes will continue. The main difference between us and other spaces is we are a community space. It is for gathering, for sharing, for learning, and communing. We have expansive space upstairs and downstairs for use for a myriad of options.

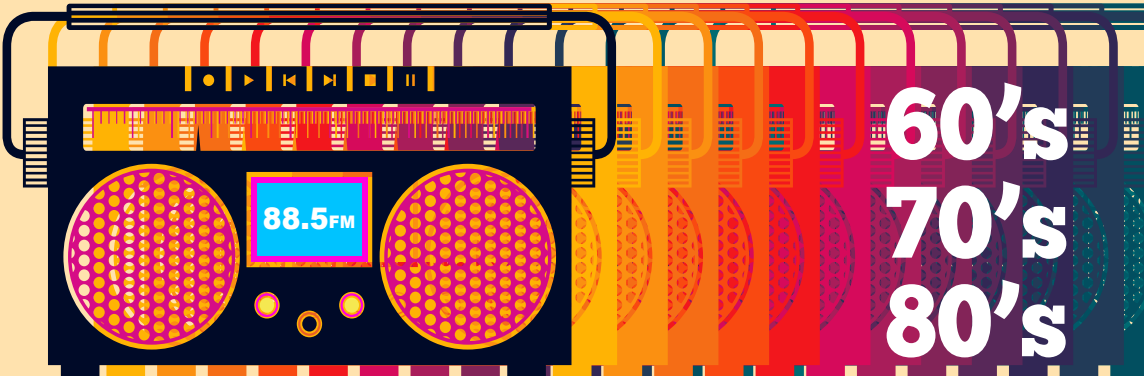
For more information, go to 1020collective.com, or visit the space at 1020 Holland St.

Jessica Hunter can be reached at jessica@eriereader.com, and at jessicahunterphotos.com.

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The Creative Hum of City Gallery

Veteran art duo makes dreams reality in renovated PACA storefront



Couple Stephen Trohoske and Lena Logvina, co-owners of Artlore Studio at 3406 W. Lake Rd., have seen their vision expand with the opening of City Gallery in Downtown Erie. Housed in the same historic Mayer Building that also accommodates the Performing Artists Collective Alliance (PACA), the space lends itself to multiple perspectives and multiple functions, welcoming artists of all kinds.

ERIN PHILLIPS

By: Erin Phillips

“This is just so exciting. I’ve always loved this building. When this place opened up I was like, ‘Oh my god! I’ve always wanted it, I’ve always loved it. If it’s ready for us, let’s just jump in.’” Lena Logvina, co-owner of Artlore Studio (3406 W. Lake Rd.) and now City Gallery at 1503 State St., is visibly excited during our tour of her new gallery. With each turn of a corner, the building opens up to a new space, a little alcove, an unexpected balcony, all brimming with the potential of what it is becoming. Building owner and PACA (Performing Artists Collective Alliance) progenitor Mark Tanenbaum reiterates the serendipity that Logvina feels: “Five years ago, we weren’t ready for them and they weren’t ready for us. We’ve both grown to the point where now our shared mission is able to be presented and created. It’s just perfect timing.”

City Gallery opened in July 2021 to great accolades for the veteran Erie art scene duo of Lena Logvina and Steve Trohoske, as they work to make their dreams a reality in their new space. They have an glowing vision for its future, in collaboration with PACA, to be a lighthouse for creative minds in Erie.

When Logvina and Trohoske started their business at Artlore Studios six and a half years ago, they never

dreamed it would grow to what it is now. It started as a space for Logvina to work on and display her own art and jewelry, but with so much support from their friends and the art community, they were able to expand, show and sell work from dozens of different local artists, offer artisan run classes, and hold live music events. “We had ideas and we worked really hard, and everyone just came together to make that place what it is. And now this is like a hundred times bigger in the sense of dreams than Artlore. We have so much space, and I love that you can go to so many different spaces here and see different things.” And as we walk along a wide open upper balcony that spans the length of the gallery, Logvina points out how all those different spaces can help you see the art in a different way. She points to a striking, colorful landscape below us: “When you’re standing here and looking at that purple piece, a Rachael Burke, look at how amazing, magnificent it looks. Then move over here, and it takes you to a completely different place. It changes the art to be able to see it from different heights and different perspectives.”

A change in perspective is what the couple hopes can shape and define their new art gallery. Eventually, they are working to move Artlore Studios into this building, to combine it with

this space. The area upstairs, behind the main gallery area, will become a studio for work the likes of which now happens at their West Lake Road location. Logvina also points out an area of the building that will be transformed into an art supply store. Because there are more than 40 artists using the studio space at PACA, they are excited to offer retail art supplies, where artists can pick up the basic tools they need right there, without leaving the building.

It is this synergy that Tanenbaum hopes contributes to both City Gallery and PACA’s continued success: “Having everyone build off each other, that’s the goal. That creative hum interconnects things. City Gallery is physically connected to PACA, so when people come to PACA for a play on a Friday night, they can then wander down to listen to music or buy some art. There’s cooperation and interaction.”

Having such an expansive gallery space and venue within the same building, which has been growing, expanding, and improving for the past 10 years, is such an important move and addition to the overall vision and mission of PACA. City Gallery fills a need in that little corner of the city that is dedicated to serving the creative sector of Erie. Tanenbaum comments: “In an overall sense, City Gallery, as Artlore before them, is an essential gathering space for a variety of types of artists: visual arts, painting, sculpting, and the like, as well as jazz and music. That’s actually PACA’s main thrust: to connect the various arts all in the same place, all at the same time. We’ve always been dedicated to this so to have City Gallery connect with us is just a natural progression for where we are and where they are.”

Not only are Logvina and Trohoske changing their perspective and their place within the art community, they

are doing it in a 120-year-old building that has redefined itself alongside the City of Erie over the years. The Mayer Building, which Tanenbaum recently succeeded in adding to the National Register of Historic Places, stretches nearly half the block, comprising PACA along with multiple storefronts, including City Gallery, and has long been an anchor building in the area.

Henry Mayer was a Civil War veteran who built 1501-1509 State Street in 1899 to house his construction business and offices. The building has had many functions over the years including serving as an overflow Typhoid ward during the epidemic in 1913. The storefront that has become City Gallery has also been a home to a number of businesses through the decades, including a wallpaper store, a grocery store, and more recently, serving as the studio and gallery for prolific local artist Fran Schanz. But as PACA grows and changes, so does the building’s purpose. Finding a sustainable use for an old building is essential to its preservation, and Tanenbaum has made it his mission to make sure the building and its use are well-defined: “More important than to save an old building, which is important, is to create a methodology where that saved building is useful.” As one walks through City Gallery, it looks like a modern, up-to-date art gallery, but with little touches that give away it’s oldness, like the wooden, multi-paneled doors, the creaky wood stairs, decorative banister and newel post, and exposed brick and stone walls. The character of the building shines through, while it is still able to function comfortably as a modern space.

Trohoske, Logvina, and Tanenbaum, have already completed a mountain of work in the building, and work is still ongoing. “We’ve gotten really far since July and every day there’s work going on here. A lot of this will be done and ready to go before people think,” Trohoske reports. Within City Gallery, Logvina and Trohoske have painted, cleaned, installed tracks for hanging art, removed carpeting, and finished the floors, while Tanenbaum accomplished most of the major construction including the design and current layout of the space, lighting, and adding an ADA compliant bathroom. And



ERIN PHILLIPS

construction and improvement is ongoing as they transform the ever unfolding square footage of the building into more usable spaces to come.

While parts of the building are still in the throes of reinvention and renovation, City Gallery is currently fully operational and has an interesting and eclectic schedule of upcoming shows and performances scheduled through the spring. Through mid-February, the gallery will feature the work of local artist Jon Box, who is hosting a month-long visual presentation entitled "Amor Supra Omnia," Love Above All. Trohoske is excited for their upcoming slate of artists: "We want to bring world class art here. We also want to give younger people their starts. We're bringing in three musical acts this spring: The Ethnic Heritage Ensemble, Afro Horns, and Matt Maneri's Dust Quartet." City Gallery has plans to host a fashion show featuring the work of a local designer in March. In terms of visual art, the gallery is looking forward to showcasing the watercolor art of McKenzie Sprague in March, Dan and Rachael Burke in April, and a Fairview High School photography show in May. The couple is also excited about the possibility of holding events like weddings

Located at 1503 State St., City Gallery will continue to showcase bold and eclectic art both visually and sonically, with exhibits and performances scheduled through spring. Currently on display is "Amor Supra Omnia" (Love Above All) by local artist Jon Box.

and private parties in the gallery.

When one walks through the doors of City Gallery or PACA, one can feel the buzz of creative energy and excitement. The place is filled with the passion of the people who have made it all happen, and it is only going to grow, expand, and mature from here. Tanenbaum reflects: "I get up every morning and I can't wait to do more stuff, I just love it. When people put their time and money and everything they have into something, I want them to be successful. We've only been in existence here for 10 years and look at all we've done. Who knows what the next 50 years brings?" With some of the most creative, ambitious, and hard-working people in Erie at the helm, I, for one, look forward to watching it all unfold.

Erin Phillips runs the Instagram @olderieonfoot, an in-depth look at local architecture "by foot, stroller, papoose, bike, and occasionally minivan."

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ART & CULTURE

A Dash of Salt Makes Any Recipe ‘Flavaful’

Local DJ whips up a savory treat that’ll leave you wanting more



DJ Salt (Jeremy Salter) has become one of the region’s most prolific beatmakers and producers, rising to prominence during the 2010s by working with up-and-coming artists. Slated for release is a hip-hop compilation album entitled *The Recipe*, featuring CEE Brown, Sharpshooter, Aaron Rennell (Major Coin), Crew Life, Brooklyn J, and many more.

his instrumental albums, *Flavanoids Vol. 1*, in 2015, with *Vol. 2* following in 2017. From there, he began to work with more local up-and-coming artists to bring his beats to life, executive producing two albums in 2020 — Pay-so Best Ever’s *G.O.A.T Music* and Shai Boogie’s *Death of Religion*.

Shortly thereafter, a tragic turn of events tested Salt’s integrity and drive as his house burned down, and his nearly-completed recording studio along with it. After being displaced for six months and having to cope with this obstacle, his hopes and aspirations to continue on severely deteriorated. Fortunately, with COVID-19 still in full effect, his boredom overrode his sorrows, therefore pushing him to prevail and begin rebuilding his livelihood. This would bring about the foundation of his imprint known as Flavaful Sound.

With the establishment of his company and the revival of his studio, Salt is working diligently to expand his portfolio and showcase himself and local colleagues on a level that Erie hasn’t seen before. He recently produced local artist Nefhew’s debut album, *ENVY-P (Most Valuably Hated)*. *The Recipe*, which is about 25 percent complete, will become one of Salt’s most notable creations. This album features 25 top-tier local artists, with names such as CEE Brown, Sharpshooter, Aaron Rennell (Major Coin), Crew Life, Brooklyn J, and many more — all handpicked by the man himself.

Just like in any important recipe, every ingredient is key to making it complete. Each one is special and adds a unique flavor to a dish, just as each artist contributes heat and spice to Salt’s mixes. Let’s just say this production will definitely leave you begging for seconds.

DJ Salt can be found on all streaming platforms as well as on social media and on his website at www.djsalt.com.

By: Symoné Crockett

Local DJ, beat maker, and producer DJ Salt (Jeremy Salter) is gathering the essential ingredients (artists) in order to create a first-of-its-kind hip-hop compilation album coming out this summer. *The Recipe* is a well-conceived production that will showcase some of the top up-and-coming artists the 814 has to offer. “The goal is not only to build my own legacy by combining forces with talented and like-minded artists, but also to showcase the talent that this city has to offer,” declares Salt.

Salt is no novice when it comes to the music industry. Growing up in a church atmosphere, Salt was constantly surrounded by music. Taking after his drummer father, Salt also

tried his hand at percussion, in turn leading to an interest in beats. Listening to acclaimed rapper and producer Dr. Dre’s *The Chronic* (1992) would prompt him to discover his love and passion for the hip-hop genre. During his teenage years he met his mentor, hip-hop artist Action Davis, who Salt proclaimed “taught me everything I know...without his guidance and opportunities, I would not be the man I am in the industry today.”

In his twenties, Salt continued to pursue his career and became an online beat maker even without any type of classical training. Production work for local rapper Hectic in the 2010s spurred a rise in popularity. Recognizing that he had more potential musically than lyrically, Salt began to build his brand, releasing the first of



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PACA's Every Brilliant Thing a Life-affirming List

The interactive one-man-show seeks to transform pain into appreciation and joy



DAVE SCHOREDER / PACA

special filmed version starring comedian Johnny Donahue, who originated the role. Written by Duncan Macmillan (with a credit to Donahue as well), *Every Brilliant Thing* is a unique play, with truly admirable intentions.

"The storyline starts out with a young man who's back in hindsight as a little boy, the first time he is called to the hospital for his mother's attempted suicide," explained co-director (and PACA artistic director) Mark Tanenbaum. "And he's nine years old. He decides to make a list to write down every wonderful thing, every brilliant thing worth living for, and he shares it with his mother, in the hopes, of course, that his mother sees that life is worth living." Tanenbaum noted that "it is actually a true story."

"Ultimately, the list benefits him more than it benefits his mother," Tanenbaum concluded.

The show is traditionally interactive with audience members, and while special attention is being paid

due to COVID-19 precautions, this show will be no exception. It's certainly a different kind of play, one that Tanenbaum likened to a TED Talk, featuring Rob Carney as the show's main character.

With a special new backlit screen (think a projector on steroids) and a minimal set, *Every Brilliant Thing* sounds like a production worth catching in person.

"You're not alone, you're not weird, you will get through it, and you've just got to hold on," Macmillan told The Guardian, who called the play "the funniest play you'll see about depression."

With a sincere message that everyone needs to hear, it brings a positive, life-affirming note to one of humanity's darkest subjects. — Nick Warren

Fridays and Saturday, Feb. 11 to 19, 7:30 to 9 p.m. // PACA, 1505 State St., Second Floor // \$15 // For tickets and more information, go to paca1505.org

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Debuting in 2013 at the Ludlow Fringe Festival in the United Kingdom, *Every Brilliant Thing* caught on with audiences immediately. In 2016, HBO released a

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EVENTS

Make Your Way To ‘My Way: A Tribute to the Music of Frank Sinatra’

Croon along to the classics at Erie Playhouse



Erie theater veterans Joe Greulich (left), Anna McJunkin, Kate Neubert-Lechner, and Patrick Vahey will each lend their voices to *My Way: A Tribute to the Music of Frank Sinatra*, premiering Friday, Feb. 25 at the Erie Playhouse.

in all 50 states, *My Way* is now coming to the stage of the Erie Playhouse for a nine-show run.

Set up as a musical revue, *My Way* draws from Sinatra’s extensive musical book, featuring 55 different arrangements, performed by four powerhouse vocalists.

In Erie, that cast includes Joe Greulich, Anna McJunkin, Kate Neubert-Lechner (also the executive director of the Playhouse), and Patrick Vahey. If these names look familiar, it’s because all four cast members are indeed Playhouse veterans.

Audience members can expect an expressive romp through the 1950s, ‘60s, ‘70s, ‘80s, and ‘90s, following the trajectory of Sinatra’s explosive career path, including movies, hit albums, and his

long-running Las Vegas residency with The Rat Pack.

Snap your fingers and tap your toes along with standards like “Fly Me to the Moon,” “I Get A Kick Out Of You,” and — naturally — “My Way.”

Guests should note that the Erie Playhouse is still under strict CDC guidance and will be requiring proof of vaccination or, for those unable to get vaccinated, a negative COVID test within 72 hours of showtime, for all patrons 12 years and older.

Audience members should also expect to remain masked for the entirety of the performance.

Relive the historic career of Ol’ Blue Eyes, in an oftentimes-joyful but always-stirring review of one of the greatest musical talents this planet has ever known. — Cara Suppa

Running through March 13 // Erie Playhouse, 13 W. 10th St. // For individual performance times and ticket information visit erieplayhouse.org

BEGINNING FRIDAY, FEB. 25

Francis Albert Sinatra — better known to the world at large as Frank Sinatra — left a five-decades-long musical legacy that began in 1946, when he had just entered his 30s.

“The Chairman of the Board” was both

myth and legend even before his death in 1998, and it took only two years for the Tennessee Repertory Theater to produce and present the world premiere of *My Way: A Tribute to the Music of Frank Sinatra*.

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Gumbo Sound II Brews Musical Intrigue

10/20 Collective serves creative stew



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Avery (James Myles, left) and B. Gilly will be among those to perform during Gumbo Sound II at 10/20 Collective on Saturday, Feb. 26. The event is an effort to bring together and promote the eclectic tri-state music scene.

er, lyricist, and all-around idea creator Elias, If Only. Since becoming involved in the 10/20 Collective, Elias has continued to expand his expertise in the music industry following the creation of his podcast *Lake Erie Gumbo* and past musical ventures. By having the opportunity to utilize this state-of-the-art, collectively creative environment, he and the rest of his squad are not only able to explore their own growth, but also bring together and promote the eclectic tri-state music scene.

The initial Gumbo Sound took place last October and brought together a showcase of artists that included Avery (James Myles), B. Gilly, and Sean Harris. The event can be viewed as “more of a conference rather than a show,” as it not only gives Erie the opportunity to check out new and up-and-coming artists, but more importantly gives artists the chance to network and build strong business relationships.

In this second serving of Gumbo Sound, Crew Life

Productions will be performing for the first time since the release of multiple compilations and collaborations amongst the crew with a first-of-its-kind surprise during their performance. Also there will be Ayam JC from Buffalo, Faaathom from Pittsburgh, B. Gilly from Ohio, and Erie’s own BREEZOLAND DC and YUNG9INEDRO. “It’s such a different variety of people performing but we are all close in the creative community. Although we can sometimes get viewed as secondary cities, we have just as much talent as Atlanta or NYC,” protests B. Gilly.

Artists will be selling merchandise with local breweries and distilleries also participating. This showcase will be the second of many, as Elias plans on making this a monthly affair with each set displaying different artists and genres. Dive into this melting pot of the incredibly talented Erie creative community that we are a part of by putting our city on and sharing the love. — Symoné Crockett

8 p.m. // The 10/20 Collective, 1020 Holland St. // \$5 pre-sale, \$10 at the door // 21+ // facebook.com/1020collective

Simone Porter Returns to Erie Phil with Sorcerer’s Apprentice

Virtuosic violinist brings fantastical scenes to musical life



SIMONEPORTERVIOLIN.COM

Violinist Simone Porter will be the featured soloist in the Erie Philharmonic’s “Sorcerer’s Apprentice” program slated for Saturday, Feb. 26 at the Warner Theatre.

their website, indicating concertgoers should stay tuned for more details.

The program is set to include Paul Duklas’ “The Sorcerer’s Apprentice,” featured in the 1940 Walt Disney film *Fantasia*. Porter will be performing alongside the Philharmonic on “Scottish Fantasy” by Max Bruch, with the concert ending with Cesar Franks’ Symphony in D.

“Scottish Fantasy” is steeped in the tradition of its country, drawing from folk songs to create a rich musical tapestry. “Under the spell of novels by Sir Walter Scott, Bruch freely uses folk melodies and traditional rhythms to capture the joyous spirit of this beautiful land,” the Philharmonic described.

Porter first made her onstage debut at the age of 10 with the Seattle Symphony and first performed internationally at 13 with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra in London. Since then, she has performed with the New York Philharmonic, the Philadelphia Orchestra, and the Los Angeles Philharmonic. Along-

side working with various orchestras and conductors, Porter is a recipient of the Avery Fisher Career Grant in 2015.

“This piece has all of the right ingredients,” Porter said after performing the composition with the Grand Rapids Symphony last year. “It has these moving, lyrical, melodic lines for the solo instrument. These rich, ambrosial orchestral textures, violinistic pyrotechnics, moments of ‘heart on your sleeve.’”

Bruch’s composition is in four movements, with each one telling a story. Porter says Bruch’s depiction of the opening is an image of “an old bard, who is contemplating a ruined castle and lamenting the glorious times of old.”

“I love playing this piece,” Porter adds after describing the distinct style of each of the four movements. “It feels so luxurious. It offers fantastic moments of collaboration and conversation between everybody on stage.”

Porter previously played with the Philharmonic back in March of 2019 at Allegheny College. — Thomas Taylor

8 to 10:30 p.m. // Warner Theatre, 811 State St. // \$32 - 52, \$10 for students // For tickets and more

SATURDAY, FEB. 26

The Erie Philharmonic has set a last-minute change to their program in February. Violinist Simone Porter will take the stage for the Philharmonic’s “Sorcerer’s Apprentice” concert, replacing Cameron Carpenter

as featured guest.

“While we were looking forward to welcoming Cameron Carpenter to Erie to perform on the mighty Wurlitzer Theater Organ, we’ll have to wait a little longer while the organ installation is completed,” the Philharmonic said on

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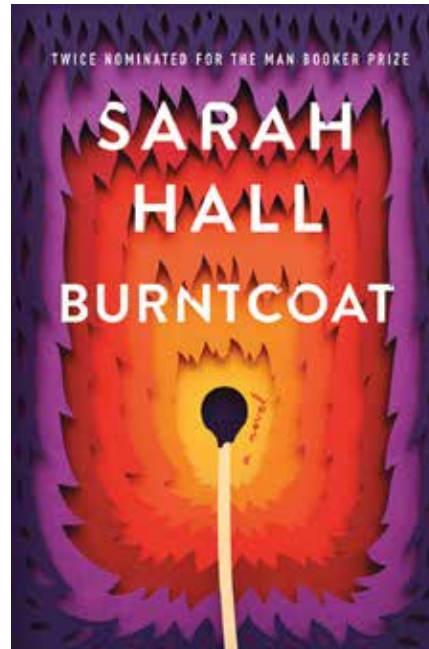
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BOOK REVIEW

Book Review: *Burntcoat*

Sarah Hall's streamlined sixth novel glows bright, weaving a poetic post-pandemic tale



with a mother who suffered a brain aneurysm when Edith was young, who has no memory of becoming a mother, and whose personality quirks make for a very unique coming-of-age for Edith.

She recounts her stories of art school, an internship in Japan, and how she happened to return to England when her mother died. It was upon this return that she ended up in quarantine with, ostensibly, a stranger she just began dating and the story progresses as they learn about each other and live and suffer through the pandemic together. At times graphically steamy, the relationship with her live-in pandemic lover, Halit, demonstrates how we show ourselves to others, the role of art in that expression, and ultimately, how death and destruction shapes that art.

Do we need fiction about a pandemic? Is that something that will help us navigate our current reality? Or recognize ourselves on the other side? The impetus of the novel *Burntcoat* by short story writer Sarah Hall is a pandemic (like COVID, but worse), but the story is hardly about that. It gives our protagonist, Edith Harkness, a reason to tell us her story.

The story floats in and out of timelines, the present being many years post-pandemic, which Edith has survived, but where she is suffering a relapse from which she will likely die. She tells us her autobiography which includes her progression as a profitable artist, producing large public installations, and how she came to live at her industrial studio, named *Burntcoat*. The story includes her childhood

This novel packs so much in just 300 pages. The writing is poetic and efficient; it feels beautifully edited. There are no wasted words, and the descriptions of Edith's art, her childhood, her lover and the relationship they discovered together are perfectly presented right in front of the reader. In a way, it gives light to a potential post-pandemic that we can all see as a possible reality: the loss of normalcy, the residual effects, and the unceasing need for artistic expression to cut through all of the pain. I would recommend reading this book in as few sittings as possible to get the true thrust of it's fluid timeline, and to fully appreciate the way the book feels sculpted, bit by bit, into being. — Erin Phillips

304 Pages // Custom House // Psychological Fiction, Dystopian Fiction





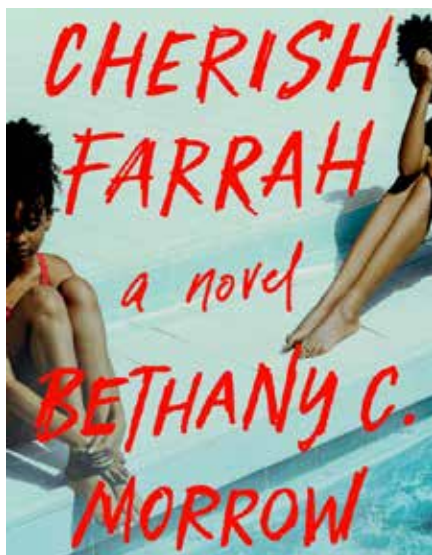
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Book Review: *Cherish Farrah*

Chilling page-turner found in new social horror from Bethany C. Morrow



We all know someone like Farrah: calculating, manipulative, and always seems to get her way, no matter the situation. Thinking she's invincible, Farrah does as she pleases, with one word dominating her life and her choices: Control.

As one of two Black girls in her country club community and the only one with Black parents, Farrah Turner has seen the difference between her family and the others in her community, including her best friend, Cherish Whitman. Adopted by a wealthy white family, Cherish's parents often indulge their daughter's every whim and desire. Farrah uses this to her advantage, finding she can often exploit this privilege of her best

friend's familial position.

When things take a turn for Farrah's family and foreclosure on their house occurs, she's determined to regain control by staying with Cherish in the Whitman's home as well as plotting herself further into their lives. Strange things begin to happen, though, and Farrah's control quickly spirals away from her.

The commentary on race and class in *Cherish Farrah* should not be missed. Morrow's storytelling paints a stark contrast between the picture-perfect exterior on which we see the benevolent white family who adopt a Black child, and what's really going on under the surface.

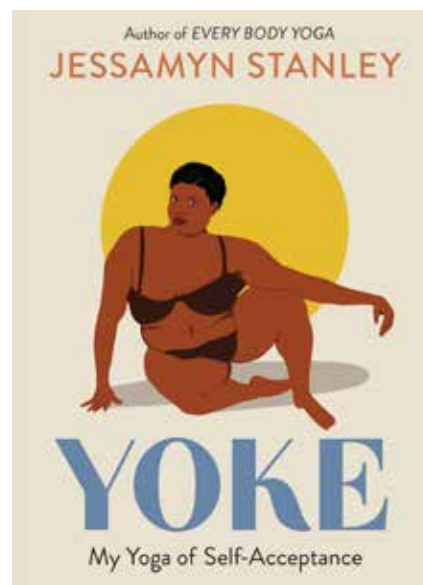
Morrow has made the interesting decision to tell the story in Farrah's voice, even though she is a character whose behaviors often paint her in an unflattering light and can lead readers to potentially consider her an unreliable narrator. In any other setting, this choice would have fallen, but in this psychological, social horror, it adds much more intrigue than any concretely "good" character could bring.

One of the most intriguing aspects of the novel is the slow burn of the story, leading readers into the thick of it before realizing how deep they've gotten, by which point it is too late to turn back, and they'll be on the edge of their seats right until the end. — Ally Kutz

331 Pages // Dutton Books // Suspense, Psychological Fiction

Yoke: My Yoga of Self-Acceptance

Jessamyn Stanley's second book explores the realness in wellness



It's hard not to gravitate towards the beautiful packaging of *Yoke*. The book is small, with textured paper, gorgeous illustrations throughout, and muted colors. But Jessamyn Stanley's voice is neither small nor muted, and her collection of incredibly honest, unapologetic, funny, autobiographical essays invite the reader to embrace the deeper, authentic spirit of yoga and their own self-acceptance.

The Sanskrit word yoga, means "to yoke," as in, "to join together," to marry breath, thought, and movement, to connect body, mind, and spirit, and to explore the meaning of balance, linking the good and bad, light and dark, on

and off the mat. Stanley encourages the exploration of these ideas as she takes the reader along on her personal journey to discovering and teaching yoga, from growing up Bahai, reading Tarot, loving astrology, learning to meditate, practicing at home, and eventually landing a *Yoga Journal* magazine cover.

Far from the typical self-help and wellness books that tend to be either deeply intellectual or overly flowery, Stanley strikes a balance and tells it like it is, as if you were having a conversation with a friend. In the first chapter she lets you know right away that "the fine print of being a fat, Black, queer yoga teacher in a predominately thin, White, and very straight yoga industry is that there are just as many people who are inspired by you as there are with a strong desire for you to shut the f*ck up." She doesn't shy away from talking about raw feelings and real topics such as impostor syndrome, wealth inequality, cultural appropriation, sacred music, plant medicine, and white guilt. She does it all with a fresh voice, charm, and sharp wit.

Yoke unpacks the deeper meaning of yoga and reminds readers that "the yoga of everyday is not about perfecting your downward dog, but about applying the hard lessons learned on the mat to the even harder daily project of living."

— Amy VanScoter
208 pages // Workman Publishing // Autobiography, Mind and body therapies

A Throne of Blood: *The Tragedy of Macbeth* is a Haunting Adaptation



★★★★★

The works of William Shakespeare have endured throughout the centuries not just thanks to his brilliant wordplay, but also the universality of his stories.

That is why his play *Macbeth* has been adapted and retold in so many different cultures and time periods. As long as the allure of ultimate power leads one down a cycle of madness and violence, the sto-

ry will have relevance. However, Joel Coen's first solo outing (his brother Ethan has since retired from filmmaking) *The Tragedy of Macbeth* stands apart from other adaptations in its filming style. The film is unlike anything else the director has ever done and in a lot of ways, unlike anything else currently in theaters.

Scottish lord Macbeth (Denzel Washington, excellent as usual), urged on by a prophecy from a trio of witches (all played by Kathryn Hunter) and the persuasions of his wife (Frances McDormand), plots to assassinate the King Duncan (Brendan Gleeson) and take the throne himself. The decision and its aftermath lead everyone involved down a path of paranoia, tragedy, and a great many deaths.

Filmed in stark black and white and with minimal, expressionistic sets, the film feels like a lost Carl Theodor Dreyer pic-

ture. The minimalism allows us to focus solely on the performances and Washington is more than up to the task. With his gray/white hair and lined, weathered face, his Macbeth is simultaneously fearsome and pathetic. My only complaint is that with a shorter runtime, some of the Bard's wonderful soliloquies feel rushed (the story could have benefited from an extra half hour). That complaint aside, Coen's take on the Macbeth story is an absolute feast for the eyes and ears. *The Tragedy of Macbeth* is currently playing in select theaters and is available on Apple TV+

Written and Directed by: Joel Coen, based on the play by William Shakespeare // Starring: Denzel Washington, Frances McDormand, Bertie Carvel, Alex Hassell, Corey Hawkins, Harry Melling, Miles Anderson, Matt Helm, Moses Ingram, Kathryn Hunter, and Brendan Gleeson // 105 minutes // Rated 'R' // A24

The Harder They Fall aims to subvert old Westerns with help of Black writers and cast



★★★★★

Filled with gunslinging gangs, sheriffs after outlaws, and a protagonist thirsty for justice, Netflix's 2021 film *The Harder They Fall* delivers, what on the surface appears to be, a typical outlaw Western in style. Yet, unlike other modern takes, Jeymes Samuel makes *The Harder They Fall* feel contemporarily fresh as a revisionist West-

ern with its witty dialogue, casual humor, and energetic soundtrack in his feature film directorial debut.

While the plot itself is fictitious and draws inspiration from dusty tales of cowboys and outlaws, the movie characters are based on real-life Black figures from the Old West. In fact, the film opens with a written statement: "While the events of this story are fictional... These. People. Existed." In an interview with Netflix, Samuel emphasizes how this isn't a Black western, but rather a western with real, historical Black characters who are often left out of the genre.

The story begins with 11-year-old Nat Love (Majors) witnessing the murder of his parents at the hands of outlaw Rufus Black (Elba). Twenty years later, Love learns of Buck's release from prison and devises a plan to seek revenge. He is joined by his crew of smug sharpshooter Bill Pickett (Edi Gathegi), skilled quick draw Jim Beckwourth (RJ Cyler), along with former lover Stagecoach Mary (Zazie Beetz) and the newly added enforcer Cuffee (Danielle Deadwyler).

Meanwhile, Buck and his intimidating gang led by "Treacherous" Trudy Smith (King) and Cherokee Bill (LaKeith Stanfield) have returned to their town of Redwood City where Buck demands money from the townsfolk, threatening to kill and burn the homes of anyone who doesn't comply.

Unlike Quentin Tarantino's 2012 *Django Unchained* (another revisionist western), *The Harder They Fall* sees success in telling a story of Black heroes without relying on violent depictions of slavery and pain or the use of racial slurs, something Samuel felt passionately about. Overall, *The Harder They Fall* presents an emotional dialogue on what it means to be good/bad. Vibrant cinematography and explosive performances carry the film to a cathartic end. — Hannah Wyman

Directed by: Jeymes Samuel // Screenplay by: Jeymes Samuel and Boaz Yakin // Starring: Jonathan Majors, Idris Elba, Zazie Beetz, Regina King, Delroy Lindo, Lakeith Stanfield, RJ Cyler, Danielle Deadwyler, Edi Gathegi, Deon Cole // 139 minutes // Netflix

Our Monthly Podcast Picks

Audio Valentines to engage the mind

The MLK Tapes

Hosted by: William Klaber // Tenderfoot TV

Many of us have been taught throughout the years that on Apr. 4, 1968, at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tenn., a single gunman named James Earl Ray assassinated Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and forever changed the Civil Rights Movement. After being caught two months following the shooting, Ray pled guilty in what seemed to be an open and shut case. But according to witnesses and other lesser-told details, that's not what really happened.

In *The MLK Tapes*, part-time journalist William Klaber tackles the real story of Dr. King's assassination, and the plot behind it all. Introducing rare recordings from eyewitness testimony and interviews from those who were there, Klaber rips apart the narrative that Dr. King's death was a lone man's act.

This 12-part series, released weekly beginning Jan. 10, 2022, explores the things that just don't add up — from the angle at which they claim Ray allegedly shot Dr. King, to the reasons he was booked into the Lorraine in the first place — making even the most skeptical listener begin to question everything.

Was it a government plot to end the Civil Rights leader's life? Did his potential as a presidential candidate have anything to do with it? All that and more are explored in this harrowing and perplexing story that delves deeper into the mystery that surrounds Dr. King's death and the plot hatched to make it a reality. — Ally Kutz



Talkin SH#T

Hosted by: Andre Jenkins // CAM Studios

Here in Erie, PA, several podcasts have been making their way online, garnering listeners and viewers throughout the area. Home-town comedian Andre Jenkins, who was ushered into comedy by local heavy hitters Kyle Harris and the late great Dorian Buckner, decided to take his presence onstage to another level.

"Always love and respect to Kyle Harris and Dorian Buckner for letting me in their lane and pushing me to use my gift," says Jenkins. Launching his own podcast now, *Talkin SH#T*, the live stream places Jenkins in another light and extends his comedic persona.

Utilizing CAM Studios on West 12th Street for his platform, Jenkins decided to hit the go button on his show in October of 2021.

"I got into it to put my voice and my talents out there for any and everybody to hear," says the comedian. Streaming through Live Waves, Apple TV, Roku TV, and Video On Demand, the show has been receiving positive reviews, which should come as no surprise if you are familiar with Jenkins' naturally humorous personality.

But if you think that his podcast was the only thing that was in the works, the funny man has done a plethora of shows with some of Hollywood's class acts. "I've done shows with AJ Johnson, Joe Torre, Shanty Shawty, Prince T Dubb, etc." Jenkins has an upcoming show with actor Brian Hooks from the cult classic comedy *3 Strikes*. "I'm just happy to be here and blessed with the talent to make people laugh and it's working for me right now." — Charles Brown



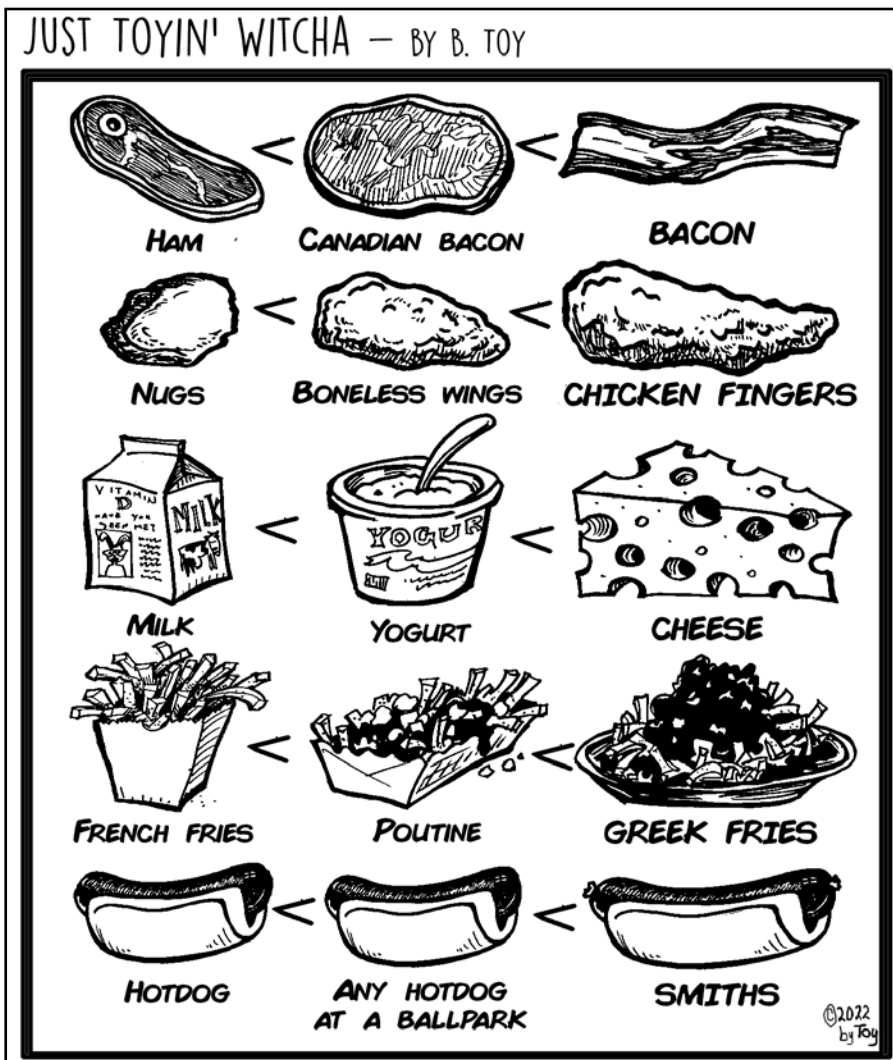
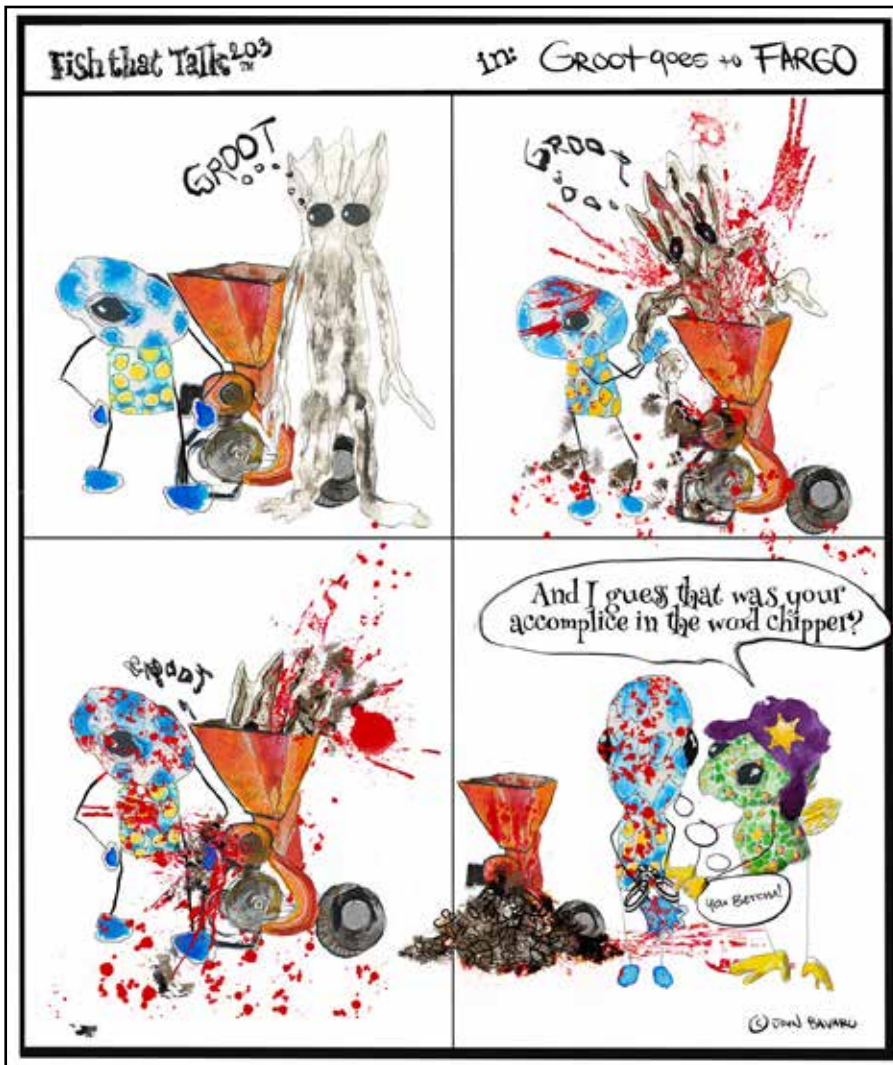
Object of Sound

Hosted by: Hanif Abdurraqib // object-of-sound.simplecast.com

In Hanif Abdurraqib's Sonos-branded podcast *Object of Sound*, the celebrated writer and poet promises a "deeper way of listening." He helps us reach this zen state through excellent guests, thoughtful episode structures, and, of course, Abdurraqib's insightful interludes. Sprinkle in some music discovery (each episode is accompanied by a playlist that the guest often contributes to) and you've got one of the best podcasts going.

Highlight episodes include Jeff Tweedy (Wilco) stopping by to discuss cover songs; The National's Aaron Dessner talking about collaboration and living out in the woods; and a recent Christmas special featuring Hrishikesh Hirway (Song Exploder) and She & Him. The best example of the show though may be "The Contract," which serves as an exploration of the "song of the summer" phenomenon. Wesley Morris (The New York Times) joins first to establish that the "song of the summer" isn't subjective, but instead a quantifiable answer and the inescapable melody that very nearly haunts our warm season existence (like a gentler Stockholm Syndrome). Then, Nate Sloan and Charlie Harding (Switched on Pop) jump in for a longer talk on Lorde's "Solar Power," a contender for the 2021 honor. Sloan and Harding comparing the hit single to a Rolling Stones song had me nodding along in agreement. That sort of zoom out/zoom in, and all accomplished in 20-25 minutes, is impressive storytelling. — Chris Lantinen





ALBUM REVIEWS

Earl Sweatshirt
SICK!
Warner Records
★★★★★

Years separated from Odd Future, the defining rap group of the 2010s, the recent past has sent Earl Sweatshirt down a more personal path. At least, that's how it would appear. In reality, the young rapper's switch-up from abrasive Tyler, the Creator associate to ambassador of lo-fi East Coast sounds had just as much to do with grief and accepting who he was. Son of an academic and a South African poet and political activist, Earl grew to be particularly comfortable with words sometime prior to his 2018 opus, *Some Rap Songs*.

SICK!, a short but proper follow-up to that record, breathes new life into the rapper. Still working with The Alchemist and familiar faces such as Armand Hammer ("Tabula Rasa") and Zelooperz ("Vision"), Earl's tricks largely feel the same, but there's a lightness to his tone suggesting that he, now a father himself, sees the world with a previously unexplored levity. The shimmering production of lead single "2010" matches this energy, and while Earl may still rap about challenging subject matter, for the first time in nearly a decade, he doesn't sound like he's drowning.

— Aaron Mook



The Weeknd
Dawn FM
Republic Records
★★★★★

As any artist does, The Weeknd has evolved over a decade-long career, and he deserves all the credit for that. But in this case, we can also thank five strangely specific people for his creative trajectory: Drake, Daft Punk, and the Safdie Brothers. 2020's *After Hours* and now *Dawn FM* feel like a direct result of the singer and rapper's involvement in the modern classic *Uncut Gems* (a film scored by Daniel Lopatin, co-writing and producing here as Oneohtrix Point Never).

Like Kanye or Drake in their prime, The Weeknd is at a thrilling point in his career where he can seemingly bend the sounds of current Top 40 at will, and *Dawn FM* is the best example of that. Narrated by Jim Carrey of all people, the record acts as a radio station that plays in purgatory; it's a dance party for the afterlife. Beyond his ever-present Michael Jackson Influence ("Sacrifice"), *Dawn FM* finds the singer attempting daring new tricks, from the low-register Talking Heads-esque verses of "Gasoline" to the almost comical easy listening of "Here We Go... Again." In a month known for dumping forgettable media, The Weeknd has gifted us with what may be his best record yet.

— Aaron Mook



RJ Payne
Beautiful Payne 4
Educated Ignorance Music Group
★★★★★

Philly emcee RJ Payne, once known as Reign Man, has had a resurgence over the past few years from his days of being a battle rapper. Teaming up with Memphis born/Erie raised producer PA. Dre, Payne has reached new heights and has caught the attention of stars such as Ice-T and Eminem. These days, the rapper has been leaning toward more songwriting than battle bars through his *Beautiful Payne* EPs. Entirely produced by PA. Dre, *BP4* sheds more light on Payne's personal life and musical journey. From honoring his late mother on "Momma I Made It" to fighting the thought of having a child in today's world on "The Curse," the indie artist offers transparency over light-hearted soulful production that gives him room to speak, but keeps listeners nodding their heads. In just nine tracks and two artist features (King Iso and Buffalo's own L Biz), you're taken on a wild ride through elaborate storytelling with countless gems to take heed of. The EP allows Payne's words to resonate until the very end. It's safe to say that RJ Payne and PA. Dre have created an undeniable experience for all of us to enjoy.

— Charles Brown



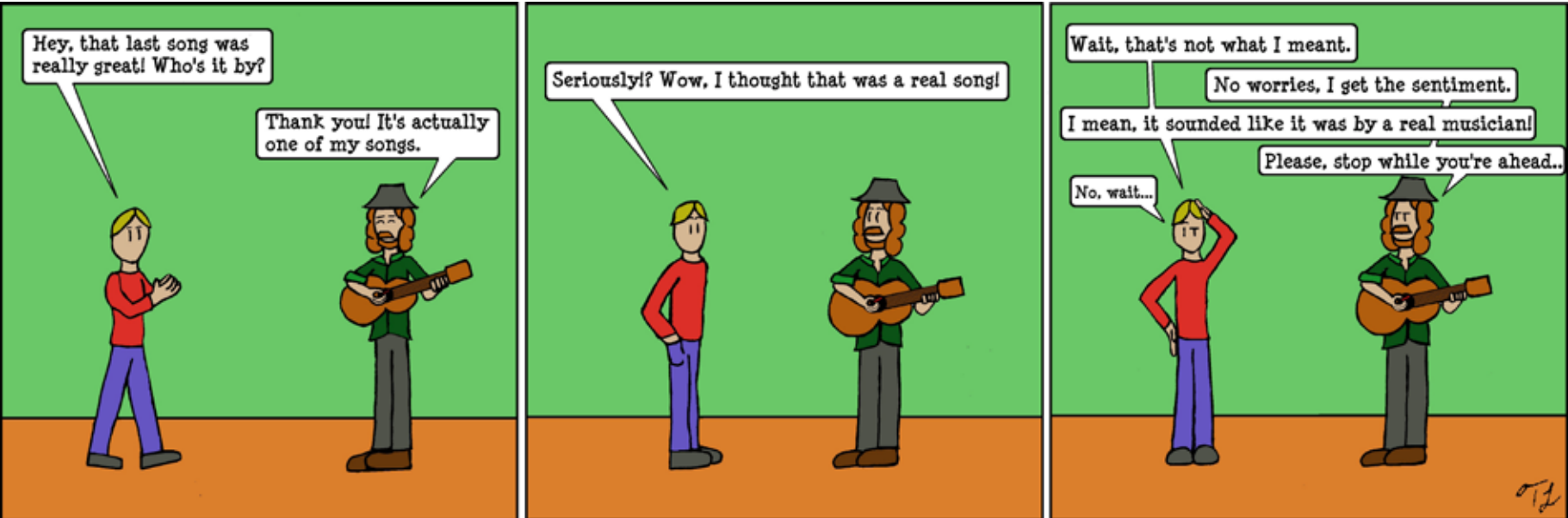
The Arden Room
Leave It All At The Door
Self-released
★★★★★

From the wistfully brilliant mind of singer-songwriter Jake Johns comes *Leave It All At The Door*, a multifaceted work of indie rock expertise. Now living in Pittsburgh, Erie music fans will be quick to know his name, as the city was his home for several years. Johns is clearly not one to forget his time spent in Erie, enlisting local musicians Todd Cline (drums), Jesse Michael Guerrein (trumpet), and the album's producer, Gabe Poland (guitar, percussion) to help him bring his songs to life. Johns plays most of what you hear on the record, however, in what is a fully realized album, whether you want to call it a solo album or not. Above all, it's a gorgeous, dense work, Johns' lyrics at times both mysterious and welcoming. With nine tracks at nearly 44 minutes, the album opens with the warm invitation of "Rebels and Brass" — which was also the name of Johns' ill-fated Erie band prior to his relocation. There's a throwback feeling at work here, often reminiscent of Red House Painters, Wilco, Broken Social Scene, or some spectrum therein. Throughout, it soars with '90s-inspired indie and twinges of Americana, like on closing track "Motorcade."

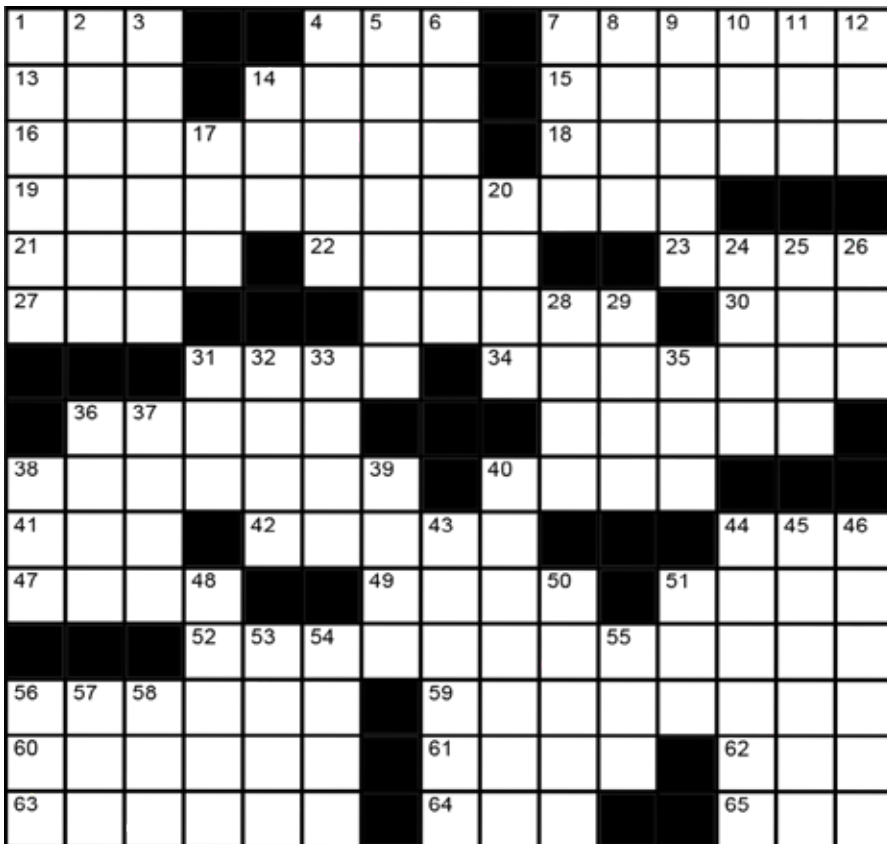
— Nick Warren



TOMMY IN TOON — BY TOMMY LINK



CROSSWORD



Across

1. "Lowdown" singer Scaggs
4. "Ruh-____!" (Scooby-Doo interjection)
7. Wisdom teeth, e.g.
13. Prefix with meter
14. PlayStation maker
15. They may be humble
16. Responded to a busy signal, perhaps
18. "Why, you little ..."
19. *Seeking an Olympic victory
21. Lead-in to much
22. Evidence of surgery
23. Until
27. *Not just chilly
30. Goal
31. Women's rights advocate Lucretia
34. Coming out of one's skin
36. *Fictional character whose name is French for "flight of death"
38. Scott Joplin's music
40. Fall associated with winter
41. DVR forerunner
42. *Image seen on the back of a \$50 bill
47. Recognizes
49. 905-year-old in Genesis
51. Oodles and oodles
52. "Ha-ha! I could hear that joke a thousand times ..." (or how to describe each answer to this puzzle's asterisked clues)

Down

56. "Big Little Lies" costar of Reese and Laura
59. Drips on the driveway
60. Furniture cleaning brand
61. Firm message?
62. ____ Day (May 1, in Hawaii)
63. Personal preferences
64. Spanish "that"
65. Doc performing tympanostomies

28. Either of two filmmaking brothers
29. Muppet who testified before Congress
31. Clubber Lang's portrayer in "Rocky III"
32. Horatian or Keatsian
33. Rating for "South Park"
35. Drag behind
36. Nightgown fabric
37. Folklore fiend
38. They're parked at national parks
39. Largest fencing sword
40. Smokes at a poker game
43. Where to emulate the locals, it's said
44. Eight-time Oscar nominee for Best Actor
45. Like lava
46. Says "You and I are done," e.g.
48. Conspicuous aardvark feature
50. 2014 film in which David Oyelowo plays Martin Luther King Jr.
51. Symbol of royalty in ancient Egypt
53. "What ____ is new?"
54. People calling the shots at the zoo?
55. General with a Chinese dish named for him
56. Clear, financially
57. "Barefoot Contessa" host Garten
58. '90s music holders



Answers to last puzzle



NEW



**BREWED FOR
WHAT'S NEXT**

**BUD LIGHT.
NEXT**

0
CARBS

80
CALS

4%
ALC/VOL

AVAILABLE FEB 7th