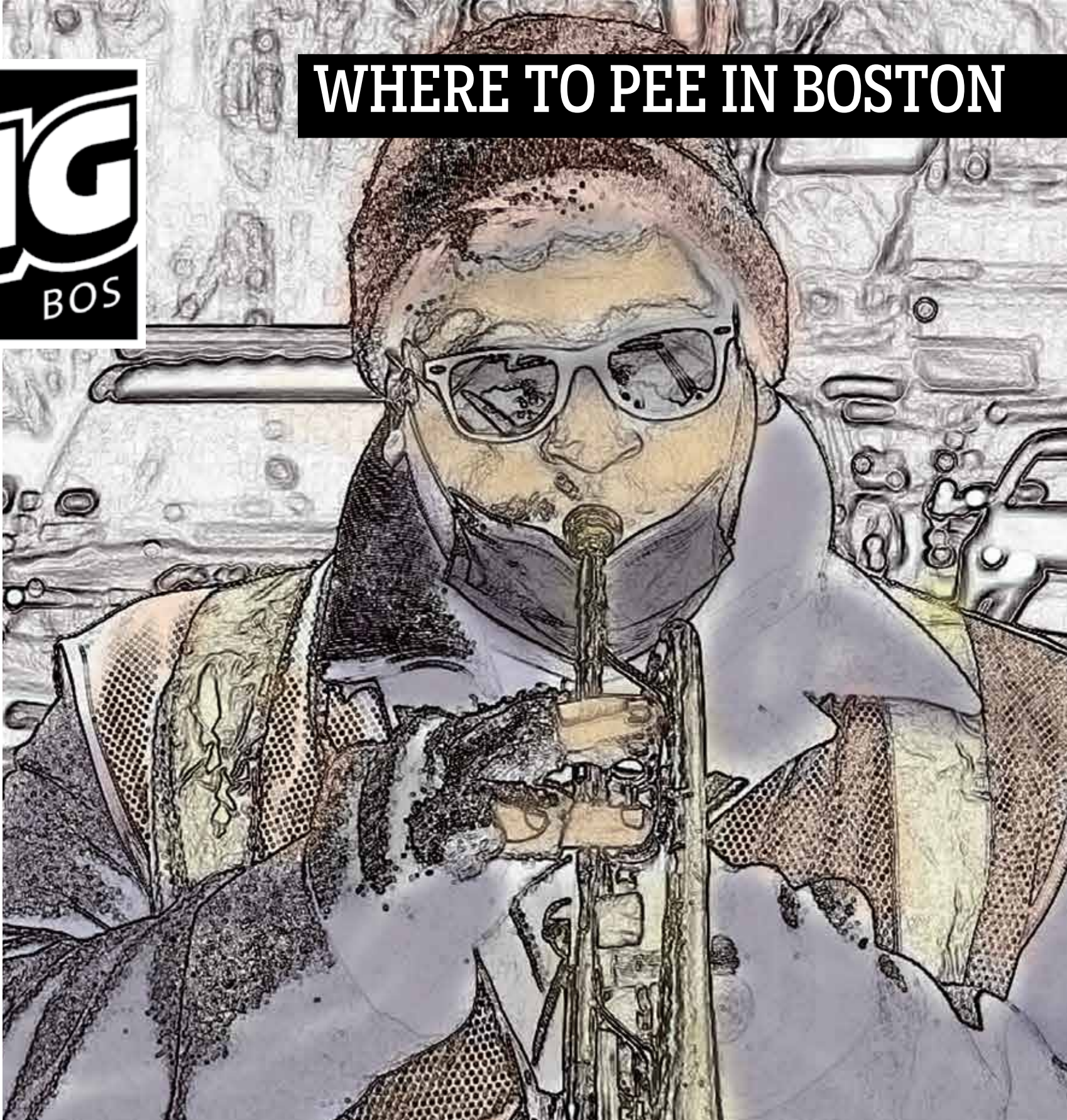




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VOL 23 + ISSUE 12
JUL 15, 2021 - JUL 29, 2021

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ON THE COVER

IG: @litakelley | litakelley.com
Original cover photo of Swampscott protest in support of Ernst Jean-Jacques Jr. by Lita Xu Ling Kelley. Find the article by Sophie Yarin in this week's feature section.

DEAR READER

WELCOME TO BOSTON, NOW WALK THIS WAY

What do you tell people they should eat, see, and do when they tell you they're coming to Boston? Assuming they asked, because only horribly annoying people offer unsolicited travel advice ("You absolutely have to try the P.F. Chang's in Houston," someone once informed me unprompted).

But what if they really are looking for tips? After all, the internet is only good for leading wanderers toward shameless advertorials, so as a local maybe you can help. And to those ends, should you lead them toward historic Quincy Market and the gorgeous Rose Kennedy Greenway? Or steer them clear of the collegiate crowd that gathers in the bars around that area to shout lines from Seth Rogen movies at each other over Nickelback and picklebacks?

Given the task of playing tour guide, do you send them down the Freedom Trail and to that silly Boston Tea Party museum? Or do you recommend a road less traveled like the Black Heritage Trail around Beacon Hill? How about the nearby Boston Journalism Trail?

Are you one of those people who insists that travelers venture outside of downtown? I certainly do, and often tell friends to train it out to Eastie or Jamaica Plain, especially if they are looking for eclectic cuisine served from behind a counter, as I do when I'm on the move.

Do you still tell people visiting the area to check out Harvard Square? I don't, unless they're looking for an ATM or passing through on their way to or back from Somerville or Central Square.

What about our natural beauty? Do you ship 'em up to Gloucester for lobster? What about the Cape for crabs? Or the Blue Hills for an unparalleled panoramic view? And I shouldn't forget the Boston Harbor Islands, even though I've only made it out there once in 20 years of living here. I mean, I'm no commodore or captain; still, I encourage people to experience Boston from one of the many available kayaks or cruises if that floats their boat.

I don't typically steer welcome wagons, but I have been circling this topic for a while since next week the Dig is hosting friends from all across the country for the annual Association of Alternative Newsmedia convention. I have some ideas about attractions they may want to seek out, but mostly I'll tell them what I tell anyone who wants to know what's up around these parts—read the *Dig*. If you can't find a show to watch, a hill to climb, or a gallery, record shop, or bookstore to browse in our pages, then I guess you will be happy to know that there is a P.F. Chang's one block away from Boston Common.

I recommend the lettuce wraps.

CHRIS FARAONE, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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Here's what's happening online:



MUSIC

More updates on old venues reopening and new venues popping up. Finally!



NEWS

Our latest investigation into how the state wasted millions on indefensible COVID contracts.



BEER

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LOCAL

POLES, POLLS, AND MORE POLS

A rare update on the horse race since most other news is behind paywalls and our readers need to know about this shit

BY ZACK HUFFMAN

LOCAL

There are only about two months left before the field of six Boston mayoral candidates is narrowed to two final contenders, and one in five voters is still not sure who to support.

From the few polls that have been made available, the leading two finalists are City Councilor Michelle Wu, the only candidate to announce before Marty Walsh was tapped by Joe Biden for a cabinet position leaving an acting mayor behind, and Kim Janey, the Council President who ascended to the role.

As current at-large councilors, Wu and Anissa Essaibi George have the advantage of having already appealed to a citywide electorate in previous election years. Mattapan City Councilor Andrea Campbell has also cultivated a reputation with a wide range of constituents after serving as council president for two years before Janey took over.

The most recently published poll, from Suffolk University and the Boston Globe, shows that Wu currently leads the pack with 23.4%, followed closely by acting mayor Janey with 21.6%. Next is Essaibi George with 14.4%, Campbell with 10.8%, state Rep. Jon Santiago with 4.6%, and John Barros at 1.8%.

The poll also showed that 21.6% of voters are still undecided, while there is about a 4% margin of error, undercutting any predictability this poll might generate for September's election.

Wu and Campbell, who were considered early frontrunners before Janey announced her intention to keep her current job as mayor, have the most cash, with about \$1 million each, according to data from the Office of Campaign and Public Finance. Janey still had about a half million coming into July. Essaibi George had \$665k, Barros had \$319k on hand, Santiago had \$410K in the bank.

At this point, recent City Council

votes have enabled the frontrunners to differentiate themselves from the competition.

At a recent council meeting, Wu and Campbell voted against Janey's proposed budget for the city over the lack of police cuts, while Campbell also opposed the school budget. Essaibi George was one of five councilors who voted in favor of increasing funding for the police department's Boston Regional Intelligence Center.

Thus far, the election, which many had expected to involve Marty Walsh until Joe Biden's win last fall, has featured little heat between candidates, but that is likely to change as weaker hopefuls get desperate over the next few weeks.

STATE

The race for governor is still over a year out, but this is the point when potential candidates begin to set themselves up for a contentious 2022.

Thus far, three Democratic candidates have announced runs, including Harvard professor Danielle Allen, former state Sen. Ben Downing, and current state Sen. Sonia Chang-Diaz.

Attorney General Maura Healey has been long-rumored as a candidate, and would likely be a Democrat front runner, but she has yet to officially announce. This despite an amassing of about \$5 million in campaign funds—about six times as much as what Gov. Charlie Baker has on hand.

The governor, meanwhile, has yet to announce if he will seek a third term.

Baker came into 2020 with a record-high approval rating for any governor at the time, despite being a registered Republican in a consistently blue state. His popularity took a hit due to his COVID response, which was caught between left-leaning critiques of his not taking severe enough measures to close down the state

during the pandemic, and conservative criticism over taking any precautions at all.

If Baker chooses to run again, he will face a primary challenge from former state senator and US Senate also-ran Geoff Diehl.

Diehl, who co-chaired Donald Trump's 2016 campaign in Massachusetts, only just announced in the beginning of July, but so far his platform appears to be about attacking Baker for attempting to curb the spread of COVID-19.

NATIONAL

President Joe Biden may only be halfway through his first year in office, but so far he and the Democrats in the House and Senate continue to water down almost every legislative agenda item that Biden promised on the campaign trail.

Most recently, Biden announced that his fellow Democrats in the Senate had reached a compromise deal with 11 Republicans on an infrastructure bill that cut everything out of his original proposal with the exception of actual roadwork and bridge improvements.

The new compromise ignores the need to address climate change, even after extreme heat decimated utility lines and roadways in the Pacific northwest during the recent heat wave.

The first midterm election of a new presidency often results in a loss for that president's party in congressional seats. In 2022, 34 seats in the Senate will be contested. Currently, there are 14 Democratic seats to defend, against 20 Republican seats—including five that are open due to retiring law makers.

In delaying major legislative achievements, Democrats may be waiting for 2022 in the hopes that a blue shift will make the work easier. It is a common Democrat strategy; occasionally, it even works. ☒



STATE



STATE



NATIONAL

MEDIA FARM

The political theater is brimming with potential plotlines, but which ones are the media pursuing?



“Diehl’s first test: Can he force Baker to make a decision earlier than he wants?” - *Boston Globe*



“Kim Janey leads in Boston mayoral fundraising for June” - *Boston Herald*



“Biden’s fake infrastructure ‘compromise’ has thrown Democrats into disarray” - *Washington Post*

A TALE OF SIX PUBLIC BATHROOMS IN BOSTON

Boston is a tough place to pee. But we have a map...

BY MAX GRINNELL

Let's face it—everybody poops.

And everybody pees.

Whether you are abled, differently abled, somewhat abled, brown, pinkish, somewhere in-between-ish, gay, cisish, polyamorish, tallish, stoutish, fitish, or whatever, you will need to use the bathroom at some point in your life. Maybe you're thinking, *Oh, I should probably get up and use the facilities right now if Max is going to keep on exploring down this path.*

Parks, beaches, public buildings, and other egalitarian spaces are made more egalitarian and open when they have well-maintained public restrooms. They are infinitely more important than trendy initiatives like “rewilding” initiatives, creating Instagrammable backgrounds, and opening beer gardens. To bogart the insufferable trending descriptor one might find on certain socials, bathrooms are infrastructure.

With this in mind, I set out to look at six “public” bathrooms as offered up by the official Boston Harborwalk map. All of these commodes are within a 15-minute walk of the New England Aquarium, which struck me as a good place to begin.

First, a bit of my modus operandi, or my way of conducting this highly unscientific public restroom audit. I decided to specifically appear as if I was consulting my phone as I approached the host stand/entrance/public doorway. I would then look up and say, “Hey, I am using this Harborwalk map and it says you have a public bathroom here. May I use it?”

That's it—my deep philosophy for going undercover and appearing as if I was just a babe wandering the waterfront with a pressing need to pee.

Long Wharf Marriott

This hotel is probably best known for hosting a COVID super-spreader event last year. Not its fault, of course, but you know—mistakes were made. When I walked in the main entrance, I immediately noted a freestanding sign prominently displayed that gave clear instructions to the bathrooms. You walk past the Starbucks (closed) in the first floor lobby, through another set of doors, and there it is. There's no signage to indicate when the bathrooms might be closed, but overall a job well done.

Joe's American Cafe

The only other time I've been to any part of Joe's American empire was a time that I wound up sharing nachos with some type of “disruptor” I met via Twitter who wanted to pump me for free information and work. I'm pretty sure he didn't even pick up the tab.

Anyway, I walked up to the host stand and as I started my spiel, the hostess said, “Let me take you to the bathroom.” She did and I did what I had to do. Leaning up against the restroom wall to scribble a few notes, a man said to me, “Taking notes on the hand dryer, huh? I do that too sometimes.”

Long Wharf North Ferry Terminal

Despite this long and grandiose title,

this is just a modest but well-designed outdoor public bathroom installed by the city of Boston in 2001. I've been by it hundreds of times over the past decade and it's usually offline—which defeats the purpose of having a public bathroom, wouldn't you say? [Ed note: Also read our article from January about how it's harder than ever to find a bathroom in Boston for vulnerable populations that need them most. As for accessibility, when it's open, this single-stall unit at Long Wharf is fitted for use with a wheelchair and provides privacy while being relatively safe smack in the middle of a major tourist area.]

Heading around to the water-side entrance, I noticed a sign posted next to the unit's digital display screen: “Due to COVID 19 this toilet is out of service.” Like

some other public services, this facility has fallen victim to this global pandemic. But wait—other toilets have reopened, so what gives?

I gave a call to JCDecaux, the company that manages this loo, and have been told that it has since reopened for business, with “pay toilets fully operational” as of July 1 and “open seven days a week from 6 am-9 pm.”

The price will remain 25 cents.

Chart House

I made my way past six or seven tables of diners and into the dark interior of this venerable surf and turf joint. I paused to look at a brunch display, glanced at my phone, and as I caught the eye of a waiter balancing a troika of lobster rolls on a serving dish, I started my—

“The bathroom is around the bar and on your right.”

Well, that answers that.

The New England Aquarium (or more specifically, the IMAX Theatre at the New England Aquarium)

Don't you need a ticket to enter the aquarium?

Of course you do.

With that in mind, I made my way over to the IMAX Theatre entrance. There's a sign that reads “TICKET REQUIRED FOR ENTRY”—OK, sure—still I opened the door and made my way to the attendant. And for the sixth time today, I began my recitation. As I approached the end of my prepared remarks, the attendant informed me, “Sure, you can use the bathroom. It's upstairs via those stairs behind you.”

Clean and commodious this bathroom is—and by this point, I actually needed to use it.

Bonus: Does this toilet exist?

There are more public bathrooms to talk about—there always are. We'll get to those another time.

But first, to complete this adventure, I wanted to know more about a particular pay toilet that evaded the Harborwalk map. You'll find it in this area, but on the front of the stainless steel doors you will also find a note that reads: NEED A RESTROOM? GO THROUGH LONG WHARF MARRIOTT HOTEL (STRAIGHT AHEAD). PUBLIC RESTROOMS ARE ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE HOTEL ON YOUR LEFT.

As your guide in these parts, I can confirm. ☒



WELCOME, BOSTAAN!

DigBoston hosts the premiere indy newspaper convention at a difficult moment for journalism

BY JASON PRAMAS

Publishing an alternative weekly—an independent metropolitan newspaper with a left-leaning editorial policy, crusading investigative reporting, and up-to-the-second cultural coverage in the tradition of the now-zombified *Village Voice*—in the 21st century can be a solitary enterprise. So it is a real pleasure for my partners Chris Faraone and John Loftus and I to have the opportunity to spend three days with over 150 of our peers from around the US and Canada at the annual Association of Alternative Newsmedia trade convention. And it is a signal honor to be hosting this year's iteration of that confab here in Boston.

Actually, we were supposed to host the event now dubbed BostAAN last year—which was to be the 42nd anniversary of the founding 1978 convention of our trade group. But the pandemic made that impossible. So we were gratified when our AAN colleagues decided to keep the convention here this year, when it is once again possible to hold an in-person gathering in a local hotel.

And what changes the last four decades have wrought. Forty-three years ago there were hundreds of alt weeklies. Today there are fewer than 100. In fact, several of our sibling newspapers went under during the first phase of the coronavirus crisis. With most of the surviving papers remaining on the edge of financial ruin for the foreseeable future. Readers that have been following

Dig editorials will note that we almost went under ourselves when all our advertising evaporated within a week of the World Health Organization declaration of a pandemic on March 8, 2020. But we were saved by generous supporters and, ironically, Papa Trump's Small Business Administration.

Forty-three years ago, a few young journalists and a couple of business heads could launch an alt weekly newspaper in their city in a matter of weeks. And pulling in advertising revenue was like shooting fish in a barrel from sea to shining sea. Within a couple of years, such a paper could easily have a dozen full-time staffers with decent benefits and a circulation approaching 100,000.

Today, most people that work for alt weeklies are freelancers and contractors. While owners like my partners and I

often struggle along with meager salaries out of a sense of the importance of the Fourth Estate to our failing democracy and our love for serving our audiences with cutting-edge journalism. Even as the advertising that has sustained us (as I wrote just a couple of weeks back) has dried up for local newspapers—absorbed, in large part, by digital giants like Google, Facebook, and Amazon.

Forty-three years ago, people flocked to read the latest issue of every alt weekly—which led public discussion and debate on every conceivable issue from elections to nuclear power to the popularity of disco. Today most everyone's attention is on the latest social media outrage. And fewer and fewer people turn to newspapers at any level from the once-mighty dailies to the most humble village weeklies for the information they need to be engaged citizens (or residents), in print or online. Less readers means even less advertising for surviving papers; so the downward trend in the economic model that once drove alt weeklies from success to success is easy for all to see.

Meanwhile, the US in general and cities like Boston in particular have become the scene of economic devastation for everyone but the rich and upper echelons of the professional managerial class

due to both the pandemic and forty plus years of rapacious, neoliberal capitalism. So the need for more and larger independent news outlets to offer a strong alternative to

the corporate-dominated information sphere that has replaced journalism with marketing copy and critical thinking with propaganda has never been greater.

Yet, as we make the final preparations to gather here in the Hub with our colleagues, we very much look forward to discussing the many challenges facing our corner of the news industry and to working together to rebuild our enterprises back to their former strength and relevance in the years to come.

We are therefore thrilled to welcome the 43rd Association of Alternative Newsmedia convention to Boston, Massachusetts. And to plan the future of independent journalism in the service of democracy ... together. ☺

Jason Pramas is executive editor and associate publisher of DigBoston.



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PHOTOS BY NATE LAMPKIN

SHIMMY VS. SWAMPSCOTT

A Black Lives Matter activist was targeted by local law enforcement. Without national attention on the case, authorities are playing by their own rules

BY SOPHIE YARIN

On any given weekend in the waterfront enclave of Swampscott, you can see the gamut of the American political spectrum on display.

For more than a year, throngs of fringe right-wingers, people for whom Republicanism is a secondary concern to an allegiance to former President Donald Trump, have gathered in the North Shore suburb. The group is consistently white and middle aged, and their appearance in town is the result of the organizing efforts of one Dianna Ploss, an ex-radio host-turned-local conservative figurehead. The crowd gathers on Saturdays—10, 20 of them in some weeks—at the spot where Humphrey Street intersects Monument Ave, perhaps the most visible place in town and a short walk to the home of Gov. Charlie Baker.

On Sundays, the radical end of the left wing rallies just down the road, in front of the Swampscott police station. While the crowd fluctuates in size, there are usually at least 10 protesters—tattooed, pierced, multiracial city kids—often wearing all black and carrying Black Lives Matter signs. This crew began to gather as a direct response to the presence of Ploss and her affiliates, but that was then. In more recent months, a predominantly local faction has splintered off, turning their attention toward the town’s police department ever since a community organizer from Boston, Ernst Jean-Jacques Jr. (known by friends as “Shimmy”), was arrested at a Ploss rally on Dec 12, 2020.

There’s a chasm between the two groups’ ideologies, and denizens of the wealthy surrounding community of Swampscott make up the rest of the political spectrum, the shades of gray. This is a place where town elections are predictable, and there is peace and harmony on the surface, at least; recently, the town held a well-attended, public Juneteenth ceremony with speeches calling for an end to systemic racism.

But since Dec 12, and the fallout around Shimmy’s arrest specifically, it’s been hard to ignore the uglier, deeper truths that have played out publicly, right in the center of a quiet bedroom community.

I became aware of Shimmy’s effect on local leftist politics soon after his arrest. According to his fellow organizers, he has been an electrifying force, and people familiar with the events that unfolded expected his case to be dismissed. They were wrong.

While his arrest is squarely in line with the narrative of Black people being profiled by police, few news outlets have covered Shimmy’s case closely. With his trial set to begin on Aug 18 in Lynn District Court, this deeper look at the situation is an attempt to pay it the attention it deserves. I have learned a lot in researching over the past several months, but the bare facts of the case are the same as when I first heard about it last December: he stands accused of assault, despite video evidence of the incident that appears to exonerate him; he was arrested without statements taken or rights read; and an assistant district attorney’s behavior regarding the case has been questionable.

THE ACCUSED

Over the summer of 2020, as rallies for racial justice proliferated across the country, Ernst Jean-Jacques made appearance after appearance as an organizer for a leftist group called Freedom Fighters Coalition (FFC). His lanky frame and long Senegalese twists, in addition to a propensity to wear all black and carry a megaphone, made him easy to spot in press photos and on social media. As FFC’s unofficial mouthpiece, the duty of addressing large crowds was often left to him. For these reasons, the Penn State graduate has been viewed as something of a poster child for Boston’s young left wing.

At demonstrations, the 32-year-old

Shimmy’s rhetoric is unequivocally anti-establishment. Talking about police brutality, one of FFC’s primary issues, he makes no effort to hide his anger and frustration. FFC does not align itself with the Democratic Party, nor do they collaborate with pols at any level. Antifa flags have flown at their events.

Shimmy’s is a radical bunch to be sure, but in practice they are hardly seditious. They run a number of community initiatives ranging from mutual aid drives to counterprotests to citywide marches and bike rides. The ethos of FFC, Jean-Jacques explains, is to “stand against social injustices and all forms of oppression.”

THE INSTIGATOR

Dianna Ploss made international headlines in July of 2020 when she was fired from talk radio station WSMN in New Hampshire over an incident occurring in Nashua. A livestreamed video—that she herself sent to TMZ—showed the radio host happening upon a crew of landscapers speaking Spanish, whom she immediately demanded speak to each other in English. WSMN and its broadcaster, Bartis-Russell, severed ties the following Sunday, but soon enough their former employee found new ways to broadcast her message.

Since her dismissal, Ploss, a Dedham native, has redoubled her efforts as a right-wing spokeswoman, organizing pro-Trump rallies throughout New England. She streams via her own website and YouTube channel, and casts live from her events, which makes it convenient for allies and detractors alike to track her.

Among the self-proclaimed former Obama Democrat’s views: The COVID-19 virus is a hoax, the Democrats stole the 2020 election, and many state governments—including Massachusetts—are in league with the Chinese Communist Party.

While the scourge of liberalism at large

remains Ploss’ central rallying point, locally Ploss is probably best known for helping organize the protests against Republican Gov. Charlie Baker in Swampscott. She first arrived in town last April, and was immediately fortunate enough to have town leaders reluctantly sanction her right to assembly—in spite of a state-mandated COVID-19 lockdown. In time, it became clear that the aversions of some elected officials did not exactly represent those of their constituents, as many residents have welcomed Ploss and her rallies with open arms and symphonies of supporting honks.

THE ACCUSER

Linda Greenberg is a regular attendee at right-wing Swampscott rallies and has been featured on Ploss’ local live streams on more than one occasion.

One stream, from last November, focuses on Greenberg, who explains to the camera: “I wasn’t here (at the rallies) at the beginning. My mailman told me. He says, ‘How come you’re not at the rallies?’ ... I said, ‘I had no idea.’ So I went, and the first thing I said was, ‘Can I join you?’”

“Well, duh,” Ploss responds, with one arm slung around the older lady’s shoulders.

According to Steve Krause, a veteran writer at the *Daily Item* in Lynn and lifetime North Shore resident, the Greenbergs have resided near Phillips Park in Swampscott for nearly 50 years. [Ed. note: The author of this article is currently employed by the *Daily Item* as an editor, but she has reported this story for BINJ as an independent journalist.]

The Greenberg family has been known for their traditional conservative views; her relatives are members of the Republican party, and some accompany their mother to Ploss’ events.

Based on Ploss’ live streams, she and Greenberg have an affectionate relationship,

with the former calling the latter by the Yiddish endearment *bubbe*. In one exchange, the Swampscott local calls Ploss the “mayor of MAGA-chusetts.”

THE LAW

The town of Swampscott, with a population of 15,000 and a median household income of over \$100,000 per year, is home to a falling crime rate and an appropriately small police department. Swampscott officers typically respond to fewer than 10 violent crimes per year.

Policing is a community affair, with at least two well-known families in town sending their sons to the force: the Cassidys and the Reens.

“Chances are, if there’s any kind of police activity going on [in Swampscott], at least one Reen is going to be involved,” Krause explains.

Up until December, Swampscott natives Brendan and Kevin Reen were best known for their shared affinity for physical fitness. Kevin joined the police department 12 years ago and is a trainer on the side. His brother Brendan preceded him on the force, joining in 2006. This past year he was promoted to field training officer.

It remains unclear why Brendan Reen was watching Dianna Ploss’ live stream in the police station on Dec 12, or what possessed him to leave his post and visit the rally.

The Swampscott Police Department has declined multiple attempts to reach it for comment.

THE FOOTAGE

Most FFC organizers were looking away when it happened; none could say for sure who did what. Two videos—one shot from behind the Trump supporters, another facing them—are all that remain of a seconds-long exchange between Greenberg and Shimmy.

The video shot from behind shows Shimmy dancing directly across from Ploss and Greenberg, separated by a waist-high police barricade. Greenberg retreats, then comes back with something in her hand. A splash of water, coming from Greenberg’s direction, hits Shimmy in the chest.

“The optics are really sort of unmistakable in terms of the white individual using water to diminish the dignity of Black people,” explains Jean-Jacques’ lawyer, Murat Erkan. “This is an image that appears time and time again in our nation’s narrative.”

An outsized reaction can then be heard from the Trump supporters; a few gasp and shout, as if a violent incident has just occurred. This video, the one from behind, however, doesn’t clearly show what caused the horrified reaction. The second clip does.

In the latter video, the one facing the horde, Shimmy is in full view as he faces the Trump supporters. Water droplets spray in his direction. He looks at the camera with clenched fists. He moves toward Greenberg, who is shielded from view by another woman.

Shimmy’s fist opens up to a flat palm. He swipes his hand downward, in the direction where the water came from. The top of Greenberg’s curly gray head can be seen as she stumbles back a few paces and is immediately enveloped into a crowd of Trump supporters.



PHOTO BY NATE LAMPKIN

Shimmy, perhaps sensing danger, makes a speedy exit to the right. That’s where the action ends, and the consequences begin.

Officer Brendan Reen had been assigned to desk duty at the Swampscott Police Station, where he says he was watching Ploss’ live stream of the event. According to the police report, Reen saw footage of a young Black man punch Greenberg in the chest with a closed fist at around 11 am. The report alleges he alerted his shift leader that he was leaving his post. Then he exited the station in an unmarked car and headed for King’s Beach.

THE RALLY

It didn’t take experts to determine trouble on the horizon; even though Ploss’ crew and Shimmy’s had run-ins in the past, something about that day felt different.

Dec 12, 2020, was a Saturday, and the rally was on a stretch of Route 129 that buffers the town of Swampscott from the Atlantic Ocean. Ploss and her crew stood on the shoulder of Humphrey Street facing King’s Beach, a couple of hundred yards away from the Lynn town line.

Roughly 15 locals, most in Donald Trump campaign apparel, waved DON’T TREAD ON ME flags and signs, including one that read DEMOCRATS ARE TRAITORS. Inside a row of metal police barricades, they passed around cigars and snacks.

At around 10:30 am, FFC organizers Ernst Jean-Jacques, Hibah Nour, and Mia Paré arrived in Swampscott by car. Upon reaching Monument Square, they noticed that the Swampscott Police had set up the scene so that the opposing groups were directly facing each other, like dogs in cages.

According to many who were there on Dec 12, the demonstration was a particularly tense one.

“It was one of the most vile protests I’ve ever been to,” Nour recalled. “None of the [Trump supporters] had masks on, and they were smoking soggy, damp, old, rotten cigars

in our faces.”

“This was definitely a more aggressive action than in previous weeks,” Sergeant Jay Locke told the *Daily Item*. “It felt like it was going to be violent at any moment.”

The summer of 2020 saw a vast divide in how Americans see protest: While many citizens supported the Black Lives Matter movement and its mobilizing efforts throughout the country, huge swaths of the US population were quick to equate protest to violence, uprising to looting. This mentality was demonstrably shared by a number of police departments, as arrest numbers nationwide reached around 10,000 by last June 4—mainly for crimes related to breaking curfew or failure to disperse.

However scandalous at the time, arrests made at demonstrations in the summer of 2020 have followed a pattern experts say has been in place for decades: Namely, police disproportionately arrest Black individuals.

Last June, a *Chicago Reader* analysis of its city’s police data showed that, of 2,172 arrests made at recent Chicago protests, 71% were of Black people. It also presented separate data proving the majority of arrests over two days were for “peaceful protest actions rather than property damage, ‘looting,’ or assaults on police officers.”

Courthouse News also reported that Black individuals made up 11% of those arrested in Portland on May 29, 2020, “almost double the rate of Portland’s Black population.”

A 2011 study in the *American Sociological Review* looked at similar data over a long period of time. After examining more than 15,000 protests over 30 years, their findings were definitive: Black people are more likely to “draw police presence” at demonstrations, while “police are more likely to take action” in their presence. The authors coined the phrase about the phenomenon, “Protesting while Black.”

The day after Shimmy’s arrest, Nour and Shimmy joked that the latter “was the only Black man in Swampscott that day.

“And he was the only person arrested.”

THE FALLOUT

According to FFC organizers on scene, Reen arrived at King’s Beach approximately five minutes after the incident with Greenberg. Shimmy was perched on a railing overlooking the shore, surrounded by a clutch of activists and officers. Reen approached the group and, without preamble, informed Jean-Jacques that he was being investigated for assault and battery.

From behind a phone camera, Nour demanded to know Reen’s badge number. When her camera turned back to Shimmy, he was being put into handcuffs. As an officer clicked a metal cuff around his right wrist, he asked, “I’m being arrested?”

Activists shouted in protest, but Reen’s voice cut through the commotion: “What I heard was that you hit a woman.”

“You can’t just hear something. You have to see it,” Nour responded. “How are you going to do your job and say, *I didn’t see it?*”

Two officers led Shimmy up Monument Avenue toward a squad car, the exchange lasting less than a minute. No rights were read, no statements taken.

Around the same time as Jean-Jacques’ arrest, Detective Rose Cheever arrived at the barricade to take Greenberg’s statement. Another camera-toting FFC activist caught Greenberg admitting to “getting water on” Shimmy.

“He was gyrating in front of me, and I got mad,” she says.

The activist chimes in, saying this meant Greenberg assaulted him first.

“Why don’t you fuck off,” Greenberg replies, swiping at the camera.

Cheever says something about finishing the interview later, and heads toward the street.

“And then he punched me,” Greenberg says.

In the police report, Reen mentions

speaking to Greenberg's daughters over the phone. The women claimed their mother had a condition known as essential tremors disorder, which "causes their mother to have tremors uncontrollably that are exacerbated under stressful conditions." This, they said, was the real reason Greenberg got water on Shimmy.

The activist follows Cheever to the edge of the sidewalk. The detective spins around to face her.

"You're videotaping me when a victim is talking to me in private," Cheever shouts at the activist. "I'll get her statement when you're not videotaping me."

With the detective gone across the street, the activist turns her camera back on Greenberg, who appears to have been watching her.

"You're not America," Greenberg calls out to the young woman. "You're not America!"

THE TRIAL

Ernst Jean-Jacques was arraigned on Dec 14 in Lynn District Court, with Judge Matthew Nestor presiding. Attorney Murat Erkan later noted that Essex County Assistant District Attorney Danielle Doherty-Wirwicz "assumed the role of advocate (for Greenberg) and rejected the role of truth finder," by immediately asking the court to determine Jean-Jacques a "danger to society."

According to Nate Lamkin, an FFC organizer who witnessed the five-hour arraignment, Doherty-Wirwicz was also reluctant to watch video evidence presented by Erkan.

"It took literal hours for Shimmy's lawyer to successfully convince the prosecution to just watch the videos," he says. "He thought that if they watched the videos they would realize they don't have a case and join him in

dismissing it."

A decision came at 1:30 in the afternoon: Shimmy was to pay \$550 in bail and have no contact with Greenberg. He was charged with assault and battery of a person over 60—a felony in Massachusetts—and was ordered to return to the courthouse on Feb 24 for his first pretrial hearing. As a result of a local initiative in support of Shimmy, the public was invited to sit in on his Zoom court sessions.

For the first few minutes of the February hearing, the virtual gallery was a chorus of support for the defendant. Many left a hint of their identity in their messages: "Teachers for Shimmy!" "LGBTQ+ for Shimmy." "Parents AND kids for Shimmy!"

In contrast, Jean-Jacques appeared taciturn throughout the hearing. His webcam showed him with brows knit, his mouth hidden behind his hand.

Dianna Ploss logged on and made a few incendiary remarks about Chinese communism, but was quickly drowned out by Shimmy's supporters.

The rest of the hearing progressed as if a courtroom drama were broadcast via Twitch stream. In the chat, the gallery reacted in real time to motions from the counselors and their responses from the judge. Eventually, upcoming court dates were scheduled, and Judge Nestor was on to his next hearing of the day.

Perhaps nobody expected it to end so soon. Onlookers lingered in the Zoom chat for many minutes, writing messages of support to Shimmy, lambasting Nestor and Ploss, calling out to each other and no one in particular.

Beyond angered, hopeful, or scared, most were simply incredulous that the case was actually progressing. The most-repeated demand, posted over and over again by the

near-hundred people attending the virtual session, was simply "drop the charges."

THE FUTURE

Like the residents themselves, Swampscott's leadership has been divided on the Dec 12 incident. A letter demanding the DA drop its charges was released on Jan 22 on Select Board letterhead, but was signed by only two out of five members.

On March 24, an internal investigative report made by an outside agency was released to the town of Swampscott, which appraised the actions of Jean-Jacques' arresting officers.

The report pointed to multiple violations of conduct among the officers present on Dec 12—none of whom were named—but ultimately concluded that the arrest was made with probable cause, and the issue now fell within the jurisdiction of the court.

The report's release marked the end of Swampscott's influence over Jean-Jacques' case, and his fate. Since late March, the town has been resigned to biting its nails while a culture war continues its weekly battle on Humphrey Street.

The majority of FFC's demonstrations around Shimmy's trial have moved to Mondays in front of the Lynn District Court on Essex Street, while Ploss' group has moved its activities to Thursdays in Swampscott. Ploss, who in October of 2020 was arrested for punching a woman at one of her own rallies in Plymouth, has public events planned well into August.

As for Jean-Jacques, few of his activities, as an FFC organizer or a criminal defendant, have broken into the larger local mediascape; most outlets have remained mum on the story as of this writing.

"Life has been pretty shitty since the incident," Jean-Jacques says. "The same media outlets who followed me from protest to protest all summer have basically vanished since my unjust arrest."

Jean-Jacques was let go from his position at the senior facility and reported that he and his father, who shares his name, have been receiving frequent death threats. In spite of this, Jean-Jacques' schedule is as full as it ever was. According to various Instagram accounts belonging to him and to FFC, the organization remains busy with drives, marches, and counterprotests—many in support of Palestine—and Jean-Jacques remains at the helm.

"Ernst has shown tremendous courage," Murat Erkan says. "When the rubber meets the road and it's your freedom on the line, your own rhetoric might not reflect what you have the courage to do. Ernst is deciding to put his own freedom at risk in order to fight for what's right."

On social media, Jean-Jacques is adamant regarding Greenberg and the Swampscott Police Department's complicity in framing him for violent assault, mentioning in a June 1 Instagram post, "They are gonna drag this case out until I'm either homeless or insane."

Yet never does he speculate on how his trial will proceed, or what life will be like afterward. It is in these moments that the crusading rebel from the summer of 2020 becomes the stoic, silent young man from the Zoom hearings.

"We'll see," he says, when asked about the verdict. "Anything is possible." ☹

This article was produced in collaboration with the Boston Institute for Nonprofit Journalism.



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DIG THIS

FRI 7.16

[bar fly](#)

Bars over Bars Hip Hop Showcase

Boston's always been a hip-hop hotbed, and with talent breaking internationally at levels previously unreached, it's as exciting a time as ever to see who may be next on the big stage. "Bars Over Bars is a New England hip hop Media company focused on throwing shows 100% free for the artist," and their shows are where you will hear the top up-and-comers from the region. It's also noteworthy that this event goes down at the Jungle, which you can now add to the short list of venues willing to host hip-hop around here.

[The Jungle, 6 Sanborn Ct., Somerville. 8pm/\$6. [facebook.com/bar-soverbarsmedia](#)]

SAT 7.17

[license plates](#)

Stop Hunger Now: Drive Change

"In partnership with Citizens, the Stop Hunger Now license plate will benefit Boston Medical Center (BMC) and the Greater Boston Food Bank (GBFB) to provide essential support to families struggling with hunger. Thousands of our neighbors across Massachusetts are food insecure, and the COVID-19 pandemic has made the need

for food assistance more widespread and critical than ever. Featuring a traffic light made of healthy fruits and vegetables, the Stop Hunger Now charity license plate is the first-ever Massachusetts specialty plate that supports ending hunger in the state. By purchasing a plate, you are helping BMC and GBFB tackle food insecurity through programs that increase access to affordable, nutritious food. Speak with a representative at our Stop Hunger Now events on July 17 and August 21."

[Lawn on D, 420 D St., South Boston. 2:30-5:30pm. [stophungerma.org](#)]

SAT 7.17

[welcome backbone](#)

Vertebrae: Volvox + Katie Rex + BR-1

"A dominant force on the Brooklyn underground scene, Ariana (Volvox) is known for tough, stripped-back techno and groovy, acid-flavored sets. She has been a busy DJ and event producer since 2006 and in that time has shared the decks with many international stars including The Blessed Madonna, Marcel Dettmann, Ellen Allien, DVS1, The Hacker, Legowelt and Mike Servito. Based in NYC since 2011, she holds two monthly residencies: JACK DEPT. NYC at Bossa Nova Civic Club is a top event of the notorious hotspot that's focused on an acidic house

party vibe featuring standout DJs and producers from across the burgeoning American scene. The mighty UNTER party pushes the harder edges of techno and is one of New York's most essential underground events."

[The Lower Level, 55 Bishop Allen Drive, Cambridge. \$15-\$25/9pm. [facebook.com/LowerLevel55](#)]

TUE 7.20

[new brewtine](#)

Artisanal Comedy

"Please join us in welcoming back Bethany Van Delft and her Artisanal Comedy show here at Dorchester Brewing! This show will be located inside our second floor Hopservatory. Ticket holders will be given general admission access to the Hopservatory. All seating is first come, first served. Additional tickets will not be available at the door. Proceeds from ticket sales will be given directly to the comedians." Also on tap: DBC's 5th Year Anniversary Bash on Sat., July 24 starting at 11:30am.

[Dorchester Brewing Company & M&M BBQ, 1250 Mass Ave., Boston. 7pm/\$6/21+. [exploretock.com/dorchesterbrewingcompany](#)]

FRI 7.23

[lights on](#)

A Lantern Experience

"Back by popular demand, Boston Lights, presented by National Grid, will once again illuminate Franklin Park Zoo with all new lanterns, lights and memories to last a lifetime! Experience the wonder of over 60 magnificent displays comprised of hundreds of beautifully crafted lanterns spanning Franklin Park Zoo's 72 acres. We invite you to walk (socially distanced, of course) through glowing corridors of lotus and sunflowers, cranes and cherry blossoms, and a towering 87-foot-long Tyrannosaurus Rex tunnel! Luminous animal and ocean scenes, traditional Asian lantern displays, a stunning 164-foot-long phoenix, and more will light up the night sky, dazzling guests of all ages!"

[Franklin Park Zoo, Boston. Through Oct. 11. prices vary. [zoone-wengland.org/bostonlights](#)]

FRI 7.23

[skaterade](#)

This is How We ROLL!

"Join Swerve and Laraland Roller Disco for a magical evening of skating under the stars at Starlight. Come down and experience the unity and love of our local skate community while roll bouncing to the city's hottest DJs Mo, Nomadik, and Manny Reese! Feel the



PHOTO BY HONGYU LIU

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vibes and energy that has everyone lacing up their skates for some FUN! SKATE AT YOUR OWN RISK and bring your own skates. SORRY NO RENTALS... FEEL FREE TO JUST COME AND DANCE!"

[Starlight Square, Bishop Allen Drive, Cambridge. 6-9pm. starlightsquare.org]

SAT 7.24

salt life

Boston Margarita & Mimosa Fest

"7 Bars & Restaurants will participate in this summer cocktail celebration to support the Boston bar & restaurant district! Featuring \$4 beer, \$4 mimosa & \$5 margarita specials for wristband wearing participants only! Social distancing & masks may be required to comply with safety guidelines. Tickets are limited due to safety provisions."

[The Greatest Bar, 262 Friend St., Boston. 2-8pm/21+/\$22.99-\$27.99. bosmargaritafest.eventbrite.com]

ONGOING

once again

ONCE x Boynton Yards

As JJ Gonson, the proprietor and experience orchestrator at ONCE Ballroom explained to Dig writer Amie O'Hearn in

an interview that you can read at digboston.com, her latest venue is a "post-pandemic outdoor club in conjunction with Boynton Yards in Somerville." The developer, which is also the underwriter for the Fluff Festival and Union Square Farmers Market, is collaborating with Gonson and her team to create a venue to hold 20 outdoor shows, starting this weekend and running through September, in front of the redeveloped life sciences building on South Street. "I am feeling really scared ... butterflies and joy and excitement and it is intense," Gonson said. "We have six months of work to do in six days. It feels like a reality tv show ... but I have this amazing team and we have a sound company doing this whole thing and they are coming and going every night." This summer's billing is a reimagination of a year without music and boasts mostly local artists such as Julie Rhodes, Walter Sickert and the Army of Broken Toys, and No Small Children. In the hallmark ONCE style, it is also a clever and creative schedule that includes several theme nights, family matinees, and a one-day music festival.

[Boynton Yards, 101 South St., Somerville. various dates and times. oncesomerville.com]

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PHOTOS BY HEATHER KAPLOW

WOKE IN PROGRESS V: IMAGINING SOMETHING ELSE

Artists who signed the ‘Boston Arts for Black Lives’ letter last year weigh in on what’s changed—and what hasn’t—in the regional arts scene since then

BY HEATHER KAPLOW

This is piece number five in a long, leisurely *Dig Boston* series examining the impact on Boston’s arts community of a June 2020 “open letter” circulated by a group identifying as “Boston Arts for Black Lives.” The letter and the group’s website have since been taken down from the internet, but an archived copy can be accessed here. The significance of the letter beyond the extremely specific commitments it asked its signers to advocate for, is that it was signed by hundreds of employees of Boston-area arts institutions, arts educators, community organizations, city officials, and individual artists (including myself).

The goal of this series was to get a baseline sense of where those who signed the letter were starting from in terms of the kind of reckoning and reconciliation work the letter called for. The hope was to create a collective snapshot of the arts community that the whole city could look back on in 2021, from (ideally) a different place in terms of equity and inclusion. And so here we are, in 2021.

The very fact that the letter and Boston Arts for Black Lives disappeared from the internet before even a full year had passed says a lot of what there is to be said here—not necessarily about the group behind the letter, but about a community that hasn’t been looking for it. Can you hold yourself accountable if you aren’t looking at your to-do list? Maybe the do list has been internalized?

In the final piece of this series, I’ll circle back to everyone I spoke with in earlier columns to see what they feel has and hasn’t changed since 2020. But for this installment, the focus is on the many artists who signed the letter.

The letter’s call for change was addressed to those holding power within the region’s

cultural institutions—it made demands for very specific things like divestments; equity audits of human resources practices; term limits on board members, directors and senior staff; and centering of community voices/ decentering of institutional ones. Still, over 200 people who identified themselves as either “artist” or something like “painter” or “musician”, signed the letter. Many of Boston’s educators, arts administrators, programming staff etc. are also artists and identified themselves in both ways when signing the letter. But this article focuses on those who signed with no affiliation listed beyond their individual or collective creative practices.

At the one-year anniversary of the letter’s release, I crafted a 10-question survey that artists could answer anonymously, asking how people had found out about the letter, why they signed it, about their expectations when signing it, and about what they’d felt had changed in Boston or within their own practices since its circulation exactly a year before. I went through the signatories to the letter and did my best to track down or guess at the email addresses of the first 140 artists that had signed it. (A thrilling research project because it was a reminder of how many amazing artists work in Boston!)

A handful of artists told me they were not going to have time to respond to the survey within the week allotted. (Here is the survey if anyone reading this who signed the letter wants to answer the questions for themselves, now or later.) And many didn’t respond at all.

Of the artists who responded to some or all the survey’s questions, a very neat 50% of them identified as falling into one of the two groups the letter specifically advocates for:

Boston’s BIPOC community and/or those that are differently-abled.

Most respondents said they originally learned about the letter from social media or a friend/colleague, and several didn’t remember how they’d heard about it.

When asked why they signed the letter, despite not being in a position to meet many of its demands, almost everyone who responded to the survey gave an answer that had to do with a deep desire for change either in “the world”, or in Boston, and expressed support for and solidarity with the very specific demands the letter was making of Boston’s art and cultural institutions. Some also expressed a more general sentiment along the lines of allyship. In several cases people described having already been involved in activism around specific demands mentioned in the letter, or signing because the letter brought multiple requests they’d been involved in advocacy about under one umbrella. Others knew and wanted to lend support to the letter’s authors. In a few cases people admitted to signing because they saw that peers whose opinions they valued had signed it before them. And some respondents identifying as BIPOC or differently-abled described signing specifically to show their support for one another at a difficult time, or as a symbol of commitment to themselves: a public statement of their unwillingness to tolerate bias, oppression, inequity and other painful conditions of engagement with Boston’s art institutions.

When asked about their expectations—what they thought would happen as a result of the letter’s circulation—most artists demonstrated cautious optimism plus some

wariness of the risk of performativity standing in for action.

“This kind of public acknowledgement, and collective consensus is the first step in making structural changes. Public announcements, at the very least, create witnesses. My first thought was: It will take time. A long time probably, but hopefully not too long, and it will be ongoing. And much of it will not be visible for a while if all goes well, in my opinion. The emphasis of visibility as proof of work can in fact mask the bigger problems that need to be addressed.”

But others harbored profound cynicism. One artist summed up the kind of concerns that many expressed as follows:

“Honestly, I didn’t think it would contribute to any systemic change. These museums and academic institutions are old, and they are funded by old money. The legacy foundations themselves are beholden to complicated social and family politics. In addition, these public entities are part of a complex ecosystem with deep ties to white supremacy and the capitalist machine. Most successful visual artists themselves are tethered to these same systems. I’m not sure if institutions can be truly dismantled from the inside, if we are brave enough to bring around real change.”

When asked what kind of changes they’d witnessed at the individual institutional level or across the city’s broader arts culture during the year following the letter’s circulation, the answers showed a similar pattern of being divided between feeling some real, if incremental shift might be in progress, to feeling pretty hopeless.

Those who thought change was definitively in the works described it as happening



primarily in the realms of programming: open calls and academic hiring processes prioritizing artists of color, a wider range of voices/stories included in exhibition curation, more funding allocated to public events featuring BIPOC talent and centering BIPOC audiences.

But even the artists who pointed to this kind of progress included caveats that the areas where they'd seen the most progress were all at the level of institutions holding themselves accountable for increasing BIPOC *visibility*, not at a level that pointed towards any kind of internal or systemic change. No one pointed towards evidence of meaningful institutional restructuring, efforts at reparations, handovers (or even sharing) of powerful leadership positions in the arts in Boston. One person noted that even programming meant to showcase Boston's many talented BIPOC creatives seems to go out of its way to avoid content posing any kind of real challenge/threat to the status quo. The complaint made most frequently about the efforts that Boston's cultural institutions have made so far, besides just their inadequacy in terms of depth, was an utter lack of imagination in approaching the problems.

Probably the saddest thing to read was a response that said "I am so disappointed with the city's cultural institutions. I am moving out of Boston this fall in no small part due to their incompetence and fear."

Finally, when asked about the changes each artist surveyed had made in their own practices or communities after signing the letter—what kind of anti-racist commitments they had been enacting personally over the past year—the answers included things like engaging in reading/self-education and conversation with others about difficult issues; revamping teaching curriculums to be more inclusive; refining an activist practice so that it formed alliances to bridge gaps between underrepresented groups rather than focusing on just one; changing

subcontracting/hiring/casting practices; championing students and colleagues from underrepresented groups/sharing personal opportunities with them; starting a BIPOC culture workers support group; holding employers accountable for biases; redistributing a percentage of personal resources as way of modeling reparations and offering meaningful financial support; becoming a labor justice activist; educating and healing others through workshops and presentations (about decolonizing, racialized trauma, equitable collaboration); working to

deinstitutionalize conferences/programming as a term of participating in it. People reported these activities as making them feel tired, energized, skeptical, enriched, more heard/cared for, overwhelmed, like the work is enormous, taking them deeper and deeper, a part of something more profoundly important than they ever expected to be part of.

Overall, many respondents were already engaged in the work that they reported doing in these realms before signing the letter, but the timing of the letter seemed to coincide with a ramping up or doubling down on their

efforts.

It looks superficially here like artists have been extremely active in honoring the commitments they made when signing the letter, but in fact many people did not complete the entire survey and left this answer blank. Or simply noted that they had been doing a lot of thinking and reflecting, but felt immobilized in terms of what action to take next: what was and wasn't appropriate. One person described going through "a mental crisis" over these issues in the past year that they were still processing. And another said that they did not feel that signing the letter required them to take any kind of personal action—signing it so that the institutions it was addressed to would know people supported its demands was the critical action.

Which allows this piece to close on an important question that a few survey respondents asked in different ways—and which circles back to the issue of whether it matters that the letter is no longer accessible online.

Who are we, collectively, as a city, accountable to for making the kinds of changes the letter called for? Are we accountable to its writers? Are we accountable to each other? Who gets to decide what meaningful progress looks like?

I started this series thinking that I'd use it to help hold people accountable for at least reporting on how things feel as they try to shift the city's arts culture. But now I'm sharing the accountability outwards: is Boston's arts community the place you want it to be yet? Do its institutions reflect what you think is most important about culture? Does the ecosystem nurture everyone and everything that's important to you? If not, what's the next rallying point for pushing this agenda forward? What's your next step? ☺





First, a disclosure. I know Joe Keohane, and not just from the interview we did for this look at his new book, *The Power of Strangers: The Benefits of Connecting in a Suspicious World*. Many years ago he was the editor of this newspaper, called the *Weekly Dig* back then, who fielded some obnoxious emails from yours truly in the mid aughts, and instead of telling me to piss off did what no gatekeeper up to that point had dared, and invited this strange fool to join a cast of freaks that at one point included a septuagenarian intern who we met on the street.

I don't just note my history with the author in the interest of transparency, but rather because I believe he sells himself a bit short in his modest self-assessment at the start of his book, before the attempt to morph into an athletically social stranger engager over the course of 306 pages. Keohane is a born connector, a curious cat who's always made a habit of contacting interesting people and asking them out for a beer. In short, he's no stranger to strangers. This project, however, is an attempt to break out of his comfort zone of fellow writers, friends of friends, and honky tonk musicians; as he puts it early on, "I had set out on a mission to become good at talking to strangers, to build myself up as a much more social creature, and as it turned out, I had a lot to learn."

Of course, Keohane started researching and writing at a time when, as he describes, "political polarization, segregation, discrimination, and equality have conspired to turn fellow citizens into strangers." "The fact is," he writes, "in America anyway, we simply cannot stand the sight of one another." But this is no veiled anti-Trump punch or MCU moral play, nor is Keohane clamoring for kooky optimistic kumbaya cacophony, in which Americans from every corner of the spectrum celebrate their similarities and pretend all is well. There are chapters on "Talking to Them" and "How to Talk to Enemy Strangers," to be sure, and both may prove quite challenging to stubborn partisans unwilling to recognize intelligent life over ideological walls (ahem!). But while the mere acknowledgment of decency across the divide is enough to scare

off some readers, from righty hatemongers who, let's face it, would never read a book like this anyway, to left-wingers who would scoff at the idea of a white able-bodied dude writing about approaching folks on the street and saying, "Hello, I'm Joe," that would be a shame, because this survey is for them as well, and thoroughly considers the experience of talking to strangers from a planetful of unique perspectives.

In his travels, Keohane meets a cast of characters fit for a Douglas Adams novel, from introverts and extroverts of every shade and bent who he converses with to varying degrees of success, to the experts, sociologists, and interpersonal gurus he turns to for inspiration, including one in London he describes as a "wizard at this" who "once started a conversation with a man on the Tube simply by pointing at his hat, smiling, and saying, simply, 'hat.'" (In a section that hit home for me, this same mentor, Georgie, "delicately explains" to Keohane "that while 'it's clear you're a person who asks questions for a living,' everything about my body language suggested I was looking for something to pounce on. I asked questions too quickly, she said. I was leaning forward. This wasn't a conversation; it was an interview.")

Within months, what started as an idea born out of "the most amazing conversation" with a taxi driver in his current home of Brooklyn spun into a concept on its way to a publishing contract with Random House.

"I thought maybe I could just talk to people for two years and report back about what happened, but then I started seeing all this research from the last decade or so that was very interesting, and it started to explain why I enjoyed having these interactions," Keohane says. "Why did I feel good? Why did I feel a sense of relief?"

Eventually, he came up with a simple plan of action: "I just asked three questions—*Why don't we talk to strangers? When will we? What happens when we do?*—and got to chase them all over the place. I went as far as I could to answer those questions. I ended up sitting naked in a sauna in Helsinki with a Finnish philosopher ... on a train for 48 straight hours with a bunch of southerners

DR. STRANGER

Joe Keohane on the benefits of connecting in a suspicious world

BY CHRIS FARAONE

... at a convention where they were trying to teach Democrats and Republicans how to speak with each other."

Even though innumerable books are technically by and about strangers in that they're penned by people who at some point phoned, emailed, or showed up on a subject's doorstep, as Keohane discovered, there isn't too much out there about actually engaging people. Unless you want to take advantage of, manipulate, date, fleece, or kill them, in which case there are dedicated sections of your local Barnes & Noble.

"The closest I could come up with was some folklore books about strangers, and there are books about religious conflict that use the word stranger," Keohane says, "but really this research only started happening like 15 years ago, where people started wondering what happens when you talk to strangers."

He continues, "The book involves a lot of social science and a lot of psychology papers. That stuff's interesting if you know how to read them but they're death if you don't."

While Keohane has his criticisms of the social sciences, *The Power of Strangers* is nonetheless buttressed by data via the likes of Gillian Sandstrom, a psychological scientist "studying social interaction to help people connect to each other." And by various studies that show how our "expectations for interacting with a stranger

is that everyone is going to shoot you down and it's going to be a fucking disaster."

"Part of it is stranger-danger propaganda and that we think everyone is a mass murderer because that's what has been taught to us for decades," Keohane says. "America invented that one, that's our gift to the world—a statistically unfounded terror of everyone you don't know. But when your expectation is that everybody is going to kill you, then there's nowhere to go from there but up."

"These two philosophers have this idea of a moral dial," he adds, "and when the dial is cranked all the way up, we make big social networks and we can talk to people and all of that, and when it's cranked all the way down in the other direction, we become genocidal lunatics. And what turns it is the sense of threat. When we're threatened, we

refuse to accept the other side's humanity."

As irony would have it, Keohane learned that these phenomena can apply to the very individuals studying them.

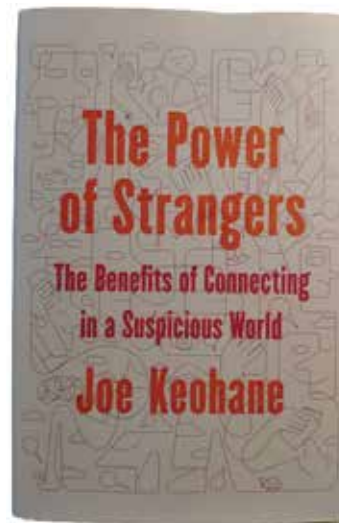
"There are definitely factions," Keohane says about those who interrogate the way we interact with strangers. "Another thing I discovered is that academia is totally broken, and is not going to solve anything because none of these people are talking to each other. If you want to understand why we don't talk to strangers, you have to be a psychologist, you have to be a sociologist, you have to be a political scientist, and you have to be an evolutionary biologist. ... But if you're coming out of grad school and you have a PhD in sociology and evolutionary biology, people will just be like, *Sorry, we don't have a department for that, so you don't get a job*. They have a tiny little patch of land, and that's what they farm. I would call people and they would say, *This is happening*, and I would say, *But why is that happening?* And they would say, *Sorry, that's not my field*." This is the only book that really takes all of it into account."

In his own personal journey, Keohane has become a social gymnast, even chatting it up with outgoing NYC Mayor Bill de Blasio at their neighborhood bagel shop. My former editor even offers advice: "You have to have a sense of timing. You can't just be in a crowded bar and walk up to the bartender and be like, *So, what was your childhood like?*"

Beyond interactive skillbuilding, it's clear he has come to appreciate strange faces around him in ways that he never imagined. As Keohane writes in a footnote, "When I was starting this book, I used to tell people that I believed if you talked to a stranger—really engaged—that you will discover that everyone has at least one meaningful thing to share. At least one! I realize now that that is a monstrously condescending thought and offer my apologies to the world."

As for the rest of us ...

"For anyone interested in digging more deeply into the topics addressed in this book," he writes, "there is plenty there to help get you started. Now, please: Go talk to a stranger." ⊗



Joe will be reading from and signing copies of his book at the Plough and Stars in Cambridge on Thurs, July 22 starting at 5:30pm. Head over and be sure to introduce yourself.

EATS



TASTE MAKERS

Ethnic Boston, Cambridge, Somerville establishments in spotlight

BY DIG STAFF

We're thrilled to hear that **A Taste of Ethnic Boston** is back and bigger than ever, complete with a reimagined bolstered mission.

"The pandemic has had a devastating impact on the restaurant and hospitality industry—particularly those owned by BIPOC restaurateurs and in BIPOC neighborhoods," reports Get Connected!, a "social impact venture" built "to curate meaningful business and social connections." "Unfortunately, several restaurants that participated in the Get Connected!'s annual A Taste of Ethnic Boston have gone out of business and some are on the verge of closing."

"This is why this year's A Taste of Ethnic Boston is even more vital."

For 2021's high-stakes event, Get Connected! is linking with Big Night Entertainment, the Greater Boston Convention and Visitors Bureau, Boston Beer Company, Boston Black Hospitality Coalition, and NBC10 Boston to "spotlight, amplify, and support neighborhood food and beverage establishments," as well as "encourage attendees of the year's event to use the power of their purse to financially support these organizations by patronizing them after the event."

The festivities will also attempt to address the industry's labor shortage, which Get Connected! describes as "one of the biggest challenges facing restaurant owners today." Participating restaurants will be able to post job listings for free until Sept. 1 on the **GK! Job Hub**, while proceeds from the event will benefit the Boston Black Hospitality Coalition and the participating restaurants, all of which face major hurdles.

In **Somerville and Cambridge** specifically, we are now smack in the middle of the summertime "**Dining Passport**" program instituted by the Chambers of Commerce in those cities as a reimagination of their annual "Taste of" initiatives. "Dining Dollar Vouchers" are available through mid-August and will be valid Between September 1 and December 31, 2021, with 100% of passport proceeds going to local restaurant workers and nonprofit organizations.

"The initial list of participating restaurants features 25 establishments, including Craigie on Main, Hong Kong, and Puritan & Co in Cambridge along with Foundry on Elm, Saloon, and The Independent in Somerville."

"The passport program is a 'win-win-win' initiative that directly benefits restaurants, hospitality workers and local diners," said David Maher, president and CEO of the Cambridge Chamber. "We are grateful for the opportunity to directly support restaurant workers in Cambridge and Somerville."

The Dining Passport program is funded by the COVID Resilience & Recovery Urban Partnership, a "pilot collaboration between the Cambridge and Somerville chambers" that "will leverage a portion of a \$160,000 grant award from the Baker-Polito administration, which was awarded to buoy economic empowerment and revitalization in both cities."

"The Dining Passport program is exciting because it will help our local economies get back to work while providing relief for workers in the hard-hit hospitality sector," said Stephen Mackey, President and CEO of the Somerville Chamber. "We are proud to offer this program to local diners."ⓧ

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THE BALLROOM THIEVES OPEN NEW CHAPTER AT SINCLAIR

On “womp womp” songs becoming more relevant in the pandemic and on celebrating major changes

BY ROB DUGUAY

During a band’s existence, changes are bound to occur. These changes can come in terms of artistic approach, the vision behind the music, or simply members leaving and moving on.

For Boston folk-rock dynamos the Ballroom Thieves, the latter is happening with Devin Mauch’s plans to depart the band by the end of the month. It’s a time of transition but also for celebration of Mauch’s contributions, and that celebration will begin with back-to-back shows on July 16 and 17 at the Sinclair in Cambridge.

I recently spoke with singer-bassist-cellist Callie Peters about their upcoming shows, looking forward to playing in front of a live crowd again, their latest album, and what the post-Mauch era of the band will look like.

The upcoming shows at the Sinclair are a big turning point for the Ballroom Thieves with it being your first shows since the COVID-19 pandemic hit last year and the last time Devin will be performing with the band in the Boston area. Is it a mix of excitement and nervousness?

We have really missed playing live in-person shows, so we’re excited to finally get back on stage and watch people enjoy music together. Martin and I did a handful of live-streamed living room shows and small in-person shows, but there’s nothing like playing to a room full of music lovers from a stage. We hope it’ll be a fun way to end this chapter of the band, and besides the anticipation of playing three shows in a row after such a long break, we’re eager to get back to performing.

With it being Devin’s final hometown shows, do you have anything special planned?

Both shows will feature a handful of older songs from our first two records. We’ve been performing with our bandmate Ariel Bernstein for a few years now, so it’ll be different to strip it back to the trio lineup and play, and sort of attempt, some of the songs we don’t really do anymore. We’re calling it “Early Waypoints of the Ballroom Thieves” to honor the many years we spent touring as a party of three.

While live music was shut down for the most part during the pandemic, how did each of you keep yourselves occupied? Did you write and work on new tunes remotely or did you do

other things?

I think we all started the year in disbelief that the world had been turned upside down by a virus and that our jobs would probably be put on hold for the next year and beyond. After some months of over-watching news and worrying through the end of a long winter, I think we all enjoyed the rest and quality home time after the years of consistent touring. We practiced a lot, caught up on a few home projects, and Martin got really good at making bagels. We fostered dogs and then adopted one we couldn’t part with who we named Bagel, which was probably the most pandemic thing that happened. We also wrote a bunch of songs and recently recorded 10 of them with producer and friend Jerry Streeter.

Speaking of albums, in February of last year right before the pandemic hit, the Ballroom Thieves released their third album, *Unlovely*. It abides by a sociopolitical theme inspired by the 24/7 news cycle and the presence of toxic masculinity and straight up evil in our society. To reflect, how do you think the songs on the album have evolved from that time to now?

Firstly, I have to mention that we’ve been working with our friend Ariel for many years. We feel so lucky that he joined us on stage full-time in 2019, making us a four piece. On the album he played percussion, guitar, and organ while basically contributing sick licks every which way, you name it. Since we released *Unlovely* weeks before the shutdown and haven’t toured since, the songs really haven’t evolved beyond their life as tracks. They did become even more lyrically relevant as the year progressed, which I’m not sure is a good thing seeing as our lyrics are usually pretty womp womp.

After Devin leaves the band, what does he plan on doing? Also, do you, Martin, and Ariel plan on having the Ballroom Thieves back as a trio or are you searching for another fourth member?

Dev spent the year reconnecting with home and doing a ton of camping, even through the winter. He also started a wood burning business called the Wild Electric, which features scenes from his adventures. I’m positive he has many glorious wilderness trips in his future. We’re happy to report the Thieves will remain a quartet and we’ll be playing shows together starting in August. ☺

QUICK HITS



RETURN TO THE GOOD LIFE

Phased reopening starts with Friday and Saturday night parties

After having its doors closed for nearly a year-and-a-half due to COVID, beloved Downtown Crossing lounge and danceteria Good Life will return to action on Friday, July 16.

“With little to no help from the government, things seem doomed,” owner Peter Fiumara said. “But where there’s a will there is a way.”

“I think Good Life is both reminiscent of the past but important for the future,” added DJ Knife, who has handled DJ bookings there for more than a decade. “This city has lost some of the most important places that have made up its charm. There needs to be some grit and character remaining.”

Good Life will reopen in phases, starting with parties on Friday and Saturday nights. The kitchen will reopen at a later date.

“Everyone who worked at Good Life lost their job and had to reestablish themselves somehow,” Fiumara added.

“Most of those employees treated Good Life as if it was their own business—they cared about the patrons and their co-workers, it was a community. The ones who believed in and continued to believe in what we all created will be back to reopen and see everyone again. Good Life would be nothing without all these remarkable people.

“We have been trying to claw back, somehow, we are almost there.”

-Dig Staff

MUSIC



METHADONE MYLES

New concept album explores Mass Ave and Melnea Cass with compassion, journalistic rhymes, dope beats

BY CHRIS FARAONE

It's not unusual for hip-hop artists to paint pictures of their environs, whether glamorous or tragic. From Nas brushing strokes based on scenes outside his housing project window, to any number of rap artists shouting out their block.

Methadone Myles, a new concept album from the Supervisor and produced entirely by Chairman Chow about the cycle of death, addiction, and hope for rehabilitation in the Hub, follows in that storytelling tradition, but with a rare specific focus on a certain place and time—namely, the crosshairs of Melnea Cass Boulevard and Mass Ave, which, due to its proximity to so-called recovery drug services and other contributing factors, has become Boston's skid row and an open-air opioid market over the past decade or so.

"It's a concept album about that infamous stretch," the Supervisor says. "I basically put myself in the shoes of those who I've known that have spent time out there and told a few of the stories that just aren't getting told. It's an amalgamation of different people I've known who have been on the mile, from 2016 to this last year when the last kid I was close with finally got off. I made sure to stay in my lane to the point where I'm not talking about anything I haven't seen with my own two eyes or heard about directly from those who have lived it."

In time, he and Chow decided on six tracks for the final EP. The Supervisor recalls, "The structure came about just as a process of paring it down. I had 150 more bars that didn't make it onto this record. I asked, *Is this something I have seen with my own eyes? Or, is it something someone told me?* If it was just something someone told me and I didn't know it to be true, that's the stuff I threw away."

Having covered hip-hop as well as the opioid epidemic in Mass for nearly two decades, I attest that *Methadone Myles* stacks up in both lanes. Chow's

beats are solid boom bap screwed back to minimalist perfection, making for a proper space for his MC to explore so much bleakness. Which the Supervisor does in the kind of explicit detail that only an insider could possibly be privy to, not just in his name-dropping the gamut, from trap corners to halfway houses, but in the compassion he has for the characters whose paths he crosses.

"It just comes from the position I'm in," he says. "I've never lived out there, but I've been around it—my entire life has been shaped by this epidemic and again, I feel like a lot of these stories aren't told. I read an article today in the *Herald* that was pretty much uniform in that they don't dive too deep into the lives of the people living [on Mass and Cass]. It's just about what action the government is taking. So what I wanted to do was point out the real life experiences people are going through and to talk about the entities down there helping."

In order to help those who are assisting on the street level every day, Chow and the Supervisor are donating the proceeds from their project to Health Care for the Homeless and Pine Street Inn.

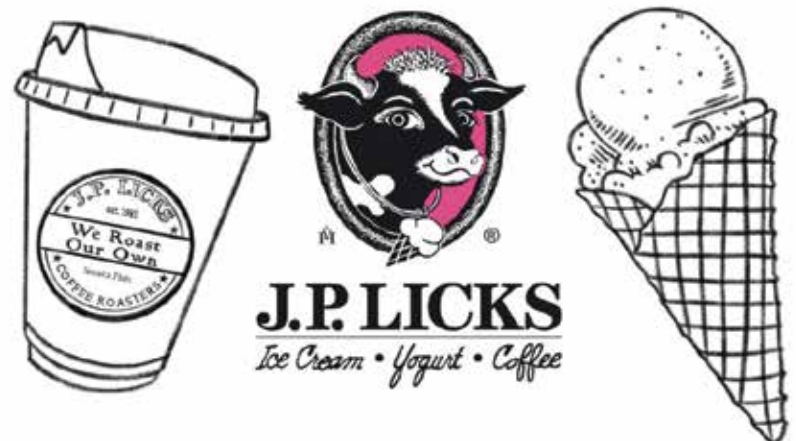
"The reason we chose these organizations is because they're helping people survive, and Pine Street is a place where you can be if you want to be out of that mix," explains the Supervisor, who himself has tried to help multiple friends battling hard addictions. "What's going to help is getting people off the mile. You really have to traverse quite a maze. It's not easy and there's a lot of pitfalls along the way."

"I've had the idea for this record for years," he adds. "It's a little more serious and it's a different experience creatively than what I've done before, but in hip-hop we have all these tropes, and that shit gets tired after a while."ⓧ

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MOVIE DIARY: “BETTER LUCK TOMORROW”

Notes from the section editor, and the first entry in a new article series

BY JAKE MULLIGAN

For the nearly 500 days between March 11, 2020 and July 2, 2021, I didn’t watch a movie outside my home. I didn’t watch movies in theaters, I didn’t watch movies at drive-ins, I didn’t watch movies shown outdoors to crowds of people sitting on blankets and lawn chairs—I didn’t watch movies except for when I was sitting on my couch and staring at the 40-inch screen that sits roughly 10 feet away. Which I suppose is the way that most people watch movies now, even before the pandemic made it mandatory.

But whether literally mandatory or not, I decided that if COVID was going to enforce a sort of moviegoing sobriety then I might as well go full cold turkey. And for me the only way to properly break a cold turkey stretch like that was by watching a movie projected on 35mm in a theater I loved where I could have a drink and not have to worry about the whole mask thing. And *that’s* how it happened that the first movie I watched in a theater after what’ll hopefully be the biggest moviegoing break of my life was Justin Lin’s somewhat rarely screened second feature *Better Luck Tomorrow* (2002), which among countless possible *back to the cinema programming choices* is one that I really never could’ve predicted.

Better Luck Tomorrow played at the Brattle Theatre on July 2 as part of their “Reopening Week 2021,” which featured six films on 35mm scheduled across the theatre’s first six days of public screenings since March 2020. And in fact two of the six were *back to the cinema programming choices that I really never could’ve predicted*—first *Better Luck Tomorrow*, and second *Harriet the Spy* (1996, screened to celebrate its 25th anniversary), which played alongside slightly more expected choices like *Casablanca* (1942) and *Shaft* (1971). Now, how’d those late 90s/early 00s deep cuts sneak in with the household names? *Better Luck Tomorrow* made it because it’s got a connection to a currently ongoing blockbuster series (more on that below). And *Harriet the Spy* made it for being a standout at-home viewing: The

Brattle’s own synopsis explained the choice by saying that “One of our silver linings during the ‘Pandemic Pause’ was revisiting a lot of nostalgic films, and this 90s dramedy was one of our favorites,” pointing towards the way that even theatrical repertory screenings remain in dialogue with and directly influenced by the movies watched on private time.

Reflecting on those circumstances got me thinking it was the right time to start up **MOVIE DIARY**, a new recurring article-category that’s designed to let our critics write about whatever movies they’ve been watching no matter why or where they’ve been watching them. Distinct from our standard **FILM REVIEW** articles (which focus almost exclusively on new films and special revivals), the **MOVIE DIARY** articles will be a venue for our growing roster of critical writers to provide capsule-sized remarks that fall outside the ongoing release calendar. Maybe sometimes the given movie will be getting a new home video release, or showing at a repertory theater, or something like that. But just as often I expect the subject will be a random movie watched at home on a disc, or even more likely on a streaming platform.

For indeed part of the motivation behind this new article series is that it seems to me like most ongoing film discourse is currently dictated by a combination of release dates and *what’s on Netflix* (or maybe the Criterion Channel or some other streaming platform, depending on who you’re speaking to), and I think by writing more loosely about the movies we’re viewing in our spare time (at home, in theaters, or elsewhere) we might hopefully reach a more honest and engaged representation of where film culture’s really at right now than is accomplished by rigidly focusing on the release calendar (although we’ll of course continue doing that to some degree too).

As editor the only rule I’m really going to hold is that the movies covered under the diary headline have to be accessible in some form, so that whoever’s reading can

hopefully watch them too.

And it seems right to start with *Better Luck Tomorrow*, for at least two big reasons. One, because it’s the first movie I saw after the pandemic it’ll probably end up being one of the more memorable theatrical experiences of my life and thus a good fit for the first entry in a diary format. And two, because I think *Better Luck Tomorrow* is better than any other movie I saw at the Brattle that weekend ... yes even *Casablanca*, which is of course very good but a little too down the middle for me if you know what I mean ... not that I’m even comparing them, but just to work off that aforementioned phrase for a second *Better Luck Tomorrow* is anything but *down the middle* ... to wit it’s now best know as an *off to the side* entry in the *Fast & Furious* (2001-) franchise, because Lin transported the film’s best supporting character into that series’ complex mythos with *The Fast and the Furious: Tokyo Drift* (2006).

Like *Tokyo Drift*, the California-set *Better Luck Tomorrow* is essentially a modern-day *juvie crime* film. But while *Tokyo Drift* is just as narratively compromised and pseudo-campy as the 50s hot-rod drive-in movies that originally kick-started the *juvie crime* tradition (which is not inherently bad, but hardly original), *Better Luck Tomorrow* approaches both parts of the equation with equal sincerity, slowly unfurling a genuinely clever narrative with stark character dynamics that excitingly criss-cross from a *juvie* focus to a *crime* one.

The story is that unofficial friend-group ringleader Ben (Parry Shen), Pesciesque hothead Virgil (Jason Tobin), De Niroesque elder Han (Sung Kang, as the future *Fast* character), and smartass valedictorian Daric (Roger Fan)—most of whom are high schoolers planning to attend Ivy League universities within the next year (no phrase recurs in the film more often than “college apps”)—start running small-time schemes together on the side mostly just because they’re smart enough to get away with them (usually they’re lifting computer parts

through retail cons or easy heist jobs). This draws the attention of the boys’ mutual crush Stephanie (Karin Anna Cheung), which draws the attention of her rich-kid boyfriend Steve (John Cho), which sets everyone on the path towards a murder already revealed mystery-style during an unnecessary prologue scene.

If *Better Luck Tomorrow* has an obvious flaw it’s that Lin’s direction follows the lead of his movie-mad characters too closely by constantly imitating directors that were fashionable in the decade before this film was made. When I first saw *Better Luck Tomorrow* about 12 years ago, that struck me as deeply limiting. But now it appeals to me more, once again for at least two big reasons. One, it matches up with the psychology of the characters. And two, when compared with the current state of American genre films, where even good ones like the movie reviewed in the last issue *No Sudden Move* (2021) seem to have been assembled nearly entirely by citation, Lin’s formal lifts seem almost quaint.

The same could be said for whatever aesthetic limitations one might ascribe to *Better Luck Tomorrow*, which features a lot of blown-out lighting and functional compositions surely necessitated by its small budget, tight schedule, and novice crew. Yet it still establishes a certain pictorial quality—slick but disconcerting—mostly on the strength of its 35mm cinematography. And so for reasons that had little to do with the content of the work itself, seeing *Better Luck Tomorrow* at the Brattle after my 16-month layoff was just one more reminder of the specifically cinematic qualities that were lost when a combination of industry power structures and changing societal habits displaced film-based theatrical exhibition as the centerpiece of movie culture in exchange for mid-quality digital video files designed to be seen at home instead. [★★★★★]

***Better Luck Tomorrow* is available on Blu-ray and DVD, to rent on digital VOD platforms, and to subscribers on Paramount+.**

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SACK LUNCH

BY DAN SAVAGE | @FAKEDANSAVAGE | MAIL@SAVAGELOVE.NET

On the first Thursday of every month I host "Sack Lunch," an online hangout exclusively for Magnum subscribers to the Savage Lovecast. I take questions, invite listeners to answer them with me, and we have a blast. I'm giving this week's column over to some of the questions we didn't get to during this month's Savage Lovecast Sack Lunch...

My son is straight, cute, accomplished, 25, and has friends. He's never been kissed. I suspect he's terrified. I can't talk to him about it. Should his dad talk to him? Should he go to a sex worker? Would this undermine his confidence?

Your son has friends and that's a good sign. Not only does it mean your son has social skills, mom, it means he has people in his life that he can confide in about his sex life and ask for advice. You can and should ask him if there's anything he would like to talk about—keep those lines of communication open—but it's entirely possible that your son has no interest in sex (he could be asexual) or that he has an active love and/or sex life that he doesn't wanna talk with mom and dad about for reasons, e.g. he's someone's rubber gimp or he can only get it up in a fursuit or he's in a polyamorous triad that he's not ready to tell you about. If he's happy, let him be.

Is there a safe way to enlarge a clitoris?
Allow me to Google that for you. Hey, turns out there's a Wikipedia entry for that ("Clitoral Enlargement Methods"), as I suspected there might be, and it lists three methods to grow a clitoris: the use of creams containing testosterone (applied directly to the clit); testosterone supplements (administered by injection); and the use of clitoral pumps, i.e. suction cups. Testosterone injections is the most effective way to enlarge a clit—as any trans man can tell you—but it has other "masculinizing effects" that you may not want. Clitoral pumps, much like penis pumps, can enlarge the clitoris temporarily but overuse or too-enthusiastic use of a pump—on a dick or a clit—can damage erectile tissues.

I am familiar with demisexuality—the idea that some people cannot develop a sexual relationship without an emotional

or a romantic bond first—but what about the opposite phenomenon? I lose interest in people who get to know me and my desire to hook up is quickly replaced by a desire to just be acquaintances.

Not only is there a term for people like you—people who lose desire after getting to know someone—there's also a pride flag because there can never be too many pride flags: "Fraysexual, also known as ignotasexual, is a sexual orientation on the asexual spectrum," says LGBT Wiki, "[describing] someone who only experiences sexual attraction towards those that they are not deeply connected with and lose that attraction as they get to know the person." Your pride colors are blue, cyan, white, and gray. (There are so many pride flags out there these days—and they come out so damn fast—that I suspected someone created an online pride flag generator. And I was right: myflag.lgbt.)

What would you say to someone in a poly relationship who had their heart broken as a third?

It gets better.

My husband (gay, age 29) has continually accused me of cheating and other similar activities over the course of our six years together. It wasn't too bad at the start but it got worse. I now feel so much resentment toward him that it's destroying us. I feel like a prisoner in the relationship. He's tracked my phone to make sure I'm not going anywhere "unapproved" and if I don't tell him everything I'm doing he gets upset. At this point I hate being intimate with him. I don't even want to touch him. We've started seeing a couples counselor but it's not helping with my resentment. How do I get over this resentment? Or do I do what my brain is telling me and divorce him?

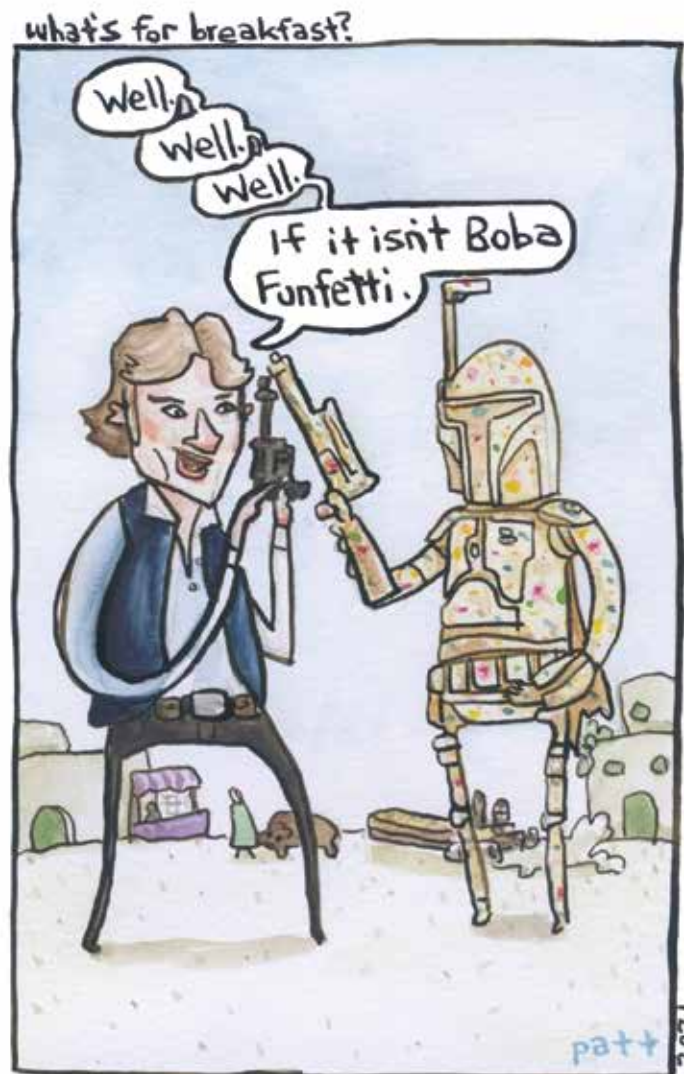
DTMFA—divorce the motherfucker already—and you'll not only be doing yourself a favor you'll most likely be doing your ex a favor as well. Because the pain of getting dumped is the only thing that motivates jealous and controlling assholes like your husband to get the help they need.

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What's for Breakfast

BY PATT KELLEY



Comfortably Dumb

BY BRUCE QUEST



DEFEND YOURSELF

DAVE WILDMAN OF TELL

“My lyrics became more and more about characters I’d create, or situations, vignettes, plots.”

INTERVIEW BY CHRIS FARAONE

Longtime *Dig* readers will certainly remember Dave Wildman, one of our first standout film critics and a powerful cultural siren about town for other outlets as well. When he left our paper more than 10 years ago to pursue music full-time, Wildman promised we would hear from him, and in the years since he has delivered on that pledge, becoming a familiar voice as a member of the Unfamiliar with bassist Jay Raffi and as a solo artist bleeding through the microphone at pubs around the region.

With his current band TELL, a trio with Raffi plus Chuck Ferriera on drums, releasing their new COVID-spurred project, *Stir Crazy*, at the Jungle in Somerville on July 23, I connected with our former film editor, whose crotchety insight I have always admired, to ask what moved his pen through the pandemic.



You know we have to start with something *Dig* related. You were our film critic, but after your stint here you angled hard toward the music industry.

When I first came to the *Dig* I’d had about eight years of being a local music and arts columnist at the *Boston Globe* during which I got to interview pretty much everyone in town who identified as a musician. ... I was a musician myself, and I’d seen what a bad review could do. A drummer in one of my bands quit once when someone at the *Noise* described his playing as “encephalitic.” After we looked it up, he stormed out and never returned. So although I’d written extensively about music, I’d never written a critical review, and never wanted to. Films on the other hand I had no personal or emotional connection to. So it was easy to be as caustic as I felt, to dump on, say, the latest Will Ferrell fiasco.

You have earned a rep as a gifted songwriter, an observer and a guy who sometimes “opens up [his] soul to show you where it all comes from” on a track (though not always so straightforwardly). In any case, is that a gift and a curse?

It used to be a total curse. For years I wrote only about my personal feelings and relationships. It was real sensitive shit because I’m a bit of an introvert, despite the public nature of a lot of what I do. But I began to hate my songs.

We’re talking over a thousand songs total, sometimes a new one or two every day. Once a month or so I’d turn on the tape recorder, open up a vein and do six in a row. It makes me shudder to remember. Anyway, things began to change when my fiction writing started to find an audience. Maybe it’s because I got older, smarter, and built up buffers. My lyrics became more and more about characters I’d

create, or situations, vignettes, plots. The subject matter was still personal, but it got more interesting, detailed, and unpredictable. I think this album I’m releasing is the high water mark of that. There are songs about relationships, but I look for unique angles.

Tell us a little bit about being bottled up in your “familiar hell” while recording this album. I mean, we were all a bit stir crazy this past year-plus, what makes your nightmare so special?

Well, I mentioned before that I’m an introvert and writer, so it was probably easier on my

psyche being stuck alone with myself than it was for most. I finished two novels and a chunk of a third. There was no playing music with anyone though, which was a serious bummer. When I had an idea I had to go right to the computer software and knock out all the parts to see what it would sound like. Then we realized that Jay could record his basslines and send them to me, so we were able to bounce off each other a bit, and keep things going that way.

So yeah, while some aspects of the COVID were trying ... the song “Stir Crazy” was more about what all my friends were feeling, most of them with families all stuck in the house together for a year. ... The song is written from the point of view of a guy who just wants to go out, have fun and meet girls, but the goddamn beaches are all closed. ☹️

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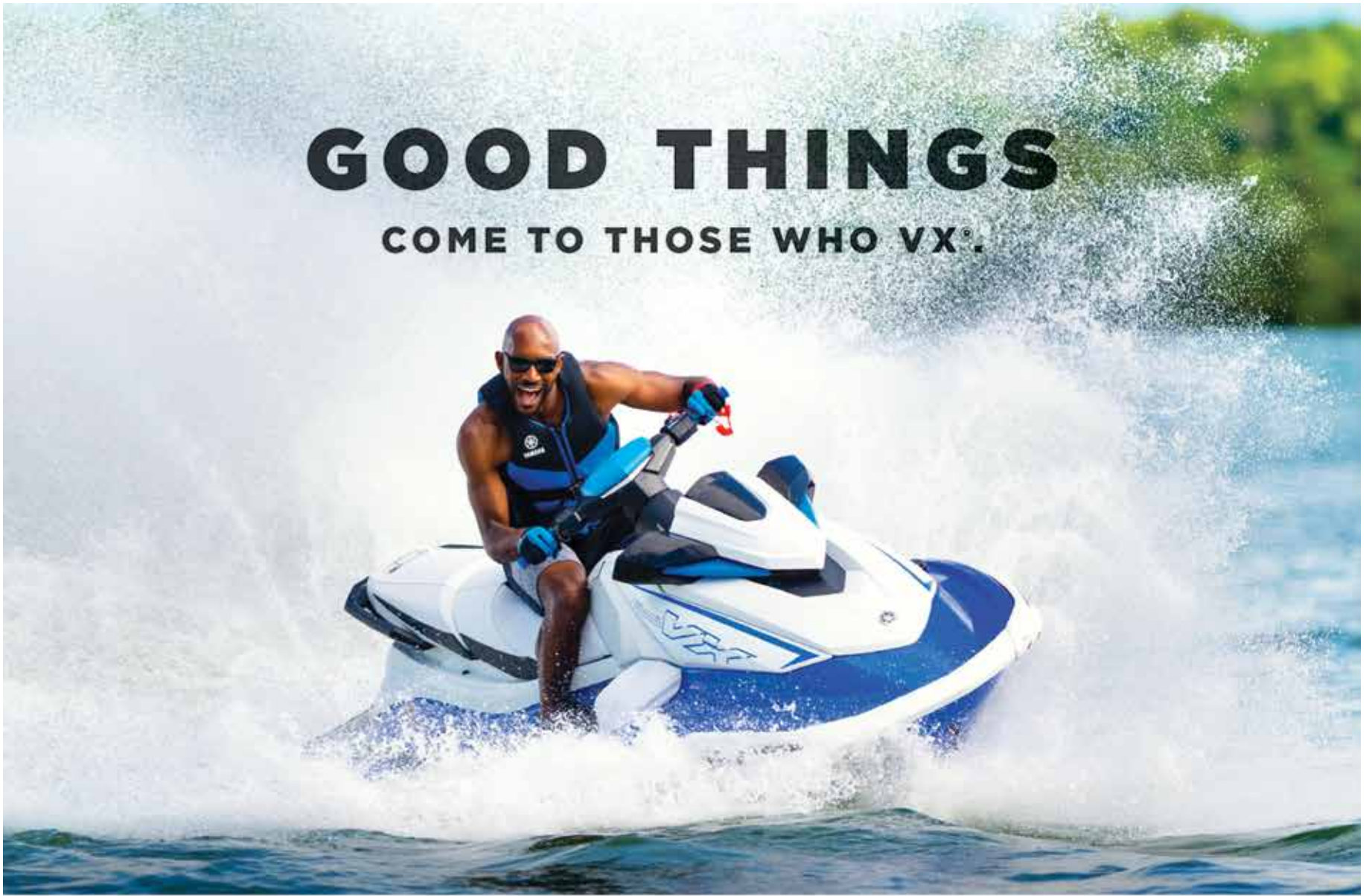
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