



The Vanguard Youth Arts Collective Presents:

SPOT ON!



Nick behind his house, where he usually writes

Issue 4, September 2021
Interview with Nick Hildenbrand
Edited by Alexei Ungurenașu

The Vanguard Youth Arts Collective are a group of creatively driven youth who act as a voice for an emerging generation of the arts within the Windsor Essex region.

'Spot On!' is Vanguard's new artist interview series edited by members Meaghan Sweeney and Alexei Ungurenașu. These interviews offer a spotlight for emerging and established local artists who work in various media to discuss and promote their past and current art projects.

Nick (he/him) is a poet and musician from LaSalle and a recent graduate from the University of Windsor with an M.A. in English Language and Literature. Regarding art, his interest is in the organic quality of individual,

intuitive perceptions and expressions, and how they reveal immediate, personal, and encompassing realities. He considers his art to be a contemporary extension of the Orphic, Transcendental, and Beat traditions. Nick's poetry is concerned with natural percussive universality and its implications, the revelation of matter as meaningful in a Maenadic world which may at first appear devoid of signs and symbols, and the exploration of a transient yet lifted beauty inherent within the local and mundane.

When and why did you start writing?

I've felt the compulsion to write since I was a little kid. Various experiences—exploring unfamiliar lanes in pockets of woods behind the house, hearing the right bit of my older brother's early forays into punk, seeing the grand imbrications of unpolluted

stars at night in Algonquin—would fill me with a strange sense of longing that was hard for me to understand then. It'd just make me feel strongly about things, an array of emotions I can sum up now as “agitation.”

While agitated, I recognized something vaguely tangible beyond the scope of my immediate perception. There was something there underneath and above the senses that was sublime, and I wanted to touch it. I had no idea what was going on—I had no outlet; I couldn't properly explain myself to myself. I didn't know what poetry was. As a teenager, I started writing to capture these moments of noticing. At that point I was a burgeoning musician, my only frame of reference was song lyrics and cheesy young adult novels. So, I began with very poor lines about friends, girls, and nature. Then I read Whitman in university. Now I write very good lines about friends, girls, and nature.



A treehouse where Nick writes sometimes



Nick playing guitar in his friend's basement

How does your background as a musician affect your writing?

My experience as a musician has allowed me to easily intuit rhythms and melodies when writing poetry. It's given me an ear for the innate melodious quality of language, and I can discern the rightness of a line according to the way each syllabic beat arranges itself. I feel like I lucked out there.

It's also changed my perception of poetry as a craft. To me, poetry is an extension of the art of music. I believe the reason why the old poets wrote in structures of rhyme and meter is because

they aspired to music's fundamental immediacy—its ability to convey a universal, supra-organic language of genuine feeling.

Music is the manifestation of both sentimental and kinetic energy in an amalgamated balance. It is the culmination of both sudden abstract emotion and the sudden athletic energy required to effuse it as either euphonic or dissonance (this is especially true with regard to the drummer). In other words, music is the barest translation of an individual's spirit and body, extracted and revived from a specific point in time. When you perceive music, you perceive both the ambiguity and specificity of that musician's primal consciousness.



Nick's guitar: designed by Hrista Stefanova; built by Mike Barnett; inscription by Walt Whitman

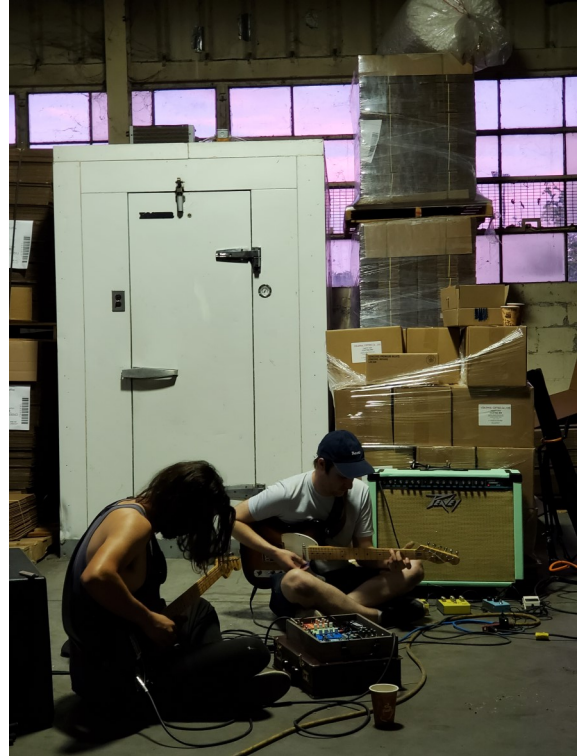
Like music, good poetry bears the potential to translate abstract sentiment with more immediacy than most other aesthetic modes. Primal consciousness can be more readily found in the rhythm, cadence, and phonetics of a line vs. the specific word meanings themselves. The way a line is spoken – the melodic charge of a line – is what conveys essential meaning. Sentiment is the life behind the symbol. With that said, the athletic component of poetry can be found in the existential moment from which poetry is extracted. Good poetry is a translation of the world as it occurs. The candid and synchronous events of one's animate experience in this world bear the potential kinetic energy needed to effuse the true self in music.

The following poem is about a moment of epiphany during a crisis of extreme uncertainty. To keep it short, I could not escape the neurotic labyrinth of my own mind. Yet upon touching my guitar, I realized I could suffuse the reality of self that underlies ego into this instrument that my friends had composed for me. It was therapeutic, absolutely freeing. With this poem, I wanted to actualize/catalyze the Whitman verse inscribed on that guitar, and cast back my own "reckless warblings."

LILY IN THE MUSIC ROOM

exhume from my decibel collar your trifold pitch,
hand-made, unfurled bass root woodgrain, riffled
buzz-tone morse and sand-hair mechanic compadre,
your lily-mark face sunflower pickguard pose of cat-
wire and mewling, “would I listen?”

your warble is setting,
your trail of verse and patch-cord hyphae casted,
would I listen?
my teacher,
white curl flag-staff sweep,
wet meadow blemished,
I cradled and kissed your puppy self—
I directed your neck toward stars of plaster



Nick's bandmates practicing in a warehouse

What plans or projects do you have in mind for the foreseeable future?

Recently, Iovan Stefanov and I received a grant from the WEA to fund the compilation and publication of a collaborative work of poetry called the *Marshwood Songs*. The name denotes and celebrates the natural environment of Southwestern Ontario's original wetland landscape. As well, the name characterizes this landscape's inherent liminality—both in terms of borderland and topography. The poems in tandem operate as a record of local duality, moving back and forth between rusticity and cityscape, expressing a conflated history and concurrence of Windsor/Essex environments. Our poems will also be supplemented by designs created by Hrista Stefanova and Emily Conlon, two local and incredibly talented visual artists. The project is essentially completed, and we're just trying to determine the best means of publication right now.

Other than that, eventually I plan to apply some poetry to music. I'm playing in a couple of 5th wave emo bands with my musical brother, Michael Barnett. Normally, I focus entirely on drumming (my first instrument), but many of my musician pals have been encouraging me to experiment with literature in an instrumental setting. It could be cool.



Cover by Emily Conlon for the *Marshwood Songs*

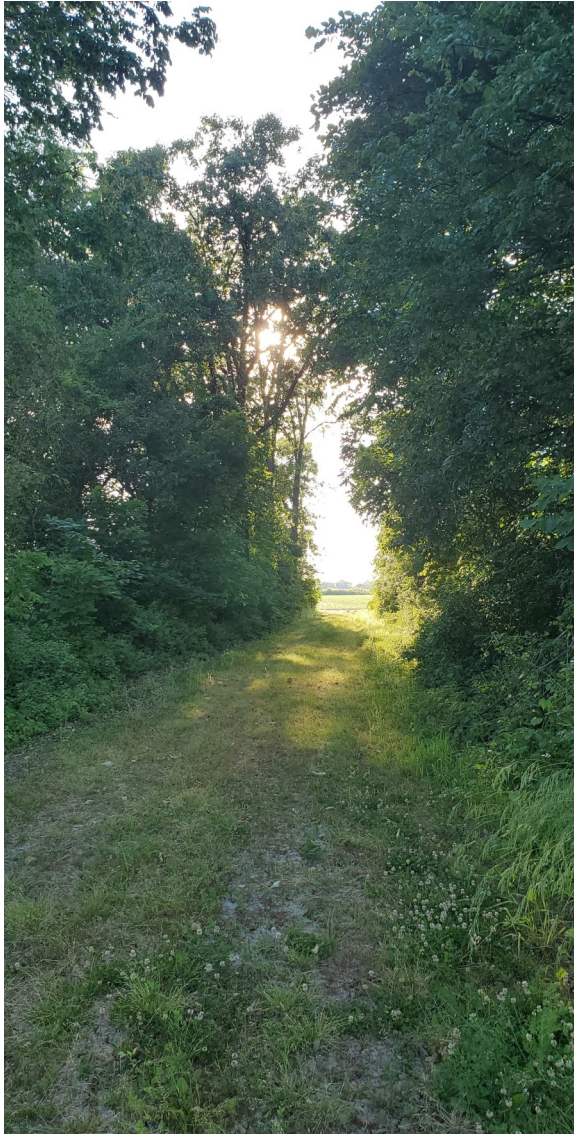
It seems that Southern Ontario's woods and other natural landscapes have had a significant influence on you and your work; how do you usually experience these environments, and what do they impress upon you as an artist?

As a kid I was lucky enough to have immediate access to a large swathe of field and woodland. Some of my earliest memories involve my mom taking me on walks in these locales. It was an experience that mystified me because, back then, these areas were wild and uncertain. The fact that they were unexplored invigorated me with a sense of hidden meaning. I felt that if I walked in any direction, eventually I'd arrive at something formerly lost. I imagined if I investigated anywhere at all, I'd find things that'd tell me stories of what had once been.

All of the locations I used to explore as a kid are being torn up by the incursion of suburbia. I feel like my memories are being erased by pavement—not only that, but also this landscape's memory and the possibility for other people to connect with their environment in any meaningful, organic capacity. Walking the same trail in Ojibway Park can become monotonous. The designated



Nick and Mike Barnett playing at Milk



Path from Nick's explorations

paths formulated by governance are absolutely sterile. There's little meaning in walking the same circuit on a sidewalk every single day—you're constrained to a homogenous, brainless experience—a "dark Satanic mill." Your monochromatic routes have been preordained, along with what you're allowed to perceive.

Treading only in accordance with the whim of the map—whose will are you really espousing? That's why I started trespass walking, to unfetter and see what's what. Going into these locations, it seems like I'm moving within history and presence in concurrence. It's nostalgia and freshness at the same time. I've found a lot of interesting places, experienced a beautiful—yet struggling—liminal nature, even met some cool and deranged people. It's both self-autonomizing and humbling.

Every landscape contains its own latent memory—its own particular happenstance. There are always specificities in each locale that reveals its own poetry, whether organic or industrial.

What are some places outside of Ontario that you would like to immerse yourself in, and what, if anything, would you hope to find there?

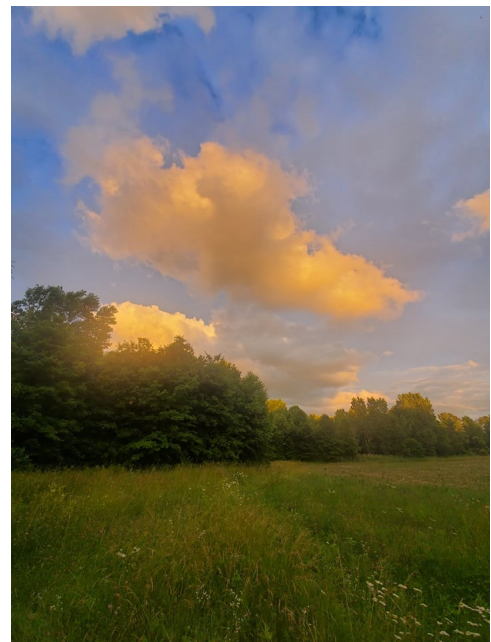
I want to visit the environments of my ancestors in Europe—Germany, France, Hungary etc. I want to see what those familial landscapes offer to me. Dr. Muse, one of my former instructors, told me I'd feel an immanent and genealogical connection to these places, and that's something I'm really curious about.

The next poem is one of my first deliberate trespass pieces. The poem catalogues abstracted images and sounds in passing, as me and an old pal, Jake Mclean, moved along the train-tracks at night, exploring random bush-lots here and there, feeling both

estranged and connected. We experienced liberation in diminution. Exploring liminal places we weren't meant to see—under the grandiosity of previously imperceptible starlight—our sense of personal insignificance extended to the social realm around us, and somehow lifted us up, making us powerful in the basic exertion of our step.

TRESPASS POETRY MARCH 21 2020

I mark my railway father with a church-bell,
with booted-faded mudded chuck mirage suffuse,
with barge song tinkling balance-beam tie-dye handy bud-print soil-tan I-love-yous,
young driftwood buffed trapeze pole dangling like a lampshade,
cross-placed plank curtains starry bead curvature two-horn dryad with the prong-staff deer-bone
shoulder-guard and a backpack,
stored leaf-pressed light assortments and water-bottles and poems and a faulty pendulum on the
copse-side,
slinging strident what-the-hell hobos screaming foxed rainbow trails on the cake-ground,
running antler claw sigil crust graphite packages our passport in the walk-apocalypse,
a spreading bonsai pedicle,
marrow fur marrow fur treasure we sat on the poplar rolled-steel rust for Joe's lovely lonely
saxophone,
mice listeners and buck curators, coyote peers we ordained there,
Iovan's manly bellows in the marsh-wood wallow immensity jabbering drum-stick knockings
against coppers and flashlights,
eloping in the georgic,
loping past the pass-sign,
observing aeroplane bugs like comet darts burning, doe-
eyed brothers gate-keeping at grade-school soccer nets
across the road, our entrance to the lark,
shouting the former grass-haired girl that wept by the wine-
bottle purple-housed and checker-souled and beautiful,
inscribing the bustling tract where I picture her golden
wheat-shear face,
fen hill thrones of strewn cinder, thermos coffee and hawk-
swells in the rinds of stumps,
I announce her kingcup quality in this wetland journal,
shouting transience and insignificance and snappish dog-
bark samples and two ambling cowherds in the froth and
quarantines for our side-step records on St. Patty's Day.



Another view from Nick's nature walks



Nick singing the body electric

We thank Nick for being our fourth guest in the Spot On! interview series, and we look forward to reading and hearing more of his work.

If you would like to keep up with Nick's music and writing, you can find him on Instagram @nick.hildenbrand.

We hope you enjoyed this interview! If you did, follow the Vanguard Youth Arts Collective on Facebook and Instagram @vanguard.collective and stay tuned for our October interview!