



VOL. 43 ISSUE 2

EXHIBIT  
INSTITUTION

**After All This by dreamcastmoe:  
Sexy Music for Dustheads**

By Tuhin Chakrabarti

1

**Financial Aid at  
Stony Brook:  
The Experiences of  
Two Students**

By Keating Zelenke

5

**More Than a Fashion  
Statement: The Telfar Bag**

By Katherine Heredia

11

**The Gentrification of  
Thrift Shopping**

By Katherine Heredia

15

**Irony at the Met Gala: The  
Class Divide in America**

By Carmela Cassara

21

**Hands Off My Uterus!**

By Samantha Aguirre

25

**“Malice and Hunger”**

By Daniel Donato

28

**How High Expectations Led to  
Disappointment Over**

**Lorde’s *Solar Power***

By Sydney Corwin and Rafael Cruvinel

29

**South Park’s Blame Game**

By Emily Scott

33

**The Inventory: Beginning Thoughts**

By Arun Nair

37

**Måneskin and the Joy of  
Discovering New Music**

By Sarah Beckford

39

**WARNING: Mothman  
Sightings in Suffolk County**

By Jin Ton

43

**“Tripli-Tee of Wife-Mans”  
& “Nature Scene”**

By TZilantro Slumber

45

**Songs of the  
Summer**

47



# Letter from the Editor



By Josh Joseph

I've been thinking a lot about loss lately. My cat Oliver passed away this month, just a few days after his tenth birthday, so quickly and unceremoniously that I couldn't process what was going to happen until the night before it did.

Last week, I went home for the weekend, pet him and could feel his vertebrae as I did. Days later, the vet found a large mass on his intestine. They didn't know whether it had spread, or if it was even operable — and they wouldn't know until they attempted surgery.

I tried to reassure myself, fixing in my head a future in which this was just a scary blip in the many years we had left together. But then he got worse — barely eating and secluding himself. The last time I saw him, he was nestled defensively under my parents' bed, refusing to budge. I stared at old pictures and felt the rush of a decade of memories cut off in an instant, in a single text from my sister just a day before he was scheduled for surgery.

I haven't been back home yet but I suspect there will be a void where he once was, curled up asleep on chairs or in boxes. Just the knowledge that he won't be there, that I won't have another chance to see him, pushes me into a place where I could ugly-cry for a long time. I think I've fallen back into denial for the time being, but I know there's a long slog of grief ahead. Memory feels like such a flimsy thing sometimes.

Here at the magazine, I'm just coming to the realization that this is really it — that there's less time ahead of me here than there is behind me now, and in less than a year I'll be somewhere else. I think I've been waxing poetic on that cold fact for as long as I've been writing these letters, but it's always there when I'm thinking about the future. I can't help it.

With each passing semester, more and more people vanish into the ether, and I will be one of those people too. Sometimes, that feeling makes me want to do every possible thing I can at once, at hyperspeed, before it's too late. Other times I feel paralyzed, unable to do much more than wake up, run my paces and go back to sleep on a hollow day. Reality lies somewhere between these two extremes. I'm learning to cope with the randomness of inspiration and the length of dull moments.

All that said, I don't mean to be a downer or anything. There's so much light and purpose I've found in doing this, something I can only hope to recapture after I leave school. I love The Press, and this magazine is not quite my last. There's still a lot left to do.



## THE STONY BROOK PRESS

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2021

Executive Editor	Josh Joseph
Managing Editor	Nick Wurm
Associate Editor	Emily Scott
Business Manager	Elisha Asif
News Editors	Janet Chow Melanie Formosa
Opinions Editor	Falah Jalali
Features Editors	Sarah Beckford Keating Zelenke
Culture Editors	Sarah Beckford Julio Taku
Music Editors	Emily Scott Julio Taku
Science Editors	Arun Nair Sam Rowland
Lead Copy Editor	Melanie Formosa
Multimedia Editors	Elisha Asif Falah Jalali
Graphics Editors	Komal Grewal Keating Zelenke Cris Zhang
Ombud Team	Jeni Dhodary Justin Liganan

## JOIN THE PRESS

The Press is located on the third floor of the SAC and is always looking for artists, writers, graphic designers, critics, photographers and creatives!

Meetings are Wednesdays in SAC 307K at 1PM and 7:30PM.



after all this by  
**dreamcastmoe**

sexy music for dustheads

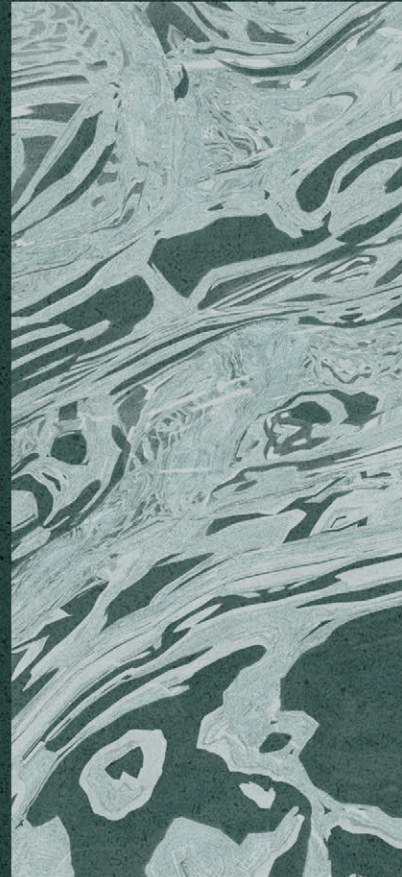
by tuhin  
chakrabarti

# truly **sexy** music

seems like a thing of the archetypal 1980s. The luxe, nostalgia-addled hallucination of plastic-laminate luxury and brick glass, combined with cocaine and digital synthesis, seems like a paradigmatic backdrop for hypersexually smooth music. Numerous examples of commercial R&B and soul from the '80s can back this up. The primary current of music during this time was thickened with Moog bass, spiced with an aspirational sexuality, and simmered in the political, legal and psychological-spiritual manipulation of the Black community.

The '80s were a nest for the two most radical potentialities in the timeline of Black American music — rap and house music. The common thread between these genres is their eloquent danceability as a vehicle for political reimagination, Black liberation and revisionism, while also acting as a simultaneous trauma therapy. Sexiness then becomes a function of the music, not a feature. *Smoothness* in music is an oddly subjective measure, and an ideal destination for a generation of beat-makers looking to reconnect to the complex traumas of their ancestors. It remains anchored in the 1975-1981 sound, and reduplicated in the sounds of '90s Houston rap, g-funk, deep house, disco house and neo-soul. There is no ebb and flow more consistent than the trauma healing process, the only one being the flow of information between the crate-digging beatmakers of today and their forefathers.

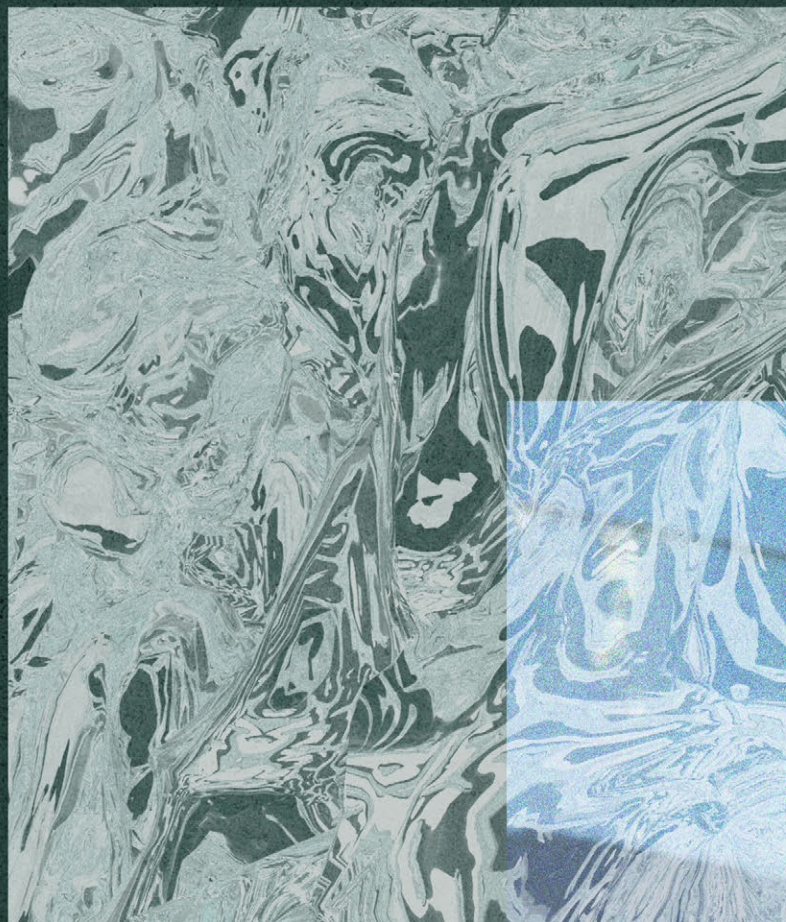
Dreamcastmoe is a shining example of an absorbent dusthead, finding himself in the nestle of Washington, D.C.'s fecund dance circuit. His 4-song EP *After All This*, released on July 27, 2021, is the epitome of nostalgic soul-searching. This sense of wandering finds consistency



within the boogie-funk genre, where it remains stylistically dedicated. There's no more evidence of moe's nostalgic yearnings than his partnership with People's Potential Unlimited (PPU), a D.C.-based record label whose online store sells private pressings from some of the most obscure artists of the emerging boogie-funk genre in the '80s. The label is run by Andrew Morgan and his partner, who started by reselling obscure vinyl on eBay and "whose ability to identify and source incredibly obscure Black music is now the stuff of legend."

*After All This* is packed tight with references to this specific obscurity, laden with tight drum programming enveloped in boom-bap warmth, folded into square-shaped bass lines that leave a resounding phonk in the air. All of this supports moe's pining vocal performance, one befallen by a desperate soul romance, underscored by decadent boogie-funk beats and expert glide.

Every song is a personal reflection on transitional relationships, the ones we form with ourselves, others and with objects to anchor us amid chaos. These reflections include explorations on self-assurance, attachment and hedonism. On "lou," he affirms that "I owe you / No Answer," and on "L Foot, Right" he dances away his worries: "Forget about paying them bills / We gon' just chill." The best song is "You Had Better Deliver," a warm, synth and bass-powered investigation into the relapse of attachment. Second best is "L Foot, Right," a four-on-the-floor roller rink party with a sexy chant.



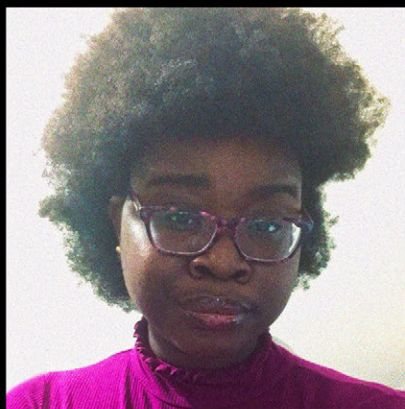
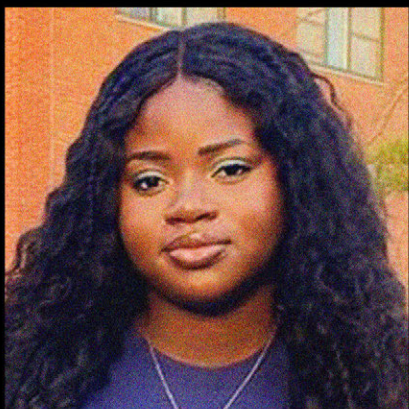
crate digging in a hyper-connected world transcends time and space: one can live through the 1980s via a youtube playlist.

While the personal reflection on this album is inherently complex, the overarching reflections on musical identity are what delivers its profundity. *After All This* is a deeply referential work, one that blurs the line between an obscure '80s PPU release and contemporary R&B. The responsiveness reflected in it is a treasure — crate digging in a hyper-connected world transcends time and space: one can live through the '80s via a YouTube playlist. It allows the subject to position themselves in physically inaccessible communities. It provides an “alternative

geography of belonging.”

This connectivity goes farther for the Black beat-making youth. Through sampling and record collecting, artists like dreamcastmoe can musically demonstrate their reckoning with the ephemeral stories contained in reissued, obscure Black music. It's also a shining example of why we need to archive and preserve as much of these authentic, non-commercial “private pressings” as we can before all that's left is a commercialized — and often whitewashed and banalized — byproduct. ■





# Financial Aid at Stony Brook

The Experiences of Two Students  
By Keating Zelenke





Damilola Oseni sat on a cushioned bench in the brand-new Student Union. Her braids swung as she examined the new building — the high ceiling, the glossy white floors, the prison-made furniture. Anger — maybe disgust, maybe disdain — crawled up her throat like hot vomit.

“I know they have money, they just built this whole building,”

she said, throwing her arms up. The Stony Brook Union cost \$63.4 million to demolish and rebuild. The university seemed to produce the money with ease. Her first semester cost only a little over \$5,000. They had nothing to give her.

Her voice dropped low, as if she were about to whisper a secret or say a swear word under her breath.

“Did I do something wrong?”

she asked in a small voice.

For Oseni, who was born in Nigeria and emigrated to the U.S. at 7 years old, academics have always been a priority. She worked all throughout middle and high school to earn the scholarships she thought would make college — and later, medical school — a reality.

But when she applied to Stony Brook and proudly presented her 4.0 GPA and Advanced Placement credits to the university, it felt like admissions only turned their noses up at everything she had worked so hard to earn. She didn't receive a cent in scholarships or financial aid.

One night a few days into the semester, while crying on FaceTime with a friend, Oseni typed out a plea on GoFundMe to help pay for her education. During Orientation and Welcome Week, she had spent over \$500 on train rides, Ubers and buses for her commute from Hempstead, in addition to food during the day. The weight of how she would keep this up for the whole semester — and the next four years — was crushing.

Yet everyone around her was celebrating. A sea of people in red shirts with *CLASS OF 2025* splayed across their chests surrounded her as she attended the mandatory events scheduled all week long.

“I was under the impression that it was gonna be something academic,” she said. “I came here and it was like little party stuff, and I was very confused and upset.”

If freshmen don't attend the mandatory events held during orientation, their SOLAR accounts are put on hold and they have to take the Required Orientation Makeup Experience during the semester.



Oseni — a Black woman — left that first weekend’s “Gender Awareness and Equality” lecture and “Seawolves This is Us: an All Inclusive Campus Community” presentation in a panicked frenzy. She scrambled to find a way home, and wondered on the two trains she took back to Hempstead how she’d tell her parents the whole weekend had been a waste of time and money.

Outside, Hurricane Henri cut the sky open like a wound and rain spilled down the window to her side. She waited two hours for the bus. The bus that normally would have taken her right to her house doesn’t run on weekends, so she got dropped off and tried to call an Uber to take her the rest of the way.

“There was no Uber because of the rain,” she said.

She walked home in the dark while Henri poured rain down her back and whipped her braids in the wind.

It takes weeks to schedule an interview with Subomi Babawale — between finishing up her degree, working and trying to sort out her immigration status, she doesn’t have much spare time. Her paintbrushes collect dust. She hasn’t been able to think about art much with everything going on.

This is not the first time she’s had to juggle her visa and academics.

“February was actually when I was supposed to be kicked out [of the university],” Babawale said. As an international student from Nigeria, she’s not eligible for any federal aid, and she did not have the money to pay her tuition on time. With a hold on her SOLAR account until she paid, she was still not able to enroll in classes after the add/drop/swap period ended.

“I was supposed to come up with 20-something thousand dollars,” she said.

If Customs noticed that she wasn’t enrolled in classes, her student visa would be terminated and she would be deported.

“I called the financial aid office and begged for any kind of extension,” Babawale said. The Bursar would eventually give her more time, but she still didn’t have any way to pay. Her family sold land and valuables back in Nigeria. It wouldn’t be enough, though.

A friend recommended that Babawale make a GoFundMe, so by the glow of her laptop screen, she poured her prayers into a campaign: *I have toiled so hard academically and my family has worked so hard financially. ... Please, any sort of assistance will go a long way for me and my family.*



Babawale's GoFundMe flashed through the Instagram timelines of Stony Brook students and her secondary schoolmates in Nigeria. Since she posted her campaign last winter, she has raised \$80,000 for her education and will complete her degree at the end of this semester.

"I didn't think it was going to happen for me, to be honest," she said.

Despite expressing her gratitude to the donors, her tone reveals she's a bit jaded from the ordeal — she should never have been put in this situation. When asked about whether or not the university was helpful over the past stressful few years, Babawale sighed deeply.

"I always felt there was more they could have done," she said. "They just didn't want to."

Her words are heavy with exhaustion and the understanding that the university could be doing more for everyone. But at a school with 16,000 undergraduate students — many of them attending a public state school specifically because they couldn't afford a private university — could the university really help everyone?

The conversation lapses into a discussion about her life after Stony Brook and advice for students who might also be facing barriers to receiving an education, which she disseminates happily. Her

most important piece of wisdom: "If you have a problem, *ask*." The GoFundMe that would allow her to complete her degree was born out of a conversation with a friend — neither of them had any idea how it would change her life.

And while reaching out specifically to international students and lower-income students: "The playing field is not designed for people like us... *but don't ever look down on yourself* because the minute you start to look down on yourself is the minute that others start to look down on you."

Speaking with Damilola and Subomi was a bit like peering into a fun house mirror. The reflection isn't exactly the same — our lives are pinched and stretched in different places — yet it feels so familiar.

Though I received some scholarships from the university and some federal loans, every year I still have about \$20,000 I can't pay. The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) estimates that my family should somehow be able to cough up nearly \$27,000 towards my education per year, but they can't help me *at all*. I have gone over this in my brain hundreds of times, but I always end up with the same question: how could the FAFSA be so *wrong*?

Sometimes reality settles over me like silt on the bottom of a river and I panic. I'm 20 and I'm tens of thousands of dollars in debt. One night my

Her words are heavy with exhaustion and the understanding that the university could be doing more for everyone. But at a school with 16,000 undergraduate students, could the university really help everyone?

sophomore year, I sat on the floor crying because I felt like I should be cam-modeling or stripping or something — *anything* — to be making more money and lowering my debt as much as possible.

My mother and I spent days not talking over the summer because I wanted to save money by living in my car and she didn't feel that was safe. She was a first-generation college student in the early 1990s and insists that she paid off her student loans with ease over her 10-year repayment period after she graduated. What she and other parents who encourage their kids to take out loans don't recognize is that not only did her degree cost less, but it was also valued higher by employers.

When I asked Damilola what she had sacrificed in order to come here, I expected her to talk about material things, like the fact that her entire family moved from Flushing so she could be close enough to commute instead of dorming on-campus. That wasn't what she told me, though.

"Just my own sanity," she replied. "I know that this school focuses on that, but realistically, for my situation, my mental health isn't going to be prioritized at all."

Conversely, Subomi, nearly at the end of her time as an undergraduate, said she felt better than she did earlier this year, but the fate of her immigration status after she graduates is like a cold, flat stone over her heart.

"It's getting very hard to relax."

When SBU News published a profile of Subomi earlier this year, they highlighted her "resiliency" while failing to recognize that their demands had

What she and other parents who encourage their kids to take out loans don't recognize is that not only did her degree cost less, but it was also valued higher by employers.

put her at a disadvantage to begin with. I hesitate to end this on a hopeful note like they did. I want Damilola and Subomi to succeed. I want Damilola to go to medical school and become a doctor. I want Subomi to get her doctorate and work at the U.N. They both deserve to excel, and they both would be perfect for the positions they're pursuing.

But the truth is, many, many students will graduate from Stony Brook and still struggle to make ends meet for the rest of their lives. One in five Stony Brook graduates report not making any progress on their loans two years after receiving their degree. It feels a little bit like a slap in the face to those one in five students to see Stony Brook flaunting their "dedication" to improving social mobility.

These numbers are not a reflection on any given one of us — capitalism peddles the myth that if you work hard enough, anyone can be anything. The university can blame the debt of thousands of students on a "volatile and mercurial global economy" all they want, but by graduation, Maurie McInnis will hold her nearly \$700,000 annual income in one hand and pass you your bill with the other. This school is an "Evil Institution" — it's etched right into the concrete across from the new Union. ■



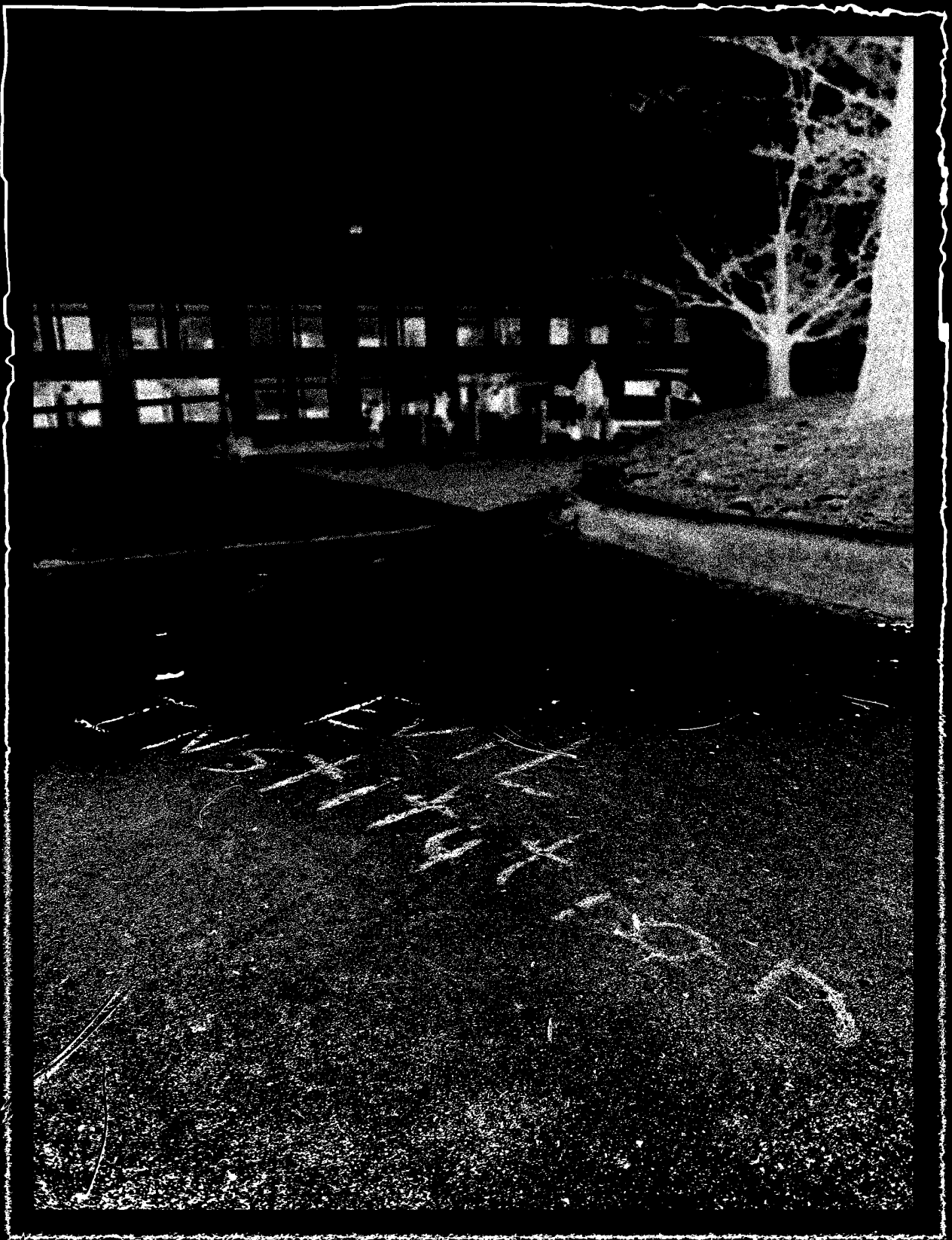
*Damilola Oseni removed her GoFundMe page a few days after initially speaking with me in late August, afraid her parents would find out she had started the campaign. She has since received a relief grant from the financial aid office, though it is not enough to cover her tuition.*

*Subomi Babawale's education has been fully financed and she will graduate at Winter Commencement with a B.A. in psychology and a minor in geology. She is still searching for a way to secure a place for herself in the United States.*

*Maurie McInnis will make \$695,000 this year with guaranteed housing at the President's House in Old Field, 10 minutes north of the university. She will also receive an automobile allowance.*



*Cover photos courtesy of Damilola Oseni (left) and Subomi Babawale (right). "Evil Institution" photos by Josh Joseph and Keating Zelenke.*



**MORE THAN  
A FASHION  
STATEMENT**

**NO**

**THE  
TELFAR  
BAG**

**BY  
KATHERINE  
HEREDIA**



OT NOT NOT NOT NOT NO

The Telfar bag, or the “Bushwick Birkin” as some have started to call it on social media, was originally released back in 2014.

However, over the past year, it has become probably the most sought after Black-owned accessory in the market. The iconic bag has built such a cult following that the brand is announcing new drops every week and consistently selling out.

Many celebrities have been seen rocking Telfar bags, including Oprah Winfrey, Beyonce, Wendy Williams, Bella Hadid, Selena Gomez and even politicians like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

So how did this simple vegan leather bag gain so much popularity?

It all started in 2005, when Liberian-American Designer Telfar Clemens, then a student at Pace University, decided to start their own brand of unisex clothing. They wanted to make something that transcends gender; the motto of the brand is “not for you — for everyone.”

After the unjust deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery and many others, the Black Lives Matter movement garnered attention across the nation, creating a national outcry to support Black businesses. Since then, Telfar has seen an uptick in demand for their bags.

FOR  
YOU —



FOR  
FOR FOR FOR FOR FOR

FOR

EVERYONE

WHAT'S MORE MO  
WHAT'S  
FASHIONABLE  
THAN  
G A BAG  
THAT'S USED TO T  
CARRY  
ON? FASHION? FAS





# DRE MORE MORE MO

The iconic Telfar bag logo is actually a monogram standing for Clemens' full name. When Clemens was in school, their teacher made monograms for every one of his students and the Telfar logo was the symbol assigned to them.

Many of Clemens' designs are a commentary on identity, American culture and consumerism.

"We were just looking at everyone with their holiday shopping bags and thought it was so funny to think of that as a unisex silhouette," they said. "We literally measured a Bloomingdale's bag to make ours... If you think about it, what's more fashionable than a bag that's used to carry fashion?"

CJ Green is a fashion enthusiast and Telfar bag collector. They saw valuable representation in the Telfar brand.

"Anytime I have the opportunity to support queer people of color, I absolutely take the time to because I feel like these communities have faced so much oppression on multiple axes that make both their survival and success even more difficult," they said. "Additionally, I feel so much love and pride to be able to see myself reflected in a fashion company that I admire. Fashion is one of the biggest parts of expressing who I am, and to have someone like me

representing and serving me feels good."

The message of the brand from day one was about diversity and inclusion. It's beyond performative activism — when compared to luxury brands from other designers, the Telfar is affordable. The price point for a Telfar Bag ranges from \$150 to \$257, well below the thousands of dollars that many high fashion brands charge for similarly stylish products. Because of this pricing, Telfar has been able to develop a fan base in a range of ages, classes, cultures, sexual orientations and gender identities.

As the demand for these bags continues to grow, Telfar's online store consistently sells out. In response to resellers buying up and selling the bags for marked-up prices, Telfar developed the Bag Security Program, opening preorders for custom bags months in advance and ensuring that everyone is able to secure a reasonably priced Telfar bag, rather than turn to a scalper. This way, the brand is able to ensure its affordable luxury status.

Wearing a Telfar bag is not just a fashion statement, but a political statement. It shows your support for the Black and Queer community. ■



**ALL  
MERCHANDISE  
SOLD  
AS IS**

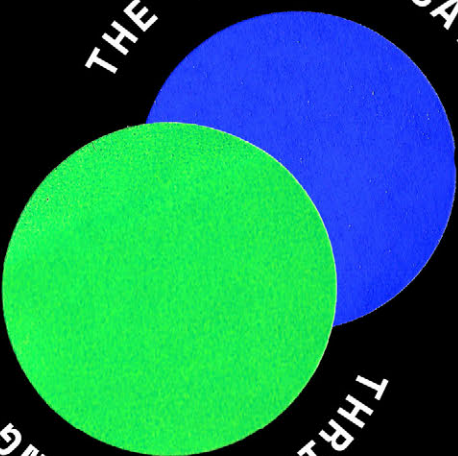
ALL ITEMS SOLD AS IS  
NO WARRANTIES EXPRESSED OR IMPLIED  
CHECK WITH CONSUMER PRODUCT SAFETY  
AGENCIES FOR RECALLED ITEMS

TODO LOS ARTICULOS SE VENDEN COMO ESTAN  
NO HAY GARANTIAS EXPRESADAS O IMPLICADAS  
PARA INFORMACION DE PRODUCTOS QUE HAN SIDO  
QUITADOS DEL MERCADO LLAME A LA AGENCIA DE  
SEGURIDAD DE PRODUCTOS DEL CONSUMIDOR

# WOMEN'S



THE GENTRIFICATION OF  
THRIFT SHOPPING



BY KATHERINE HEREDIA



PHOTOS BY KEATING ZELENKE AND JOSH JOSEPH



gen·tri·fi·ca·tion  
 /,jentrəfə'kāSH(ə)n/  
 noun

- The process whereby the character of a poor urban area is changed by wealthier people moving in, improving housing, and attracting new businesses, typically displacing current inhabitants in the process.
- The process of making someone or something more refined, polite, or respectable.

How are gentrification and thrift shopping related? Well, for a long time there was a stigma attached to wearing clothes that once belonged to a stranger. It was seen as unsanitary and displayed a lack of wealth. These beliefs stemmed from antisemitism and xenophobia.

In the late 19th century, Jewish immigrants first started selling used clothes from pushcarts on the street. These immigrants often didn't have many other employment options due to antisemitism.

Discrimination impacted their ability to sell clothes outside of their own communities. A May 1884 issue of the Saturday Evening Post included a satirical story about a girl who bought a dress from a Jewish-owned resale shop and was later humiliated at a party when one of the other guests recognized it. The girl would even end up contracting smallpox from the garment and spreading it to her family, perpetuating the belief that thrifted clothing was somehow unsanitary.

Regardless of how it has been viewed by society, the buying and selling of second-hand clothing has always existed. However, it wasn't until the Industrial Revolution — when clothing became mass-produced and thus seen as more disposable by its owners — that thrift stores really came into existence as they are today.

Thrift store chains, like Goodwill or Salvation Army, were created with the intent of providing clothing and giving back to those in poverty. These thrift stores often make it easier for immigrants to find clothes and assimilate into American culture. They also provide other social services like job training and employment placement services. Unfortunately, people who buy used clothes out of necessity are still too often associated with poverty and treated poorly as a result.

Avid thrift shopper Salimata Toure, 20, dealt with this stigma growing up, before thrifting became the popular trend it is today.

"I mainly felt judged as a kid because I got made fun of when I went to school," she said. "I'd show up with thrifted clothes or my Sketchers and get the shit bullied out of me in 2008 just for those same girls to wear them now in 2021 because it's trendy."

Toure said she was glad that thrifting is growing in popularity because of its environmental benefits. But she was annoyed by the appropriation of an industry that provides a lifeline for lower income people like herself.

"At the same time, a lot of these people can afford more expensive clothing and they just want the cute thrifted look for an aesthetic. That frustrates me because it feels like [they're] making poverty a trend."

Toure also expressed her frustration at finding clothing in her size due to shoppers purposely buying larger clothing in order to achieve an "oversized" look.

"I literally just have trouble buying clothes in other places because a) they're expensive, or b) not in my size. So when I go to thrift stores hoping for cheap plus-size clothes, a lot of them are already gone."

Now, in the age of influencer culture, thrift shopping has become fashionable — especially among young people. This is mostly due to the influence of social media platforms like YouTube. Some thrift haul videos garner millions of views. There's also been a rise in popular resale apps like Depop, where thrifted clothes are often resold again at much higher profit margins. About 90% of Depop's active users are under the age of 26. These factors play a large role in the destigmatization — and gentrification — of second-hand clothing.

While it's great that thrifting is no longer something to be looked down upon, its popularity has significant drawbacks for the people who rely on thrift stores' affordability. Sellers on Depop tend to "clear out" thrift stores of all their high quality, trendy clothing, leaving nothing but lower quality clothing left for the people who shop there because they can't afford anything else. These sellers then mark up their items to unaffordable prices. They may have bought a pair of jeans at the thrift store for \$7, but then go on to sell them for \$200 on Depop.

Consignment shop worker Karen Velaquez, 20, has watched Depop sellers come into her store and completely change the industry in recent years. She said she's noticed many resellers come into the store and search for certain branded items due to their popularity. As someone who thrifts herself, she said it has been harder to find quality items because thrift stores have become aware of these trends, increasing their prices.

"When you do [find things,] they're usually \$12 to \$16 plus, which isn't a lot, but compared to back then when I would find Harley t-shirts for five dollars, it's a big difference," she said, "especially for the people that go to thrift stores because they genuinely can't afford to shop anywhere else."

"IT FEELS LIKE THEY'RE MAKING POVERTY A TREND."







Velaquez's workplace is located in Commack, "which is in no way a poor town" according to her. She's noticed people from upper-middle class communities like Smithtown and Dix Hills coming into thrift stores and making purchases ranging from \$30 to \$100, or even more.

"By no means are the people that shop at my store depending solely on thrift stores for clothing items. These are the kind of people that can spend \$50 on a pair of jeans or even a t-shirt and not bat an eye."

Velaquez said that growing up, thrifting was looked down upon and something to be ashamed of. She's happy to see the destigmatization of buying clothing second hand. However, she still has some reservations.

"The issue is that these people who can easily afford higher-end goods are going in and capitalizing on the cheaper items for profit because it's just making it harder for the families that depend on thrifts to be able to buy the items they need."

Since thrift stores have caught on and begun to hike up the prices of trendy items, many low-income customers have been forced to turn away from thrift stores and towards fast fashion. Even if the quality of these items is lower, at least they can afford the trendy clothing that is otherwise being bought up by middle- and upper-class shoppers. And when these clothes eventually either wear out or fall out of style, they have nowhere to go but the landfill. Because of virtual thrift apps like Poshmark, Thredup and Depop, the act of thrifting has been appropriated by the middle class.

This gentrification goes completely against the original intention of providing clothing to low-income individuals. The clothing resale industry has become exploitative and unethical, as stores turn their backs on the people who created them and need them the most.

There's nothing inherently wrong with enjoying thrift shopping — it is more environmentally sustainable to reuse and repurpose clothing. It also helps curtail fast fashion and the exploitation of garment workers around the world. However, the needs of people who need thrift stores the most can't be overlooked. Low-income people deserve to wear quality, trendy clothing as much as anyone else. Middle- and upper-class people must address their economic privilege and how their consumerism may be impacting people with fewer resources. ■

THE NEEDS OF PEOPLE WHO NEED THRIFT STORES THE MOST CAN'T BE OVERLOOKED.



HYPOCRISY



AT THE





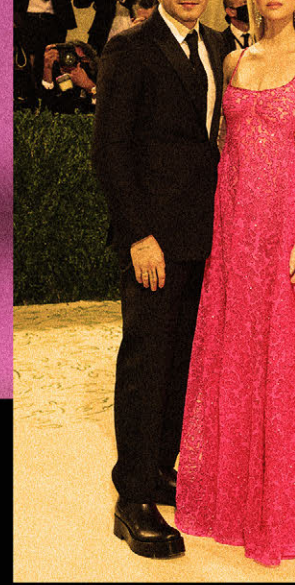
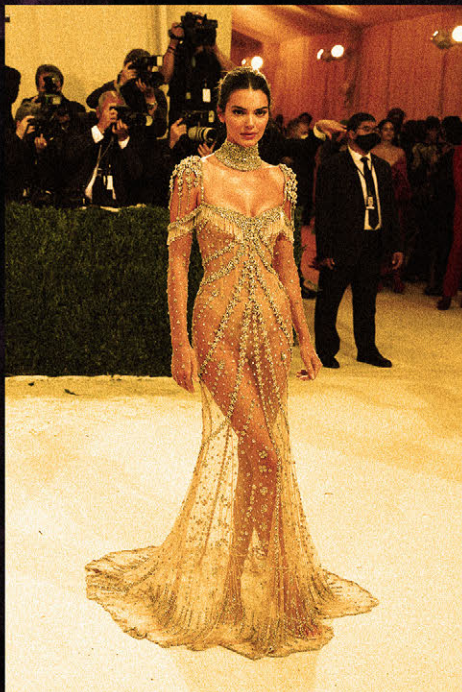


MET

GALA

THE CLASS DIVIDE  
IN AMERICA

BY CARMELA  
CASSARA





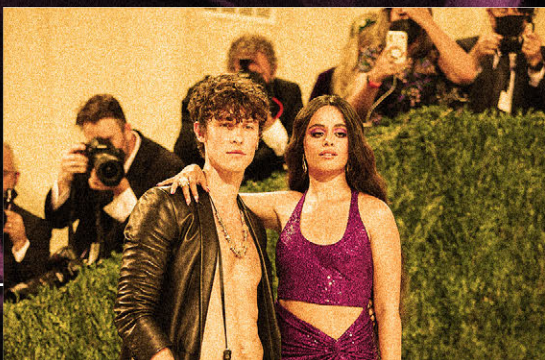
# THE MET GALA.

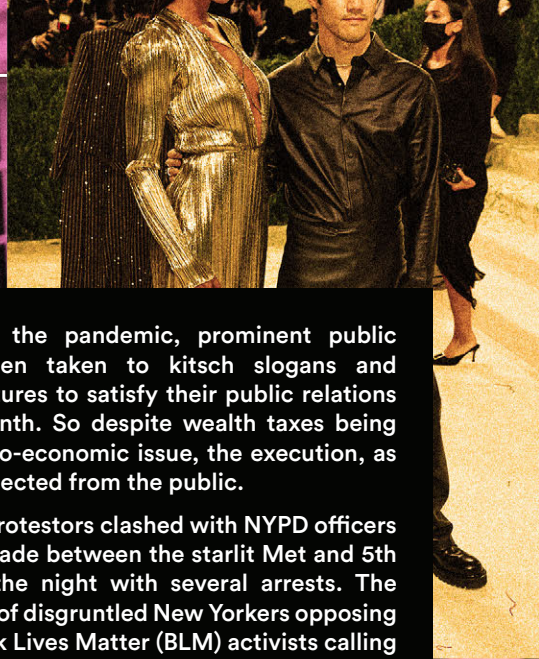
It's one of the most highly anticipated events in the fashion world. An annual clash of upper-class peacocking and faux political statements. Social media buzzes about the event for months — and rightly so. It serves as a lavish means of raising money for the Metropolitan Museum of Art as well as a celebration of its Costume Institute's new exhibit. With each ticket starting at \$30,000, it's no wonder the event has raised over \$13 million for two consecutive years since 2018. Although this year's Gala was on a smaller scale due to COVID-19 concerns, it still managed to produce its usual quality of upscale fashion and celebrities. The theme for this year was "America: a Lexicon of Fashion" — a celebration of American industry and innovation.

Among the off-theme garb and eclectic regalia, one gown in particular made its way to the political stage, sparking an important debate on the class divide in America. Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez debuted at her very first Met Gala sporting a beautiful off-the-shoulder white dress with "TAX THE RICH" scrawled in red grunge lettering on the back. The irony did not go unnoticed. On the surface, it is a simple phrase meant to call out the unfair taxation rates across different economic classes. But within the context of the gala, her message came across as a crass attempt at "woke" activism. Similar to Cara Delevingne's "PEG THE PATRIARCHY" ensemble, Ocasio-Cortez's dress represents the clamor to stay relevant in a highly performative society.

Ocasio-Cortez is vital in providing a voice for more than 650,000 people across the Bronx and Queens, as she is the representative of New York City's 14th district. Although she did attend this star-studded event, Ocasio Cortez is a "woman of the people," and her core beliefs reflect the grassroots campaign that won her a spot in the House of Representatives. She's known as a progressive who advocates for issues like climate change, civil justice and, more notably, the wealth tax.

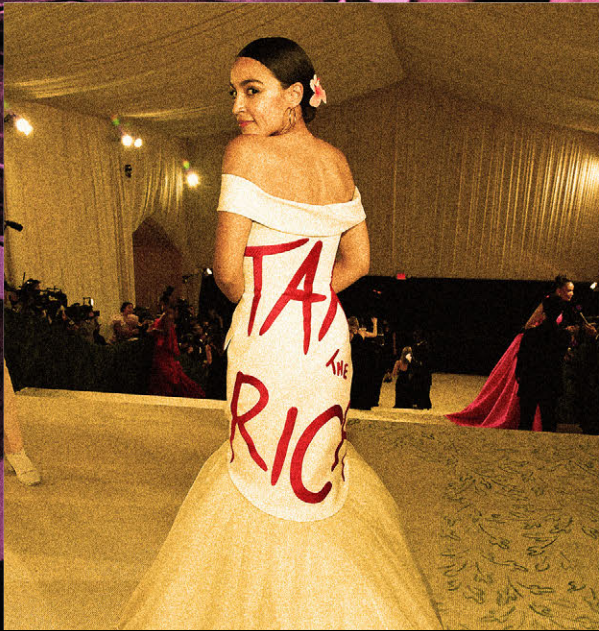
Many working-class individuals would agree to increased marginal tax rates, especially considering the glaringly obvious wealth gap between themselves and CEO giants like Jeff Bezos or celebrities like the Kardashians. During the height of the pandemic, while people struggled to buy bare necessities and COVID-19 deaths skyrocketed, big names in Hollywood proved just how painfully out of touch they are with a poorly-edited, poorly-sung rendition of "Imagine" by John Lennon. Their luxurious homes in the background served as a constant reminder of just how differently elites were experiencing the pandemic.





Yet even before the pandemic, prominent public figures have often taken to kitsch slogans and performative gestures to satisfy their public relations quota for the month. So despite wealth taxes being an important socio-economic issue, the execution, as always, is disconnected from the public.

Simultaneously, protestors clashed with NYPD officers outside the barricade between the starlit Met and 5th Avenue, ending the night with several arrests. The protest consisted of disgruntled New Yorkers opposing the Gala and Black Lives Matter (BLM) activists calling for Mayor Bill de Blasio, who attended the Gala, to defund the police. Both groups were there for different reasons, but the underlying issue was money. BLM supporters organized in defiance of the NYPD budget, which provides the department with \$11 billion in resources. Meanwhile predominantly Black and Latinx communities aren't given even a fraction of that aid despite being in desperate need of help.



Neighborhoods like these were hit the hardest during the pandemic, with people of color suffering higher mortality rates from COVID-19 and more severe economic setbacks. The Met Gala was a distasteful display of wealth and privilege in a city still healing from the wounds inflicted by the pandemic.

In a way, this year's theme did succeed in representing America — its values, its political climate, its reality. Amidst a deadly pandemic, historic rates of homelessness, a devastating eviction crisis and inflated unemployment rates, New York City witnessed the upper-class throw money away at a glorified costume party. While the city still struggles to crawl its way out of financial ruin, its inhabitants were able to see just how generous the rich and famous are when it serves their interests, and how disparate the class divide has become. ■

OCASIO-CORTEZ'S DRESS REPRESENTS THE CLAMOR TO STAY RELEVANT IN A HIGHLY PERFORMATIVE SOCIETY.





# HANDS OFF MY UTERUS!

By Samantha Aguirre

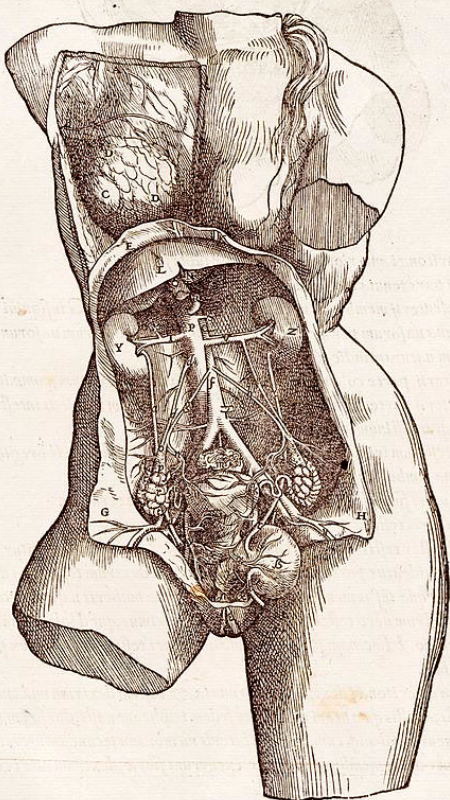
**O**n Sept. 1, like a scene from a dystopian novel, Texas officially banned abortions post-six weeks throughout the state. Senate Bill (SB) 8, also commonly known as the Texas Heartbeat Act, is one of the most restrictive abortion bans in the country. Not only is it a violation of the rights of all people with uteruses around the country, but it is also a breach of *Roe v. Wade*.

Decided by the Supreme Court in January of 1973, *Roe v. Wade* confirmed access to abortion for every pregnant person anywhere in the country up to 24-28 weeks into pregnancy. According to Planned Parenthood, 79% of Americans do not want *Roe v. Wade* overturned, yet with SB 8, Texas is blatantly taking away the right to abortion at six weeks, which is months before fetal viability — the point at which a fetus would have a chance at survival outside the uterus. This is a clear violation of a nearly 50-year-long precedent, yet the Supreme Court refused to block the bill in a 5-4 decision. What does this mean for *Roe v. Wade*? What does this mean for the rights of all Americans?

Alongside this bill, Texas Governor Greg Abbott has made a \$10,000 bounty available for anyone, in Texas or elsewhere, who agrees to report and sue a person involved in an abortion case at any degree. This is a particularly upsetting aspect of this bill because it is pitting Americans against one another.

In her dissent from the court after they refused to block the bill, Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor said it best — Texas is mobilizing these civilians as “bounty hunters.” This puts a target on the backs of women and it puts clinics who provide access to safe abortions and anyone who “aids and abets” an abortion in a dangerous position.

Dr. Alan Braid, a Texas-based physician, has already been sued by multiple plaintiffs seeking to challenge the law, after admitting he performed a post-six weeks abortion in an op-ed for The Washington Post. Ironically, suits like this may



VIGB

end up being beneficial in the fight for reproductive rights. If they are challenged and taken to higher courts, they may create opportunities to overturn SB 8 and uphold *Roe v. Wade*. However, the bounty is still deputizing citizens, and although the potential for an overturn would be a great stride for reproductive rights, less altruistic lawsuits can severely impact those like Dr. Braid who are forced to face them.

The ban does not only limit the amount of time in which people are able to get abortions, it also makes no exceptions for cases of rape, sexual assault or incest. These lawmakers are taking away the right for people with uteruses to have agency in their own lives. The law's refusal to acknowledge even these most extreme cases shows that the lives of pregnant people are simply not the priority of these lawmakers. Some argue that cases of rape and incest are less than 1% of abortion cases anyway, but why does that matter? Those cases still count and should be acknowledged. A person should be able to get an abortion for whatever reason they see fit. Whether it is an extreme situation like assault, or one in which a pregnant person simply does not want the responsibility of carrying or raising a child, that should be their prerogative — not the choice of people who will never know them and never think of them again.

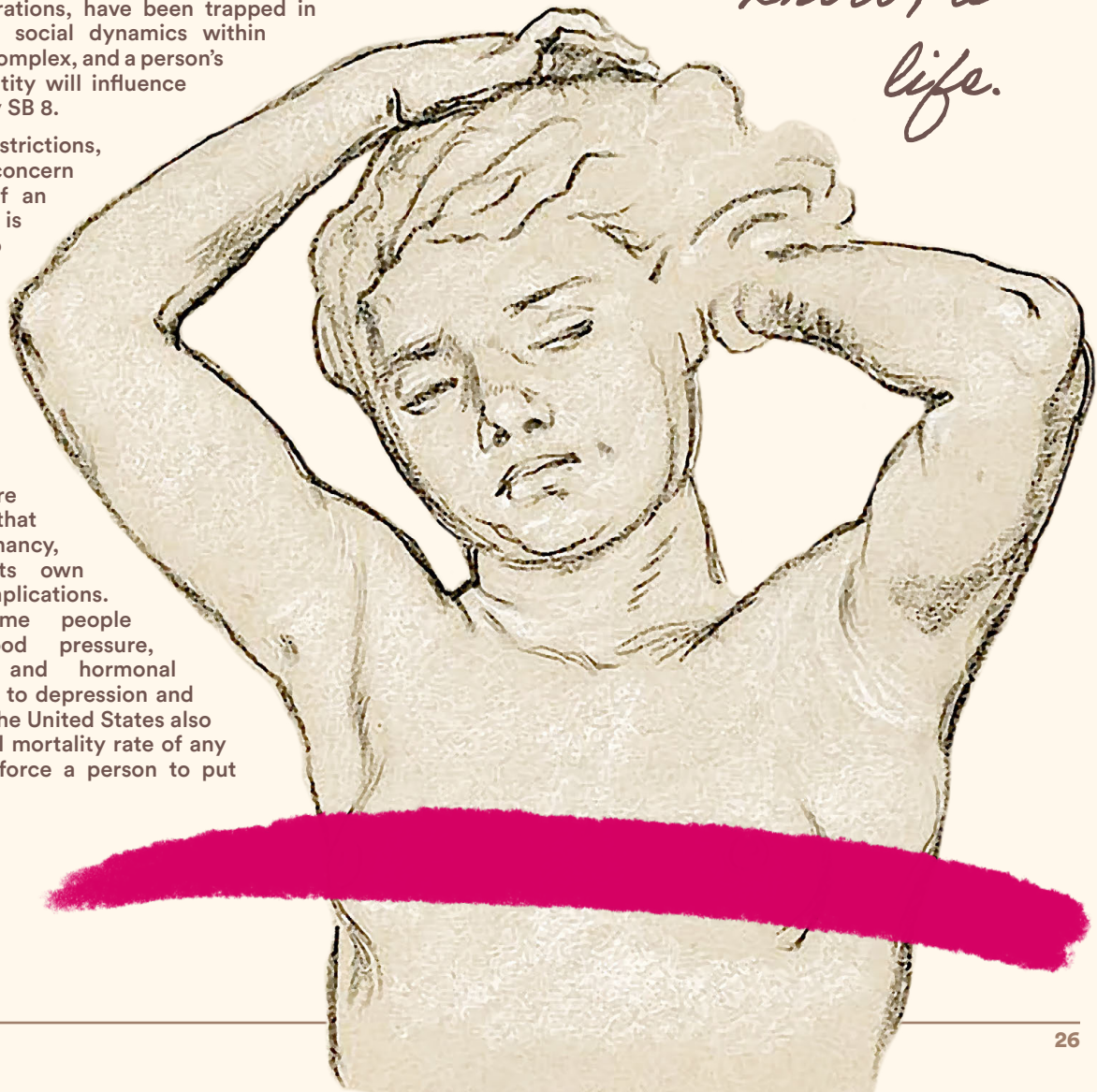
It is important to note this is also a class issue — those who have the funds and opportunity to travel out of Texas will be able to get access to an abortion, but someone without such mobility will be further victimized by this bill. This will go deeper in disproportionately affecting women and people of color who, for generations, have been trapped in cycles of poverty. The social dynamics within reproductive rights are complex, and a person's social position and identity will influence how they are affected by SB 8.

With these abortion restrictions, it is clear there is more concern for the potential life of an unborn baby than there is for pregnant people who are already grappling with life-changing challenges. People seem to forget someone seeking an abortion is already a person with goals, dreams, loved ones — you know, a *life* — and these lawmakers are forcing them to alter that life and undergo a pregnancy, which comes with its own physical and mental complications. From pregnancy, some people experience high blood pressure, gestational diabetes and hormonal changes which can lead to depression and other mental illnesses. The United States also has the highest maternal mortality rate of any developed country. To force a person to put

themselves at risk of these health challenges against their will is wrong. That is not pro-life, that is just anti-abortion.

This is the United States of America in 2021, and these laws make it feel like we've jumped back 50 years. The way the bill is termed the "Heartbeat Act" and the way anti-choice and anti-abortion people label themselves as pro-life is a tactic to engender certain emotions about pregnancy, and to gain support for their movement. They want to garner sympathy

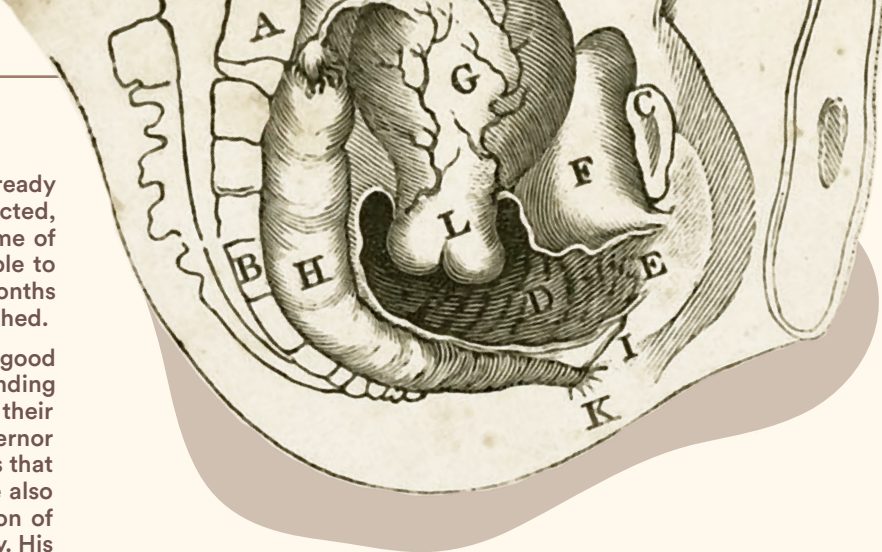
*People seem to forget someone seeking an abortion is already a person with goals, dreams, loved ones — you know, a life.*



for a fetus, but they forget about the person who is already alive. In reality, even though a heartbeat can be detected, a fetus would not survive if born at six weeks. The name of this bill is misleading and intended to manipulate people to believe a fetus is a fully mature baby, but there are still months to go in the pregnancy before the viability period is reached.

I think many people around the country do have good intentions and genuinely believe in what they are standing for, but some lawmakers use this emotion to push their conservative political agendas. As we have seen with Governor Abbott, he has a plethora of conservative ideas and bills that he is continuously pushing in Texas — in September he also signed into Texas law a bill to terminate the distribution of abortion-inducing drugs after seven weeks of pregnancy. His positions on these social issues are indicative of the direction he intends on taking Texas toward, and this issue is only going to continue to get worse if the Supreme Court does not uphold the precedent set by *Roe v. Wade*.

I believe we have to try to separate emotion from science when it comes to abortion laws. A very common misconception is that all people who are pro-choice would personally get an abortion if they had the chance. Maybe they would, maybe they wouldn't — but that really doesn't matter.



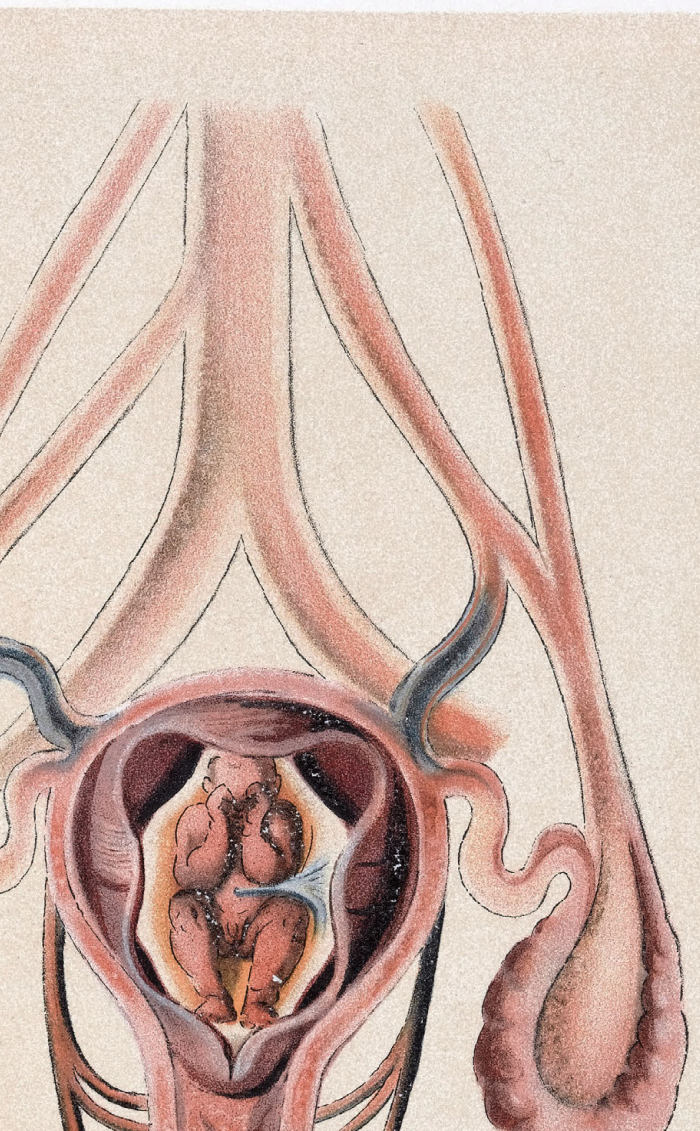
*If you have a pregnant person in your life who is struggling with these choices, support them.*

Being pro-choice means I am in favor of what a pregnant person wants to do. Whether that be a full-term pregnancy, adoption for the child or abortion, I want to support THEIR choice. These decisions seem hard enough without shame and judgement from people on the outside. As we have seen time and time again, people protest outside of abortion clinics and harrass patients, they insult and belittle them, and there is no place in our society for that type of hatred.

If you have a pregnant person in your life who is struggling with these choices, support them. Show them how much you love them, because this is an issue that is not going away, and we all need to come together and take a stand for reproductive rights. What matters above all is that people with uteruses have access to a safe abortion procedure. ■

• • •

*On Nov. 2, the Supreme Court began hearing oral arguments in two of the cases brought against the Texas Heartbeat Act — Whole Woman's Health v. Jackson, which questions whether the Texas law can insulate itself from federal court review by delegating enforcement to the public, and United States v. Texas, which aims to establish whether or not the federal government has enough interest to challenge the state over the law.*



Artwork courtesy of Dan Donato (@dandonato3 on Instagram) and Stony Brook's Fine Arts Organization.

**"Malice and Hunger"**  
Dan Donato



HOW HIGH EXPECTATIONS  
LED TO DISAPPOINTMENT  
OVER LORDE'S



# Solar Power

BY SYDNEY CORWIN  
AND RAFAEL CRUVINEL



After a four-year music drought, New Zealand native Lorde dropped her long-awaited third studio album, *Solar Power*, on Friday, Aug. 20. The new album conjured an entirely new image for the 24-year-old artist, and the record's twelve tracks have divided both fans and critics.

In 2013, Lorde released her debut album, *Pure Heroine*, at 16 years old. She rose to fame with her song "Royals," which peaked at number 1 on the Billboard Hot 100 chart and won both Song of the Year and Best Pop Vocal Performance at the 2014 Grammy Awards. The hypnotic album epitomizes teenage cynicism, the pain of growing up and the feeling of being out of place. "Ribz," for example, describes the fear of getting older and leaving things you love: "I've never felt more alone, feels so scary getting old."

Her sophomore album, *Melodrama*, was released in 2017 to great critical acclaim and was nominated for Album of the Year at the 2018 Grammy Awards. Its tracks reflect themes of love, heartbreak, partying and finding yourself. The album's closing track "Perfect Places" explores the idea that young people try to find relief in perfect places while questioning if these places even exist: "all of the things we're taking, 'cause we are young and we are ashamed, send us to perfect places." The song's complex production and intense rhythm section sound revolutionary.

Both albums saw great success immediately after their release, and would continue to withstand the test of time. As fans relistened to her first two albums, there was a clear expectation her next release would fall within the same vein — dark aesthetics, gloomy introspective lyrics and complex production. But what came to life was completely different.

In June 2021, Lorde unexpectedly released her first new song in four years. "I hate the winter, can't stand the cold," she sings at the opening of the title track and

first single off her new album *Solar Power*.

She sings about loving the summer and the beach, heat and brightness — themes never seen in Lorde's work before. Fans were surprised at the song's happy lyrics and upbeat tempo, and some people even thought it was a joke. Listeners began to wonder if the whole album would share these attributes despite the difficult year most had experienced in the wake of the pandemic. Different from previous lead singles, this one contained soft vocals and a lot of organic instruments, making the song feel like a whisper of nature in your ear. Not only did the sound and lyrics change, but the visuals did, too. The album's cover art features Lorde running on the beach with the sun in the blue sky behind her.

Lorde used this track as an invitation to a new lifestyle. Contrary to the dramatic way most artists boost music now, she decided not to make promotional posts on social media. Instead, all news and information about the record was advertised via email to subscribers of her website. This move makes sense considering the idea of leaving social media behind is a common theme throughout the album. On "Solar Power," she sings, "I throw my cellular device in the water/Can you reach me? No, you can't." Rather than focusing on technology and the internet, Lorde encourages the listener to seek joy in nature.

The second single she released was "Stoned At The Nail Salon." This track felt familiar to listeners — Lorde seems closer to her past self due to its sad lyrics. In an interview with Spotify, she said the idea for this track came after she returned from the *Melodrama* World Tour, which was extremely exhausting and emotional. As she returned to her calm life in New Zealand, she began to question her life choices and whether or not she was even happy.

"I would get stoned and go and get a manicure, which I find very relaxing, can recommend," she said. Some people criticized the track, saying its sound resembled tracks from Taylor Swift's *folklore* and Lana Del Rey's *Chemtrails Over The Country Club*. Fans began to question how three completely different artists could be making music with such a similar sound.

The answer is the producer: each album was produced by Jack Antonoff, who Lorde previously collaborated with on *Melodrama*. He was accused of reusing sounds from other songs and making the music sound the way *he* wanted, rather than how the artists had wanted it to sound. Lorde was understandably upset by these rumors.

"I haven't made a Jack Antonoff record. I've made a Lorde record," she told *The New York Times*. "To give him that amount of credit is frankly insulting." Lorde went on to confirm the song sounds exactly how she intended.

The final single released before the album was "Mood Ring." The sonic patterns are similar to those on "Solar Power," and the lyrics satirize the culture of pseudo-spirituality and wellness.

"Things like eating a macrobiotic vegan diet or burning sage, keeping crystals, reading tarot cards or your horoscope — these were all things that they were dabbling in back then, and that me and my girlfriends are dabbling in today," she wrote on her website. "I was like, 'I think there's a pop song in here.' So this is kind of my extremely satirical look at all of those vibes."

In the music video, Lorde is shown inside a green tent while doing a ritual with other girls. The blonde wig and the green dress she wears demonstrate she is playing a character in the video, rather than herself.

When Aug. 20 arrived, *Solar Power* was already a polarizing album and the release of its full body of tracks divided opinions even more. In critic Chris Willman's review for *Variety*, he wrote that Lorde's greatest accomplishment is making a successful album that relays a positive message.

"On 'Solar Power,' there are some wonderful moments where it's clear that for her now, love is a many-splendored thing," Willman wrote. On the other hand, Neil McCormick at *The Telegraph* called the album "underpowered," affirming that "Lorde's lyrics are still acute, her singing superb, her songs beguiling," but suggesting that "her perspective has shifted from every-girl outsider to over-privileged solipsist."

A significant inspiration for Lorde on her creative journey was a January 2019 trip to Antarctica. In a 73-question interview with *Vogue*, she was asked what she had learned from that trip. The artist had difficulty putting it into words, but emphasized the continent's "raw power of nature." She also talked about the work that scientists are conducting there. "They're

# REMNANTS OF LORDE'S PAST WORK CAN STILL BE FOUND ON THE RECORD.

not trying to prove climate change, they're just checking out the science, taking the measurements, observing, and telling us what's up."

Curiously, climate change is the theme of "Fallen Fruit," one of the songs on *Solar Power*. In the interview with Spotify, Lorde explains the lyrics — she was singing to her parents' generation. In the chorus, Lorde sings, "You'll leave us dancing on the fallen fruit," while a siren can be heard in the background, symbolizing that humanity is reaching a climate emergency.

Even though *Solar Power* is drastically different from her previous two albums, remnants of Lorde's past work can still be found on the record. She took two chords from the insanely popular "Ribbs" and reversed them to make "Secrets From a Girl (Who's Seen It All)." She described the lyrics as her *Solar Power* present talking to her *Pure Heroine* past, saying "it's going to be okay." Not only does she offer that advice to her younger self, but to her listeners as well. Those who related to "Ribbs" because they struggled with feelings of isolation in their adolescence and fears in facing the future may find solace in "Secrets from a Girl." "Member all the hurt you would feel when you weren't desired? / No one's gonna feel the pain for you / You're gonna love again, so just try staying open." It's a comforting reminder that even if you're anxious about what's to come, things will be alright.

### Sydney's Take

I honestly didn't love the album on my first listen. I thought a lot of the songs sounded the same and the instrumentals were boring. I kept waiting for a song I could play at full volume and completely lose myself in, like "Supercut" or "Green Light," or a devastatingly relatable song like "Ribs" or "Liability" that I could really cry to. *Solar Power* doesn't really have any of those kinds of songs. At first, this really disappointed me, but the more I listened to the album, the more it grew on me. The songs are still good even though they're completely different from her past ones. Her impressive lyricism and distinctive voice is still there, now with an organic sound behind them. Lorde isn't trying to repeat herself. She is trying to make something new, something happy and anxious and wise all at once. Something that shows how she has grown as a person and as an artist. The album is exactly what

she wanted it to be, no matter what anyone else's perception of it might be. Listening to *Solar Power* with all of that in mind makes me appreciate Lorde's accomplishments so much more.

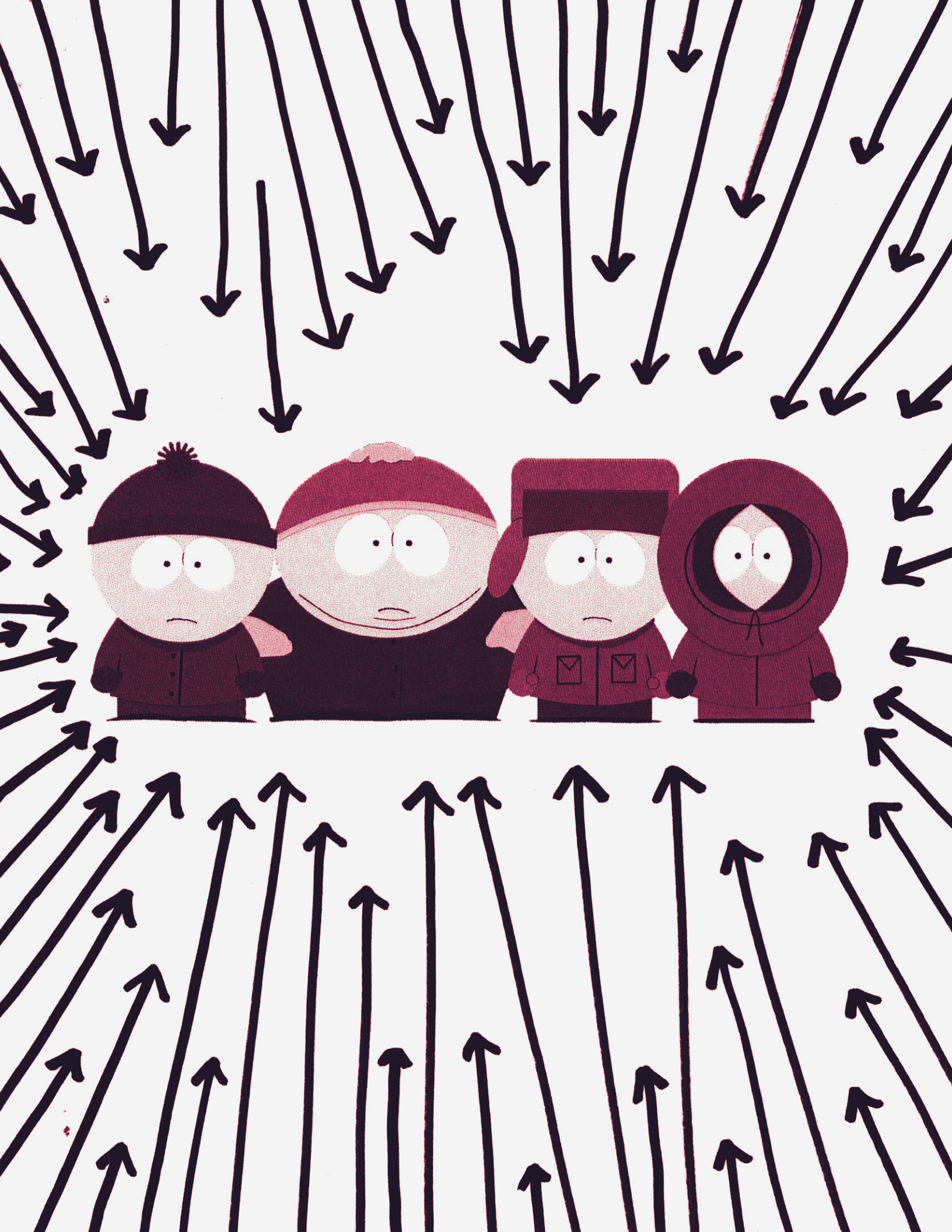
### Rafael's Take

I feel upset that a lot of people didn't appreciate the work provided by Lorde. *Solar Power* is not only a new album — it's a new era in her life. More than an era, it's a new universe she has created to express her art and relay the messages she wants to share. The same way regular people do, artists change. It is unfair to expect someone to always be a sad, brooding teenager, and I believe it is really inspiring that the person who before found comfort in the darkness is now seeking it in brightness. For me, it shows that she is in constant growth and that her life doesn't need to be summarized in two albums.

• • •

Regardless of how much critics and fans are divided, one thing is for sure: Lorde is happy with what she has done. It's hard to imagine *Solar Power* bringing any hits or awards to her career, but she doesn't seem to care. Lorde continues to promote the album and she has announced through her emails that more singles are to come. Lorde's bright era will continue to shine for at least the rest of 2021 — independent of others' opinions. ■





A collection of hand-drawn black arrows of various lengths and directions, all pointing towards the central text. Some arrows are long and thin, while others are shorter and thicker. They originate from the left and bottom edges of the page and converge on the text.

**SOUTH PARK'S  
BLAME GAME**

**BY EMILY SCOTT**

**S**outh Park being satirical isn't something new; the children still have mouths like truck drivers, and even now the series pokes fun at modern society. The Comedy Central hit first aired in 1997, and it has a certain nostalgia to it. The animation style hasn't changed: the show is made from what looks like paper scissored into shapes of characters and backgrounds.

The first time I watched *South Park* was in fifth grade, sitting in the living room of my childhood home. My dad had shown me clips of the show beforehand, censoring out the inappropriate bits, but the first full episode I watched was one of the Christmas specials, "Mr. Hankey's Christmas Classics."

The room illuminated by only the Christmas tree, I sat pretzel-style on the living room floor between my dad and brother, laughing at the dancing turd on the screen.

The skits were parodies of typical Christmas specials and songs and 10-year-old me was eating it up. (Technically my dad skipped over the Hitler "Christmas Time in Hell" sketch because he deemed that too inappropriate, which is fair.) That night opened a can of worms that

I still haven't shut nearly 12 years later.

Once my parents had the green light that we wouldn't mention *South Park* outside of the house, my dad rented the 1999 movie, *South Park: Bigger, Louder and Uncut*, to show us. At 11, I didn't quite get most of the movie, but the songs were stuck in my head for weeks and stupid fart jokes a la Terrence and Philip became the norm between my brother and I. Recently, I rewatched the film — multiple times, to be exact — and realized what a satirical masterpiece it is. The movie is as old as me, but the core message beneath the various shits, assholes and uncle fuckers is one that still speaks to modern society: America places the blame for its problems on everyone but itself.

The film opens up with a Disney-esque song about the "quiet mountain town" of South Park, Colorado as the gang — Eric Cartman, Stan Marsh, Kyle Brovloffski and Kenny McCormick — make their way to see a "foreign film from Canada" starring their favorite comedy duo, Terrence and Philip, in *Asses of Fire*. The film is R-rated, which only fuels its antics and cursing. Soon enough, almost the entire child population of the "quiet little white-bred redneck mountain town" has seen the film, which leads to *fuck* becoming an even more normal part of the fourth graders' vocabulary. The adults of South Park only get clued in that something is off when the gang is sent to Mr. Mackey's office, where their naughty language is brought to light by the school counselor asking the kids where they learned phrases like "eat penguin shit you ass-belonker." The parents are *pissed*, understandably so, and forbid the boys from seeing the movie again.

Radical changes sweep through the school: Terrence and Philip shirts are banned and a mother-enforced "rehab" for the kids is established — complete with the song "It's Easy Mmmkay," — which teaches the kids safe-for-school words they can swap in for the swear words that seem to have taken over their vernacular.

Along the way, Kenny dies (as per usual with any episode of *South Park*) when he tries to light a fart on fire after another showing of *Asses of Fire*. Following Kenny's death, the mothers form "Mothers Against Canada" (MAC) and decide to "blame Canada" for their children's behavior. Of course there's a musical number accompanying the formation of the group, with snappy lyrics ("it seems that everything's gone wrong since Canada came along!" and "don't blame me for my son Stan, he saw the darn cartoon and now he's off to join the Klan!")

I realized, on my gazillionth rewatch, that adults placing blame on something besides themselves is still going on today in American society.

In the eyes of some, America is the greatest country on earth and can do no wrong. A prime example of this is seen in Trump-era thinking,



with the former president placing the blame for most of the country's problems on immigrants — but he isn't the first, nor is he the only, person to have this view. Trump supporters claim immigrants are “stealing [our] jobs,” but the jobs most immigrants work are underpaid and often characterized as undesirable. An even more current example can be seen in the fact that we are still in the chokehold of COVID-19. Anti-vaxxers are refusing to get the vaccine, placing the blame for rising case numbers on anyone but themselves — and they are throwing hissy fits at the mere idea of having to wear face masks.

In the film, Sheila Brovloffski, Kyle's mother, rants about how awful Canada is, eventually performing a citizen's arrest on the Canadian comedy duo from the movie. Upon ordering their execution, she refers to Terrence and Philip as “Canadian smut” at the United Services Organization (USO) show set up for the soldiers right before the American-Canadian war. The three living members of the gang work to stop the planned execution — for a variety of reasons, the main one being that if Terrence and Philip's blood spills on American soil, Satan and his gay lover Saddam Hussein will come and rule Earth — and by the end of the film the adults realize they've placed the blame of their problems on someone else rather than themselves.

But American society isn't like the culmination of *South Park: Bigger, Longer and Uncut*. Look at the state of the nation over our exit from Afghanistan, after nearly four decades of conflict — all political parties are guilty for the unnecessary deaths and destruction that occurred, but instead we choose to point the finger and blame the other side of the political spectrum. Why would any party admit they fucked up when everyone could just play the blame game for hours on end? I don't foresee this cycle of blaming others ending anytime soon — because why would it? I guess in the meantime, I'll just rewatch *South Park: Bigger, Longer and Uncut* and laugh while I shake my head at the fact that nothing has changed that much in the past 22 years. ■

**AMERICA** ←  
**PLACES THE BLAME**  
**FOR ITS PROBLEMS ON**  
**EVERYONE BUT**  
**ITSELF.**





Illustration by Komal Grewal



# The ————— By Arun Inventory: ————— Nair Beginning Thoughts —

I am cognizant of the fact that I shouldn't be alive right now. I was left for dead on the Long Island Expressway, causing my right-sided tremor and vision and speech problems.

That makes every moment I have now a precious gift.

But this is only the latest example of my having cheated death.

When I was a small child, my father took a cricket ball to his back, shielding me from its blow, but giving him lifelong back pain.

I'm sure that if you think about it, you will probably find you have a similar story, an example of why you should be grateful for this life that you have.

Dr. Jordan B. Peterson is a Canadian clinical psychologist who rose to prominence in 2016 because of his vocal opposition to bill C-16, which would have forced him to call students by their preferred pronouns. I was inspired to write this column because I often see older people like Dr. Peterson say something to the effect of, "We live in the greatest civilization that humanity's ever created, but college students are so ungrateful."

I see that, and I think, simply, "not all of us."

Maybe you didn't know this one aspect of Indian culture, that they don't say "thanks." Indians prefer to show their gratitude rather than verbalizing it. For example, instead of saying "thank you" for a piece of food, they may simply eat it.

I am Indian. I love my roots, and I am grateful for them: I know exactly how much money I have because my father taught me I should always know how much money I have in my pocket. I'm not ashamed to say that my father or my mother told me something, because it's my *dharma*, or duty, as a Hindu to carry out their wishes. But I am also American. This means that I grew up in the U.S. and served in the U.S. Army, and it means that I am now a writer. Kind of like my idol, the prolific writer and brilliant neurologist Oliver Sacks.

I just read a book by Dr. Sacks about gratitude, and I have a movie ready to watch about his life.


When I say I am American, I mean that I know English really well (I grew up in New York and was the beneficiary of the school system here), and I want to write and tell you about these things that we have as heirs to this legacy — for thousands of years, people have walked this earth and have given their lives to ensure that we now have enough food to have an obesity epidemic (a class I took on human evolution, BIO 358, has something to say about that!), enough water to never ever be thirsty, and proper heating and lighting wherever we go. This isn't just in America, of course, but it is characteristic of the Occident (as opposed to the Orient), the Western

world. The rest of the world is catching up fast, but we are it right now.

I think it is important to be grateful for all of the things we have been given because we really do have a whole lot.

Thank you for reading so far. ■

I'm sure that if you think about it, you will probably find you have a similar story, an example of why you should be grateful for this life that you have.



# CRANBERRIES

AND THE JOY OF DISCOVERING NEW MUSIC  
BY SARAH BECKFORD

# “WHAT THE HELL GOES ON AT EUROVISION?”

It’s the question I’m pretty sure I wondered aloud after scrolling through YouTube. I’d heard of the song competition in passing, seen it trending on Tumblr — but never watched it. It seemed like something I could afford to miss, after having seen my fair share of song competitions (*The Voice*, *Rising Star*, *American Idol*). Eurovision, with its international competitors and flashy costumes, seemed cool but not enough to pique the interest of my short attention span. After weeks of watching random SNL compilations, my YouTube feed decided to recommend a quick video of meme-able moments: “Eurovision 2021 moments that sent me.” After watching it and being slightly amused by Graham Norton’s commentary and finally intrigued by the costumes and production, I figured it was a one-off thing. Little did I know that my bubble of ignorance was about to dissipate. Why?

Måneskin happened. And with that discovery, I remembered how fun it is to discover new music.

Måneskin, an Italian rock band who were the winners of Eurovision 2021, have only been gaining momentum since the competition. Their song for the contest, “ZITTI EN BUONI,” with its edgy rock sound and impressive vocals from lead singer Damiano David, caught my attention. Compilations of the band’s best moments popped up in my YouTube feed. Before hearing their music, I saw their outfits and was instantly a fan.

Måneskin is likely to make a big splash in the United States in the coming months. The band has been getting tons of social engagement from fan accounts to YouTube compilations of their interviews. Their second album, *Teatro D’ira*, dropped in March of this year, and another record is rumored to be in the works. Though it’s only a mere eight tracks, *Teatro D’ira* is a great introduction to the band and their sound, even for those not fluent in Italian. (One of the songs on the album, the hit single “I Wanna Be Your Slave,” is in English.)



IT'S CLEAR THAT THEY'RE A BAND  
WHOSE SOUND IS BOTH  
DISTINCTLY MODERN AND  
INCREDIBLY RETRO,  
EVOKING EARLY '70S PUNK  
AND ROCK MUSIC.



What distinguishes Måneskin and their rise from American rock bands, and the general rock scene, is that they were already a well-established group prior to winning Eurovision. If anything, Eurovision simply gave them a platform to introduce themselves to the rest of Europe and the world.

Måneskin is what I consider to be part of the slowly simmering revival of rock music that's been occurring in recent years. Their music is filled with brash guitar solos and lyrics of love and rebellion that recall earlier eras of rock. Until recently, mainstream rock music has been populated mostly by varying interpretations of the genre. There's the radio-friendly pop rock of bands like Imagine Dragons and Coldplay, angsty pop punk that feels outdated and alternative and indie rock, which has its own unique spectrum that ranges from Royal Blood to The 1975 and Twenty One Pilots. It's hard to define what exactly rock music is in the 2020s, as the previous eras of the '90s, 2000s and 2010s had a number of clear signature sounds — grunge, screamo, emo and pop-punk.

In listening to Måneskin, it's clear that they're a band whose sound is both distinctly modern and incredibly retro, evoking early '70s punk and rock music. On the opening track, "FOR YOUR LOVE," Damiano's vocal styling and delivery is similar to Gerard Way of My Chemical Romance, reminding me of early MCR tracks like "Vampires Will Never Hurt You." But Måneskin's melodies and instrumentation sound more like early '70s punk bands like The Stooges. It makes sense that the band would release a new version of "I WANNA BE YOUR SLAVE" featuring punk legend Iggy Pop, The Stooges' lead singer.

What makes this retro yet contemporary sound so important is that Måneskin's very existence will allow for younger generations to experience this classic sound, much like older generations who grew up with Television, The Stooges or The Velvet Underground. Rock music is experiencing a renaissance of sorts, with older sounds being given new life through groups like Måneskin, Palaye Royale and Royal Blood. Palaye Royale, a Canadian trio of brothers that's best known for songs like "Mr. Doctor Man," "Don't Feel Quite Right" and most recently "Paranoid," have a deliberate aesthetic that mixes punk, steampunk and vaudeville with a gritty rock sound.

The reason why Måneskin matters is that their appeal and impact hits deeper than their well-crafted instrumentation, energetic live performances and fashion. They're a band that's able to bring an olden sound back to life, but with lyrics and a mission that affirm today's generation. Måneskin's music is incredibly sex-positive, conscious of the diversity among their fans, and rather introspective and poetic at points. "ZITTI E BUONI," the song that put them on the map, is a song that celebrates individuality. The same can be said for Palaye Royale and Royal Blood, as the latter tends to sing heavily in metaphor. These bands are ushering in a new definition of rock — rejecting the old motifs of "sex, drugs, and rock and roll." The sound is there, but for a new generation who is more open, compassionate and creative. This allows for Gen Z to learn more about rock (if they so desire), but also to feel connected to a band that celebrates them for who they are and how they express themselves. ■

# WARNING

## MOTHMAN SIGHTINGS IN SUFFOLK COUNTY

BY JIN TON

**T**he recent uptick in missing children cases has only increased since October began. According to reputable sources, this may be due to the activities of invasive predators in the Suffolk County area. Experts claim these predators may have migrated north from the Virginia area. So far, we know attacks of this nature have only occurred in West Virginia beginning around 1967, and we are shocked to find maulings so far from their origin.

While we can't confirm the exact location or essence of this perpetrator, we can list preventative measures for you and your loved ones to take in order to avoid maulings or abductions.

### 1. The creature is attracted to light.

According to reported sightings and survivor accounts, it is drawn to shiny things such as fireflies, car headlights and lamps. You can use jewelry or a flashlight to distract the creature people have dubbed the Moth Man.

### 2. The Moth Man is primarily interested in sugary scents.

We believe it is following its “moth instincts” and mistaking these sugary smells for nectar and fruit. Try to avoid floral perfumes or eating fruit outside.

### 3. Make yourself look big!

The Moth Man has been believed to mistake large fuzzy dogs and children wearing puff jackets for sheep. It does not intentionally attack humans, but will when confused. It is rarely known to attack fully grown adults — larger frames are less likely to be chosen as prey.

We at The Press hope you take caution and stay safe in the following days. Please report any findings to the Federal Association of the Uncanny Extraordinary (F.A.U.X.), and stay safe. ■

Art by Jin Ton





**“Tripli-Tee of Wife-Mans”**  
TZilantro Slumber

Artwork courtesy of TZilantro Slumber and Stony Brook’s Fine Arts Organization.





**"Nature Scene"**  
TZilantro Slumber

SONGS

OF

Every year, we compile our favorite songs of the summer  
into a piece that explores our feelings.

— **THE** ————— **SUMMER**

This is that.



# Malibu Interlude

Surfaces  
By Melanie Formosa

I forgot the ocean was there — it had become synchronous with my inhales and exhales.

The sky's setting sun is a mere backdrop, its sole purpose to illuminate our silhouettes. Iridescent golden hues graze our foreheads, purplish blues smudge the corners of our smiling eyes. We're laughing.

The resonance of his voice summons my senses. He's saying something. I'm fully occupied with seizing each fleeting moment that, ironically, his words don't register. Now I hear the same sounds — this time a bit slower, with more emphasis: "Tell me something I don't know about you."

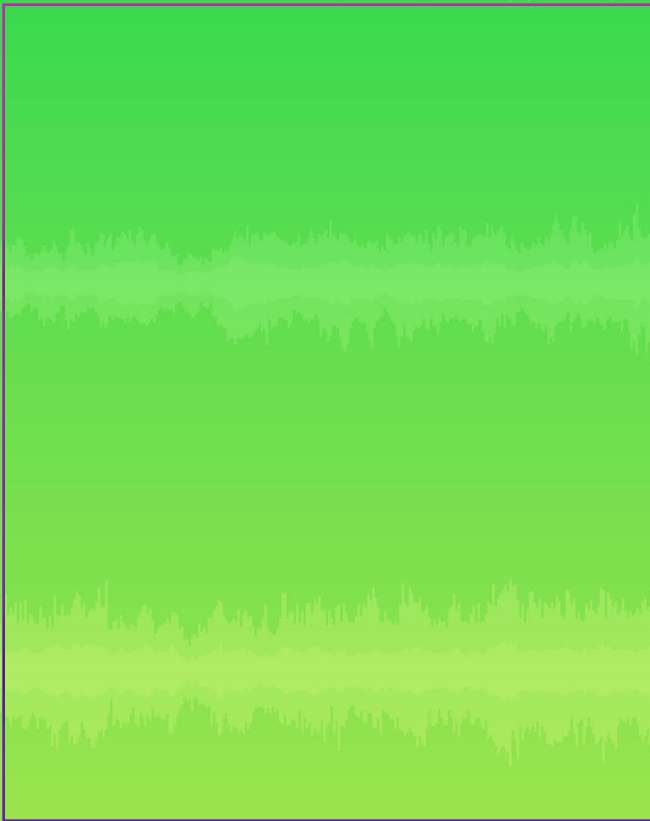
I can't help but smile. He already knows everything there is to know.

Yet his eyes are on me, probing to know more. On an unscripted cue, the next song plays. At the first lyric, I shake my head in disbelief. Besides the ethereal coincidence of it all, the vocals and instruments fit like a lock and key, and I can't help but sway. I interrupt my train of thought — now swirling to unearth a hidden truth — to glance at the song's title so I can play it once this moment ends.

...

My breath seems quieter now that the waves are gone.

The sand's mountains and crevices reshape into the uneven trails of my duvet, and my mind returns to my surroundings. The sheer curtains in my sunlit room are dancing. I hit replay and at the song's first notes I return to the youthful scene — the made-up memory. He might be imaginary, but the ocean will be there. I gather my belongings and head to the beach.



A single synth note fades in like the rising sun heralding the morning. The soft melody of a shinobue, a traditional Japanese flute, flutters through as if riding a soft breeze, followed shortly after by the first distorted, reverberating notes of an electric guitar.

“Kala Kala” continues to wake up as the seconds tick by; deep drum rolls signal a darker shift in tone from the synth, conjuring brief images of the first dystopic ride through *Blade Runner’s* industrialized, irradiated L.A. skyline on the wings of a Vangelis score way back when.

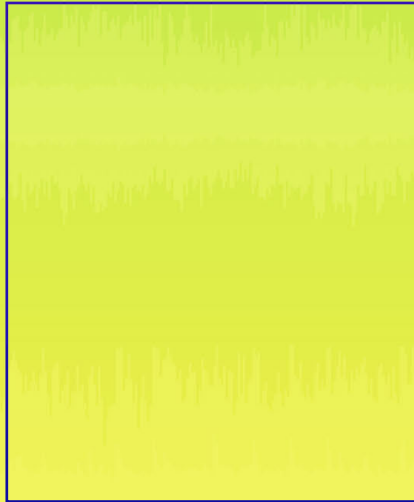
And then the song erupts from sleep with a wall of sound, harkening back to the psychedelic tracks of ’60s and ’70s Japan as Maya Kuroki launches into the first frenetic verses.

Everything about “Kala Kala” and *Shirushi*, TEKE::TEKE’s first full-length album, pays homage to the past while still moving forward. The blend of surf and psych rock with flute and traditional Japanese instruments is like nothing else I’ve ever heard and there are days where I can’t get it out of my head. That the song, along with every other on the album, is in Japanese doesn’t matter.

Even though I don’t know what they’re saying, I feel the energy nonetheless.

**Kala  
Kala**

TEKE::TEKE  
By Nick Wurm





# Lay Wit Ya

Isaiah Rashad &  
Duke Deuce  
By Sarah Beckford

This summer, besides working a ton, I felt like I needed to catch up on music. I listened to older releases from artists I like but only just became a fan of, like Tyler, The Creator, Headie One and Skepta. Another such artist was Isaiah Rashad. He's a famous fixture in the Top Dawg Entertainment lineup, and the songs that introduced me to his music were from SZA's album *Ctrl*, and a few singles, like "West Savannah" and "Wat's Wrong." Following the release of his 2016 record *The Sun's Tirade*, he took a five-year hiatus from music. This May, he finally released "Lay Wit Ya," the lead single off his third album *The House Is Burning*.

As soon as I heard it, INSTANT head bops. If a song makes me dance upon first listen, clearly something's up with it — for all the right reasons. "Lay Wit Ya" soundtracked many a commute to fun summer destinations this year, and it's one of those songs that gives you a bit more pep in your step, in your own swagger (do the kids still say that? We'll roll with it anyway!).

To be fair, I'm not sure what Isaiah Rashad's talking about in this song, but in general, the song has the feel of celebration, of feeling cool. The hook itself is easy to sing along to, and inspires imagery of big cars that are meant to be driven with pompous flair while blasting music with a massive squad of your closest friends.

*Big wheel got that motherfucker skatin' hard*

*Chill pill got me high but*

*Can I lay wit' ya?*

*Last year, you was my bitch*

*Now you my baby girl*

The video's filled with dizzying angles and dancing from Rashad and Duke Deuce, who both hail from Tennessee. Truthfully, your interpretation of the song's lyrics don't essentially matter here. What matters is *feeling* it, letting it move you. It's the song you blast when your significant other or crush sends you a text that makes you feel like you're on top of the world. Or when you come up with an idea you *know* will change the world. It's a victory song.

Now to continue to shoulder-shimmy to the bass of this track.

Much of my summer consisted of reconnecting with friends and making up for the memories we had to put on hold last summer. "Champagne Dreams" by Emblem3 remained a regular on my playlist for when I'd host pool parties at my house. This song provided a backdrop to many perfectly roasted s'mores, chaotic splashes in the pool and laughs I'll never forget.

Emblem3 is a pop-rock-reggae-rap fusion group consisting of brothers Wesley and Keaton Stromberg, along with their good friend Drew Chadwick. I have followed this band since 2012 when they rose to fame on season two of *X Factor USA*. They placed fourth, just behind the accomplished girl group Fifth Harmony. The group has faced some raw deals with record labels, so they have been self-producing for the past few years. They have broken up twice now with each member continuing on to pursue side projects — Wesley and Drew as solo acts, and Keaton as the front-man of the band THE SOCIAL.

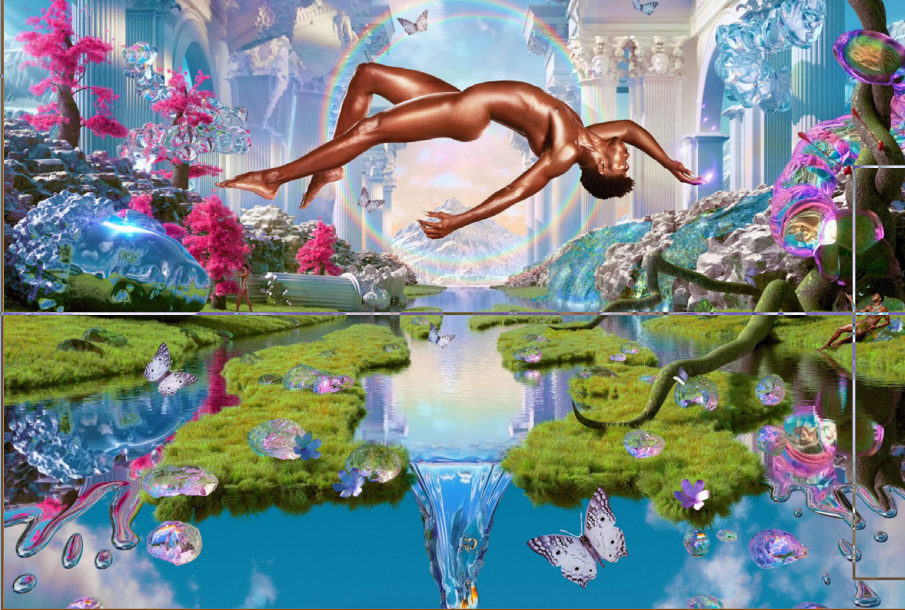
There was some fear among the fanbase that the last breakup would be final, but thank God it wasn't. While this band hasn't experienced commercial fame to the extent that groups like Fifth Harmony and One Direction have, I think their obscurity makes them more real and relatable. I've seen them twice in concert, and last September I went to see one of Wesley's solo shows at Rockwood Music Hall in New York City. There were only about 25 people there, and I got to chat with him after the show, which was amazing. One of my favorite parts of "Champagne Dreams" is the sound of waves during the intro; they really set the perfect scene in my head. Wesley is on lead vocals with Keaton singing background, and Drew's voice appears about a minute into the song.

Be sure to check them out!

# Champagne Dreams

Emblem3  
By Lauren Canavan





# Industry Baby

Lil Nas X & Jack Harlow  
By Tamzid Ahmed

I, like many others, had a difficult 2020 and 2021. I was dealing with low self-esteem, a lack of confidence and a seemingly lost passion for life. When the whole world paused as COVID-19 hit, anxiety took over my life. I felt out of place in my body, and I had to try and figure out life problems on top of dealing with questionable online classes and a global pandemic.

I had a long year of reflection, discovery and experimentation which led me back to hobbies, like filmmaking, that I haven't touched in years due to feeling overwhelmed. When making a film, I would get into my head thinking my work wasn't good enough or my voice did not matter. This time though, it was different. I started again with a beginner's mind. I did it without expecting to create a masterpiece or be the best or to please someone — I started doing things for myself, and enjoyed the creative process again.

On a drive back home, after a difficult filming day, I heard "Industry Baby" on the radio and instantly loved it. I don't know whether it was the epic intro with the horns or the way Nas danced around with the lyrics but it stuck with me. The song's core message — *whether you believed in me or not, I will make it* — was something I needed to hear. I deal with issues of self-doubt when pursuing filmmaking. There are so many scripts and unfinished videos on my computer that weigh on my mind. In the chorus, Nas says:

*I told you long ago on the road*

*I got what they waiting for*

*I don't run from nothing, dog*

*Get your soldiers, tell 'em I ain't layin' low*

This is Nas's story, but I wish it was mine. Listening to him talk about his self-confidence and faith in his own music even through opposition makes me want to get up and go film something myself. The context of the song pushes this idea of empowerment further — Lil Nas X and Jack Harlow both felt that many people in the music industry and media thought their success was just a fluke, as they have just broken into the mainstream media and music sphere. With this song, they wanted to let everyone know

they will be here for a long time, whether the media wants them to be or not. This idea of persistence even through opposition and criticism is monumental in the creative industry. People can and will get to you — unwarranted criticism and complaints lead to self-doubt and questioning of the validity of what you make, but through all this, you have to have a strong sense of self-confidence and faith in your abilities. Nas says it best; at the end of the chorus, he goes:

*You was never really rooting for me anyway*

*When I'm back up at the top, I wanna hear you say*

*He don't run from nothin', dog*

*Get your soldiers, tell 'em that the break is over*

His bravado, faith in himself and indifference to critics are traits that any creative needs to internalize. I did not have this faith and backed down — that is why I am not where I want to be with filmmaking. But Nas and Harlow have persisted through the opposition, allowing them to hit unimaginable new heights.

Now, as we are nearing the end of 2021, I am not where I want to be, not even close to be frank. I haven't reached any of the goals I set when I was just starting, and it's still difficult to reach smaller weekly goals now, but listening to songs like "Industry Baby" makes me want to get back up and try again. Listening to people like Nas share their stories about overcoming challenges and perceptions of their work inspires me to keep at it. When I started making videos and filming I had an initial belief that what I made mattered and I should share what I believed in. Since then, I had completely stopped filming and had given up on myself and the original vision. After listening to "Industry Baby" and hearing these artists' stories, I believe my break is over and I have been slowly coming back to what I wanted to do forever ago. I shoot film much more and give myself the room to make the mistakes everyone has to go through. I watch more movies and take inspiration, and I share my opinions and beliefs like I'm doing right now, in the hope one day my small fire can grow and turn into one that can help others brighten theirs like others have brightened mine.



I spent the summer working as a janitor for a camp in upstate New York, sweeping floors and cleaning porta potties at night on a mountain all by myself. Working full-time didn't leave much room for the kind of summer that every movie and ad on TV had promised me. Most nights in July and August, I pushed around the wooden handle of a mop and felt sorry for myself.

I listened to Clairo's July release, *Sling*, during one of my shifts alone at the lodge. The slow, sad rhythms written in the Catskills only an hour further down the Hudson matched how my life seemed to be going — suffocated by the heat and humidity of a New York summer.

The more I listened to the music, the more I melted into it: her gooey vocals, the somber strings, the acoustic guitar, the soft piano runs. Each song becomes a series of notes that is somehow improvisational — almost absent-minded — and often trailing off.

"Little Changes" was the first song I connected with lyrically off *Sling*. The soft and simple ballad is less than three minutes long, but I felt that Clairo had spooled out my first relationship like an unfinished project and put it on display. Her lyrics seeped into the cracks of my confidence about falling in love, and they lay there dormant even now.

*For the first time it feels*

*Good*

*Good to fall between*

*The ones I loved, and the ones that faded*

*He loved me good enough to calm me down*

*But tried to trick me into little changes*

Cleaning the same lodge over and over again every single day left me a lot of time to think. I had noticed myself changing and continue to notice now. For twenty years, my life had been solely about who I am. In May, overnight, it wasn't solely about me anymore. I wonder endlessly about where my boyfriend ends and I begin, and I wonder, too, about whether or not searching for my identity was worth the loneliness and isolation that pushed me to a ledge last winter. If I feel happy now, if I feel at ease for the first time since I was a kid, are the little changes worth it?

Clairo seems to believe they're not, but I am less sure. I don't feel tricked. I feel relieved. Relieved to give up the brooding, tumultuous pieces of myself that lent to the depression and chaos and panic that have defined the last few years of my life.

All summer, "Little Changes" and the rest of the songs off *Sling* have been the worm in my ear keeping me company. Maybe Clairo's nagging, sharp insights can keep you company, too.

# Little Changes

Clairo  
By Keating Zelenke





## Rare

Nas  
By Anthony Leon

When I was listening to Nas' new album, *King's Disease II*, "Rare" was a song that stuck out to me immediately. From the cadence and lyrics to the instrumental changeup, this track epitomizes why Nas will be remembered as one of the greatest rappers of all time. Creating quality music over three decades is hard to do; that's why only a few rappers have been able to do it and why Nas is so rare.

From the introduction, Nas immediately dives into how people want him to sound like he did back in the 90s when he released his iconic album *Illmatic*. In the first verse, he talks about how hip-hop has changed over the years and how "too many young gods beef over nothin'." From there, he raps about Jordans and his hometown, Queens, which is where I'm originally from. He also talks about the shooting of Ahmaud Arbery and he makes references to other African-American music icons such as Jimi Hendrix and the Notorious B.I.G.

This song primarily describes how people have forgotten about him, since many believe he's a relic from another era. However, Nas lets people know that he is still relevant in today's ever-evolving hip hop culture. Since beats are very important in hip-hop, the track's drums are rare. It switches from a lighter slow snare drum and synth to a more '90s-style beat reminiscent of "I Ain't No Joke" by Eric B. and Rakim. With the switch to this faster snare beat, Nas changes gears completely going into the second verse. Although changing beats in a song is not new in hip-hop, this particular track showcases the contrast between modern rap and old-school East Coast hip hop. I think this song does a fantastic job of letting people know that Nas is a once-in-a-generation rapper who is still producing quality music to this day. It's a reminder that his longevity in hip-hop and his ability to adapt is what made him last so long, and that he doesn't plan on stopping anytime soon.

Love is weird. This summer began after a semester of staring down the abyss, assuring myself I was wrong about my feelings or that what I wanted was impossible. My nerves and neuroses had worked overtime for months — and just as it became real, school stopped and I went back home.

The summer months became a series of bright, bright spots strung together by weeks of boredom. I felt almost transparent in that time, boiled down to waking up, eating, sleeping and the occasional creative activity. I wanted to, if not stop time or speed it up, gently nudge it forward and drag it out for the brief weekends I spent far away, like a record on a turntable. Three-hour drives up- and downstate put me in a serene space where I could think, hear and really listen to music without worrying about time or myself. I remember the exact moment this song came on, as I careened by mountains and hills on the Taconic State Parkway, finally clear of city traffic.

I'd anticipated the next St. Vincent album for years, and it finally arrived just days before I moved out of my dorm. Each track hits with precision; the album presents a warped reinterpretation of 1970s soul — like *Young Americans*-era David Bowie through a blender. There's so much worth listening to, but "Somebody Like Me" stuck out lyrically.

You can hear Annie Clark (St. Vincent) directly confronting her own discomforts about monogamy, relationships and marriage for the first time on record (a funny proposition over a decade since she released an album named *Marry Me*). It's a pretty tune, with

an acoustic guitar's constant finger-picking chased by a rattling drumbeat. Clark sings near the top of her register, reaching up further for runs at the end of the song's refrains.

*Paint yourself white*

*Clip on the wings*

*Climb high to the top of a building*

*Does it make you an angel*

*Or some kind of freak*

*To believe enough*

*In somebody like me?*

There's real, stare-down-the-ledge fear in those lines. Yet the guitar and drums whirl away and the melody flows sweetly into the chorus, where Clark is joined by two backup singers.

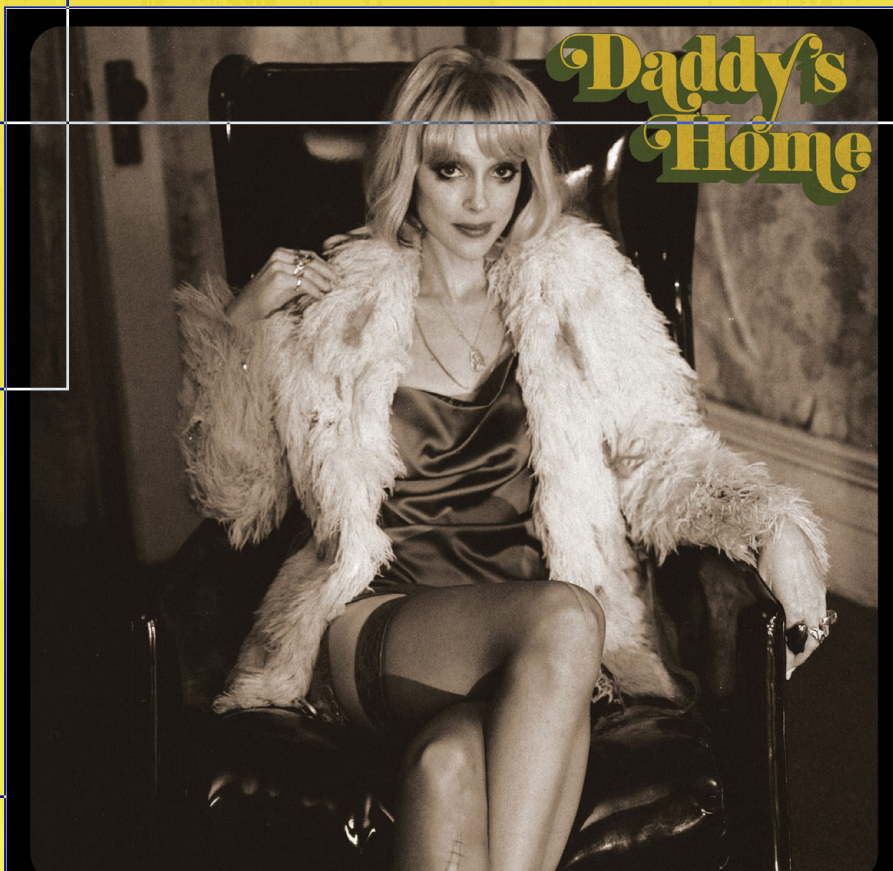
*Oh, I guess we'll see*

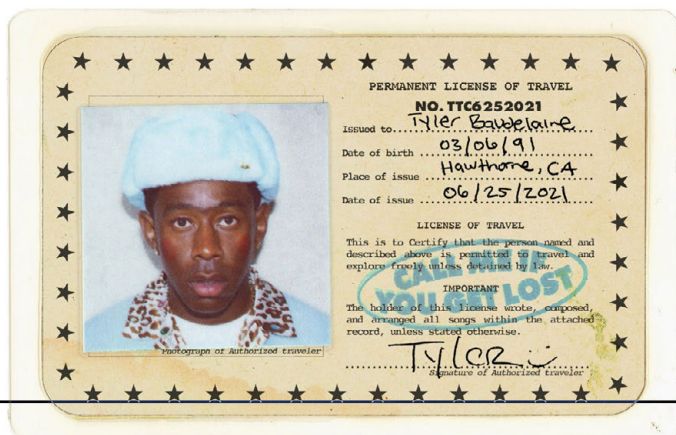
*Who was the freak*

She sings with what sounds like an outstretched hand, wavering with uncertainty but prepared nevertheless. In her words, I see a little wind-up version of the last few months of my life, awkward conversations turning into midnight texts turning into whole days spent together. On the precipice of the summer, who I was seemed to shift and refract in my own gaze, turning the corner on a new chapter in my life if I was right, or making a terrible mistake if I wasn't. I think about lyrics I initially misheard, and find truth in them — it *doesn't* make you an angel, or some kind of freak, to believe enough in somebody like me. It's more like somewhere in the middle, but it's a happy medium.

## Somebody Like Me

St. Vincent  
By Josh Joseph





## Corso

Tyler, The Creator  
By Julio Taku

### *The sun beamin'*

These are the first three words spoken by Tyler the Creator on his latest album *Call Me If You Get Lost*, just before the music begins. I woke up at 3 a.m. the morning of June 25, the same day the album dropped, because I had to drive upwards of three hours to Kerhonkson, N.Y. to work on the set of a music video. (No, the music video wasn't for Tyler, but it was a great opportunity nonetheless.) As I drove further from home, the album played on. On the opening track "Sir Baudelaire," DJ Drama's voice breaks through with his usual mixtape ad-libs and interjections over a bed of stringed instrumentation and woodwind that sounded like it would play beautifully on vinyl. DJ Drama is a hip hop veteran best known for his pioneering work in the mixtape era and his "Gangsta Grillz" tapes. Tyler has been a lifelong student of hip hop and even tweeted back in 2010 that he wanted a "Gangsta Grillz" mixtape.

This is a crossover we didn't know we needed, but Tyler ALWAYS wanted.

The song lays the groundwork, preparing us listeners for what the album has in store. Tyler speaks casually about stamped up passports, his Rolls Royce Cullinan, the success of his clothing label le FLEUR\*, his lavish jewelry and other generally fly shit.

Stage set.

What comes next?

CORSO, Y'ALL. CORSO.

Where "Sir Baudelaire" loaded the bases, "Corso" hit a grand slam to send it all home EARLY.

The driving piano riff, DJ Drama's perfectly placed ad-libs and Tyler's braggadocio are a perfect trifecta. He riffs about his accomplishments, subtly intertwining a larger narrative about breaking up a friend's relationship. This story dominates the rest of the album.

He replaces therapy, introspection and an honest conversation with his lover (his friend's girlfriend!) with lavish spending on cars, homes and travel.

*Tried to take somebody bitch 'cause I'm a bad person  
I don't regret shit because that \*\*\*\* worth it  
In the end, she picked him, I hope when they fuckin'  
She still thinkin' of me 'cause I'm that perfect  
I'ma get that deep text when this verse surface  
Better send it to my ego 'cause that shit hurtin'  
Hope y'all shit workin' (True story), I'm a psycho, huh?  
Don't give a fuck, you left my heart twerkin'*

That there is egomaniacal as hell. Feeding the id pre-workout.

Why is this my song of the summer? It's not because I can relate to it, but because of how triumphant and exciting Tyler makes this very sad reality sound. It's very much in the canon of happy songs with sad or dark lyrics — think "Wonderwall" by Oasis or "Hey Ya" by OutKast. This song is my song of the summer because of its replay value, it's rap-along bars, the intoxicating effect of DJ Drama's presence on the track and being the soundtrack to one of the most memorable days of my summer.

It's the best sounding emotional breakdown I've heard this year.

Imagine my delight when I found out the artist who released “Stole The Show,” a song I’ve liked so much since its 2015 debut, put out a brand-new song in August. That song, the comeback we’ve been waiting six years for, is “Love Me Now” by Kygo featuring Zoe Wees.

I still love my 2015 favorite, but not every song can be about aliens (heh), and “Love Me Now” is a great, fun summer track that’s much more down-to-earth — both literally (the subject matter, at least in the video, is summer romance and not space aliens) and figuratively.

The lyrics start off with a lament:

*I got this grey cloud over my head*

*Breaking down here in my bed*

*And I’m running round, round and round*

*Just to go nowhere*

But they quickly turn into a longing for love:

*Who’s gonna break these walls*

*Tell me I’m beautiful*

*Who’s gonna love me now*

*Oh when the lights go out*

You know the answer is the singer’s beloved.

The masterful bridge underscores her devotion:

*Deep under the surface*

*I’m smiling but I’m hurting*

*No one else can bring a smile back to my face*

This bridge serves to show that her beloved is the one she feels free to let go and be herself with. She knows that she can let go of the persona she shows to the rest of the world as her shield, because she doesn’t need any armor now.

This song is emblematic of Kygo’s work and makes me happy to be alive in this moment.

# Love Me Now

Kygo & Zoe Wees  
By Arun Nair





## Thot Shit

Megan Thee Stallion  
By Emily Scott

For the most part, I had the summer I wanted. Sure, I had to work a few days and watch my siblings, but I always had Wednesdays off — which my pals dubbed “Emily Day.” I could spend those days floating in the pool, getting sunburnt on the beach, tie-dying and drinking Bud Light Retro Summer hard seltzers, or just sleeping and watching shitty compilation videos on YouTube.

I dubbed this summer “fat girl summer,” because I wanted to have fun, and for the first time in my whole life, I didn’t let my weight define what “fun” could be. I ordered a string bikini top — because Lizzo got a string bikini, so *of course* I needed to get one. I ordered not one, but *two* crop tops — and *wore them out of the house!* Needless to say, “fat girl summer” needed a playlist to accompany the various things I did, which actually exists on my Spotify. So when Songs of the Summer time came around, I turned to that playlist to find my pick. After careful consideration that included Lil Nas X’s “Industry Baby,” Saweetie and Doja Cat’s “Best Friend” and Doja Cat’s “Ain’t Shit,” I found my song of the summer: “Thot Shit” by none other than Megan Thee Stallion.

Hot Girl Meg has released so many bops and bangers, but picking “Thot Shit” was a no brainer. It’s got a beat that makes you want to shake your ass and dance while trying not to spill your drink. Meg does not disappoint with the lyrics on this bad boy either — “hands on my knees,

shakin’ ass, on my thot shit” is the catchy hook that repeats throughout the song with a funky beat pounding behind it.

*Hoes tryna call me a snake*

*Shit, I guess I can relate*

*‘Cause a bitch spit a whole lotta venom*

As someone who was once called the “nicest bitch I’ve ever met,” I felt this line in my soul. One line in particular always gets me: “I walk around the house butt-naked and I stop at every mirror just to stare at my own posterior,” because, well who *doesn’t* stop to check out their ass in the mirror? The brashness of the lyric with the beat in the background has led to this being stuck in my head on more than one occasion.

Hot Girl Meg did not disappoint with “Thot Shit,” and gave us the fun summer bop we so desperately needed after the shitshow that was 2020. So, if any of y’all need me, I’ll be walking around the house butt naked, stopping at every mirror to check out my own posterior.

Some days it feels like the world is falling around my head. That's not really a traditional summer feeling, but we've had a rough few summers. And besides, I'm not a fan of the heat. Summer 2021 saw environmental catastrophes hitting the news cycle one after another. Floods, deadly heat waves, hurricanes, wildfires and the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) latest report, confirming that it's going to get worse before it gets better no matter what we do.

Of course I do what I can to help — and when it gets too much, I like to search for silly or hopeful songs. Maybe it was in that mood that I first found Jonathan Young's (debuting as Galactikraken) album: *Starship Velociraptor*. With a name like that, it's clear this is not an album dedicated to taking itself seriously or being restrained. It has songs about sword fights, jetpack races and even one heroic power ballad about some nutjob talking about the army of tigers he would use to snuff out the hated sun. It's loud and full of layered and modulated vocals, synth horns, keyboards and electric guitars — if you've listened to Ninja Sex Party, you know that '80s throwback sound I'm talking about — all with a general theme of adventure, discovery and space opera sci-fi.

But it wasn't any of those songs that became my song of the summer. "Final Frontier" shares many of the same musical elements, but its tone is different. Jon's bombastic baritone is not rallying people to go on adventures and

fight evil kings. Instead he laments a battle that is already lost. It's a slow dirge of a piece compared to much of the rest of the album, mourning an Earth described as "a burning bed our fathers made."

I thought back to an episode of The Daily podcast, hearing New York Times climate reporter Henry Fountain explaining to host Michael Barbaro how the IPCC report said Earth would be warming well into my 50s in the best case scenario, and how it was not likely to reach the climate my grandparents lived in within my lifetime — if it ever did. We may not have an urgent need to leave the planet, but it still feels like the Earth that provided a livable home in our little corner of the infinite cosmos will be very different to us now.

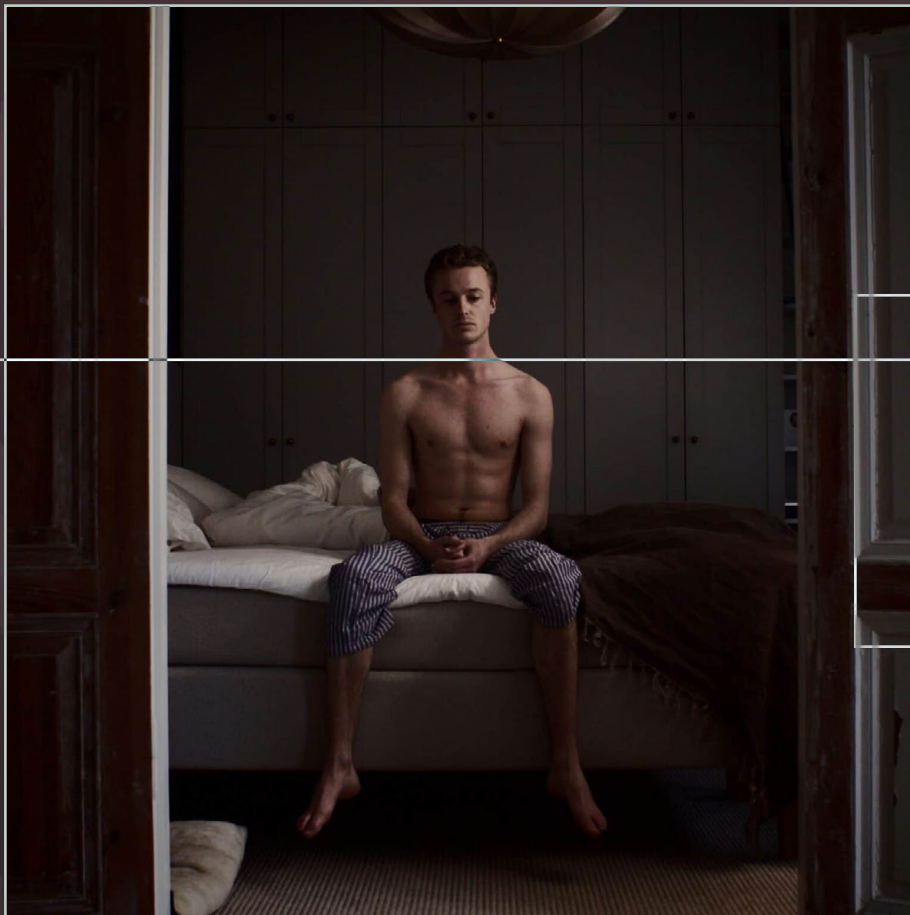
But within the lament for the home we started to appreciate too late, there is a thin glimmer of something more. After all the shame and fear, every chorus ends with the line "we are conquering the Final Frontier."

And that's the kind of message I think we needed this summer. Not a happy song to distract us. Not some anthem of our unstoppable might. Rather, a song that acknowledged that shit's fucked right now and that it's okay to feel like shit. But the future is an unknown entity. And though that's terrifying, it's also hopeful.

## Final Frontier

Galactikraken  
By Sam Rowland





## Face My Fears

Isak Danielson  
By Janet Chow

I found Isak Danielson back in 2018 when his song “Ending” was featured on the show *Cloak and Dagger*. His voice grabbed my attention right away. It was like a young Hozier coming to life.

Over the summer, I wanted to find peace in myself and my mind. Danielson’s lyrics and sound helped me to do just that. His song “Face My Fears” gave me a feeling of release, like I could let go of my worries and doubts.

*I could fly high and never be low  
I could be far away from home  
I would face my fears, and they disappear  
I’d be happy on my own  
Falling in love, wouldn’t be hard  
I could deal with a broken heart  
I’d be anything that I wanted to be  
And I’d never feel my scars*

I was able to spend more time with my family and friends back in the city. I felt less worried about my responsibilities and I truly felt happier. Everyone in my life I needed was there with me.

*I have been here many times before  
But I keep walking away, away from it all  
I wish I trusted you the way I can  
But will someone ever love me for who I am?*

The lyrics resonated with me because sometimes it feels like I might become a burden if I bring my worries and doubts into my relationships. Sometimes, I want to walk away. But, in Danielson’s video for “Face My Fears,” he demonstrates through his dancing and words that we shouldn’t let our struggles and worries define us. In the video, his dance showed the pain and growth that I’ve related to. I’ve found love in myself, my boyfriend, my friends and my family. I have opened up and I’ve grown from it.

Over the summer, I found my true self. I was able to take care of myself and truly be happy with those around me.



It is rare for a famous musician to DM you back on Twitter.

One night in the middle of the semester I ate an edible, popped in my AirPods and started listening to Mr.Kitty's "After Dark."

I then decided to DM him on Twitter to tell him about the experience, and he almost immediately responded with, "sounds angelic." My body then got consumed with giddiness, and about 25 milligrams of THC.

"After Dark" came out in 2014, but has picked up momentum recently from viral videos on TikTok. This summer, "After Dark" made many fans feel the phenomenon of loving someone you've never met. Bringing synth-pop back like it's the 1980s, Mr.Kitty has emerged as a new artist. Self-destructive synth-pop is the described genre of Mr.Kitty and "After Dark." The song has accumulated 65 million listens on Spotify but doesn't have an official music video yet.

Right at the start, the song pulls you into this dark yet safe and dreamy synth-topia. Something about the progressive trance beats and lyrics haunts you, but they also make you feel welcome. The song resonated with me in the second summer of COVID-19. It was not a great time for anyone but somehow I still thrived, longing for success. Part of the lyrics talk about hours and hours passing by, waiting for someone — just like how we are all waiting for this pandemic to be over.

All summer I would listen to it on repeat, at night, in my car, and feel the vaporwave beats run through my veins. Angelic it was.

# After Dark

Mr. Kitty  
By Jayden Feisthamel



MANGO  
 KAMAUU  
 FT. ADELINE  
 AND MASEGO  
 PROD. BY NIGHTSHADE



MANGO  
 (Remix)

Kamau, Adeline & Masego  
 By Falah Jalali

Kamau Mbonisi Kwame Agyeman, known by his stage name as KAMAUU, debuted with his first song in 2014.

Raised in Maryland, Kamau now lives in Brooklyn, N.Y.

The song that I love by him is called “MANGO.” It came out in September 2020, but I first heard it in June 2021. Agyeman was exposed to traditional African music from a very young age, which has a deep influence on his craft. In an interview for Ladygunn, Agyeman said, “There is a certain level of bliss we give ourselves access to when we contribute to something bigger. My point is not necessarily to be a musician but to serve. However, I can do so through music.” When you listen to the message of his music in songs like “BOA,” it becomes clear that he is guided by his spiritual ideology to serve.

The lyrics in the start of the song say:

*If you found some other dude*

*What do I do?*

*If he loves you truly, yeah*

*How could I not love him too?*

*If he improves you*

*More than I used to*

*I don't want nothing but you getting what you need*

*Even if it ain't from me*

These words, when backed by powerful vocals of Adeline, become a testimony of the artist's emotional intelligence and maturity.

This summer for me was a constant up and down between fun and boring.

Summer 2021 was supposed to be great. But unfortunately, despite the best efforts of so many people, COVID-19 restrictions were still around.

Half of the time, I was pacing the cage of pandemic restrictions that we've all been in over the past year. During the other half, I was filled with hope and anticipation as places reopened and opportunities to get out of the house grew.

"Get Into It (Yuh)" perfectly encapsulates the promise of a vaccinated summer, following a year of pandemic blues. It's playful, upbeat and a guaranteed crowd pleaser. You can't help but dance and enjoy yourself while listening to this song.

My favorite lyrics are:

*Yeah, you just wanna party, you just wanna lap dance*

*You just wanna pop up on these clowns like you're the Batman*

*You just wanna ball out in designer with your best friends*

*You don't wanna talk no more about it in the past tense*

Doja was right. All I wanted to do this summer was party, pop up on clowns like I'm Batman, ball out in designer with my best friends and stop talking about things in the past tense. During an Instagram Live on June 26, Doja broke down the meanings behind all the *Planet Her* songs and said the "you don't wanna talk no more about it in the past tense" line was referring to the pandemic. She understood that we're all tired of talking about the things we used to do freely before COVID-19 and incorporated that feeling into her lyrics.

I listened to this song all summer long on good days and bad. It reminded me to find new ways to make my summer fun and embrace life regardless of its imperfections. Honestly, there's no better advice for when you're trying to look on the bright side: whatever it is, just get into it, yuh!

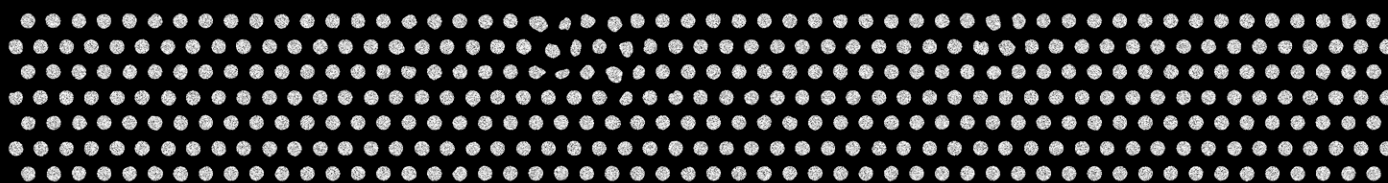
# Get Into It (Yuh)

Doja Cat  
By Jordan Isaac



Create  
with us.

See your work  
in print.



## Join The Press

**Stony Brook's  
campus magazine**

We're looking for artists,  
writers, graphic designers,  
critics, photographers  
and creatives.

We meet on Wednesdays  
at 1 and 7:30 PM  
in SAC 307K.

SBPRESS.COM  
🐦 @SBPRESS  
@ @THE SBPRESS

Stop by and  
share your  
creativity.

Scan to  
sign up for our  
email list  
and follow us!

