floated

ISSUE 8

ALTERNATIVE CULTURE MAGAZINE

Floated Mag is an **alternative arts and culture magazine highlighting up and coming creators, alternative lifestyles, and social topics.**

We aim to share the stories behind the artist and offer niche perspectives on emerging trends within contemporary culture, showcasing unique and obscure aspects of society.

As a collective of artists, designers, writers, and music fanatics, we produce quality content to ensure that our readers are engaged and well-informed with the best in upcoming entertainment. **We’re here to show you what’s dope today, and what’s going to kick ass tomorrow.**

floated

CONTRIBUTORS

ON THE COVER
Danielle Ponder
shot in Rochester, New York
Photography by Krit Upra

Meg Myers
shot in New York, New York
Photography by Maegan Gindi

LOGO
Rowan Rosenthal

EDITORS IN CHIEF
Krit Upra
kritupra.com
Emmarae Stein

CREATIVE DIRECTOR
Krit Upra

PHOTO EDITOR
Krit Upra

COPY EDITOR
Emmarae Stein

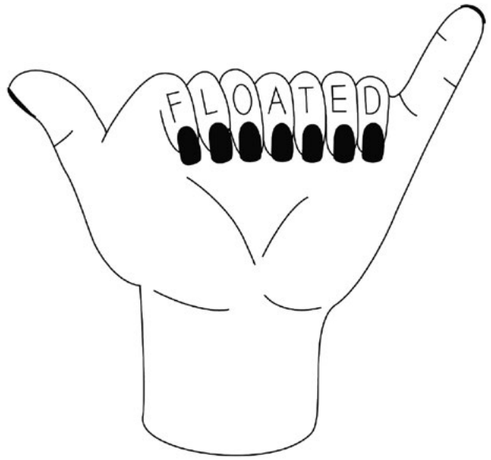
OPERATIONS MANAGEMENT
Emily Pacifico

DESIGNERS
Krit Upra
Olivia Konys
(Page 47 ; 64-65)

CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHERS
Amber Estherpeace Doerr
Bridget Hagen
Evan McClellan
Jeremiah O'Reilly
Jordan Kraft
Krit Upra
Maegan Gindi
Nathan Sengillo
Olivia Edvalson
Teagan West

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS
Amber Estherpeace Doerr
Caroline Rhoads
Emmarae Stein
Marc Gabriel
Hillary Bosy
Joseph Larkin
Lex Howland
Nala Ward
Paula Cummings
Teagan West
Zach M Anderson

Social Media Manager
Hillary Bosy



DON'T FORGET TO FOLLOW US ON SPOTIFY FOR A NEW CURATED PLAYLIST EVERY SUNDAY

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CHAD CLEVELAND

PAINTING, SELF-IDENTITY, AND MEANING

Words by Teagan West
Photography by Teagan West

Either by dabbling in creative projects solely for fun or defining ourselves as committed artists, at some point or another, everyone has experienced the incredibly cathartic quality of making art. It is undeniable that art can create an outlet for us to explore and unlock deeper parts of ourselves, acting as an immensely evolutionary process. For some, this process can be more deeply accessed than others. Chad Cleveland, a local painter based in Canandaigua, is the true embodiment of an artist who uses his practice to ignite transformative personal experiences. His relationship to his practice is nearly metaphysical, as he dives deep to explore his subconscious mind, and uses the process of making his paintings as a way to transcend the mundane level of our day-to-day existence. This undeniably devotional process has become a transference of his carefree and curious nature, which was explored in his younger years through outlets outside of the art world. Cleveland now carries on this adventurous spirit through his paintings by using the act of making as an exploration within itself.

Cleveland is a self-proclaimed rebel, and he has never been known as one to follow the rules. In his younger years, he held an audacious and rambunctious spirit and was known to push against the grain and question what the rest of the world was taking for granted. Cleveland describes himself as attracted to a “run-on sentence way of life,” and pulls inspiration from the rebellious energy of rule-breakers like Jack Kerouac and Picasso. Cleveland is continuously evolving and building off of the adventures of his past. This inquisitive spirit lead him down a myriad of mysterious paths in his life. It wasn’t until his early twenties that Cleveland decided he would pursue painting, which was indeed an adventure on its own, as he hadn’t explored art very profoundly as a teenager. There was something in this venture that felt deeply resonant, and in the spirit of following his intuition, Cleveland decided to attend Binghamton State to receive a Bachelor’s Degree in Painting.

Originally trained in traditional painting techniques, much of Cleveland’s earlier work is in the classical style of portraiture. Always yearning to push against the norms, Cleveland began exploring more abstract and non-objective ways of visualizing his ideas which opened up an entirely new and surreal artistic world. Cleveland’s work began vacillating back and forth between realistic and abstract art forms, and his current practice works to combine them into a unique and distinct style.

Cleveland acknowledges the transient nature of all things, as we are ever-evolving and constantly in a state of flux. This behavior is echoed in his relationship to painting, one that has already taken on many new phases of life. Cleveland often goes back and paints over or adds onto paintings that he has previously worked on. The paintings grow with him and change as he experiences personal and professional growth. He can leave a piece untouched for months on end and become reacquainted with it - seeing the painting

in a completely new way. This ever-evolving mentality allows Cleveland to exercise immense freedom within his paintings, creating an endless world of possibilities to be explored within each piece.

Cleveland explains that he finds joy in capturing the entire spectrum of the human experience through his work, bringing together both lightness and darkness. Playful details and elements in his paintings pull in some light-heartedness, which work to balance the more somber tones in his portraiture harmoniously. Cleveland acknowledges that a lot of his personality can be seen in his paintings, as his free-spirited nature works in tandem with the darker sides of himself. It is refreshing to see the process of an artist who embraces the complexity of the human experience and is not afraid to explore and share the wholeness of his life experiences and personal evolution with the world.

When searching for reference images for inspiration, Cleveland is searching for a specific tone evoked in the face of the subject rather than something visually pleasing. Cleveland is drawn to the mystery and intrigue that can be translated solely through the eyes of another human, which leads him to often using multiple eyes in each portrait. There is an indubitably surreal quality and subtle morbidity that is evoked in the way that Cleveland abstracts the face. This obscure quality is intensified by his ability to preserve the realistic features of the subject. Cleveland's paintings produce an unsettling yet intriguing effect on the viewer by drawing them in and urging them to question reality.

Chad Cleveland's relationship with his artwork is the embodiment of unconventionality and freedom. He continually pushes against norms and allows his paintings to take on lives of their own. The way that he has transferred his rebellious spirit into his practice is refreshingly authentic and inspiring. Although he has a somewhat grounded life in Canandaigua with his daughter and the responsibilities of adult life, Cleveland is still able to exercise that adventurous and inquisitive part of himself through his creative endeavors. His process reminds us that art can be an extremely therapeutic and transformative outlet, giving us the space to explore our shadows, and embrace the entire spectrum of the human experience; both the lightness and darkness.

DADSTACHE RECORDS

DAD ROCK FOR YOUNG PUNKS

Words by Paula Cummings
Photography by Jeremiah O'Reilly

Dad Rock For Young Punks. Dadstache's motto sums up not only what the music on the label sounds like, but also what it stands for. The label was started back in 2013 by three college students with a passion for emerging music and a sense of conviction about preserving it in a physical format. The trio has long since graduated from Rochester Institute of Technology. Joe and AJ have moved on, but JT Fitzgerald continues to carry on this labor of love.

I met up with JT at Fuego Coffee Roasters, a hip little joint in the heart of Rochester, New York, to learn more about the label. The local music community is pretty tight, and many people know JT not just because of Dadstache, but also through his experiences as a musician in local bands and his weekly radio show on Sundays at WAYO 104.3 FM. Even on a weekday at the cafe, he ran into some familiar faces.

I asked about a memorable early experience with music, and JT recalled the time when a friend shared a Blink-182 CD: "That was when I started getting into punk music. That's where it became an obsession. I was getting online and finding forums where people were sharing music - things that you can't go into Hot Topic and find the band's t-shirt."

JT's curiosity about music and the music industry was insatiable. He started reading all the books in the music section of the library. One thing that stuck out to him was that people had started record labels in garages. That idea that anything was possible, even from humble beginnings, stayed with him. When he got to RIT, he became involved in the college radio station, WITR. The station had a recording studio where they would invite bands in for the longstanding "Rochester Sessions" series.

He and his friends AJ and Joe had been kicking around the idea of starting a label. “We knew that the bands we were going out to see would only have a Bandcamp release, or wouldn’t even get that far. We felt the music was just as good as what was coming out of labels.”

The idea of starting their own label gained traction after seeing the band Skirts (f.k.a. Meanagers) play at Bug Jar. They pitched the new label to the band, and Dadstache Records launched on July 4, 2013. Skirts’ eponymous debut album was released the next week.

Dadstache Records put out music by the local musicians that JT, Joe, and AJ liked - everything from chiptune to folk. They took a stance against the trend of digital streaming by making something tangible that bands would be able to hand out. It was important to JT to preserve “a physical reminder of the music and the experience.”

As they were working out how to operate an indie label, local booking agent and musician Tim Avery gave them a piece of advice that they took to heart. “He encouraged us to curate our vision for the label,” JT said. “That got us thinking about the sound, the consistency. Who we were and who was listening.”

JT was at a Jeff Rosenstock show in Ithaca with his friends Ben and Jake, and he was talking with them about designing a Dadstache Records t-shirt. Jake suggested the slogan that became the label’s motto: Dad Rock For Young Punks.

“I FELT A RESPONSIBILITY TO THE COMMUNITY AND THE BANDS THAT TRUST US AND WITH THE PEOPLE THAT BUY OUR MUSIC. NONE OF THESE THINGS EXIST IN A VACUUM.”

“As I had more time to think about the climate we live in, it started to take on more meaning.” The motto was not just about how indie rock sounds, but what it stands for - taking timeless, classic music and infusing it with modern youthful creativity. Honing in on this vision helped to build brand integrity.

“I felt a responsibility to the community and the bands that trust us and with the people that buy our music. None of these things exist in a vacuum,” JT explains. “Every time you put your logo on something, you’re endorsing it, so you have to be sure.”

Over the past few years, Dadstache Records’ reputation has grown, as has its geographic range. Their roster still includes bands from Rochester like Green Dreams, Calicoco, House Majority, Fuzzrod, and Forevers. But it now also includes regional and national acts like The Sharp Shadows (Brooklyn), Onesie (Brooklyn), Elephants (Boston), and River Gods (Los Angeles).

Despite growing recognition, JT remains faithful to Dadstache’s ethical foundation. The label was never about turning a profit at the expense of artists. It was about building community. Sharing music via the label is a way to pass along the exhilaration of the pivotal moment when JT’s childhood friend handed him that Blink-182 CD. It’s about connecting people through the shared experience of music.

“Being able to reach a dozen people, or to inspire even one person to play music - that’s more than I hoped for when I started.” JT tells us that, “at the anniversary show last year, everyone was saying how much Dadstache meant to them. That was fuel. I’m still riding off that.”

Last year’s fifth anniversary featured live performances by Forevers, Total Yuppies, and Calicoco. JT organized a sixth-anniversary show this past July. The lineup for the day-long event included Elephants, The Sharp Shadows, EyeBawl, Full Body, Cammy Enaharo, and Tearleader. And you can bet that there was an amazing spread of vinyl, CD’s, and cassettes at the merch table.

But at the end of the day, it’s not about the number of units sold. It’s about bringing people together to enjoy a collective experience through music. As Forevers sings in the chorus of their song “Reprise,” “we’ll all hang out, at the end of this race, all in the same place.”

“BEING ABLE TO REACH A DOZEN PEOPLE, OR TO INSPIRE EVEN ONE PERSON TO PLAY MUSIC - THAT’S MORE THAN I HOPED FOR WHEN I STARTED.”

I ENJOY ILLUSTRATING ANIMALS BECAUSE I LIKE TAKING THEIR BASIC, MOST PRIMAL EMOTIONS AND DEEPENING THEM THROUGH MORE COMPLICATED HUMAN EMOTIONS, SUCH AS: ANXIETY, DEPRESSION, ANGER AND MORE. THROUGH MUSIC AND ILLUSTRATION, I'VE LEARNED TO CONVEY THESE EMOTIONS IN FUN AND EXPRESSIVE WAYS.

CONDENADOS A
ESCONDERNOS
DE SU SAGRADA LUZ...
SemilloC '19

Fashion is Everything

Stepping into the World of Little Shop of Hoarders

Words by Emmarae Stein
Photography by Evan McClellan

Collecting the strange, antique, and obscure is second nature to Monika Ludwinek, the founder and curator of Little Shop of Hoarders, a beloved vintage shop and community hub located in the South Wedge area. As a lifelong lover of thrifting and antiquing, Monika has been accruing vintage clothing and antique items her entire life. The only difference now is that she's selling these objects rather than giving them away to friends and family members. Before opening up Little Shop of Hoarders on Gregory Street, Monika would venture into neighborhood hot spots in Rochester, New York City, and London with her close friends in the search for unique and inspiring pieces to add to her wardrobe. Recalling these fond moments with her companions, she tells us that "we would all go to the thrift stores and find incredibly interesting things - and back then, most of these items were from the '60s. We would share all of our clothing together so it would stay fresh and cool, but it was always second hand. Once we were tired of it, we would give it away. That's what I did, and I kept doing it. It was the only way I knew." These early experiences with her friends acted as the inspiration for Little Shop of Hoarders, a creation designed to bring the community together and allow visitors to "open their eyes and expand their minds" through exposure to the odd and unknown.

Customers of this charming vintage shop can instantly recognize Monika's astute sense for creating a fashionable and original environment. By simply gazing upon the walls strewn with local surrealist artwork and walking through the corridors filled with colorful and lively articles of clothing, the care and detail put into the store is clearly evident. While Little Shop of Hoarders is seen as a staple of the South Wedge neighborhood, Monika had to overcome a series of challenges to make her voice heard and get the shop off the ground. Starting in a different location, she poured money and care into muraling the walls, installing plumbing, and envisioning a juice bar for a space which was made completely useless by a number of outside unforeseeable misfortunes. Out of necessity, Monika moved from this location at the end of the lease and continued to keep Little Shop of Hoarders' spirit alive by doing various vintage pop-ups across the city. Her perseverance paired with the support of other local business owners helped the idea stay afloat, as Monika reflects that "I feel like I went to a four-year school. I dealt a lot with the city, I learned a lot about permits and different laws about opening a business, and I met a lot of people through it. A lot of very successful business owners and all that they want to do is help, which has been very inspiring. You feel the ambition flow, which makes you think 'I don't want to stop.' They want to see you succeed." After securing her current spot on Gregory Street, Monika relied on the loving grunt work of her partner and close friends for tasks such as renovation and demolition. By working as a team from dawn until dusk, Little Shop of Hoarders was able to make its grand opening on February 7th, 2019, upholding the communal foundation which helped the store become a reality.

"I can usually see something and say 'I can see someone wearing this.' Sometimes it's hard to show that to other people because they look at it and think 'that's not me.' But really, it's the clothing that chooses you."

At Little Shop of Hoarders, cultivating a fresh and original experience for visitors is of the utmost importance. A different person is on staff each day that the shop is open, giving customers a unique take on fashion, art, and inspiration throughout the week. By building a team of dedicated and caring co-workers including Aaron Mika from the local punk-rock band Anamon and Jen Marks, the head of Pink Flamingo Production, Monika has been able to take a step back and recharge, giving herself time to brainstorm funky ideas for the shop including a series of art shows on Second Saturdays. Showcasing the thriving artistic community in Rochester, Monika joyfully exclaims that she wants "to bring people together. Every Second Saturday we throw an art opening and have a musical performance. This past Saturday, Ms. Frankie Starr was at the shop, and she gave fashion advice. By throwing these events, I hope to show our visitors that every walk of life is welcome. We're not discriminatory at all." During our interview, Monika beamed with pride as she recalled a surreal moment that occurred in

her shop only a matter of weeks ago. As she came into work, she saw a group of young teenagers and tweens sitting on the couch located in the center of her space. She smiled and explained that the children “were having a birthday party there, it was all unplanned, and I didn’t know it was going to happen.” Occurrences such as these illustrate the communal atmosphere that Monika has built at Little Shop of Hoarders. While the shop may not necessarily be geared towards children, the inspiring and inquisitive nature of the objects within the store acts as a catalyst for curiosity in shoppers of all ages.

In the past two decades, Rochester has lost many of its vintage shops due to increasing rent prices and a lack of a solid customer base. When reflecting on the closing of Ricky’s in the Village Gate, Monika sighed and explained that “I loved Ricky’s place. It was great, and I think that they were pushed out of the Village Gate because it turned into more of a “foodie” hotspot. Which, I understand because Rochester is a foodie city.” Citing Ricky’s as an exception, Monika noted that many locations often find difficulty in selling their products because they focus solely on clothing. In order to survive as a vintage store in Rochester, Monika has opted for a “yes-man” mentality, telling us that “fashion is everything. Even the art on the wall is fashion. I’m very involved with a lot of other things, and I do pop-ups still. Right now, I do them at the Public Market every Saturday. Every opportunity that I can get is a good opportunity.” Many individuals that are new to the world of second hand become overwhelmed by the chaotic nature of the typical vintage store. Clothes are often packed upon hangers and situated tightly next to one another with no rhyme or reason. As a response to the adverse reactions to the traditional vintage set-up, Monika shares that “in other shops, many were very packed, and the customer had to dig to find something. It’s almost like in the House of Guitars: You’ll go there and be completely unable to find a specific record. But then you ask an employee, and they will know exactly where it is and pull it out. If there’s too much clutter, it will deter someone. So, I try to keep my shop relatively organized and easy to navigate for new customers.” While Little Shop of Hoarders’ physical aesthetics set the store apart from other vintage locations, it is the shop’s warm-hearted and creative environment which will pull on the heartstrings of Rochesterians for years to come.

As Little Shop of Hoarders propels into its second year of business, Monika has exciting and innovative plans for the future: “There’s a park across the street from the shop, the Marie Daley Park. I want to have a huge festival next year and invite a bunch of vendors with handcrafted items, made with love and other vintage sellers. I would even go as far as reaching out to people in New York City.” Sketching out plans for various events in the coming months, Monika is looking to invest in a box-truck to add a creative twist to her current vintage pop-ups. While she continues to focus on self-growth and exploration, Monika hopes to change the mentality surrounding fashion and allow her customers to feel safe experimenting with new looks and styles: “I can usually see something and say ‘I can see someone wearing this.’ Sometimes it’s hard to show that to other people because they look at it and think ‘that’s not me.’ But really, it’s the clothing that chooses you.”

Skating Into Success

A hobby can be more than just entertainment - it could change the path of your life.

Words by Caroline Rhoads
Photography by Nathan Sengillo

When you start something new, you never know if it will completely change the trajectory of your life. Skateboarding did just that for Scarlett Markham, owner and creator of Flour Pail Kids based out of Rochester, New York. Scarlett hung around skaters as a kid, and though she admits she was more of a rollerblader, the skateboarders let her practice on their boards. She loved the non-competitive nature of skating and craved learning new things. Scarlett picked skateboarding up again as an adult when she lived in Brooklyn, and she attributes the creation of Flour Pail Kids to her renewed interest in skating.

Scarlett is a lifelong doodler who habitually saves many of her drawings. While living in Brooklyn, Scarlett both worked and sketched artwork in her free time. She felt that the zine scene was “kind of [her] vibe” and upon returning to Rochester in 2014, Scarlett gathered her collection of doodles into her own zine called “Flour Pail Kids.” She pitched the zine to Krudco Skate owner Aaron Costa who took a chance on Flour Pail Kids and began selling it in the shop. Scarlett counts Aaron as one of her biggest supporters, giving her a start and having confidence in her abilities. “He’s been like my wingman. He was the first one to sell anything of mine,” she said. “I was handing him trash paper, and he was okay with it! He said ‘yeah, I’ll sell it!’” Scarlett has drawn inspiration for Flour Pail Kids from the Cabbage Patch parody “Garbage Pail Kids” movies, and Rochester’s history as a flour mill city. “I just feel like I like everything!” Scarlett said, naming cats and comic books as other sources of inspiration.

As her art began to take off, Scarlett wanted to do more with it. She wanted to make pins of her work, but enamel is fairly expensive. She realized she had a lot of broken skateboards sitting around and decided to challenge herself by recycling the wood and making pins with old skateboards. “It was because of skating that I started making pins.” Now that she has had the opportunity to sell her work for a few years, Scarlett admits she could make the switch to enamel but prefers the uniqueness of her entirely handmade, upcycled wood pins. Her art takes an intense amount of work - from de-gripping boards to sawing and sanding out shapes to weatherproofing - but no two pins are the same, making the hard work worth it to Scarlett.

Her solid work ethic extends into other realms aside from the physical creation of her artwork. Scarlett, like many artists, recognizes that “being a full-time artist means working a lot of gigs.” While she dedicates time to Flour Pail Kids, Scarlett also works at Krudco as a part-time store manager. She also picks up catering and flooring gigs where she can, and in the fall she works on an apple farm - she’s hoping to get promoted to the cider press this year!

Scarlett is also the host of “Ladies Skate Night” at Breaking Free Skatepark. When first asked, Scarlett was hesitant to take on such a feat. She was afraid to interact in the skating community, where she felt she didn’t necessarily belong. After three years of mulling over the idea, Scarlett concluded that if she were afraid to interact with the skating community, other women probably felt the same way. Breaking Free took a chance on Ladies Skate Night, and the women recently celebrated two years of operation. Ladies Skate Night allowed women and girls of all ages to try skating in a low pressure, encouraging environment free of judgment or commitment. Scarlett said some women drop in for a night and realize skating isn’t for them, but are grateful to have had the opportunity to try it out. Despite some backlash from men who want a night hosted for them - to which Scarlett wisely said “they get every other day of the week” - she is optimistic about the future of Ladies Skate Night. In addition to her involvement in the skateboarding community, Scarlett is giving drum instruction for the Rochester organization “Girls Rock!” at their Girls Rock Camp and their LGBTQ+ Pride Rock Camp. Scarlett is passionate about giving back to the Rochester area and believes that “everyone should get involved in their community in one way or another.”

Scarlett’s success has not come without challenges. While her operation may appear to be run by a team of people, Scarlett is the sole creator and operator of Flour Pail Kids and admits that she feels lost at times: “I don’t get to hear anyone else’s voice but my own,” she explains. She meets the bulk of her customers at Krudco, and she is firm that she doesn’t produce anything she wouldn’t purchase for herself. While she noted that her husband - who she calls her number one supporter - is a huge source of help, she remarked that she ultimately doesn’t have to follow his advice or feedback because Flour Pail Kids is entirely her own. Like many artists, Scarlett is her own “biggest enemy” and feels she is often “fighting [herself] about what [she’s] putting out there.” While being your biggest critic is challenging to overcome, Scarlett feels encouraged to continue presenting her “art as a business” by reminding herself that she has support from stores that sell her products and the people who buy it. Purchasing Scarlett’s art allows this talented and innovative artist to continue to make art and push herself into creating new products, like her recycled skateboard cutting boards.

In the future, Scarlett hopes to start producing bigger pieces with recycled skateboard wood. She also loves to paint portraits and is interested in incorporating them into more of her work. You can support Scarlett and Flour Pail Kids by following her on Instagram (@flourpailkids) or by shopping for her art at Krudco Skates, Parkleigh, Statement Boutique, Little Button Craft and Press, and POP ROC Cereal Bar and Comic Shop. You can also buy her products online (https://flourpailkids.com/), but as Scarlett would say, “support your friends... support local stores!”

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25 YEARS OF KRUDCO SKATESHOP:

SELLING A CULTURAL IMAGE

Words by Marc Gabriel
Photography by Jordan Kraft

Skateboarding, for me, has forever been an object of fascination. Always peering from the outside-in, I'd see best friends, cousins, and cousins' friends with the bigger-and-better gaming consoles pour over a culture and a scene that they themselves never even belonged to.

Skate culture has managed decade after decade to catch the gaze of those standing nearby with an intoxicating grip on what it was and is to be rebellious, cool, nonchalant, and stylish in an effortless athletic fashion. As a result, the culture has brought industry after industry in tow - in gaming, music, and presently fashion to its doorstep - all vying for that powerful image.

Unlike a handful of its iconic niche counter-parts - like grunge or gangsta rap - skate has survived the iterations, popular appropriations, and regional in-fighting that commonly plague subgenres long enough to burgeon generational differences in style, aesthetic, and even core priorities. Evidence of skate entering into a new era includes the rise of women skaters, skating to be featured in the upcoming Olympic games, and a resurgence of films (like MID90s and Skate Kitchen) closing in on what skateboarding has meant and what it means now.

It's this reason that the 25th Anniversary of Krudco Skate Shop on 371 Park Ave in Rochester, New York is such a huge deal. Not only has a sanctuary for the culture been alive for so long in the city, but this shop has become our local planet for which that culture orbits. Aaron Costa, owner, and I sat for a while to discuss the impact of Krudco, small businesses on the local scene, and the skate culture at large.
"Skateboarding was special in the 90s and the early 2000s and mid-2000s. Where now, it's not special. You don't have to hunt for it - you can just go to the mall and get it" said Aaron, sounding off on the changed landscape of skate. "Ehh, that's weird to me. Like it's not as cool as it was because of that".
To understand skate culture in Rochester, or even to grasp Krudco and what they do, is in part, to understand the function of local business in today's marketplace. Aaron is very right; many products - especially those that originate in a niche culture like skate - have to contend with a broad and unvaried competition by big-box retailers that may exist in the mall, and most recently, online.

"For a long time, you had to go find the skate shop. Now the internet just brings everything to you in your hand. And that's cool, it helped to grow it, but it didn't necessarily make the pie any bigger - it just made more people take from the pie."

That pie Aaron speaks of is the skate culture itself. The majority of the people taking the slices, he laments, are not even from skate anymore. After all, big industries just can't seem to stay away from skate. Between appropriations of skate culture and retail behemoths like Amazon, businesses like Krudco are placed in the unique position of having to produce a lot more than generic products. They must produce culture itself. It's the "special" quality in skate he mentioned earlier that keeps Krudco alive.

"The Mall is homogenized, it's mass-marketed, it's not special. It's just there because there's people there." Krudco is beating Jeff Bezos and Thrasher and the Mall in one prime department: local culture. Without a doubt, their unreplicated marriage of Rochester culture and skate is one huge element in both their survival in the internet age and also crafting a brand that exists one place in the world. Reinforcing that brand image, of course, is the time Aaron has spent investing in the skate community in Rochester.

"We sell local-centric stuff all the time we and focus on that," said Aaron on the Rochester presence in the store. The shop carries products from Fua Krew, a Rochester graffiti collective, Ghosts and Darkness, a local brand tied to the Jbrd family, and Flour Pail Kids. "There are only a few non-local brands that we move at this point because you can go to the mall and get everything anyway. So if you want something special, and Rochester, you can come in here and get it, you can go to Parkleigh and get it, you can go to Statement and get it."

A testament to the unique Rochesterian blood in Krudco's veins is that Aaron, like any wise local vendor, knows everyone. An inherent quality of the local entity is being privy to the culture and community that they operate in, and better yet, knowing customer names and faces outside of a monthly catalog, credit card, or online profile like the big competition. These are the fine details in business that large-scale operations are too bulky to finesse.

In the duration I spent in the shop to chat with Aaron, there's not a singular customer - mother, deliveryman, student, adult, or otherwise - that he did not know on a name basis. After I asked him about what type of varied clientele walk in his doors, this was part of his answer. "I've got five-year-old, three-year-old kids, up to fifty, sixty-year-old men, women, stuff like that. It is

multi-generational now. It's done. That kid who just walked in here, I watched him grow up. I know his mother, I know his brother, I know his father. I know his entire family." This almost familial connection to local customers and area skate give Aaron a very particular perspective. He can speak to broad, overarching skate culture from an angle that few other individuals can offer because he's been rooted here since he started skating in '86 and the shop in '94. He remarks that this uniqueness also has an impact far outside the 585.

"When you go out of town and you wear a Krudco hat or a Krudco shirt and you go to New York City, you go to Philly, you go to Pittsburgh, you go to California, shoot, you can go into Europe someone may see that and know it. I mean, I've had people get into clubs because they had a Krudco shirt on in New York City."

"Big line? 'Ohhh Krudco, yeah, what up, come on in!' because the guy is from Rochester, he knows Krudco. He's a skateboarder." It's also incredibly important to Aaron that customers know he's a skateboarder, too. A quick perusing of the brand's Instagram page will render images and videos of Aaron and other Rochester natives mounting their boards and tricking. "It's extremely important [customers know we skate] to me. We have a team, and we support these guys and girls with that, and I want people to know they're out there doing stuff.

But it's also personal for me because I am a skateboarder... So I get into a position where I have to at least have to show that I'm out there. Because there are shop owners that don't skate. And it's like you're supporting a non-skateboarder [who] technically, as I see it, is taking from our culture and getting money for it. How can you educate people, and sell them what they need and talk to them about the stuff if you don't do it?" This classic clash between the values of local entities and big business largely comes down to audience. Large businesses do not have the time or resources to integrate themselves into every locality they reside in, and small businesses lack the microphone necessary to broadcast mass-marketing.

For these reasons, Krudco has thrived for 25 years in the spotlight of highly specified, area-tailored Rochester culture, and will continue to do so, they don't just push products, they sell a cultural image.

"FOR A LONG TIME, YOU HAD TO GO FIND THE SKATE SHOP. NOW THE INTERNET JUST BRINGS EVERYTHING TO YOU IN YOUR HAND. AND THAT'S COOL, IT HELPED TO GROW IT, BUT IT DIDN'T NECESSARILY MAKE THE PIE ANY BIGGER - IT JUST MADE MORE PEOPLE TAKE FROM THE PIE."

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The Negroni

Words by Bridget Hagen
Photography by Amber Estherpeace Doerr

Today's cocktail,
The Negroni, is an oldie,
but a damn good drink. invented in 1919, this boozy number has had a resurgence in popularity in the past decade. In Florence, Italy, a man by the name of Count Camillo Negroni walked into Bar Casoni, and craved a boozier version of an Americano (no, not the coffee drink). The bartender decided to swap the soda water for gin, and the lemon peel for an orange, and thus, the Negroni cocktail was born.

This bittersweet babe is something you order if you enjoy imbibing on a stirred, sipping cocktail. It has three ounces of booze: equal parts gins, Campari, and sweet vermouth. But, be warned- this drink doesn't have any citrus juice in it so it packs a punch!

We bartenders find that people are often timid with gin, one of the key components in this drink. Fear not, for the gin lends the beautiful floral, piney note to the drink. It's not the same stuff your grandpa used to drink. Trust us. Campari, a bitter Italian aperitif made in 1840, is what gives the cocktail its signature beautiful red hue and bitter finish. Sweet vermouth is the last aspect that rounds out the drink and harmonizes the flavors. Life, and cocktails, are all about balance.

The Negroni is the perfect example of that. Stir for about 30 seconds (this achieves proper dilution), and strain into a clean, ice filled, old fashioned glass. Then, express orange peel citrus over the drink and place the peel on the edge of the glass to brightens up the flavor. Skip the gin and tonic the next time you're out and order The Negroni! Your bartender will thank you.

WIDER EYES

Meg Myers' upbringing and grounded attitude melt together to create intensely emotional music

Words by Caroline Rhoads
Photography by Maegan Gindi

Any form of art - writing, painting, singing - is an expression of our inner selves and our deepest emotions. Art is an outlet for feelings that are often difficult to put into words. Meg Myers has been writing and creating music since her early teenage years, and she allows her music to act as a vehicle for her emotions. Born in Nashville, Tennessee, singer-songwriter Meg Myers was raised by her parents, both of whom were former Jehovah's Witnesses. She had a very traditional upbringing until her parents' divorce, which was followed by a series of relocations. When her mother settled the family in Florida at the age of twelve, Meg took up writing songs on her keyboard and teaching herself to play guitar. At age nineteen, Meg decided to move to Los Angeles and pursue music. She was connected with producer Doctor Rosen Rosen, who helped her craft her technical expertise in songwriting and production. As her success grew, Meg found her voice in the music industry and ultimately left her record company to sign with the indie label 300 Entertainment.

Meg's songs evoke an Alanis Morissette vibe, but the style feels entirely her own. The instrumentation in Meg's songs combined with her powerful, emotion-packed lyrics hook you in as soon as you start to listen. Meg told us that she is able to have confidence in revealing her inner feelings because "we are all connected, and we all struggle. Whether we show it or not, we're always working through shit."
She recognizes that her music is a release of her "joys and sorrows," but she also hopes her music is cathartic for others, that it might provide someone with a "helping hand or ear."
While her song titles might make you think of upbeat pop songs, they are haunting and rich in feeling. "Take Me to the Disco" may sound like something you would dance to at a club, but with lyrics like "only the lonely could understand where I have been" and "you never meet me on the dance floor, now I'm dancing on my own," listeners are quickly reminded of the last time they felt lonely or betrayed.
"Numb" is so personal, yet so recognizable. Meg wrote "Numb" to express her struggle as an artist, and as a woman, with everyone feeling that they know what is best for her. Although the song was drawn from personal experience, many can relate to the feeling of being under someone's thumb and wishing you could escape.

"WE ARE ALL CONNECTED, AND WE ALL STRUGGLE. WHETHER WE SHOW IT OR NOT, WE'RE ALWAYS WORKING THROUGH SHIT."

We asked Meg about the idea of escape, as it felt like a frequently visited topic in her songs. “I always thought I wanted to escape,” she said. “I didn’t realize that what I was truly looking for was connection.” Meg described this connection as “something deeper,” a search for the “divinity within.” Her pursuit of this higher power has helped her to recenter herself when she feels “ungrounded” or “the urge to disconnect,” a feeling that many encounter whether they are familiar with depression or not. Being so in touch with her inner self helps Meg to remember “to get quiet, take some deep breaths, and chill the fuck out.”

Meg feels a sense of gratitude for her traditional upbringing. “It’s given me a new perception. Wider eyes.” She has forced herself to break away from “limited thinking” and be open to other outlooks on life. She has also learned forgiveness by reflecting on her past. “Being able to work through, release, heal and forgive, and move on…has opened up so many doorways.” The ability to recover from the past has created “more joy and freedom” for Meg that is translating into her music on her latest release.

While Meg is able to vent a lot of heavy emotions through her music, she still finds herself feeling down at times. Her favorite pick-me-ups include nature, exercising, and meditating “to be more present.”

She also told us that therapy and reaching out to trusted friends and family help her to manage her emotions. Most importantly, she recognizes the strength in “self-love and letting go of anything or anyone that doesn’t resonate with me.” While she admits she is still learning to fully embrace an attitude of letting go, Meg said:

“ALWAYS LOOKING AT THE CLOCK AND FEELING RUSHED. PRESENCE IS WHERE THE MAGIC HAPPENS.”

“The main thing for me has been learning to trust myself.” Depression and anxiety can cause people to feel disconnected from activities they usually really love. When Meg feels a creative rut coming on, she does her best to “accept where I’m at” and “stop putting so much pressure on myself.” The American Psychological Association conducted a study called “Perfectionism Is Increasing Over Time” and found that the internal and external pressures placed on an individual can cause a range of health issues, including depression.

Meg’s approach to accept a creative roadblock and prevent pressure from building is incredibly healthy. “Time fucks with us,” she said. “Always looking at the clock and feeling rushed. Presence is where the magic happens.” Meg Myers is excited to release a collection of songs this summer, as well as touring now and throughout the fall. She is also busy at work writing for her next album. She recently released a music video for her irresistible cover of Kate Bush’s “Running Up That Hill,” and she is excited that it has finally been shared! To keep up with Meg, you can follow her on Twitter and Instagram (@megmyers), where she shares a lot of fun behind the scenes clips and on her website (megmyers.com) where her tour schedule will be released and kept up to date.

The Red Fern: Cultivating Cruelty-Free Eats

Words by Hillary Bosy
Photography by Bridget Hagen

Five years ago, Andrea Parros opened the 100% vegan and gluten-free friendly restaurant, The Red Fern. Even without knowing that Andrea is the owner of this conscious and contemporary restaurant, you can tell that she's passionate about food once you notice her vibrant tattoos of vegetables and plants. In a city that is known for fried food, garbage plates, and generally unhealthy cuisine, Andrea felt that she could give back to this community by offering a healthy alternative - especially to people who suffer from food allergies: "This is such a beautiful place, there is so much opportunity, and the people are really nice."

Andrea became a vegan in 2008. She was diagnosed with dairy and wheat allergies prior to her conscious decision to give up all animal products: "I didn't have to give up eggs, according to my allergies, but once I gave up dairy and meat I felt a calling, and I thought, I am just going to try being vegan. A lot of the people that I knew who were vegan, I really thought that they were cool and with it. I never looked back. It was absolutely one of the catalysts to opening this restaurant. Going meatless myself made me think, 'what place would I want to eat at?' I really wanted a safe haven for anyone with food allergies, with gluten intolerances."

Trying to find places that matched her dietary needs was not the only challenge Andrea faced in her food journey, but her "solution-based" approach helped her get where she is today: "You have to be solution-based to be able to succeed in anything. Every time that you're met with a roadblock it's like 'how do I walk around this, jump around this, how do I skrrt?'" But she believes that "anything you do, as long as you do it well, it will be a success!"

"I wanted to start a place where people would be able to access vegan food both in price point and menu item. Because I think some people have an idea of what vegan food is and think that it is not accessible to a certain budget or it's not accessible because they don't know what the heck it is. So this was a good way for people to have the knowledge of vegan food."

One of the most common misconceptions about vegan food is that it is bland or mushy. When creating a dish, Andrea looks at classic foods that all people know and love such as steak, mac and cheese, and barbeque. She then creates the dish, matches the texture, and adds color: "I really like colors. I always say people eat with their eyes first, so I like the plates to be tidy and garnished well. I think of how it is going to look visually on the plate. Sometimes we'll come up with a special and we'll think ahead and say, 'oh that's going to be all brown,' so we'll try to swap out one of the components to make it more colorful and eye-appealing, first and foremost, and then make sure that the flavors back it up."

The process of creating dishes is not a solitary act. As Andrea tells us, stepping outside of the "meat box" requires more creativity. When striving to achieve this higher level of innovation it helps to have other people around to bounce ideas off

of or taste test: “I like that cooking is collaborative. We do a lot of collaborating. Someone might have an idea and someone else will add something to build off of that, then we’ll put it together and think well this needs more salt or whatever. It’s really fun to be in that process together.”

When the time arrives to make sure that the flavors back up that sexy eye-appealing dish, you have to get creative with the spices: “For our tofu egg seasoning we use an Indian salt, it’s very sulfury and tastes a little bit like eggs, it’s called Kala Namak, it’s a black Indian salt and it makes a lot of vegan cooking taste like eggs! As far as when you’re working with a bland protein like tofu, you really need to flavor it. Now at year five, I consider our flavors to be bold and strong. We really just want to try to make food taste great and have people, no matter what type of food they eat, be very excited about the food. We have a lot of people who come here and say ‘well I am not a vegetarian and I love your food, I come here multiple times a week!’ To me, that’s a high compliment.”

The highest compliment indeed. If you haven’t been to The Red Fern yet, head on over to expand your horizons and try their cruelty-free cuisine.

The Congressional Collective: Trust the Process

Words by Lex Howland
Photography by Olivia Edvalson

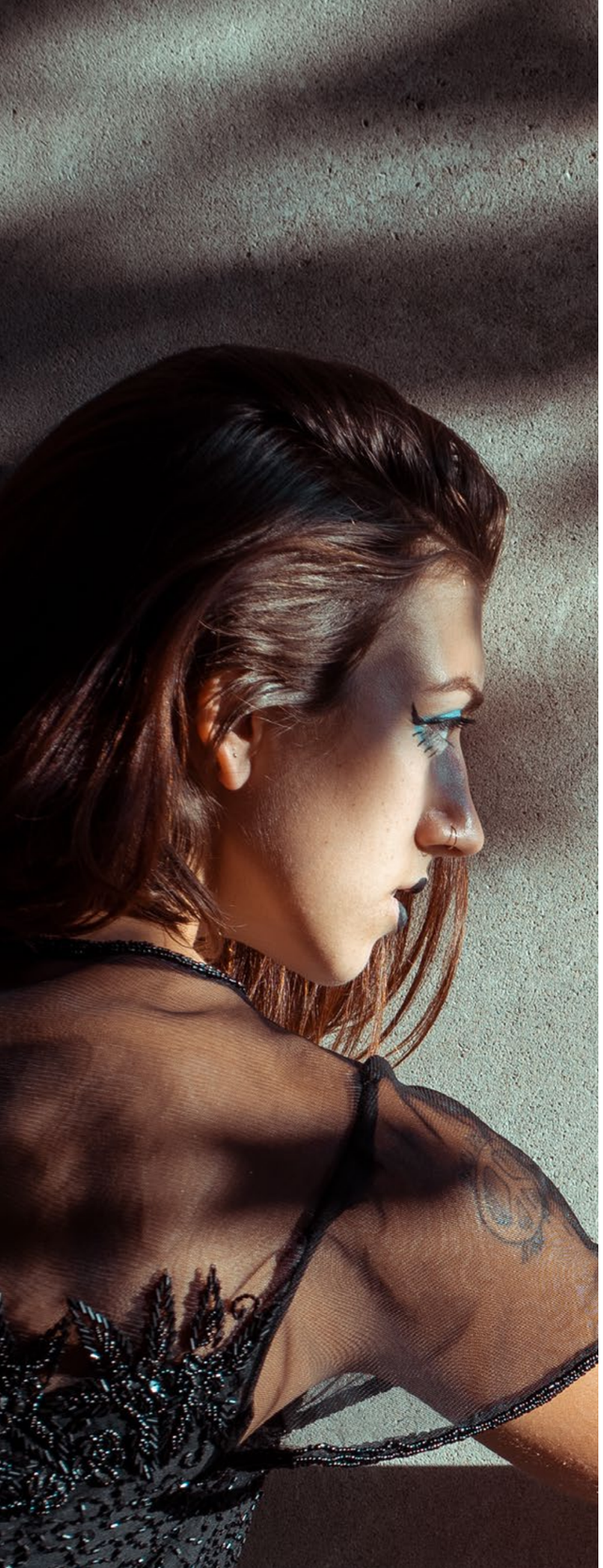
The Congressional Collective is made up of local creators Sugar Hoops, Lex Howland, and Brandon A. Mott. One of their members, Lex, has written this op-ed to describe the unique mission and values of their organization to the Rochester community.

The Congressional Collective is a Rochester-based avant-garde community bringing entertainment on the rim of social norms. We bring these events to a city that desperately needs to be opened up, exposed, and elevated. We, like a Phoenix, are rising out of the ashes and bringing Rochester into a new era, where like-minded people are heading in droves to experience the beautiful new creation that is young Rochester.

The Congressional Collective's motto is "Trust the process," because if we do not, everything that we work for will fall apart. We each have our own individual skills, and we have put serious faith in one another to do our part of the work. When one of our members tells another member to do something we know in our hearts that if it is done everything will come together. Even if it seems ridiculous or unlikely, we still have to follow through. Shirking off doesn't get us anywhere.

As a collective, we need to lean on each other. We depend on our members to get things done when they need to be done, but we also depend on each other for support. Our emotional standing is vital to the "process." We all have mental health problems, and we each go through frequent intense periods of depression, anxiety, or mania. We have to help each other out when we are down, and because we strive for "the whole." We are all cogs in a bigger machine and if the cogs aren't cleaned and maintained the machine stops working. Our merry band strives to keep everyone in the group calm, cool and collected. Some of us are better at keeping a serene level head than others, but that is our strength.

We are continually educating ourselves on a broad range of topics to keep us relevant and growing. Not only do we keep ourselves busy by learning and expanding our knowledge on social media, but we are also trying to educate ourselves on as many



topics as we can to develop into more well-rounded, socially adept, and community-minded people. We believe that this is truly one of the essential pieces needed for success.

Tenacity is something that we, as a collective, build on every day. We may all have a bit of an ego, but that gives us the confidence to get out there and give this city our all. Be it a cocktail party, a burlesque performance, a charity fundraiser, or the like; we always enter our particular landscapes with poise, grace, and certainty.

When we are hard at work writing, choreographing, planning, or any of the other thousand things we do in a day, we may come off as distant or impersonal, but that's only because we are so entrenched in our work. We believe that we can bring new and exciting things to this city - things that can open the minds and hearts of the residents. If you see any of us furiously typing or texting away, don't be intimidated by the scowl on our faces. Just give us a minute to finish our task at hand, and I assure you, we will be back to our personable selves.

When we do happen to get a day off, we try and spend our time relaxing as effectively as possible. Whether it be checking out a new menu at a bar or restaurant, trying to catch a little sunshine, or just sitting down and having a conversation at a local coffee shop, we are rarely apart. Although we realize relaxation is crucial to our mental health, we still have a hard time getting away all day without a little networking or throwing some ideas against the wall. The city never sleeps, and sometimes we doubt that we ever do either.

Each of us plays a crucial role in the creation of our productions. From concept to costumes, we all bring something essential and unique to the table. Each of us has our specialties and creative drives, giving our group its particular and peculiar flair. We are continually going over our ideas and thoughts on our projects, in the hopes that the other members will foster us into a better and more diverse product. As a forum, we work very effectively to generate new and exciting concepts to bring to the masses. We genuinely believe that together we are much more than the sum of our parts.

We are working very hard to bring excitement and enlightenment through the events we create in Rochester. We love this city and know that we can make it even better with a little bit of effort. We hope that one day, Rochester will be the most invigorating, bustling, and inclusive city there can be, and serve as a model for everyone else to follow.

playlist

TORE UP THE TRACKS – NOBODY'S MARIGOLD
BIG RED FIRE TRUCK – NOBODY'S MARIGOLD
CIRCULAR – SPACE CUBS
SIDEWAYS – SPACE CUBS
THREE WORD REVOLUTION – DANIELLE PONDER
WE LIVE – DANIELLE PONDER
LEMON EYES – MEG MYERS
NUMB – MEG MYERS
NIGHT OWL – CALICOCO
BIRD ARMS – GREEN DREAMS
THE HILL – BEN MOREY AND THE EYES
FUCK WORK – FUZZROD
DOLLY PARTON – LITTLE MUSKET
WHY DON'T YOU DO IT? – THE SHARP SHADOWS
TRASH U – TOTAL YUPPIES

Space Cubs

The Dawn of the 4th Age

Words by Zach M Anderson
Photography by Krit Upra

Experimental-electronic trio Space Cubs occupy a particular niche within the Buffalo music scene. A wildly adventurous act with avant-garde ambitions, a stunning light show, and a commanding visual presence, the group defiantly pushes against the safe boundaries that that define pop music and live performance. Originally conceived as a solo project for singer/songwriter Suzanne Bonifacio, Space Cubs have expanded their ranks with the addition of Adam Pressley (guitars/visuals) and Shawn Chiki Lewis (production/lighting). Longtime visual collaborators of Bonifacio's, and well-established artists in their own right––Pressley creates graphics as Frenchpressley, while Lewis masterminds the performance-art subversion of Lesionread––their increased involvement in Space Cubs' music has deepened and refined the group's sound and aesthetic. Their new album 'The 4th Age' is a testament to the trio's collaborative spirit; Bonifacio's sonorous voice and emotively-poetic lyrics sit intertwined among off-kilter beats, mood-whiplash dynamic shifts, and evocative soundscapes equal parts haunting and heavenly. An extraordinary record that rewards multiple listens, 'The 4th Age' showcases Space Cubs' uncompromising commitment to pushing their art into spaces unknown.

Suzanne, how has brining Adam and Shawn into the fold changed your creative method? Was it challenging adjusting to this new dynamic, or were you able to trust your bandmates' talents and embrace this change?

Suzanne: A lot of both, and still challenging, but worth it. How it's changed my creative method is actually one of my favorite parts of working with these two: I've been able to dig deeper into small details, specifically the way I produce vocals. Shawn's beats and Adam's guitar parts have given me a lot of new ideas for where something is going. My writing process is still something I take time away for. It's always been essential, and "going out on a limb" is more possible when I have time alone. When we bring it together, it's a lot of listening and talking, but super rewarding in the end.

Shawn: It's been challenging. You want everyone to trust each other all of the time, but everyone makes mistakes, and everyone can benefit from guidance. We've all experienced bruised egos along the way. I know and try to remind myself often how lucky I am to be collaborating with Suzanne and Adam.

Your new album, The 4th Age, shifts seamlessly across genres: pop, noise, Grime, IDM, ambient, industrial, post-rock, downtempo, among others. As musicians do you consciously set out to blur genre distinctions, or is this stylistic synthesis simply a by-product of your creative process?

Adam: While we may share similar tastes and influences, I believe all three of us have had varying musical and life experiences that let us approach the creative process in very different ways. I think the ultimate goal is to feel comfortable letting go, and allowing those experiences to flow and formulate freely into something that feels both exciting and natural.

Shawn: Suz and I are both really into artists like Beck and Björk, who dabble with all sorts of genres, mostly out of curiosity.

Much of the album deals with intense emotional states, such as anger, desperation, confusion, and loneliness. But amidst the negativity throughout, there's also a yearning for human connection––a faint hope that there may be something worth struggling for. Are your lyrics strictly autobiographical, or is there a more universal application?

Suzanne: I'd like the listener to feel connected to us, [to] relate in their own way. I like to keep the lyrics open for the listener's own interpretation, while still discussing the inner life, which starts from personal experiences. Everyone is living a different experience, but the emotions that come from it––anger, desperation, confusion, and loneliness––are universal.

Shawn: I also hope there is something worth struggling for.

While rooted in emotion, your words are expressed enigmatically, like poetry. While you've stressed the importance of subjective interpretation regarding your lyrical themes, do you trust your audience's ability to comprehend your message, or do you fear being misunderstood?

Suzanne: I love to explain initial concepts for songs because it's really nice when someone is genuinely interested in my process. But I don't often fear being misunderstood because it's for the listener to interpret. Sometimes the way our thoughts roll and connect with other thoughts doesn't make sense in a way that can be explained outwardly, even to our own psyche. Making art is the expression of [the psyche], and can be like moving through a fun house: you don't know what'll come up next while making it, but going for the ride is very rewarding.

Shawn: It's definitely a tough line to walk between the clear communication of ideas, and letting people hear what they want to hear.

This emotional perspective certainly recalls the cliché of the "tortured artist," one who uses their craft as a vehicle of expression––a form of "bloodletting," if you will. Does making music serve a therapeutic function for you, or is there a more intellectual motivation at work?

Suzanne: I wouldn't call it "cliché," but a blessing to be able to express myself through art. I've been allowed the resources to pursue music since I was a kid, and not everyone is given that. I didn't start actually recording my ideas until I was about 18, but when I did, it opened up a whole new way to deal with my depression and emotions. The biggest takeaway I've learned as an adult is that every human is complex by nature, just living their own experiences.

Shawn: There's a therapeutic function for sure in the initial stages of creating, but the process of finalizing what you've created can be a source of stress in itself, which can lead to spirals. I don't like the idea of the "tortured artist" because I see it as masquerading an unhealthy ego. I'm guilty of it, too.

There's a strong visual component to Space Cubs, from your live shows to your music videos, extending even to your online presence. Are visuals an equal part of the band's aesthetic or just a supplement to the music? Do you view Space Cubs as a Gesamtkunstwerk, a total synthesis of the arts?

Shawn: We've prioritized the music and live performances, but ultimately my interests lie in the fusion between the arts, on and off the stage.

Adam: Visuals will always hold a special place with me, since I spent a year or so doing live visuals for Suzanne before ever contributing to the musical process. Not a day goes by in which I don't receive a visual idea that I associate with Space Cubs.

Making music this experimental––dense sonic textures; unconventional, at times abrasive rhythms, cryptic lyrics that suggest ideas rather than outright stating them––runs the risk of turning off listeners who may not "get" Space Cubs. Are you concerned about that?

Suzanne: I have worried about people writing us off because we have the "electronic" factor and that can sometimes [confine us] into one genre. I hope for people to see beyond the means and get lost in it. But, at the end of the day, you can't make art that everyone appreciates, and that's okay.

Shawn: Art should be about taking creative risks. Personally, I'll usually prefer interesting over digestible. There will always be people we will never win over, so they just aren't a factor. We set our own standard.

Do you deliberately set out to challenge your audience, or is it more of an engagement with their intellect?

Shawn: To engage a listeners intellect IS to challenge them sometimes! No?

Suzanne: Shawn said it best.

REMAINING CALM IN THE BRIGHT LIGHTS

WITH KICKBOXER MICHAEL CARSON

Words by Joseph Larkin
Photography by Krit Upra

"A great champion is creative" undisputed kickboxer Michael Carson explains as we sit and talk in the BEDROC martial arts school off Railroad Avenue near the Rochester Public Market. Carson, who is in his mid-20's, stands tall and toned with a friendly and humble persona that echoes out real confidence. Carson is a world champion in kickboxing after winning gold in Thailand and Italy while representing the USA for the International Combat Organization and the World Kickboxing Organization. He currently stands undefeated as he has gone 20-0 as an amateur and 3-0 after making his transition to the professional level.

Kickboxing is a combination of boxing and karate, where combatants wear boxing gloves and are allowed to strike and kick each other, but are not permitted to engage in grappling, takedowns, elbows, or sweeps. Combatants can clinch each other for up to ten seconds and hit each other with their knees, but these rules can vary by promotional league. Generally, each match lasts three to five rounds, and each round lasts for three minutes with one-minute breaks in between every round. Combatants gain points for each strike or hit landed, and the judges decide a victor at the end of a fight. The fight can also end via knockout, injury, or disqualification for violation of rules. As Carson states in simpler terms, "kickboxing is unlike a street fight and more like a game with rules."

Carson grew up on the east side of Rochester, New York off of Portland Avenue and went to Joseph C. Wilson Magnet High School. He grew up in a hard-working blue-collar family with his mother, grandparents, four sisters, and stepbrother. He is lightheartedly honest about where some of his knowledge of fighting came from: "I learned early on; you need to learn how to defend yourself, growing up in the hood." Carson's initial interest in kickboxing began when he was thirteen years old as he watched the now-defunct World Combat League founded by Chuck Norris on television after school, idolizing mixed martial artist Raymond Daniels, as well as taking an interest in martial arts movies starring Bruce Lee. Carson began taking taekwondo and wrestled from 8th grade until his junior year of college when an injury to his knee prevented him from further pursuing the sport. He began to take trial periods in kickboxing at multiple gyms while finally finding a home at the BEDROC facility in May 2016. He began training full-time at BEDROC during a semester off from SUNY Brockport. Within a month of training with John Farrar, who is the owner and head instructor of BEDROC, he was offered his first fight in Cortland, New York against Mark

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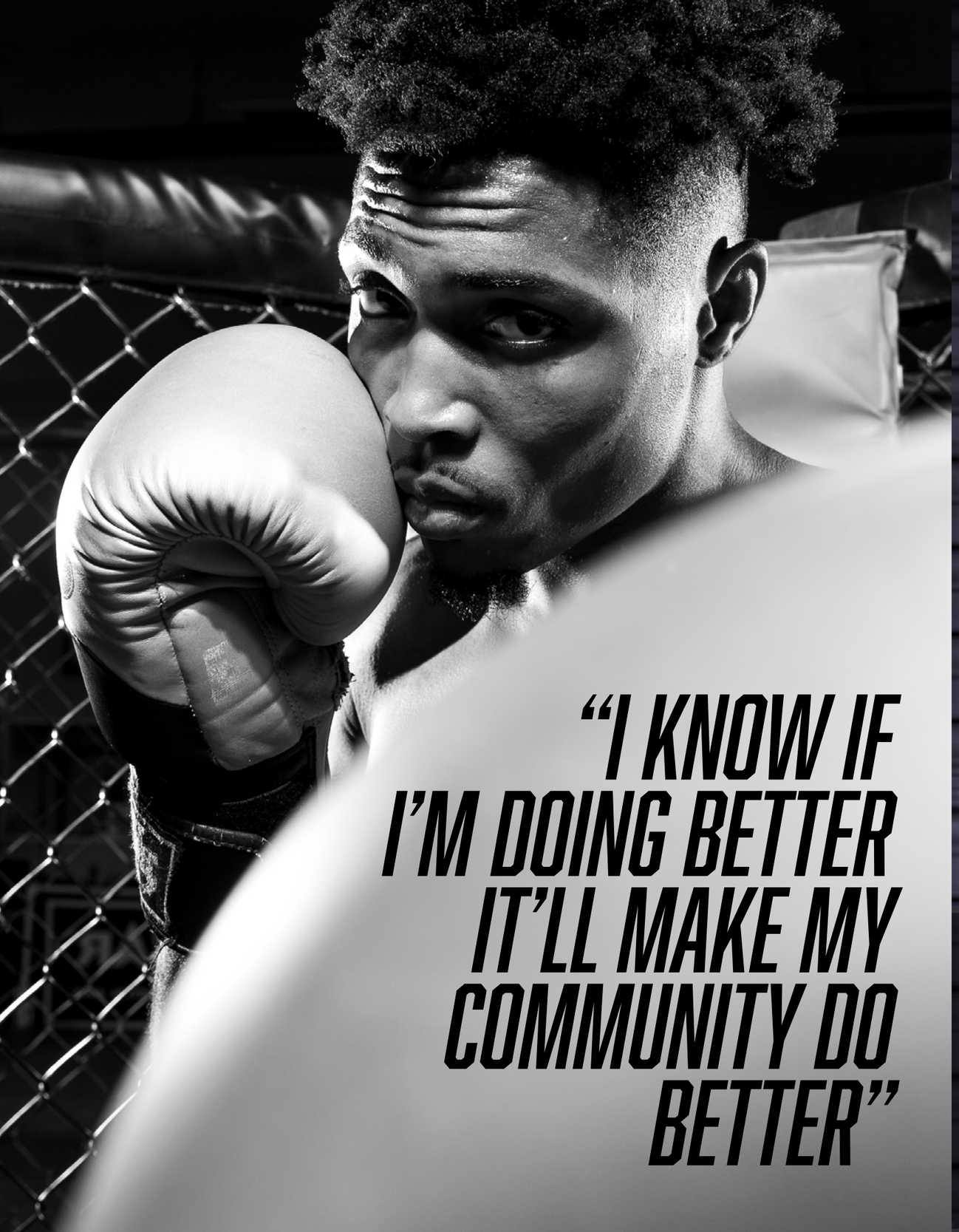

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Murray who had multiple fights in MMA and kickboxing. He had two months to prepare for this match. Carson took the matter with dire urgency, cutting off partying as well as engaging in any sexual activity, and remained "laser-focused" until the fight. Carson jokes that he "probably has never been so nervous in his entire life," and when the day came, and they called his name, "he didn't even want to come out." After taking a deep breath and remembering his training, he ended up knocking Murray out within the second round. Fast forward three years and over twenty fights later in multiple countries, and Carson remains undefeated on the pro and amateur level.

Much like any creative endeavor, Carson remains disciplined and consistent with his training and preparation. Carson trains three times a day, six days a week, as well as teaching individual classes at the BEDROC facility and the Jewish Community Center. He mixes up his training every other day focusing on different aspects of striking, weight training, stamina, as well as watching film on upcoming opponents. Carson explains that fighting is a high-pressure activity, and it takes a lot of mental preparation to be ready to go the day of the fight. In addition to having the bright lights and undivided attention on you, there are countless yells from the fans and coaches and an intense desire to win between the fighters, especially when someone is representing their entire country in an international tournament. It's easy to get lost in the overstimulation of your senses or internal and external pressure during a fight. Carson states, "meditation, visualizations, and experience" are the keys to preparation before the day of a fight. Carson also explains how imagination and creativity are essential for being a champion of the sport, as you need to keep your training fresh, or it is easy to get burned out with the countless hours spent at the gym.

As Carson has moved onto the professional level, he realizes the multiple risks involved with fighting. Not only is more money on the line for each fight, but there is less protective gear worn (at the professional level, you only wear boxing gloves, no shin pads or headgear), and there are more people involved at the management level to ensure fighters are making the right choices about their fights and diets. Carson remains unphased about a potential injury hindering his career: "if you take care of your body, you can fight for as long as you want to." When asked what keeps him motivated in kickboxing, he states that the community of fighters, his peers, and family keep him going through the daily grind: "It becomes bigger than just me doing this, it's everyone who is with me while I'm doing this. I know if I'm doing better it'll make my community do better, so in a way, I'm helping everyone."

On goals for the future, Carson has a pristine vision for how he wants to elevate the often wavering mid-20's to a place of financial stability in his 30's. Carson hopes to get signed to the Glory Kickboxing promotion company, which has partnership deals with ESPN and the UFC and currently has no U.S. champions in their league. Carson wants "to fight for as long as possible, and make as much money as possible so [he] can pay off [his] student loans and buy real estate, so [he] can go back to school and become a doctor and practice as an occupational or physical therapist." Carson hopes to win another championship and possibly make a UFC debut if the cards are right. Either way, no one has stopped him yet, and with his persistence for the community, hard work, discipline, and impressive financial plans for the future, it's hard to imagine that his career will end anytime soon.

Danielle Ponder

A Beacon of Justice Grounded in Love and Music

Words by Nala Ward Photography by Krit Upra

Many things demand our attention in our daily lives. Some days are filled with basking in the toils and fulfillment of exercising musical creativity in a home studio. Some days are filled with meeting up with community members to discuss different initiatives and programs for criminal justice reform. Some days are filled with joking around and tutoring a nephew on a school night. For Danielle Ponder, sometimes, those are all in the same day. Self-determination and motivation radiate from Ms. Ponder and her fight for equality and love cannot be tamed.

"Every artist every day overcomes fear. That's what makes us special."

With her knowledge of social and governmental factors, she works tirelessly to educate and influence change through her music. "As an artist, I have art and a business. It's difficult. It's taxing." Handling a heavy load of tangible and intangible work isn't new territory for Danielle Ponder. Right now, she is a full-time musician who also does work fighting toward criminal justice reform. Her pursuits and endeavors right now all stem from her former position of being a full-time public defender 60-70 hours a week. Even with a packed schedule, Ponder raises awareness about local progressive political candidates and gives feedback on programs and grants that help advocate for reforming the criminal justice system. Her efforts here are not separate from her music. She works to make them go hand in hand. Just this past July, she held an event with non-profit 'Citizen Action of New York' at their Justice Works Conference. She spoke on the transformative power of music, which ended with some volunteers creating an original song.

Right now, this is a time for her to work toward understanding her art and work, figuring out how to set prices to a livable wage and how to market oneself and one's creativity while staying original and in-touch with the current atmosphere. Ponder works through each day, and each struggle to learn and grow. She knows her purpose in this life and believes everything will be taken care of by faith. "It's gonna happen. There's no other option."

Fighting through difficulties toward a positive future is something she confidently perseveres through as an artist: "Every artist every day overcomes fear. That's what makes us special." Ponder believes that every time

an artist puts out a piece of work, it's a battle they've won. In her experience, artists think and hear negative thoughts about their work such as "no one's going to like it" or "they're not good enough," but believes they have to push through it all and show up to succeed. "Feel the fear, but do it anyway," Ponder encourages.

Despite how much energy her art and music takes, it is what has helped her press on through the challenges in her life. "Being a public defender was mentally draining, and impossible to do without music," says Ponder. In her opinion, one of the most pressing issues that we face is that of criminal justice reform. "It's rooted in inequity. From police officers, the district attorney's office, and the court system, there needs to be uprooting and in its place, a more compassionate justice system."

According to Ponder, lack of empathy plays a significant role in these injustices: "We need to do a better job of hearing people and need a bigger capacity for love and loving people; love is an action word, it has to be proactive." She continues to point out how there seems to be a level of self-absorption in this social media era, and it's very easy to be distracted. She believes it to be a double-edged sword: it's always good to read articles and share information, but sharing that information is not the same as activism, and shouldn't be mistaken as so. Just because your page is full of content doesn't mean that you're a social justice warrior,"it has to be deeper than that," Ponder articulates.

In an ideal future, Danielle Ponder would be selling out concert halls. "Nothing huge, but like a 250+ venue." She dreams of touring globally, writing a book, and creating wealth through her music. She "wants to be creating and getting paid in the shade to do it." When it comes to music and her art, she truly wishes never to stop. "I don't need a motivator to make music - it's like breathing. It's what I do, and I'll never stop... I can't imagine not wanting to do that."

This summer, Ponder has been able to be in a healing space on stage constantly. In addition to presenting at Justice Works Conference this past July, she was able to perform at the first annual Culture Fest in Syracuse, Thursdays on the Village Green series in Hamilton, NY as well as a few performances this past May including Ithaca Fest's post-parade concert, and Rochester's beloved Lilac Festival in May. Despite it being a rainy day, the show was able to be moved to Anthology on East Avenue to keep the good times going.

"We need to do a better job of hearing people and need a bigger capacity for love and loving people; love is an action word, it has to be proactive."

Through her music, she hopes that she can inspire her audience toward one thing: love. "Love for themselves, love for others….I want them to feel emboldened to be a force; to not live this life passively." Three goals she has set for herself in her music is to make people more aware of the justice system, help people love themselves more, and to make people dance. She believes she has a lot more work to do in this life. However, she clings to the idea that she is in charge of her destiny. "I really believe that I am the writer and narrator of this book …. We are the designers of our story." Nothing can stop her from fulfilling her purpose on this earth.

Follow Danielle Ponder on her on Instagram @dpondermusic and Facebook to keep up with her latest adventures. Be sure to check in with @walltherapyny on Instagram to be updated on their "This is Triumphant Music" mural at Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Park that features a few musicians, including Ms. Ponder.

Nobody's Marigold

Rochester's Multi-Generational Rockabilly Supergroup

Words by Amber Estherpeace Doerr
Photography by Amber Estherpeace Doerr

Nobody's Marigold is a multi-generational band that rocks Rochester with their contemporary "rockabilly americana thing." Combining multiple styles and types of people has been a focus of Nobody's Marigold, a band consisting of Rochester music industry veterans including multi-instrumentalist and lead vocalist April Laragy Stein (formerly of The Raw Magillys and the Atomic Swindlers), lead guitarist Sue Veneer (formerly of The Raw Magillys and The Antoinettes), and drummer Roy Stein (formerly of new wave punk bands such as Jet Black Berries and New Math). Alongside these well-versed performers, Nobody's Marigold has a cast of budding Nazareth College musicians among the band including multi-instrumentalist and vocalist Ignatius "Iggy" Marino (of Walrus Junction) and bassist Nick Lenard. In a world where bands traditionally consist of people in the same age range, Iggy believes that making music with musicians that are older than him has increased his expertise as a live player, explaining that "they usually have more wisdom when it comes to a live show. I feel like it makes me a better live player."

April looks back to when she was "very very young," and wonders if she would have liked to play in a band like Nobody's Marigold: "It was almost like the type of thing where I thought that 'you can't do that.' Now, I think with the way that music is, it is so much more accepted now. There are so many styles, so many different types of people, new music, the way that music is made and presented to you and all the different avenues you can be heard."

Though the band spans multiple generations, they agree that they are all equal bandmates. Creating a flow of music that can encapture all of these diver se people requires a vulnerable and forgiving place of collaboration.

"Not once have I ever written a song with all the parts in my mind perfectly," Iggy comments, "I always write it with a guitar and I let the band put down their parts. And because everybody is so different and there are so many different layers -- and they're all smart players so they know when they can accentuate their line or fall

back. You can just let the band do what they do and it always turns the song into your sound because it's your musicians and your song. It becomes the band's song. You may have written the words and the changes, but once the band plays their original thoughts over it, it becomes Nobody's Marigold."

When it comes to the live performance, April expresses that "there are so many kinds of personalities in the band. I think that's helpful because if everyone acted like Iggy and me on stage, it would be pandemonium. Strengths and weaknesses-- it all balances each other out. It makes for a really fun live show too!"

Not all bands are so collaborative; April recounted a time that she was in a band that said "no accordion," so with Nobody's Marigold, she tells us that "I'm really happy that I get to bring out Waldo-Ball. Waldo-Ball is my accordion."

However, April isn't the only one with a knack for an instrument that isn't typically found in a contemporary band. Iggy is just as happy to be able to explore his music through his primary instrument - the saxophone: "This is the only band that I actually get to play my saxophone the way that I want to, in a band. That's what I studied in college; saxophone. I feel like that is the instrument that I would end up doing long term anyways. The singing and the bands are awesome but classical saxophone, jazz saxophone, even rock and funk stuff...it's just my schtick."

April continues to touch on the creative liberty that each member can express and expand on in Nobody's Marigold, sharing that "with this band, Iggy can go off and it can take you into a whole new thing. It's like, 'alright, we were just doing this sort of rockabilly americana thing and now - Holy crap! Where it is going now?' It's so cool. Really, so cool, because he just kind of gets into this thing and somehow, 'poof,' it manages to get back into the song! It's great because he should! I like it when everybody can showcase what they can do."

April feels especially overjoyed about the camaraderie of Nobody's Marigold, noting that she could not be happier to be playing again with the newest addition to their band, Sue Veneer, her longtime bandmate and greatest companion.

"It's a party!" comments Iggy.

After a performance, however, Iggy says that the only thing on his mind is to, "go home and tuck myself in… I am in an excited and energetic state when it's showtime. But afterwards, I always feel good after a show. I just love doing it so much."

The act of creating music brings peace to these members. When Iggy is experiencing changes in his life, he says making music, "gives me something to focus that energy into. It's awesome to have something that you are passionate about in your life and that you can use your negative energy to create something positive. I don't think a lot of people in life are fortunate to find that at a young age and I'm really happy that I did."

"It's channeling an addiction of sorts," April continues, "I like to listen and write when I'm dark. It's kind of like they say, 'drink coffee on a hot day, it'll cool you off.' Rarely when I'm down will I write a positive song to get out of it or listen to one, I just don't want to."

Even though these guys enjoy every show they play, their ideal venue is one where everyone in the audience is having as much fun as they are. April says, "a dream show for me always is, and it doesn't matter where it is -- that people show up, they stay, and they have a great time and you know they're having a great time with you. I never call anybody a fan, I call them someone who believes in what we're doing… Even an energy from a small audience that is positive and just lit from what you're doing is incredible. I gotta be honest, I would rather have an audience of twenty-five people madly into it than two hundred people that were like 'meh.'"

Seeing Nobody's Marigold live is a unique experience guaranteed to shake your ideas about what a band "should" be. Be sure to come out and see one of Rochester's strongest live performers at Sticky Lips BBQ in Henrietta on September 21st. If you're lucky, you may even get a chance to sign up for one of their famous raffles and win an unexpected prize.

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