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Ralph

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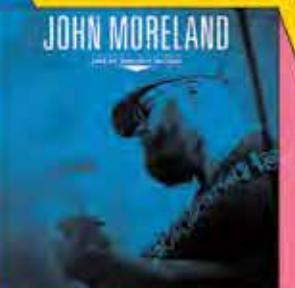
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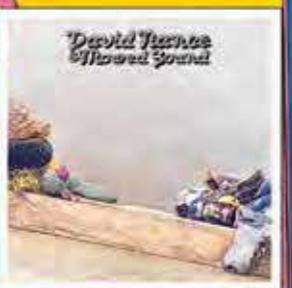
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Editor's Letter

"One issue is a hobby, do two and you're making magazines."

I think about this quote a lot. Well, I think about the moral of it... after hours of searching I can't actually find who said it, so you'll have to take my word for it. I'm pretty sure I read it in an interview with the editor of a basketball magazine a few years ago. It was something like that anyway. But it's especially relevant for me at the moment because, look! Here we are - it's Ralph issue 2. We're officially (according to the anonymous basketball guy) making magazines. There was such a good reception to the first issue, along with epic launch parties in London, New York and LA, that there was mild pressure to do something better for this one.

And we totally did.

This one is absolutely packed with fun and funny things. The incredible singer/songwriter Tayla Parx is on the cover, British Vogue Executive Editor Giles Hattersley does a fashion feature with scarecrows, we deep dive on the South Asian hip-hop scene, lie on a bed with stand up Cat Cohen, chat numbers with J-Pop band f5ve, review cheap perfumes, hear stories behind rare band T-shirts, visit the art of Japan's Naoshima Island as well LA's food scene, go backstage with epic, queer Lord Of The Rings theatre production You Shall Not Yass and loads, LOADS more.

As they said in Austin Powers, "Who does Number 2 work for!?"

Well... you, hopefully.

Here it is, have fun.

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Cover: Tayla Parx shot by H.N. James at Third Man Records, Nashville
Tayla wears Homme + Femme (top), Forever 21 (shorts), Vans (shoes) hat/glasses stylist's own.

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You Shall Not Yass

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Guvna's Greatest Hits

Gallybaggers

Parx Life!

Naoshima, Baby

Max's Dispatches

Goth Cocktails

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Don't Google This

Popcorn Pirate

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AN APOLOGY!!!

In the last issue of Ralph, we mentioned in the Don't Google It feature that only 0.1% of Americans had tried blackberries.

We haven't Googled it but someone told us that it's actually blackcurrants. Ralph hopes no one, especially Americans, were offended by this potentially grave error (we don't know, we didn't Google it) and sincerely apologise for any mistakes that might have been made.

ralph





We asked top J-Pop band, f5ve, ten questions about numbers – and they made their answers count...

WE GOT

5505
WE GOT

5505
WE GOT

5505
WE GOT

5505
WE GOT

Words by Josh Jones
Illustration by James-Lee Duffy

5505
WE GOT

Members Miyuu, Sayaka, Ruri, Rui and Kaede, make up J-Pop band f5ve. Known for brilliantly catchy songs, having incredibly tight choreography, and not taking themselves seriously, their fan army (known as hi-5) has been steadily growing around the world. Now, let's talk numbers...

① Hi f5ve! Is it weird when hi-5 say that, then try and high five you?

<MIYUU> Actually, I haven't been able to "high five" yet with hi-5 :(so I can't answer that question until I've done a lot of high fiving, haha
<SAYAKA> I'm not tired of it, because I'm always connected to hi-5 by telepathy even if I don't get to high five!
<RURI> We still haven't had too many chances to meet too many people yet, so I'm looking forward to the day when I can high five hi-5!
<RUI> Oh no...!! Unfortunately, I haven't had the chance to high five anyone yet...
<KAEDE> In fact, I haven't had many chances to meet hi-5 so far, so I actually want to high five them until I get tired of it!ahaha

② What's the funniest number?

<MIYUU> My answer is 4 because there are many different ways to write it in Japanese, and when it becomes kanji, it has the most strokes!
<SAYAKA> 8!! Because if you turn it, it becomes infinite :)
<RURI> I say 3!! The shape is cute!!
<RUI> 8 - because I've kind of started liking this number recently.
No reason, just a feeling. lol
<KAEDE> 1!! My birthday is on January 11th, so the line-up of 1s feel kind of funny and it's like a good number to me!

③ What's the most boring number?

<MIYUU> My answer is 1 – it's boring because it has the fewest strokes!
<SAYAKA> 7!! People say lucky 7, but I've never felt lucky with the number lol
<RURI> I think 0. Because it's a nothing.
<RUI> 0 Justa...circle.....lol Not that I hate it, but it's boring to me...
<KAEDE> 18! In Japan, it's the age where you're considered as an adult, but still too young to drink lol

④ How many songs does your favourite album have on it?

<MIYUU> 15! I choose *Brat* by Charli XCX. YouTube music has told me that this is the album I've listened most to this year. My favorite songs on the album are 'Talk Talk', 'I might say something stupid' and 'Mean Girls'.
<SAYAKA> Charli XCX: *Brat*, and it has 15 songs!
<RURI> Red Hot Chili Peppers, 18 songs!
<RUI> *SOUR* by Olivia Rodrigo, 11 songs!!
<KAEDE> Believe by Justin Bieber 18 songs

⑤ What's your favourite f5ve song?

<MIYUU> My favourites are 'Wish' and 'Jump'! It was hard to choose just one, so I say both! LOL
These two songs have a lot of fantasy feeling, and I really like it!
My dream agent is 'Fantasy', so maybe that's why I like fantasy songs! LOL
<SAYAKA> 'Sugar Free Venom'!! Among f5ve's songs, it has a mellow vibe, and I like it the best!
<RURI> I like 'Riajo' the most!
<RUI> 'Magic Clock'
<KAEDE> I can confidently say that all of f5ve's songs are great, so it's hard to choose...but if I had to pick one, it would be 'Snowman'.

⑥ What's your favourite f5ve dance routine?

<MIYUU> I choose 'UFO' because it has a very unique choreography and I like it! I especially like my part ❤
<SAYAKA> 'Underground'!! I like the parapara dance because it's catchy and has an impact.
<RURI> 'Underground'!!
<RUI> 'UFO'!!
<KAEDE> If I had to choose based on how I'm feeling right now, it would be 'Underground'. I'm happy so many people are doing the dance challenge videos every day, and I think the choreography is really good—it makes you want to dance! ❤



② Which f5ve song do you look forward most to playing live?

<MIYUU> 'Underground' is one of our songs where we can dance with the fans and hear a lot of cheering, so it's really fun to perform while watching everyone dance with us <3

<SAYAKA> 'Underground'!! We made a fan call & response, and I think it's fun to dance at live shows with the fans!

<RURI> 'Underground'!!

<RUI> 'Firetruck'!! Performing this song makes me feel very energetic!!!!

<KAEDE> I would say 'Firetruck'!! Performing this song makes me feel confident, powerful, and beautiful!!!!



MIYUU

SAYAKA

③ Who's best? The Jackson 5, Jurassic 5 or the UK boyband 5ive?

<MIYUU> I've been listening to One Direction's music a lot lately. I especially like their song 'Night Changes.'

<SAYAKA> The Jackson 5, because they are as cool as f5ve!!

<RURI> 5ive – the British boy band!

<RUI> 5ive...Because the name is pretty similar<3

<KAEDE> The Jackson 5!!!!



RURI



RUI



KAEDE

④ Where would be the ultimate place to play a f5ve show?

<MIYUU> This may be a cliché answer, but we want to perform at Madison Square Garden in New York and the O2 Arena in London. These are classic venues, and names that everyone knows, so we would love to see ourselves standing there!!

<SAYAKA> Our fans are in many places, so I would like to visit all the fans from various countries!!

<RURI> I want to go to various places around the world and perform!

One of the most, I would like to be on Coachella stage!

<RUI> KIA FORUM!!

<KAEDE> Coachella and Glastonbury!!

⑤ Can you describe your live show in, you've guessed it, five words?

<MIYUU> CONFIDENCE.FANTASY.JOY.EMPOWERMENT.BRILLIANCE.

If you're hi-5 you'll understand why I chose these five words as my answer:

*When we put together these five words, it will make a "f5ve" show!

<SAYAKA> conceptual, participatory type, relieve stress, sing, dance.

<RURI> Happy, Fun, Excitement, Memorable, A sense of unity.

<RUI> Confidence, Brilliance, Empowerment, Optimism, Fantasy.

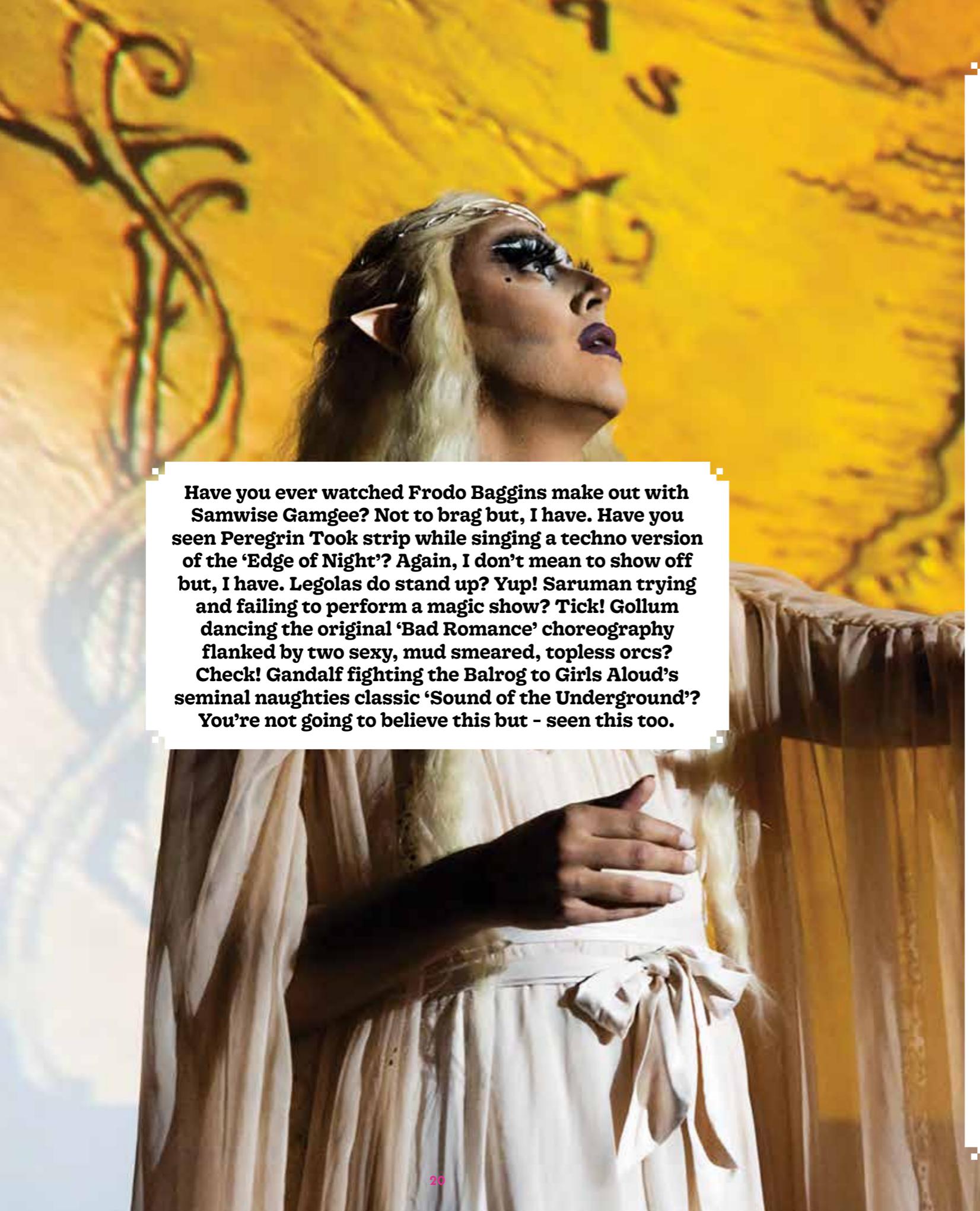
<KAEDE> Unique, Fun, Crazy, Women and Power. ralph

You Shall Not Pass!

**Backstage with one of the most
creative and exciting theatre
productions in the UK**

Words by Ben Smoke
Photos by Corinne Cumming





Have you ever watched Frodo Baggins make out with Samwise Gamgee? Not to brag but, I have. Have you seen Peregrin Took strip while singing a techno version of the 'Edge of Night'? Again, I don't mean to show off but, I have. Legolas do stand up? Yup! Saruman trying and failing to perform a magic show? Tick! Gollum dancing the original 'Bad Romance' choreography flanked by two sexy, mud smeared, topless orcs? Check! Gandalf fighting the Balrog to Girls Aloud's seminal naughties classic 'Sound of the Underground'? You're not going to believe this but - seen this too.

In fact, at this point there are probably fewer Lord of the Rings characters I've not watched doing something mental (Treebeard interpretive dancing to David Attenborough!) than those I have (Lord Elrond rapping Eminem!). Is this, you may well be thinking, some sort of kink (no shame in it!)? A very public slip of an already fragile grip on reality (whom among us!)? No, all of this and so much more was the three hours of camp chaos on the stage at the Clapham Grand in South London on a balmy September evening.

You Shall Not Yass: The Extended Edition is the brainchild of two self confessed "dumb bitches" in the shape of Me the Queen and drag daughter/co-producer Herr the Queen. The drag artists, who play Galadriel/Gandalf/Arwen/Eowyn and Golum respectively, have been producing various versions of the show for the last two years. The inaugural iteration, held in August 2022 at London's Royal Vauxhall Tavern, focused on the 'Fellowship', with later editions exploring different aspects of the expansive world Tolkein, and latterly, director Peter Jackson built.

The production has now seen 14 different drag and cabaret artists take to stages across the south east of the country, all bringing their own unique take to characters, plots, plans, schemes and shenanigans of Middle Earth. From Boromir singing Chumbawamba's 'Tubthumping' whilst being repeatedly shot by arrows, to Sauron leading the crowd in a rendition of Chappel Roan's 'Hot To Go' choreography, *You Shall Not Yass* is the place where stupidity meets genius. Ludicrous and full of heart, it is a monumental feat of production, craft and entertainment and, if nothing else, remains the only place you'd be able to find a dwarf playing a kazoo-strapped

axe on a Thursday night in London. I sat down with the creators to find out what it's all about...

Where did the idea for *You Shall Not Yass* come from?

Me The Queen: We've been doing themed shows for quite a while. We started dabbling in them in a bar I used to run called Her Upstairs in Camden, in a very low key, low scale way and they've grown from there. For *You Shall Not Yass* it was actually Herr's idea, which is odd because I'm the hardcore, lifelong super fan and I just kind of always assumed that there weren't enough people out there like me for it to do well but we've sold out every single show!

Why do you think audiences, particularly queer audiences, connect so deeply with Middle Earth?

Herr The Queen: There's a lot of themes of otherness in Lord of the Rings, the very obvious tropes of good versus evil and queer people often feel put down a lot in society so on a very surface level the audience can identify with the source material. Also drag in of itself is an escape.

MTQ: The idea of found family and fellowship, disparate communities, races, species and creatures finding kinship in one another through hardship is just Queer 101 isn't it? Also one of the things I didn't really think about but [Drag King] Loose Willis, who plays Elrond in YSNY, posts about how the films are one of the best representations of male friendship. They're non-toxic, they show affection, they're not afraid to hug each other - it's wild that it has to be done in a mythical fantasy world for men to behave normally!

Herr... you looked, if I may say so, delightfully revolting last night - talk us through the process of becoming Gollum?

HTQ: From a technical perspective, in terms of makeup, it's not that difficult and I really enjoy it. Aside from getting a bald cap on, which Me lovingly sticks to the back of my neck and paints my skull, it doesn't take too long - it's mostly face and body paint rather than any hardcore prosthetics. I just throw dirt on my face and look disgusting and I can do anything. There's something so satisfying about being ugly, like deeply, deeply ugly in drag. It gives you such a free rein to let loose on stage. Not that looking pretty doesn't, but there's something about being such a vile creature and looking so heinous you think - I've got to go for it. It empowers you to really get into that character because you can't half ass it when you look like that. In many ways, it's made me, find me.

MTQ: I'm right here.

As Gollum you perform three times - once to Christina Aguilera's 'Beautiful', then Shakespeare's Sister's 'Stay' and finally Lady Gaga's 'Bad Romance', all with audio from the films mixed in - talk us through these acts and the choices you make in them.

HTQ: Obviously they're fun and camp songs, and so the audience is going to enjoy it and react and have a really good time, but at the same time, you have to strike the balance when making the mixes. When I make an act, everything has to make sense for that character and mostly it comes down to the lyrics. There has to be some correlation there with the spoken word that you're cutting in and the narrative you're trying to paint on stage. With 'Stay', though it's about a lover, I think it actually speaks to the duality of Smeagol and Gollum, you know his good and bad side.

For 'Bad Romance', it is so obviously suited to talking about Gollum's relationship with the ring, and perfectly encapsulates his

possession and his addiction to it. I'm a video editor by day so adding in the visuals element we had, the explosions (based on Gaga's Chromatica tour), Sauron's tower, the ring, allowed me to really elevate and innovate. There were lots of these explosive moments, lots of pyrotechnics, which we couldn't have in the Clapham Grand in real life, but next time - we will have a fire.

Me, your interpretation of Gandalf the Grey's iconic fight with a Balrog, soundtracked by Girls Aloud's 'Sound of the Underground', included members of the ensemble cast for the first time in the shape Peregrin Took (played by Drag artist Carrot) coming onstage and lobbing a bedazzled skeleton into the audience - how did this come to pass?

MTQ: This show was always going to be the big one which is why we called it the extended edition, both as a reference to the director's cuts that were released of the films and because we wanted to bring every single performer who'd been involved together for it. To be honest, if we had the time and the money, there would be a hell of a lot more than what we have. For instance with Carrot coming on stage, and the whole Fellowship pretending to creep through the woods as I played Galadriel - that was just simple stuff that I could send out in an email with the track and say it's 40 seconds of you creeping across the stage pretending to be in a magical forest. None of it was rehearsed, it all happened live, right in front of the audience, because we hire the best of the best.

On that subject - discounting yourselves, who was your favourite act of the night?
HTQ: Just off the top of my head, Richard Melanin III as Saruman doing a



"Having Legolas be a deadpan dad joke stand up comedian is just excellent"



magic show ends me. It's so shit and just so funny - I was crying at the side of the stage.

MTQ: It's the perfect juxtaposition of Saruman as this like, killer, evil, supposed to be the most powerful wizard in Middle Earth, but being represented by this clown magician who's failing at doing a magic show. When we ask people to be in *You Shall Not Yass*, we want them to put themselves into it to make it their version of the character – so that's a perfect example. It can be quite easy with a theme show for it to be just lots of spoken word lip sync numbers. But our casts are really good at throwing in extra stuff so that we do have bits of burlesque and stand up comedy and magic and live vocals to keep it feeling fresh and to provide different ways of looking at the characters. Like having Legolas be a deadpan dad joke stand up comedian is just excellent.

What's next for *You Shall Not Yass*?

HTQ: We've actually had quite a few conversations about this recently. As we said on stage we're currently applying for Arts Council funding to take this on tour across the UK to theatres. We're

chatting next week about potentially taking it to Edinburgh Fringe, and we'd love to go across the pond if we can. The sky really is the limit because Lord of the Rings is so popular in so many places. We recently started our TikTok and it's crazy we have hundreds of thousands of views and nearly 5,000 followers in two weeks of having the account. There's so many people from the states being like "come to Maryland, come to New Orleans".

MTQ: I'm sometimes convinced that the name alone is what sells it for us. Also we've got 12 amazing performers in the show already and there are so many characters we haven't even touched on yet. There's still so much source material from the films that we haven't done, so continuing to add to this amazing band of performers to take it to new places and be able to have this pool of people to draw from is amazing.

While we're here, is there anything else you want to promote?

HTQ: We're doing a Shrek themed show - *Shrektacular 2: Ogre All Ye Faithful* on the 12th December at Clapham Grand! ralph





India's custodian of gaming history

Words by Radhika Iyengar
Photos by Tej Datar



Tucked in the inner alleyways of India's bustling city of Pune is Babu Video Games - a small, nondescript store, which has been open for business for over three decades.

A nostalgic trip down memory lane, it's arguably one of the oldest video game stores in India. It's a treasure trove of retro video games which were immensely popular in the 1980s and 1990s, including Nintendo Game & Watch - for those of you too young to remember, they were the flip out portable consoles like Donkey Kong, Popeye, Zelda, Atari Paperboy, Tiger Electronics' Road Race, Casio Western Bar and Casio Kung Fu. Kids grew up obsessed with these games, and they became a special and inextricable part of their childhood.

Fifty-two-year-old gaming enthusiast and avid collector, Babu Puranchand Gurnani, owns and helms this store. He has been running his video game business since he was a teenager in the 1980s, renting a gamut of handheld consoles. Today, Babu continues to rent and sell video games, including the latest iterations of PlayStation and Xbox. Over the years, however, Babu has amassed an enviable collection of video games, many of which are hard to find today. We took a trip to his tiny, yet iconic store in Pune, for a chat about his place as a true custodian of gaming history.

What's your first memory of owning a video game?

This was about 40 years ago, when my friend from Dubai had brought a Nintendo Game & Watch - Parachute, the handheld unit. When I saw it, I remember being fascinated. He gave it to me as a sample unit and I bought it from him. In the 1980s, my father ran a grocery store. The business at our grocery store was up and down. Money was scarce and I was thinking of some way to bring in extra money into our home. Video games at the time were quite new to India.

So, right next to my father's grocery business,

I began renting video games to customers. I must have been about 16 or 17 years old. At the beginning, I only had one unit. However, slowly, as my video game business began to do well, I bought more games.

Could you describe what your store was like in the 1980s and 1990s?

My father's shop was approximately 110 sq. feet in size, where he would sell groceries and I would rent out video games. When my business took off, I remember seeing long queues of customers waiting to play. Children would sit on the sidewalk that bordered our small store and enthusiastically play the handheld games there. Others would sit inside the store on stools or on sacks of food grains. Initially, my father was annoyed about many people crowding the streets near our shop but he didn't protest much because the money was flowing in. At that time, the age-group of the customers was 12 years to 30 year olds. Right above our grocery store, we had an empty loft. I decided to put 10 television sets there, where customers could play video games like Super Mario, Contra, Road Fighter, Duck Hunt, Aladdin and Circus Charlie in the '90s. I didn't have an arcade parlour where one puts a coin in the machine. I charged my customers 1 rupee per hour, which allowed many to play for hours at a stretch. The young boys were very competitive while playing. For instance, sometimes one of them would be playing well and would earn a great score; right then his friend would come from behind and switch the game off, so that he'd lose his high score. Everyone had fun though. They laughed and enjoyed themselves. That truly was a golden period and I have many fond memories of that time.

How did the idea of renting video games come about? How did you generate interest or promote your business?

To be honest, the idea just struck me. We were living in poverty. There were other



grocery stores in the neighbourhood and we had steep competition. At that time, video games were new in India and it was an unexplored territory. When I was done playing with my Game & Watch - Parachute unit, I wondered what to do with it. I thought of renting it out. I said to myself, "Let's try and see whether this works." Since my father had a grocery store, there was a regular flow of customers. Sometimes, their children accompanied them. I would promote my handheld game by showing the console to the kids and say, "Here, come and see. This is something that might interest you." The children were fascinated and their parents would agree to pay me 1 rupee per hour. That's how I began renting it out. In terms of a marketing strategy, everything was word-of-mouth. At that time, I had a monopoly since no one else was doing this in my neighbourhood. In fact throughout Pune, there weren't many game stores like mine. Many would come from afar to play at my store, so I had the upper hand.

How did you purchase more gaming units?

Rental was my main business. I reinvested my profits in my business to buy more video games. The first Nintendo Game & Watch unit I bought was for my personal use. I paid for it from my pocket and my father also helped me financially.

Over the last three decades, you've become quite a collector. From classics like Nintendo's Super Mario Bros. and Donkey Kong to Tetris, what are some of your most prized possessions?

I would say all the Nintendo handheld games – Game & Watch, Nintendo Panorama screen (coloured) and Nintendo DS. Most of them are in working condition and I'm deeply attached to them. I don't think I can ever part with them.

You also offer repair services for these vintage gems in your workshop. One of your technicians, who has been working with you for the last 15 years, said you had taught him how to repair and refurbish the units.

Yes, I used to be a technician myself. I was inherently curious. Whenever something went wrong with one of my machines, I would open it up and try to fix it. Most of the time, I would be successful. All the experience that I have gained over the years, I have shared with my staff to train them.

So you're pretty much self-taught?

Yes. I worked with Game & Watch, Casio, Atari and many others.

In fact, before video games came into my life, I used to open radios and irons. You see, my father would open his store around six or seven in the morning. All of us worked continuously throughout the day. We worked in shifts – sometimes my father manned the store, sometimes my mother and other times it was me. We would close around one o'clock in the morning. All of us were overworked. Once my father would shut the shop and my parents would go to sleep, I would climb up to the loft and repair the games till 3am or 4am because later that morning, I would have to give the consoles for rent again to make money.



What kind of video games do you have at your shop today?

I have many, many games. I haven't been able to make a list or organise them. However, in terms of type, I have PlayStation 1 to 5, XBox Classic, XBox One, XBox 360, Xbox One S to Nintendo Game & Watch, Nintendo DSi, Nintendo Wii, Nintendo Wii U, Nintendo 3DS – the list is endless.

In India, how has the video game industry evolved over the last 40 years? Has the advent of Amazon and eBay adversely impacted your business?

A lot has changed. In fact, around 2008-2009, Sony wanted to make games which were more aligned to the Indian culture and tastes to gain a larger hold in the country. They created games like the 3D action game Sri Hanuman: the Boy Warrior (a mythological game featuring a Hindu deity), fighting games like Don 1 (featuring Bollywood superstar Shah Rukh Khan) and Desi Adda (that had traditional Indian sports like kite fighting and kabaddi), but these games were developed locally. They were nothing much in comparison to their international counterparts. Games like

Black, Grand Theft Auto: Vice City and Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas were far more sophisticated in terms of graphics and overall quality, and my customers were more attracted in them. With the arrival of Amazon, our business has taken a hit because Amazon delivers across India and due to deep discounts, the customers pay less for the same product. Thirty years ago, I used to charge my customers 1 rupee per hour. Today, we still rent some games but the kids take the games home. I charge 100 rupees per hour (less than £1) or 1000 rupees (£9 approx.) for an entire day.

Your store hasn't changed one bit since the 1980s and neither have you moved. Why is that?

This is my father's shop and holds the memory of my family. My address hasn't changed, so people know exactly where to find me. I have old, loyal customers who bring their children to show them my shop. They proudly tell their kids that this is where they used to play video games 25-30 years ago. Such experiences are the most rewarding for me. *ralph*

@babu_video_games

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HOLY GRAILS

Andy Knowles LOVES collecting cool T-shirts. He's been doing it for over 30 years and during lockdown thought he'd share his collection at @_fine_bone_china (the name a nod to the tea set his mum would get out on special occasions). Each one comes with a story so we asked him for six of his favourites...

Words by Andy Knowles
Illustrations by Stephanie Unger

Sonic Youth 'Dirty' T-shirt



Getting this one was so bizarre. One of my best mates is the artist David Shrigley and I was round at his in Brighton and we were chatting about my obsession over a few beers when he asked me which T-shirts I was currently hunting. No joke, the first one I mentioned was this one and he said "I have that upstairs in my drawer. Let me get it for you, you can have it." I obviously had to go with him to said drawer and inhale the whole experience, and there it was, like the scene in Pulp Fiction when Marcellus Wallace opens the briefcase. He bought it in December 1992 from Glasgow's iconic Barrowlands venue, when he went to the Sonic Youth show mainly to see

Pavement, who were supporting. At the merch stall, to his disappointment, all the Pavement T-shirts had been sold so he bought this one instead. It gradually got demoted over time and eventually became his studio T-shirt to paint in, i.e. the t-shirt you give zero fucks about, hence the paint marks that are blotted throughout. I love the marks. I love the history. I love how it was his, the design, colour, band, album and the fact that something that meant so much to me, meant very little to him. It's not like I cried when he gave it to me by the drawer and I finally had one in my hand (I did, but must have been the beers).

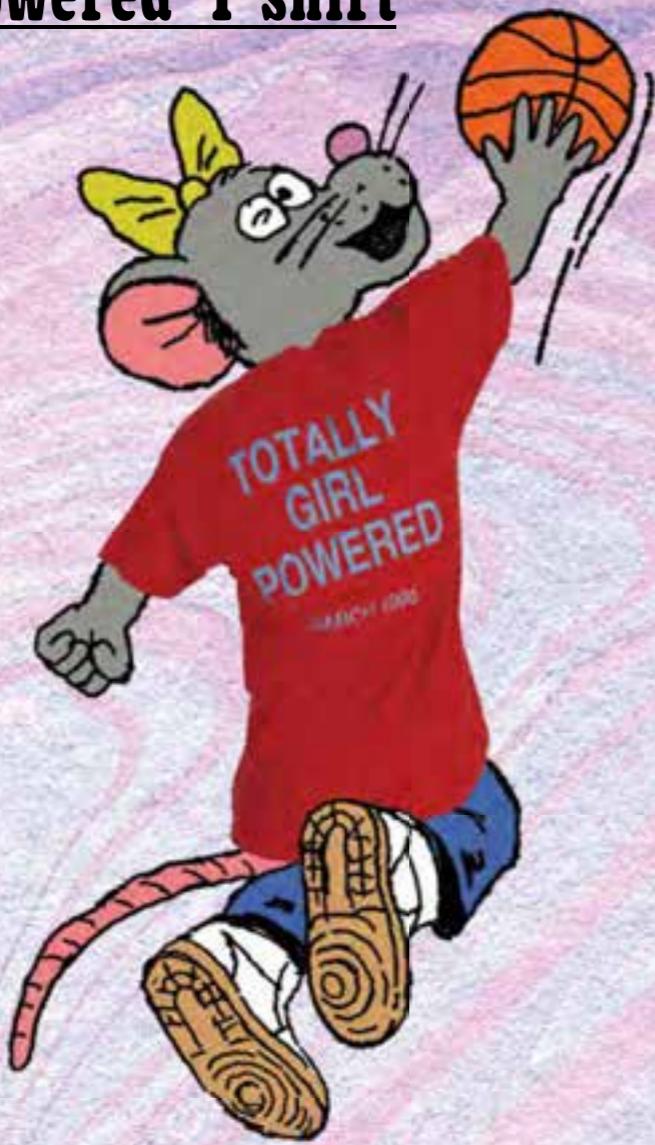
Björk 'Debut' long sleeved T-shirt



There are times in life where you just make the right choice aren't there? Mostly, when I went to a gig in the '90s, I had the recurring predicament of either buying an official T-shirt from the merch stand and drinking tap water or buying beer and a bootleg T-shirt from outside for a fiver after the show. It was never an option for beer and official merch. Boo hoo me. The irony now is that the bootleg T-shirts are often more sought after than the official ones due to their limited numbers and aesthetic appeal.

But anyway, at Björk, Blackpool Empress Ballroom, 1994 I chose to drink water. I chose correctly as this T-shirt is probably the most valuable in my collection due to many factors, date, condition, tag and the fact it's the long sleeve version. Sleeves mean money y'all! What once was £12 has now become silly money, like four figure money. So why don't I sell it, you ask? I'd rather keep it in a cedar wood scented storage box, take it out sporadically and just look at it from time to time thank you very much.

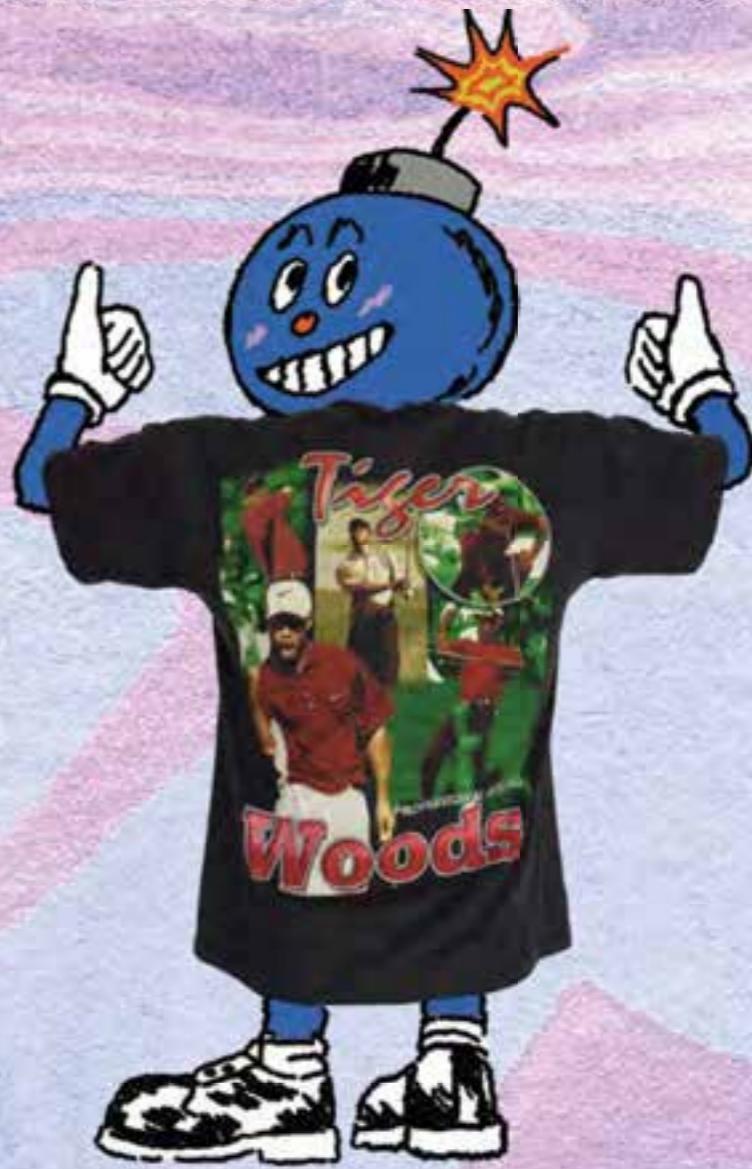
Bikini Kill / Huggy Bear 'Totally Girl Powered' T-shirt



A T-shirt saying "Totally Girl Powered" on the back? Yes please. I really love wearing this one – ace message. The front of this is the *Catcall* record label artwork used on their collaborative cassette/LP release in 1993 where the A side was Bikini Kill and the AA (the other) side was Huggy Bear. Playing alongside one another during the Riot Grrrl feminist punk movement, Huggy Bear called themselves "girl-boy revolutionaries", both in reference to their political beliefs and their line-up.

Bikini Kill pioneered the Riot Grrrl movement, with their radical feminist lyrics and energetic performances, which still influence music and bands today. This tee was sold at the shows on the band's co-headline tour, promoting the girl run label that was formed by Liz Naylor off the back of hearing the music. I'm so grateful just having this T-shirt in the collection and it is one that you just don't see about. I wish I saw more of these back prints walking about though.

Tiger Woods 'Bootleg Rap' T-shirt



We don't get many of these types of T-shirts in the UK, but they were really popular in the USA in the '90s. These specific bootleg T-shirts, also known as "rap tees", originated as a way to promote hip-hop artists in the '90s and were sold outside music venues as a quick way to make some money. The shirts were known for their bright colours, collage-style designs, and cheap low-quality images, which ironically makes them incredibly sought after now for insane prices. When I came across

this one in a charity shop in London, I couldn't believe it. It's in such amazing condition, practically deadstock (means vintage but new/unworn) and just a totally random one to have in my collection. Fuck knows why they did one of Tiger Woods but both Princess Diana and the film *Waiting to Exhale* T-shirts also got made, so answers on a postcard please. It just shows that you can still have one of those days when you're in the right place at the right time and the hunt for the next find can pay off.

Sonic Youth 'Gracias' T-shirt



This is in the top three tees I own for sure, it's perfect. The fade (a good fade is sought after as it represents the history of the shirt), the wear and love that's evident in the shirt is something else. I don't know how you know that but I guess after collecting for so long you just have a sixth sense for these things. Not only is it visually perfect, depicting the incredible album inlay art, but it has an insane history. Thurston Moore (of Sonic Youth) gave this T-shirt to Belinda

Carlisle of The Go-Gos in 1992, which then, through flatmates and flatmate's boyfriends, got into my hands – so thank you Johnny. The image on the front is from the amazing artwork 'Ahh...Youth!' by Mike Kelley, which he summed up quite nicely in this sentence "You are them, whether you like it or not." I hear you Mike, I see myself. Nostalgia, cultural objects, memories, stories... it's all there in there for sure.

Jenny Holzer

'Protect Me From What I Want' T-shirt



As a fine art graduate, art has always played a big part in my life and I think without it I would have lost the plot. So obviously this love crept its way into my T-shirt collection but I'm more selective with my art tees... I think. I was a big fan of Jenny Holzer in the mid to late '90s and focused on her work in depth during my foundation, and then undergraduate course in Glasgow. I've always loved this statement, which was first shown in Times Square as part of her Survival Series 1983-85, so getting an original 1990s version of the shirt was a great addition to the collection. Illuminating the streets, this billboard was installed

for a few minutes to encourage the thinking process about the desire for commercial and luxury goods, attacking the mindless consumerism that we all adhere to. The honesty of the piece is beautiful, people want protection from the endless push to purchase and this message from the 80s couldn't be more relevant today. Not only are vintage clothes full of nostalgia and keepsakes of art, music and popular culture, but it also feels great to reuse items in a world full of waste. *ralph*

If you want to chat T-shirts with me, message me @_fine_bone_china

COMING FOR *Cat Cohen*

A photograph of two women sitting on a bed. The woman on the left has dark hair and is wearing a black top and leopard-print pants, making a hand gesture. The woman on the right has blonde hair and is wearing a colorful, patterned top, laughing with her hands near her face. They are in a room with red walls and wooden furniture.

The coolest girl
in comedy meets
our Comedy Editor

Last year, I was on stage DJing at my indie club night at the Edinburgh Fringe when I got an Instagram notification to say that Cat Cohen was now following me. I briefly forgot where I was, delighted with myself and my evidently rising star on the comedy scene. Then I realised she must have seen the interview I'd recently given where I was asked what my motivation was for performing, and I said, "I do it all just to try and get Cat Cohen to follow me back on Instagram." And as much as this meant that I wasn't quite as cool as I thought I was, it did mean that Cat is even cooler than I thought she was. They say you should never meet your heroes, but what about interviewing them mid-Fringe a year later, on a bed in a decadent gothic hotel in the middle of Edinburgh, looking like a Poundshop Paula Yates? That, is very much encouraged. Thankfully, I met her around two thirds of the way through performing her latest show *Come For Me*, and you could barely see her face on the poster for stars by week three.

Words by Alexandra Haddow

Photos by Muir Vidler

I first came across Catherine Cohen on Twitter (remember when it was fun?) years ago when she posted a sketch that made me crack up, laughing alone in my bed, and I've been a fan ever since. I got tickets to her gig at London's Bush Hall on 11th March 2020, which turned out to be her last gig for quite some time. Regardless of the fact we were about to go into a wormhole for 18 months, that gig made me howl with laughter and come out more inspired than ever to actually try out some of my more niche ideas on stage. I'd never seen anything like it, every single line, add on, topper, throw-away remark, was not only hilarious but so well observed for a generation of women all navigating previously unheard of problems or situations. Flanked by a pianist and dressed like a gay man's wet dream, her stand up was punctuated with incredible, candid and silly songs about modern life. To a huge room of mostly millennial women, screeching with laughter at the relatability of it all, and skewed by Cat's hyper-astute, self-effacing take on it. So obviously, I tried to play it as cool as possible when I met her for this interview....

Cat: So you're debut year was last year, how does it feel coming back to the Fringe?

Alex: Wait, I'm supposed to be interviewing you!

I know I know, I'm just curious!

It's great because last year I felt like my audiences were very reserved, and this year they're a bit more rowdy. I don't want to be ageist but I feel like older people are a lot quieter even when they're enjoying it!

Last night, there were so many old people. I

love nothing more than when an old person starts laughing and I'm like, "I've got 'em! I'm timeless! I'm timeless, bitch!" Last night even though there were some older people there was a chunk of young people going wild at the start... I feel like because this show is so set in stone, I've already taped it as a special, so I can just have fun with it.

The pressure's off! Are you already writing a new show or....?

Erm...no. In my head I feel like I wouldn't have space for that until I'm done with it, but I can't wait to get back to New York to start afresh, which is exciting... but scary.

Are you obsessed with the UK?

Because you're successful enough to not have to do the Fringe – you must like us to put yourself through it.

Yeah I love the UK! It's nice to be here, and I love the Fringe! I feel like it's for anyone. But you become so much better at what you do.

It's like a bootcamp

It is! Don't you feel so powerful at the end of the month?

Oh god yeah, you do your first gig after it and you think "I'm incredible". I've seen you live twice. I saw the work in progress of this show, and the other one was your last gig before the pandemic, at London's Bush Hall, that was the last one right?

Shut up! You were not there?! I flew home that night! I was about to go back to my hotel and my mom called me and she said "You need to get on a plane and come home." And I was like, "Why?" and she said "Babe, Tom Hanks has Covid." That's when I knew I had to go. And I thought well I could do with two weeks off, and of course, that was hell. Then I started working on this show and you would've seen that first work in progress in 2022... then I toured it in 2023.



**"Babe...
Tom Hanks
Has Covid."**



No! OK my timing is all off. I hope I never have to be a witness in anything. You follow me on Instagram because I fangirled you in an interview where I said I loved you and your poems...

Oh you were so nice about me! If anyone saw that and didn't follow you they'd be a psycho. Some people are so weird and rude.

So I thought I'd pay it forward, and ask if you could appeal to anyone now to follow you on Instagram, who would it be? I'm guessing you've got some amazing names anyway...

That's a great question. Oh my God! Who do I want to follow me? I try to only follow people I've actually met. So I can be like "We're friends it's fiiiiine." I'm trying to play it cool in that respect.

Tom Hanks?

Yes! I think he should follow me. We're bound together now after that Covid story. Actually, you know those girls with like, 20 million followers? I would love those girls in the millionaires club to follow me and repost my tour dates so I don't have to keep posting the same shit to my friends who are like "We have seen your show bitch!"

In terms of your origin story, I've purposefully not looked into which way this started so I could ask you about it, did you start off as a comedian and incorporate the music, or as I've written down, did you start off as a musical starlet and then become funny? (Oh God, I've said musical starlet)

[laughing] And thank you for asking that. I started off being a theatre kid, doing musical theatre, moved to New York and was like, "I wanna be an actress" and you're just waiting around for someone to care about you, and comedy gives you the opportunity to make your own stuff and do your own shows. And

so when I fell into that community I was doing stand up, doing sketch, this is amazing I can get on stage all the time and do what I love and I don't have to wait for anyone. And then I missed the singing element so I was like, "what if I could write songs for my act?" I wrote the first song in I think, 2016, and the rest is history.

Amazing! And have you still got the residency at Club Cumming? [Alan Cumming's cult club in New York]

Yeah, I still do it any time I'm in town. Alan's the best ever, so any time I'm in town I email them and say can I come by. I haven't been there for a while because I've been touring but hopefully I'll be there more next year. That's a great way to build new material as well, in such an intimate setting, you can just try stuff and have fun.

Do you think younger people are coming to more alternative, or theatrical comedy, now?

I feel like the scene in New York, especially Brooklyn, is so alternative, very few people I know or came up with are actually doing straight stand up, they're doing a song or they're doing a dance, so that was just accepted. But yeah there's definitely not a lot of older people at Club Cumming, although every now and then my parents' friends come along and that's always a fun... vibe...

That's how I feel in my new show, it's a bit about sex, politics, questioning whether or not I should have a threesome...something which you talk about having done in your new show as well, and you talk very openly about it, how do people react to stuff like that?

I think they're fine because I sort of turn it into a joke about something else. Last night it was so fun, in the section of my show that

I call 'my disgusting sex chunk' where I get into all these nitty gritty jokes, a guy walked out, I assume just to pee, but then I was like "Stop the show! He's afraid of women's sexuality, he can't deal with my sexuality!"

Walkouts can really help at times can't they?

I love a late arrival, I love a walkout. You get so much good stuff out of that. I need someone in the crowd to do something crazy sometimes, it can really help to get everyone on my side.

How does your boyfriend feel about you being so open in your stand up about both of you? My boyfriend is a musician and he loves it.

Does he write songs about you?

No, and it annoys me so much! Let me be your muse!

My boyfriend is an actor and he has a podcast but it's about Formula One so he doesn't talk about me, thank god.

Rude of him.

Yeah! No, he's totally fine. He saw me perform before we started dating, so he knew what he was getting himself into. He's seen the show seven million times but he still came over for my birthday last week and watched the show. I say, "you must be so bored" and he's like, "no I love it!" Lying to my face. He's a liar, he's a dirty liar.

And that's what makes it work!

Exactly!

I'm gonna ask some lighthearted questions now, as it definitely looks like we're gonna shag, being photographed here...

I know! It looks so horny, here we are talking about sex and threesomes as well.

As someone so glamorous and incredible on stage, who is your

biggest rival or enemy?

Everybody needs one.

Who is my on stage enemy? Anyone who is silent during my show, with their arms crossed. But I do like to shock them a little bit, it's fun.

Preach. Who would be your dream duet to do a song with?

I mean right now obviously I'm obsessed with Chappell Roan, and do I feel like we could be sisters.

She has come out of nowhere, I'm trying to catch up.

I have to disagree with you! Because I got sent her song Pink Pony Club during the pandemic, in like 2021! I was like this girl is so good, and then her album came out and I was like, "why is nobody else freaking out about this?!" And now it's so nice to see someone who's so undeniably talented finally get what they deserve. I'm waiting for my moment like that. So yeah I think me and her should work together.

Anyway back to the professional stuff...what's new for you?

Well I'm in the new series of *Only Murders In The Building*...

Whaaaaat??

So the first episode aired in August, I'm in a few eps, we shot it in New York, it was a dream come true. It was totally surreal, I've been watching Steve Martin and Martin Short for years.

Yeah how was it meeting your idols?

Did you say anything weird?

No I actually got really shy and went really quiet. They were a delight, everyone that works on it is so nice and cool. The other thing is my special is coming out, globally, on October 17th on LiveNation's new streaming service Veeps. There's a full band, we shot it in the Gramercy Theatre in New York, it looks so sick.

"I need someone in the crowd to do something crazy sometimes, it can really help to get everyone on my side."



So for anyone who hasn't seen anything about the show, what is *Come For Me* about?

I would say it's about entering your thirties and having some of the things you want but still feeling existential dread, I talk about freezing my eggs, being in a long term relationship, filming myself having sex, you know, all the big hits!

Count me in. ralph

@catccohen
@alexandrahaddow

GRAPHIC CONTENT WARNING

Words by Josh Jones
Photo by Stephanie Furtun

As well as working on iconic series like *The Bear*, *The Morning Show* and *PEN15*, Emmy-nominated writer Stacy Osei-Kuffour also helped bring cult graphic novels *Happy!* (as a writer) and *Watchmen* (as a writer/story editor) to the screen (and a pile of plaudits). So we thought we'd ask her advice on adapting graphic novels for the screen...

When you started working on *Watchmen* did you feel immense pressure from the fandom? Did you enjoy the pressure?

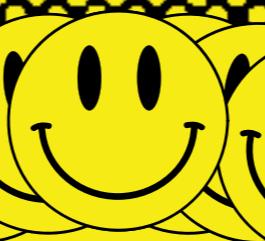
I personally didn't feel the fandom pressure, I was low on the totem pole ha—but yes the fans were something we often discussed in the room. I mean you want to make them happy, you wanna excite them, you want them to come back for more but also be satisfied with the story you're coming up with. The fans were always on our minds but doing a unique and elevated story was most important so we knew if we did that, it was hitting two birds with one stone.

Did you pore over *Watchmen* and *Happy!* before starting work on them or just read them enough to familiarise yourself and didn't get too deep into them?

I read both graphic novels before the room but in Damon's [Lindelof - *Watchmen* showrunner, exec producer and writer] room, we'd do a thing called 'story time'. Every Friday we would read a chapter of *Watchmen* and talk about it, come up with clues and Easter eggs for the fans, no matter how big or small. It was cool seeing Damon take the littlest idea or clue and put it into the show for the fans.

You mentioned in a podcast that you weren't too vocal in the writers room for *Happy!* but the *Watchmen* room was very different – were you determined to be more vocal in it?

It's not about that. The *Happy!* job was my first TV writing job — so I was just getting to know the lay of the land, how to pitch and, honestly, I didn't wanna fuck up the opportunity. You're also told as a staff writer (by those who've done it before) not to talk at all haha! I learned so much from the showrunner Patrick Macmanus and the producer Liz Swados (who is the most incredible writer out there) but if I could go back, I'd do so much differently. I remember pitching in that room and everyone being silent — hahaha and wide eyed... I'd probably not say a word if I could go back. I'd be even more silent. I'd be a fly on the fucking wall.



What's your favourite thing you personally did with *Watchmen*?
Pitching the Sister Night character to Damon and seeing it make it to screen has been incredible. But everything that made that show what it is, comes from the collaborative effort of all the people that were in that room.

Has adapting graphic novels for TV made you more or less of a fan of them?

I'm more of a fan now that I've worked on *Happy!* and *Watchmen*. The biggest thing I've learned about graphic novels is the emotional depth and beauty in them. They are literally novels with gorgeous pictures. I remember when I was interviewing for *Watchmen* I was sick at home alone and read it all in one weekend. The ending was so beautiful and moving there were tears streaming down my face. I never thought those novels could do that to me but they're incredibly moving and filled with so much heart.

How do you balance writing what you want to do with the story compared to what people expect?
Usually the parts of the novel you love are the same ones that the fans or the audience wants to see.

Do you worry about being pigeonholed as a writer who works with graphic novels or do you see it as just another string to your (very many stringed) bow?

I don't! I mean a lot comes my way that is graphic novel based but I'm not exactly going to complain about that. I started off as a very broke playwright living in NYC, whose plays nobody wanted. I mean even with the success I've had, I've still only had one limited production of a play and that got terrible reviews. I feel lucky to be a part of this business at all, in any capacity — so if I'm pigeonholed as something I truly don't care. Just happy to be here! ralph



STACY'S TOP 10 TIPS FOR ADAPTING A GRAPHIC NOVEL FOR THE SCREEN

1. READ THE MATERIAL

2. READ IT AGAIN

3. READ IT AGAIN
BUT THIS TIME MAKE
NOTES, HIGHLIGHTING
THE CHARACTERS,
THEMES, DIALOGUE AND
STORYLINES THAT YOU
THINK WOULD BE MOST
INTERESTING AND EFFECTIVE
IN TELLING THE STORY

4. FROM YOUR NOTES, CREATE
AN OUTLINE MAKING SURE YOU
HAVE THREE ACTS, EXCITING
TURNS, AND THAT THE MOST
IMPORTANT CHARACTERS,
THEMES, AND STORYLINES
ARE FEATURED

5. REWORK THE
OUTLINE UNTIL
IT'S READY TO
MOVE TO SCRIPT

6. START TO WRITE! AS I
BEGIN A FIRST DRAFT
I ALWAYS GO BACK TO
THE MATERIAL (THE
IP) TO SEE WHAT I
MAY HAVE MISSED

7. YOU'LL PROBABLY DO STEPS 1-6
A HUNDRED MORE TIMES BEFORE
YOU FEEL COMFORTABLE ENOUGH
TO SEND YOUR FIRST DRAFT TO
SOMEONE, BUT WHEN YOU ARE
READY, THAT'S THE NEXT STEP. FOR
ME ANYWAY. GETTING NOTES FROM A
TRUSTED SOURCE HELPS ME SO MUCH
IN UNDERSTANDING IF WHAT I'M DOING
IS WORKING OR NOT.

8. APPLY NOTES
FROM YOUR
TRUSTED SOURCE
TO THE MATERIAL,
FINE TUNE YOUR
DRAFT AGAIN AND
AGAIN AND AGAIN
UNTIL IT'S PIPING HOT.

9. USUALLY BY NOW IT'S
TIME TO TURN YOUR WORK
INTO THE PRODUCERS,
STUDIO, NETWORKS, ETC.
WHO WILL HAVE THEIR
OWN SET OF NOTES.

10. CONTINUE TO APPLY
NOTES UNTIL YOU HAVE
A DRAFT EVERYONE IS
EXCITED ABOUT AND READY
TO SHOOT!

CONTINENTAL Shift



Tara Joshi takes a deep dive into the burgeoning South Asian underground hip-hop scene

There can surely be few rap projects that boast the line, "I was in the trap eating saag and bread." Fewer still which deftly sample Anita Baker instrumentals, reference Mother Teresa, former glamour model Lucy Pinder and the legacy of the British empire – interspersed with clips of 1970s Punjabi comedy actor Mehar Mittal and what sounds like a splice of that 2022 viral video of a woman yelling racist abuse in Texas. (There's actually something quite funny about a record opening with someone screaming: "Everywhere I fucking go, you Indians are fucking everywhere!").

Words by Tara Joshi
Photos c/o Pataka Boys



This is *Thugs From Amritsar*, the sublime album from a group called Pataka Boys. A trio, it comprises UK underground legend PAV4N of Foreign Beggars fame, Birmingham-born rapper and producer Sonnyjim, known for his work with everyone from Westside Gunn to literal MF DOOM, and a prodigious new producer from Ludhiana, Punjab, called Kartik, who somehow made the bulk of the album on his laptop in a hospital room, sitting with his mum while she recovered from kidney failure.

"I don't think that there's been a collaboration of this sort where you've got a couple of certified vets that have been doing this two decades deep, and then there's an up and coming relatively unknown producer from India," says Mo Joshi, the co-founder of Azadi Records, who put out the album earlier this year. "[Kartik] is an anomaly in terms of sound, what he's doing and his influences, and that pairing is really unique."

Certainly, it's a record which threads together South Asian diaspora and motherland, old heads and fresh talent, culminating in something that feels inarguably special. The record teems with nods to immigrant histories, be that in references to now-defunct Southall pub Glassy Junction or subverting racist taunts ("Bud-bud, ding-ding" was once a racist playground line, mocking the sing-song South Asian accent, but here it becomes almost a brag – "Bud Dinger/big tipper"). There's something comfortingly and comically familiar about the seamless switches between languages that so many people of South Asian origin do without thinking, with lines like "you're a bachara", on 'Cheema Kalan'.

But perhaps the especially compelling thing about the record is newcomer

Kartik's Madlib-esque warm and stirring beats, which are pretty unusual for the region. Kartik taught himself to use Ableton after spending a long time with his Bandcamp library, listening to everything from jazz drummer Sarathy Korwar, to footwork producer Oceanside, to hip-hop icons like J Dilla, Ras G and MF DOOM ("obviously", he says of the latter). "It was crazy hearing those sounds, and I was mad inspired," Kartik continues, "And I wanted to make beats then, because I wasn't hearing that here." His sound is so different to other producers in India, that Joshi laughs recalling his thoughts when he first heard Kartik's music: "This is dope, but I know nobody in India who's going to rap on this."

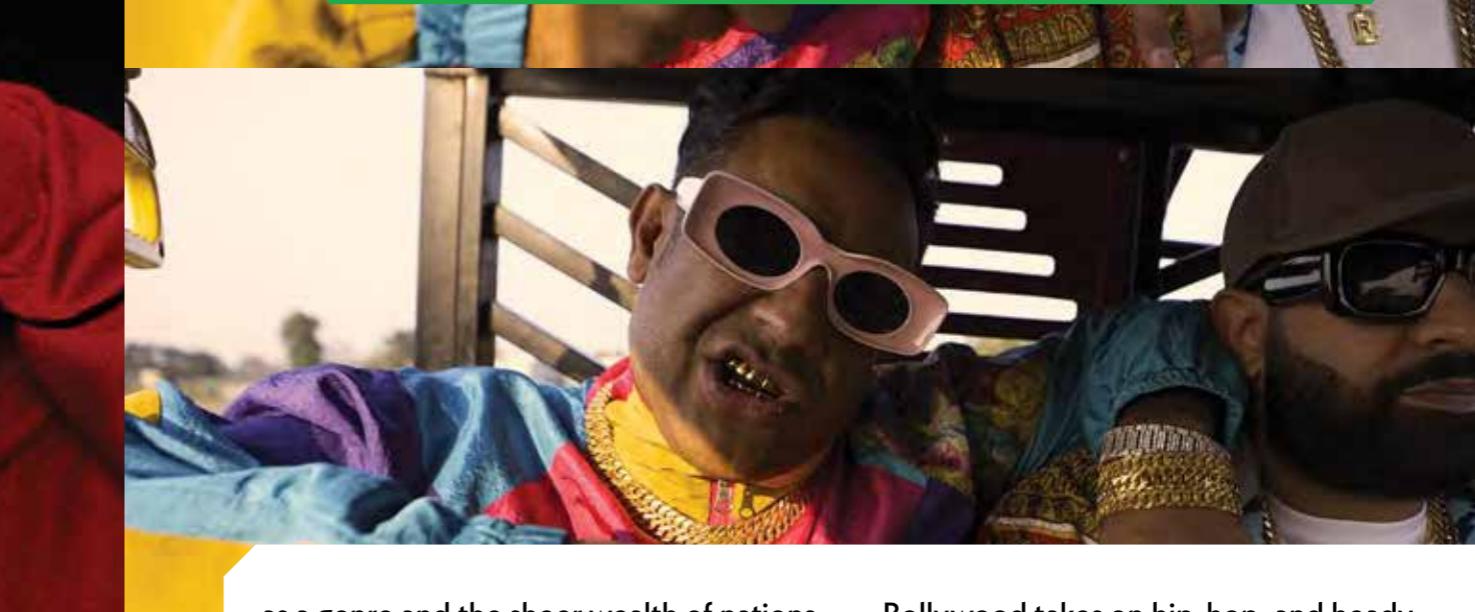
Still, Kartik spent the pandemic really going for it – to the point where, shortly after coming across the producer on Bandcamp, PAV4N started to give him industry advice such as: "Stop putting 100 beats up every day, are you fucking nuts!?"

Around a year or so later, they would begin working remotely on the Pataka Boys record. On it, Kartik's creations are topped with zig-zagging intonations from a whole host of names. Beyond the engrossing turns from both PAV4N and Sonnyjim, that includes NYC's Heems (known for both his solo work and his work as part of Swet Shop Boys and Das Racist), Delhi superstars Seedhe Maut, Punjabi rapper Sikander Kahlon and more.

In some ways, it is pretty remarkable that this feels new. There has historically been relatively little international collaboration between the various underground South Asian hip-hop scenes (an admittedly murky term given the breadth of hip-hop

"Suddenly hip-hop became a widespread youth movement that subverted the whole class system and the whitewashed top-down entertainment, and finally gave the streets all the youth power"

PAV4N

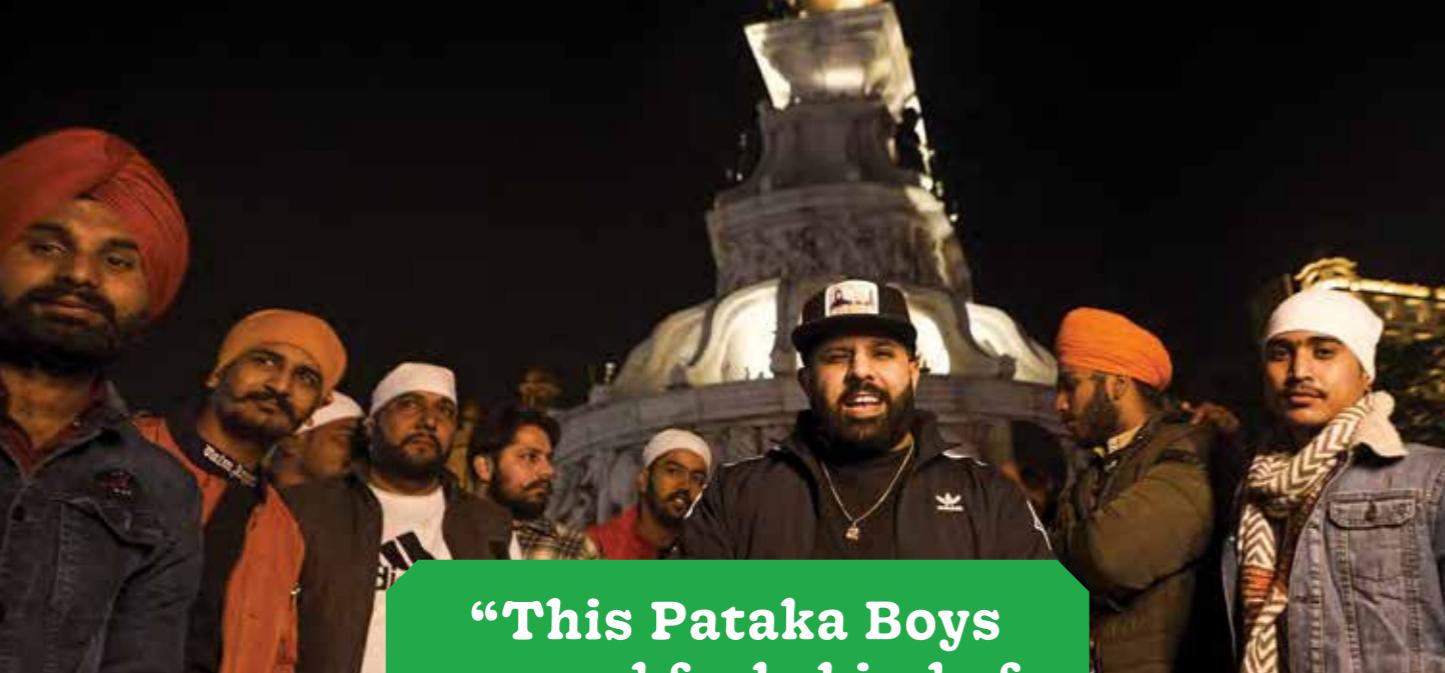


as a genre and the sheer wealth of nations and cultures that comprise 'South Asia', let alone its diaspora). Where there have been a gargantuan number of link-ups between, say, Nigerian artists and talent from that country's diaspora across the Afrobeats and Alté scenes, there hasn't really been an equivalent in spite of how abundant South Asian hip-hop has been. "You have it with the Bhangra scene," PAV4N points out, "There's always been a pipeline of the diaspora [in North America and the UK] working with artists from Punjab."

Hip-hop is a relatively new phenomenon in South Asia. There are examples from the early 2000s on the more commercial end of rap, with polished Bhangra-hip-hop dance floor-fillers and a wealth of glitzy



Bollywood takes on hip-hop, and heady combinations of both (see: Snoop Dogg's surreal appearance on the title track for *Singh Is Kinng* from 2008). There was clearly interest in hip-hop coming out of the US – VH1 brought the likes of Mobb Deep to tour in India, Eminem was wildly popular, and there are examples of rap coming out of India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and more from the '90s. But it was with the emergence of smartphones that things really took off, with people able to connect more easily, record cyphers and even make beats on their phones. "Suddenly it really became a widespread youth movement that subverted the whole fucking class system and the whitewashed top-down entertainment, and finally gave the streets all the youth power," PAV4N explains.



“This Pataka Boys record feels kind of like a timestamp”

Mo Joshi

He mentions Divine as an example of this, the MC who popularised Mumbai's sociopolitical gully rap scene in the 2010s, and has since signed to Nas' Mass Appeal label.

Now, there are multilingual Sri Lankan cyphers on YouTube, Bangladeshi rappers going viral calling out government corruption, a thriving battle rap scene in Delhi (which, incidentally, is where the two members of Seedhe Maut first crossed paths). AP Dhillon is one of the biggest artists in the world. There was even this summer's behemoth hit 'Big Dawgs' from Kerala-born rapper Hanumankind, which blew up to the extent that WhatsApp aunties and uncles with no interest in hip-hop were sharing the video with confusion and pride. "More and more you've got localised sounds developing," says Joshi, "So this [Pataka Boys] record feels kind of like a timestamp."



The insight from Joshi is interesting as he is UK-born, but moved to India in 2014, co-founding Azadi as an independent label based in Mumbai, known for its grassroots support of largely politically-minded artistry across South Asia. They had a hand in bringing through the likes of Prabh Deep, whose 2017 album *Class-Sikh* is still one of the best rap full-lengths to emerge from India, and Ahmer, the Kashmiri MC whose work interrogates the complexities of existing in his region. As PAV4N puts it, "Azadi is kind of the closest thing to Rawkus Records back in the day." What drew Joshi to wanting to find and support these kinds of artists were the scenes he grew up hearing back in the UK. "I'm a hip-hop head," he says, "I remember Foreign Beggars' projects 20 years ago and you know, it was me looking at another Brown guy rapping and going... 'what the fuck!'"



The South Asian diaspora's love affair with hip-hop – and, indeed, Black music more generally – is much longer-standing. Curator, promoter, presenter and DJ, Nerm, sees it as an obvious example of an artform that gives voice to the disenfranchised. "I think there's an inherent kind of connection between the underclass and hip-hop," he says. Though his background is more in dance music, having helmed Shiva Soundsystem and helped bring bass music to India, his time working with artists across the subcontinent as well as in the UK means he has some pretty salient observations: "In reality, [hip-hop] is expression in its simplest form. And of course that means that people from immigrant families and people who have suffered will fucking understand it."

For Nerm, the influence of hip-hop is notable in it being a huge catalyst for the British Asian music scene more broadly. He points to how Public Enemy inspired the singer and rapper Aki Nawaz not only to start Nation Records in 1988, a label which gave home to early releases from the likes of Talvin Singh and Asian Dub Foundation in an era when most labels were uninterested in South Asian artists

who weren't making Bhangra. Nawaz also founded multi-ethnic group Fun-Da-Mental, who were even framed as "the Asian Public Enemy" by Melody Maker back in the '90s. "Without Fun-Da-Mental and Nation, maybe you wouldn't have as many platforms for expression for Brown freaks," Nerm laughs, "And so there's a direct lineage to my mind. Hip-hop as a DIY culture is an extension of punk in my head – like, 'fuck it, we're gonna go do it ourselves.'"

In the footsteps of groups like Fun-Da-Mental, there have been plenty of artists with South Asian heritage in the UK who have been key parts of the country's underground hip-hop scene. Of course, there's PAV4N and Sonnyjim, but there's also M.I.A., the iconoclastic artist from a Sri-Lankan Tamil family, and the gruff tones of M.O.N.G.O. from Mud Family, who has Bangladeshi heritage (he also appears on the Pataka Boys record). With the growing reclamation of immigrant identities in the West, artists like Priya Ragu, Shan De Paul Vincent, Navz-47, Anik Khan, Nayana IZ, Cartel Madras and more are all standing proud about their heritages while channelling their love of hip-hop.



“Hip-hop is expression in its simplest form. And of course that means that people from immigrant families and people who have suffered will understand it.”

Nerm

Which is why Joshi's point about *Thugs From Amritsar* as a timestamp makes sense. We are at a place where, in general, underground rap is thriving. And so it makes sense that both in the motherlands and across diasporas, South Asian rap artists are making whatever music they want to make. "This is the best it's ever been," says Sonnyjim.

These artists are unabashed in their identity – where once it might have been the case that you had to put on an American accent or rap in English to get acclaim, some of the most interesting sounds are eschewing that: check out Bengaluru-based SIRI's lofty pop-rap, flitting like lightning between English, Kannada, Telugu and Hindi; or London-accented, hip-house MC and producer Surya Sen rapping in Bangla about the racist murder of Altab Ali. There is not anything close to one mould that fits all these artists.

With all this said, the three members of Pataka Boys are adamant that the Brownness of the album is in some ways incidental. "We stumbled into this project by mistake," says Sonnyjim who, until working with Pataka Boys, had never really taken the prospect of rapping in Punjabi seriously, "We never set out to do this, it weren't some kind of plan, it just kind of happened. Kartik had

sick beats and we kept building, and all of a sudden we're here. We didn't really discuss any of it. It was only about four or five songs in we decided to take this direction."

They all agree that if they had set out to make a 'desi' project, it might have sounded quite different. While critics and hip-hop fans on Reddit have been enjoying the release, the trio reckon they're polarising people. "You know who's not getting it?" deadpans Sonnyjim, "Indian people in India. You look on YouTube and the comments are like 'I'm confused!'" But they take this as a compliment. PAV4N laughs, "I think the fact that people are arguing is exactly what we want."

Clearly, South Asian rap in the region and beyond is thriving. Whether or not it's being consistently written about or labelled, you get the sense that all of these artists are going to keep pushing it forward in the underground. Hopefully this is just the first of many such multinational ventures. As PAV4N puts it: "It's not just 'let's get a bunch of Indian people and make a hip-hop album', there's no tokenism." Yes, it's "a Brown project" but to him what makes it good is unrelated to two-dimensional takes on representation. He continues: "This is just proper frontline cutting edge shit." ralph

GUVNA'S GREATEST HITS*

We asked Guvna B, east London's renowned artist, best-selling author, sports pundit and presenter for the best tracks to be listening to this autumn. Once you've listened to this, go and watch Guvna's brilliant and hilarious new YouTube series, *Rappers Try Things* where he and fellow MC, Barney Artist, well... they go and try new things. It's fantastic.

'King David Flow'

Kofi Stone

'Waiting on the Right Time'

Thee Sacred Souls

'Things Will Get Better'

Cleo Sol

'Belly'

Pa Salieu

'God Gave me Feet For Dancing (feat. Yazmin Lacey)'

Ezra Collective

'On the Rise'

Bashy

'Optimistic'

Sound Of Blackness

'BAD BRITAIN w/ Haile, Kojey Radical'

Avelino, Kojey Radical, Haile, The FaNaTiX

'Crying, Laughing, Loving, Lying'

Labi Siffre

'U Get Me?'

Guvna B, Ghetts

*for Ralph

Guvna B's new album *The Village Is On Fire* featuring Mercury Prize nominated Ghetts, comedian Kae Kurd and Emmy Award winning screenwriter and actress Michaela Coel is out now.

@guvnab @rapperstrythings



SCAN TO LISTEN



GALLYBAGGERS

GALLYBAGGERS

GALLYBAGGERS

GALLYBAGGERS

For over a decade, in a small corner of the Isle of Wight, the villages of Chillerton and Gatcombe have a Scarecrow* Festival (or ‘Gallybaggers’ as the islanders call them). Award-winning photographer and director Scott Lyon went and shot them for us and we got Executive Editor of British Vogue, Giles Hattersley to cast his fashion eye over their looks.



*yeah, we know this is actually a rook,
it just looked better ok?

Words by Giles Hattersley
Photos by Scott Lyon



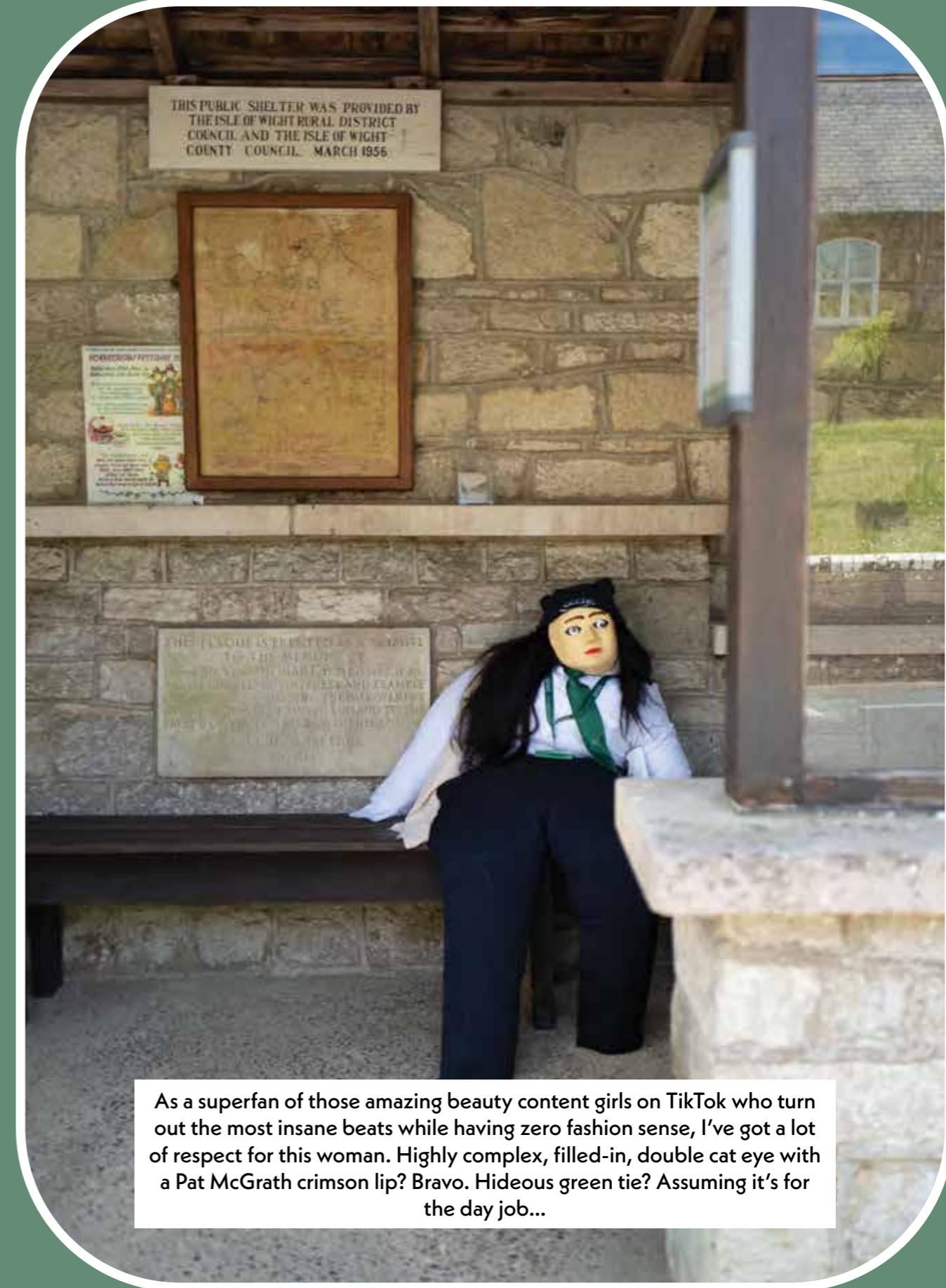
Okay, why is this actual fashion though? Thinking the Chanel leadership team should have deployed itself to Chillerton and Gatcombe in their search for Virginie Viard's successor. This be-wellied, surrealist, exquisitely proportioned beauty, with her nod to a minicab's fuzzy dice, is a true bride for our times. I can't decide if I want to be her or marry her.



Well, it's an A for impact... but a Z for effort, I'm afraid. Though we love a spot of quick drag, and this does what it needs to do, and apparently did it in less time than it takes me to down a Fanta Zero. An extra point for those magenta gloves. And another for leaving me unsure if the one on the welly is the victim of a gust of wind or an artistic choice. Fashion should always keep us guessing!



I see you 2016 street style lad, in your £2k get up, with your sad eyes and solitary bed pillow at home. The years have been unkind. And I don't know who put that belt on you. But hang in there. I reckon you'll be bang on trend again, circa 2033.



As a superfan of those amazing beauty content girls on TikTok who turn out the most insane beats while having zero fashion sense, I've got a lot of respect for this woman. Highly complex, filled-in, double cat eye with a Pat McGrath crimson lip? Bravo. Hideous green tie? Assuming it's for the day job...



Not hating the nude lip, actually, but more importantly this is how you style a work ensemble. This look could take her straight from the bus stop to Body Movements. And you know why? Because she is selling it, whisper style. From the hair-hat-band matchup, to that take it or leave it hip stance, I'm buying what she's selling. Details, people. Details.



I've not witnessed a "drunk Brexit aunty" aesthetic on any catwalk, at least one that I can recall. Funny that.



Recently some fitness company brought a few of those inflatable compression trousers to the Vogue offices, whereupon some of our more extroverted, wellness minded staffers did their emails while having their legs pressurised. Chic then, chic now.



Not to nitpick, but those crows look anything but scared. Surprising really, because this Hawaiian shirt is bringing me out in a panic sweat.



I love this man. He's got it all figured out.



Call her Mother... nature.

PARX LIFE.
PARX LIFE.

Words by Gemma Lacey
Photos by H.N. James
Art Direction by James-Lee Duffy
Hair & Make Up by DeWayne Richards
Styling by Kenya Iman
Styling assistant Claudia Alexander



The epitome of creativity,
Tayla Parx is an energy force:
a multi-Grammy nominated
singer/songwriter, entrepreneur
and much, much more.



Top/trousers by Akira, shoes by Vans, glasses stylist's own

Tayla Parx logs into Zoom not long after arriving home from a whistle-stop European tour promoting her third album *Many Moons, Many Suns*. She's tired after 20 hours of travelling but happy to be back at her ranch in Nashville, Tennessee and looking forward to giving her goats a cuddle.

But, before we start, a bit of backstory: Tayla's solo music is just one chapter of a fascinating, unfinished book. At only 31, Tayla's packed in several lifetimes of careers already. She's been an actor, appearing in the likes of 2007's film adaptation of *Hairspray* (at 12 years old), *Gilmore Girls*, *True Jackson*, and *VP*, while her entrepreneurial work with her company TaylaMade Inc.—which incorporates her label, publishing, management, lifestyle brand, and creative studios—earned her a spot on Forbes' 30 Under 30 list.

As if that wasn't enough, she's actually most well-known for songs she hasn't performed. A prolific songwriter, she's worked with an unbelievably long list of A-list artists that includes Ariana Grande, Mariah Carey, Christina Aguilera, Normani, Khalid, Fergie, Kesha, Little Mix, Fifth Harmony, and more. Signed to Warner at 19, Tayla found her first Billboard Top 100 success co-writing Fifth Harmony's 'BO\$\$' in 2014. By 2019, she was honoured with Billboard's *Hitmaker* Award for songwriting, and, today, Tayla's discography has been streamed over 6 billion times.

She's also one of only four Black women to have a number one song on the Country charts, keeping company with Beyoncé, Tracy Chapman, and Donna Summer, with her work on Dan and Shay's 'Glad You Exist'. While her writing for Ariana Grande's '7 rings' and 'thank u, next,' and Panic! At The Disco's 'High Hopes', puts her with a handful of people who have had three Top 10 hits on the Hot 100 simultaneously.

Elsewhere in the industry, she's actively creating change as a founding member of *The Pact*, which is a lobby for songwriters to ensure they get proper credit and challenging the convention of performers receiving credit and publishing rights for songs they didn't write.

So now we're all up to speed, back to Nashville, a place where she has the space to create her art, focus on sustainability, and taking things slower. Because, for Tayla, intention is everything.

Consideration isn't usually the first topic I get to with an artist, but if one thing sets Tayla Parx apart, it's her clear vision and the ethics with which she's determined to execute it. In the first five minutes of our chat, I learn that she pays for therapy for her team, plans her tour with sustainability in mind, and is determined that when her songs reach others, they're bringing a positive message. Pretty big goals for a relatively new artist. But then I remember she's from Texas, and everything there is bigger, including ambition.

The biggest driver for Tayla though is emotion; if there's one vehicle all her songs hang on, it's her intention to help her audience feel good. "I realised very early on that music is supposed to help you be a little bit more sane in your emotions." In practice, that looks like catchy songs with lyrics that truly capture feelings in an authentic way. "I think that I've always realised as a songwriter and a music creator that you have a very, very big responsibility—for lack of a better word. You're making this music and acknowledging that there's possibly millions or billions of people who will hear these words. You want to make sure that they're affecting somebody in a meaningful way, whether it is a song about being queer and not being seen in that way, or being heartbroken."

“You’re making music and acknowledging there’s millions or billions of people who will hear these words”

Success for her too is measured through this lens; that is, how her fans react and how the songs resonate with them. “There’s nothing better than when somebody comes up to you after a show and they’re like, ‘This song really helped me through tough times.’ So it’s something that I try to keep in mind when I’m creating. I love that.”

In terms of the songs that did this best for her growing up? Brandy’s ‘Afrodisiac’ and ‘Full Moon’ were some that spoke to her, but more as whole albums. “Both of them were less about a particular song but more of the feeling that this album set,” Tayla says. “It really inspired me to think that when I create my first album, I want to make sure that I’m setting a whole scene. That it’s consistent in that way, and my listener can tell what part—or what phase—of my life that I’m in. So that whole idea of conceptual albums or albums that have some type of ongoing thread really, really inspired me very early on.”

Part of Tayla’s charm as a songwriter is the scale with which she approaches her work. Once she knew her albums needed to have a common theme, storytelling became her core vision. She began exploring narrative in all forms: “I think about exploring how a harmony could paint a picture, how lyrics layer with that.” Today, the lyrics lighting

her up are those that are raw, relatable, and let her think about things in a new way. A current favourite is fellow Nashville resident Corook’s ‘the dog’, which says:

But I’ll take the knives and all of the plates// Except for the one you happened to break// I’ll take all the blame for what I did wrong// But who gets to keep the dog?

For Tayla, the raw truth of these is a revelation: “I was just like, wow! As a songwriter, to be able to hear a lyric that sums things up for anybody who’s had a dog with their partner—I feel like that’s something that a lot of couples do, but I’ve never heard it explained that way.” For her, the honesty of these lyrics and the way they share another person’s perspective is “extremely powerful just because the concept is so strong and I really, really admire it as a songwriter.”

Another track that had a huge impact on her is ‘Necessary Evil’ by Unknown Mortal Orchestra. “If I could have created that song, I would be so, so, so happy.” Not only does it call to mind “really fond memories of being in New York, swimming, and that song being on repeat,” but she also loves that the song is a little more underground, and finding it felt “like a secret I found”.

Top by Homme + Femme, Shorts by Forever 21, Shoes by Vans, hat/glasses stylist's own





We discuss if, as an artist, it's important for her to document how she's feeling in the moment or if she has moments from past records where the feelings no longer feel true to her. Love is a strong theme throughout her catalogue; with her first record, *Tayla Made*, she says her attitude was, "Eff, love, I'm not interested in it." With the sophomore *Coping Mechanisms*, that outlook evolved, and, as she puts it, "You can see, I do be asking: why do I feel this lately about love?" This phase, as she puts it, is about relearning. "So much of our life, later on, is about getting to know ourselves in a lot of different ways." So rather than go the common route of cringing at her first record, she's comfortable letting herself, and her sound, grow alongside her. "I love that my albums represent where I was in a particular timeline of my life, and that is allowed to evolve."

This confidence is an innate part of her character and is also what makes her so magnetic as an artist. Her North Star was clear to her from a young place in her career. "I had to say to myself very early on: don't be afraid of just being exactly who you are right now," she explains. "Because your music will never be as honest if you're concerned about how this will be taken a few years from now. You don't know, because you won't be the same person you are a few years from now. So it's good to catch it while it's real."

The roots of this realness are centred in where she's from. "In the South, everybody says 'you never met a stranger'; my mom says that all the time about me. Being raised that way allows me to always have interest in conversations. I'm going to go up and talk to someone, and I'm going to be curious, and

"I love that my albums represent where I was in a particular timeline of my life, and that is allowed to evolve."

I think that when you're around places that have such culture, it's impossible for it not to affect you."

Even her exuberant sense of dress and self-expression has been fuelled by this: "In the South, you have Sunday best, and you go to church, or all of these different events where people purposely get dressed up

and want to show their best. There is always an intention when you're ready to put on a show, no matter where you're headed."

For her, that big, bold sense of self-expression comes out through the colours, shapes, and styles she chooses for her tour wardrobe. But it's also acted as a magnet to draw others to her.



"I always had a very big personality, and I think that a lot of times artists wanted to work with me because they liked my fashion or because they liked my perspective and all things creative." To others, her style is a calling card, but one that shows she's tapped into things in a bigger sense too. "The moment that you don't have a pulse on culture is the moment that you're not really relevant as a writer. So these artists, they want to collaborate just because they liked whatever was happening with me, outside of the fact that I can write a song."

I ask if, at the start of her career, she ever had to dial it back to work with people, and she agrees, harking back to the deep sense of consideration she has for others, be they fans or collaborators. "My job, solely as a songwriter, is to make sure that the artist feels like the baddest vision in the room or the most handsome guy in the world. That's a part of my job to make sure that we are uplifting them." Eventually, her style found its own home within this dynamic, and her creativity opened new doors. "All these people were coming to me like, 'Can you help? We need some stylists. We need some ideas when it comes to that.' It really led me into the realisation that I get to work with artists in a creative way as well." This realisation empowered her and was also the moment she decided to stop toning things down. "I thought maybe I should just be the best version of me, and show no moments of dimming that light because it's a part of me."

Fashion does more than empower her confidence, though; it also further fuels her curiosity. "I think that the more you travel, the more you grow, and you see fashion as creative expression, because I don't think that I saw it that way when I was younger." It definitely is something that showcases the intersection of her music and her persona. "Once I started to really hone in on the idea that I can really express myself and add to my musical expression with an outfit—that I

can tell a story about all the places I've been lucky enough to travel to. Clothes allow me to show that it's all seeping into my life in every form, which is really, really cool."

It's no surprise that this has filtered into her merchandise, but even calling it merch seems a little reductive. *Trailer Parx* is a full-blown clothing line, overseen by Parx with her signature consideration, attention to detail, and ethics, which by now I've learnt are the strongest threads that run through her.

"Early on, I thought, 'I don't want my merch to just be my face on a T-shirt.' That is something that was very important for me," she says. Her intention for *Trailer Parx* was that it's run more like a fashion line. This means high production quality and sustainability, with all details factored in, from using buttons made from coconut husks to making sure there's no polyester and having 100 percent cotton. "All of these sustainable or biodegradable materials are extremely important to me." She's determined to blaze trails in showing things can be done this way. "If I'm not really able to execute it the way that I need to, that makes no sense for me, because that's what's important. I see that merchandise and clothing can be done way more sustainably; I want to be a part of that."

It's not just merch that has this focus; it's also looking at how she can be smart and tour more consciously too. This mindset is why she moved back to the South and acquired her ranch with "the goal to be zero carbon."

The roots of this consciousness and conscience go deeper, though: "I wanted to make sure that how I was spending my money and where I was spending my money reflected my values; I really just wanted to be more intentional."

Being intentional about her own work is just the start of things; her next career goal is

A photograph of Tayla Parx, a Black woman with long, vibrant pink hair and bangs. She is wearing a bright pink jacket with a colorful floral or paisley pattern on the lining. She is smiling broadly and pointing her right index finger towards the camera. The background is a solid blue.

“The more you travel, the more you grow”

to shake up the music industry and make it function differently. No small feat, but one she's not fazed by: "My whole career has been about reimagining what I would like the industry to look like. Creating the new normals that I want to see."

She's not afraid to lead by example. "I was one of the earlier people to talk about mental health and be open and honest about that, and paying for therapy for my writers and my producers because it was something that these major publishers weren't doing."

Tayla's also focused on the sustainability of her tours: "I want to see a more sustainable creation of the things that come with us being touring artists. Doing it right saves artists money. That means we can have more affordable tickets for fans. And I want fans to feel proud that they're also a part of putting sustainability first."

Many artists would be too afraid to stand up and say this, and she gets that. "You know, the longer you've been in the industry, the more scared you are of everybody, but I have a very, very strong sense of justice, as my therapist would call it. Life would be a lot easier if I was just like, 'Let me just do whatever the other artists have done', but I would rather go a slower and more thoughtful way."

It's striking that she has this sense of self-trust, and the new record reflects that. *Many Moons, Many Suns* alludes to tackling life's highs and lows and Tayla reflects that it's "the heartbreak record I needed." She writes "largely from a place of intuition" and says many songs start from her "noodling on guitar on my porch."

Tayla's songs may start on the porch but they go on to hit deep with fans and peers around the world. Multiple Grammy nominations being the ultimate proof. She's undoubtedly proud but still pragmatic when talking about industry recognition. "I've always said I want to be respected," she says. "I don't have to be popular, but I absolutely will be respected. That is something that I'm not willing to waive on. So to get that recognition was something that was really, really important to me." Although she's not one to be blinded by the light. "Being in this industry for so long, eventually you understand that it's kind of a trap to care too much about what somebody is thinking of you. Your career is gonna have a lot of highs and lows, but as long as you continue to get through those highs and lows and go through the cycle again, you'll always be relevant, and you'll always be around."

It seems she's always had the long game in mind. "I do think that being intentional about my ideas and successes was what allowed me to be grounded and consistent these years. I'm like, don't put your idea of success on me because it's poison, at the end of the day."

Success for her, it seems, is a whole other story entirely. "Everything that I do is Tayla-made; it comes from a place of intentionality, and it feels amazing to be able to know that I'm a part of something positive and able to positively affect a stranger's life. I'm just doing my part, and luckily I have fun doing it." *ralph*

NAOSHIMA, BABY

A look around the most arty island in the world

No hallucinogenic drugs were used in the writing of this article. Imagine an island, settled in a tranquil sea, which you travel to on a large white boat decorated with huge scarlet tiddlywinks, diamonds or zigzags. In the harbour is a gleaming pumpkin decorated in a ladybird's red and black coat and beyond that a perspex and steel frame which, at dusk, transforms into a glowing cloud.

Now imagine you can walk inside these structures because they're bigger than you and they seem to be saying "enter me". Inside they are clean and spacious, not full of flattened cans, broken vapes and sweet wrappers like they would be in Britain. The pumpkin and the cloud are in pristine condition, they remind you of The Beatles' Yellow Submarine cartoon, they exist in a culture where unusual things are revered and cared for. Their walls aren't covered in statements about who is ream or who sucks cocks. There is no info at all, what they are is left to your imagination to decide.

Words by James Brown
Photos by Em Prové



Now in search of a coffee you wander curiously through the quiet streets of the tiny town where roads spread out from the harbour like the fingers on your hand. You find a café called Sparky's which appears to be.... yes, is a Tim Burton shrine selling breakfast and lunch. Pumpkins and *Beetlejuice* everywhere. It's not overdone, the obsession appears quite matter of fact, like a Tim Burton café is the most everyday concept in the world.

Now you can stop imagining because you already know all this exists because you can see our photographs and you understand this call to wonder is simply a device to convey a magical essence to where we're taking you.

Step out of your imagination and move to your memory. Have you ever had friends who you laugh with so much that you double up and hurt. The humour you share is rich in ridiculous "what-if-ness", fuelled by surreal possibility. A step beyond the obvious, the acceptable, the normal. This is where we are going. To a land where these possibilities have become real.

To a place where people have considered "What about a garden wall speckled with human teeth?" or "I'd love to cover a pond with giant ball bearings" and made them happen. An island where people will walk into a narrowing claustrophobic subterranean chamber in the name of art.

If all of this sounds like your sort of thing then please go to Japan and make your way 400 miles south west of Tokyo by train and ferry to Naoshima, the most famous of the art islands in what is known as The Seto Inland Sea.

And there you will find this place where structures are outsized and shiny and silly and startling and beautiful and curious and childlike but also immensely considered and impressive. Some installations complement the island's natural beauty and blend into the sea, others are jarring to the point of craziness.



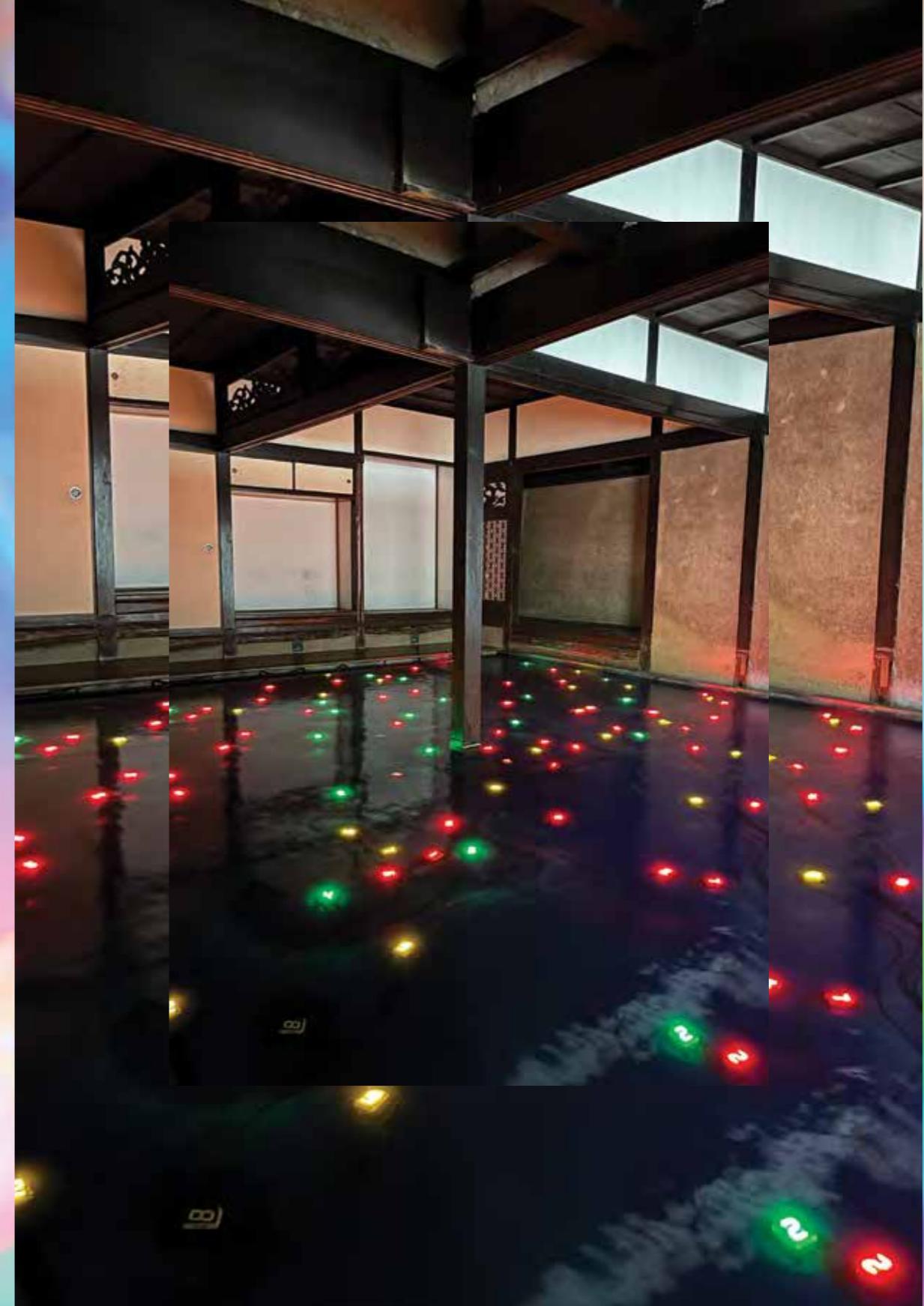
We arrived on Naoshima on a day when things were closed for repairs, they have two like this a year but it seemed to work in our favour, sometimes less people is more fun. The electric bike hire shop was open and you can cycle round Naoshima in less than an hour, so we did just that. With no guides and no apparent explanation as to what's going on we were repeatedly left wondering what the hell we were actually looking at.

There's a good chance, if you've spent too many days glued to Instagram, you will have seen the giant pumpkins of Yayoi Kusama. They are iconic pop art entities and free to visit. By midday there is a queue of keen photographers, but get there early in the morning or on repair days and you'll have them to yourself.



We cycled through a village grid of wooden houses, some exteriors decorated with buttons like the jackets of London's pearly Kings and Queens, others made of charred cedar timbers, the pathways littered with cats of all colours and sizes. We turned different corners and entered smaller and smaller alleyways flitting through what became a wooden residential maze.

When we returned to the Honmura Area the next day with information leaflets and open doors to enter, we discovered so many of the tightly knit traditional homes we'd passed previously were part of the Art House Project. Over the years newly vacated houses have been handed over to artists to create installations. What quickly becomes apparent on Naoshima is you have no idea what you will find in a house there. At least two of the buildings were flooded with water in the name of art. Plumbers would love it. If you've ever wanted to stare into an inky pool full of floating neon numbers this is the place for you. And if darkness is your thing there's a large room that has removed all sources of light, "none more black", as Spinal Tap said, I had to quell the urge to start screaming for a laugh. A big fan of sight, I found the permanent darkness slightly unnerving.



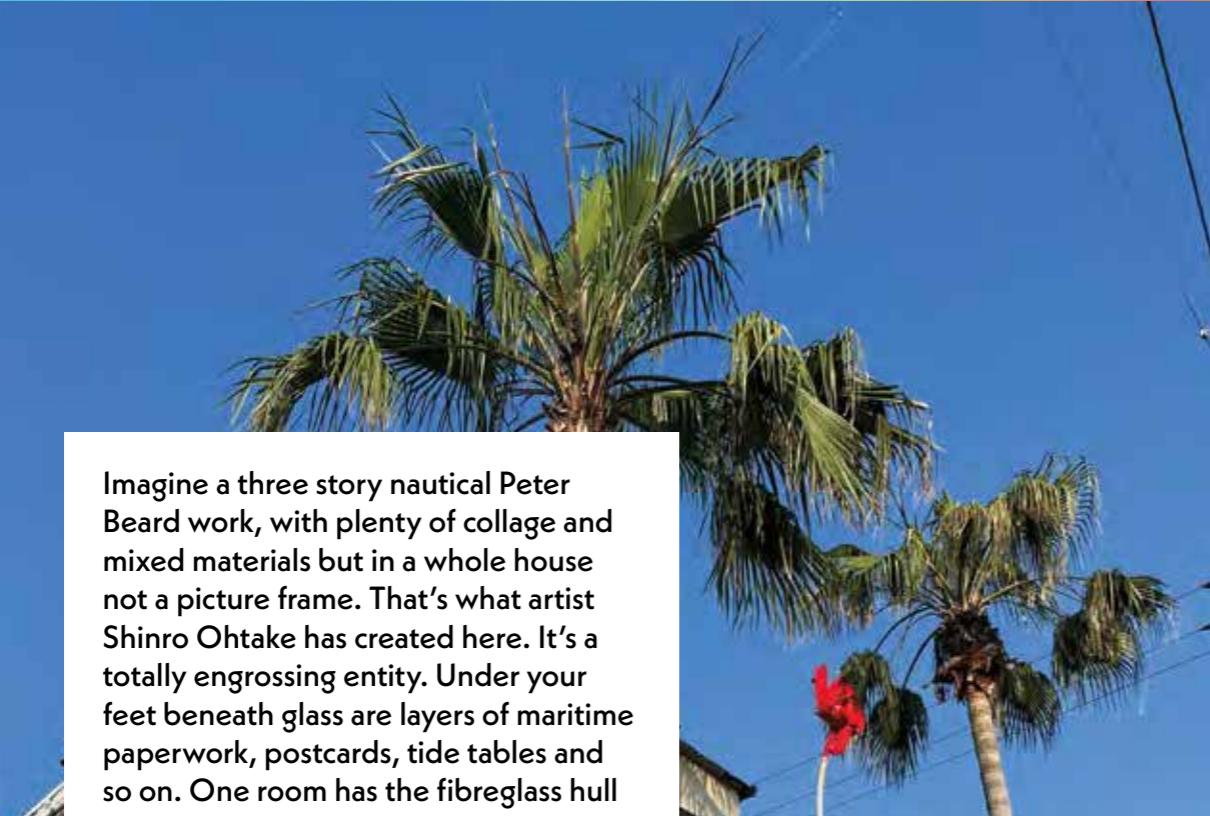


We had more fun at a house called "Haisha", notable for its blue wall with a hand painted tile depicting an open mouth. Embedded in the wall were what I initially thought were dying flowers and then realised were thin human teeth. You will not get this in Homebase or B&Q, even if you go online and research first.

"Maybe this is the dentist's house?" I wondered, "or the house of a very confident serial killer," my True Crime mind countered. Whichever it was it was really unusual, when I move house I normally take all my teeth with me.

The exterior of Haisha (which it turns out does mean dentist) is a working patchwork of rusts and browns, however inside there's no notable reference to dentistry, everything is blue.



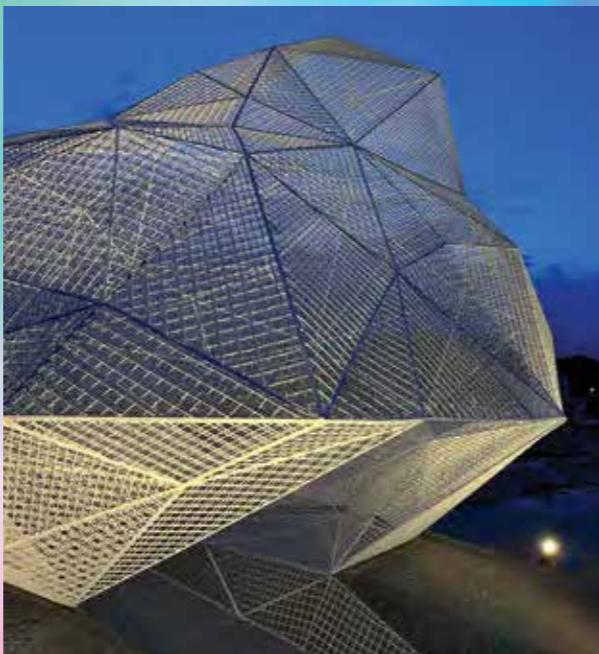
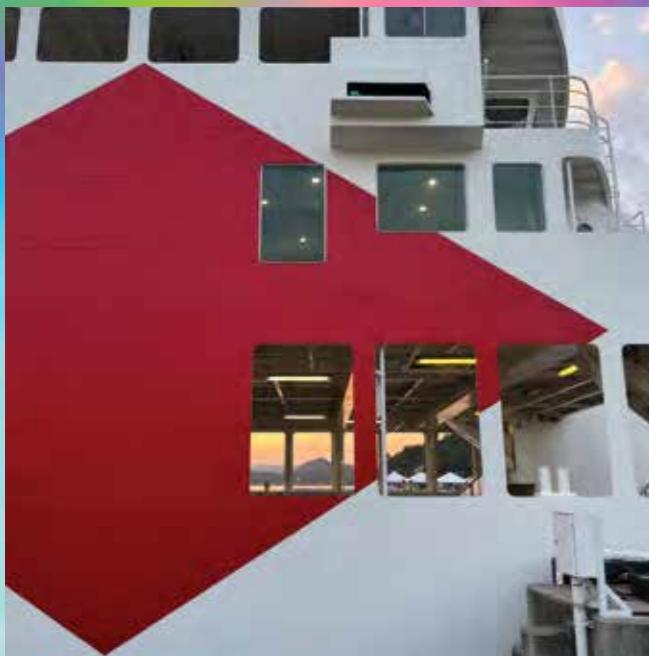
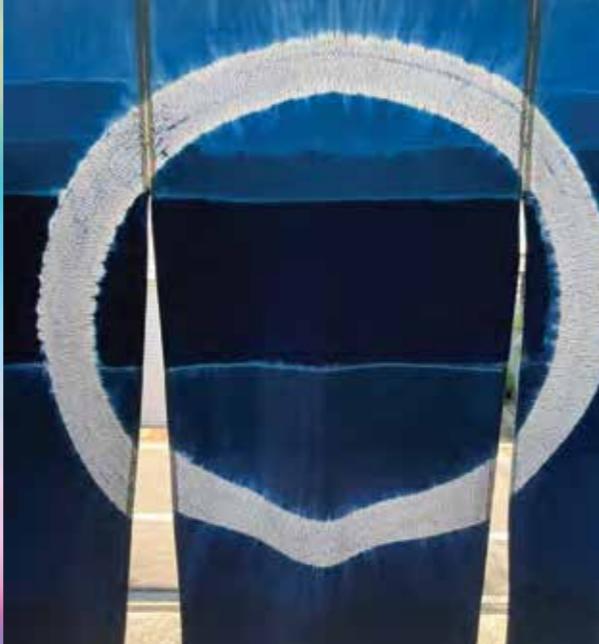


Imagine a three story nautical Peter Beard work, with plenty of collage and mixed materials but in a whole house not a picture frame. That's what artist Shinro Otake has created here. It's a totally engrossing entity. Under your feet beneath glass are layers of maritime paperwork, postcards, tide tables and so on. One room has the fibreglass hull of a small trawler for a wall, in another which fills the full height of the building is a model of the statue of liberty. Every corner draws your attention, it's the first work of art I've seen that I'd like to live in. It's manicured clutter and felt like a creative celebration and recognition of those of us who horde for a day things will come in use.



Round the island past a nice big smile of a beach is the Benesse House Musem, which anchors Naoshima, and if you're flush they have a small luxury hotel there too. The complex, which opened in 1992, has a brilliant array of site specific works. It's a modern gallery, so naturally there are impressive concrete walls and huge windows, but also so many works that stimulate and inspire.





I'd been staring at a wall of national flags made of sand and mounted in an interconnected display of clear plastic frames when I noticed an ant on the floor. Something made me go back and look at the slight corruptions in the sand flags and the tubes connecting them all and I realised the whole thing was a living ant project and the sand flag corruptions were their tunnels and tracks.

Walking beyond Benesse is the Valley Gallery, a building at the head of a small valley with a large pond at the bottom. The steps, paths and the building itself mix with the nature they're embedded in to host an amazing piece called *Narcissus Garden* by Yayoi Kusama again. Hundreds of giant mirror balls rest on the water, the lawn, alongside the tracks and inside the gallery. Given the fashions television and film have allocated to extra terrestrials and spacemen it looks very sci-fi. But like her pumpkins the size and proliferation is what grabs you. I really wanted to wade in and touch the ones gathered at one end of the pond and wondered whether they move as the winds dictate. You know those dogs you see panting longingly on the edge of lakes looking at distant ducks? This is what this island turns you into. A slobbering observer inspired to become a participant. *ralph*



While on Naoshima, James and Em stayed at My Lodge, hotel where everything was provided by Muji. The night before they sailed there, they stayed in the great Uno Port Inn with its Japanese cinema themed rooms.

MAX'S DISPATCHES MAX'S DISPATCHES MAX'S DISPATCHES MAX'S DISPATCHES

DISPATCH #2 - LALALA LAND:

Ralph Food Editor and global sandwich pioneer, Max Halley, reports from the corners of his gastronomic globe



MAX'S DISPATCHES MAX'S DISPATCHES MAX'S DISPATCHES MAX'S DISPATCHES

After all the jokes about everyone eating salad, abstaining from alcohol and being generally disingenuous, avaricious and horrible, as I sat on the plane earlier this summer, my imagination running wild and free, I was convinced I would hate it in LA.

According to Frank Lloyd Wright, if you "tip the world over on its side, everything loose will land in Los Angeles." Reading this a few weeks before coming, I wondered what the hell he was on about. Did he mean there was none of the ethereal cohesion a great city needs to bind its disparate parts? Or that (for better or worse) anyone was welcome and anything went? Or, like my internal monologue, did he have no idea what he was talking about?

Chris, the publisher of this magazine, and I checked into our hotel near the Ralph offices in West Hollywood, put our bags in our rooms and met back at the bar for a quick sharpener. Pints of some local beer dispatched, Chris said excitedly he was taking me somewhere brilliant round the corner. Devastatingly, he followed that with "it's called Barney's Beanery." Fantastic, I thought, the first fucking salad of the week. It turned out Barney's was a divey sports bar and the Beanery a reference to coffee they had once served. It had pool tables, a surly barman and the kind of sticky bar top places like this are meant to have. Our swanky hotel was very close by but couldn't have been further from this place's utilitarian atmosphere and rugged approach. Having a cigarette outside, starting to feel a little loose, Big Frank's words might have begun to take on some meaning.

Barney's wind beneath our wings, we headed a few miles east for dinner at the Musso and Frank Grill [6667 Hollywood

Bld], one of two restaurants I'd booked for us in advance. Musso's opened in 1919 and is to LA what Peter Luger is to New York. I asked our waiter what drink he'd recommend to get the party started and he said "Olive or a twist?" A twist for me, an olive for Chris and we were off. What followed was the consummate restaurant experience. Everything from the size of our martinis, to the raucous atmosphere and our wonderful table in a wood-lined snug, made us feel like a million dollars. We shared a dreamy fettuccine Alfredo (introduced to America here), a MASSIVE steak and a chunk of calf's liver that would have intimidated Hannibal Lecter. Once dinner was over, we headed back to the hotel via a few bars Chris knew, stopping at a shop on the way for me to buy something to smoke, and to marvel at the other mad shit you can buy in the shops out here.

In the morning, ahead of the next day's launch party for the issue that came before this very magazine you're reading, Chris had some work to do at the office. Having cleverly palmed off most of my launch party catering responsibilities onto LA's excellent Super Rad Sub Shop (thank you other Chris and Shanna), I was free until the afternoon and decided to go and look at some art. I booked a cab to *The Broad* (pronounced "brode") and a banged up car arrived. The driver flipped up her sunnies, introduced



herself as Melissa, welcomed me to LA and turned Anderson .Paak's 'Come Down', up even louder. A few moments into our journey I noticed, much to her embarrassed amusement, that Melissa was driving in Hello Kitty slippers. "Long days," she said. "Long days."

We chatted all the way to the museum about LA, its geographic demography and its rich sandwich history. The French Dip was invented here (at Philippe the Original), the cheeseburger allegedly too (God knows where) and there is a longstanding and excellent Jewish Deli culture. Melissa, born and bred in the city, told me many things, including that I'd learn nothing about the place staying in West Hollywood. I didn't say anything, but staying anywhere in a city tells you a lot about it, just not the same things as staying somewhere else.

I arrived at *The Broad* as it opened and swanned straight into their Yayoi Kusama Infinity Room which was unexpectedly amazing. "It's part of our permanent collection," the woman on the door said. "It's our Mona Lisa." Ranking Kusama alongside Da Vinci might be a stretch, but it did say something about LA and its willingness to value the new, as well as maintaining reverence for the old.

Once I'd bopped round the galleries, it had been at least two hours since I'd had something to eat so I left and

walked to Grand Central Market. Melissa had said (contentiously I'm sure) that it had a new outpost of the best tacos in town: Villa's Tacos. I ordered something called beef flap steak and, overwhelmed by the options, asked for it as the guy serving would have it. I didn't eat any other tacos on the trip, but this was outstanding. It was a queso taco (with a melted cheese skirt), the beef prepared similarly to al pastor, perfectly garnished and finished with habanero salsa.

Taco interlude over, my meeting with Super Rad's Chris and Shanna ahead of the next day's launch was now only an hour away. I thought I'd squeeze in a trip to the much-hyped Courage Bagels [777 Virgil Avenue] but they were closed, so I headed straight for Canter's [419 N Fairfax Avenue], one of LA's great Jewish delis. Shanna suggested we meet in the adjacent bar (owned by the deli) as they'd already eaten and, to my shame, I like a drink in the afternoon.

**"Field Of Dreams
was on the TV
and the barman
didn't bat an
eyelid at three
pints with Fernet
chasers at 3pm"**

The Kibitz Room was a rough old place, with a hole in the ceiling and a great musical history. It had one of those wonderful squidgy-leather elbow things running around the bar, *Field of Dreams* was on the TV and the barman didn't bat an eyelid

MAX'S DISPATCHES MAX'S DISPATCHES MAX'S DISPATCHES MAX'S DISPATCHES

at three pints with Fernet chasers at 3pm, during what was technically a work meeting.

They both left to start prepping for tomorrow's party and (publisher) Chris met me for a sandwich next door. I was excited because well, salt beef, sauerkraut and Russian dressing are exciting. We walked into the dining room and the first thing that hit me was the light. The ceiling's beautiful stained glass-like tiles were lit from above. I felt like I was lying comfortably on the floor of an autumnal woodland, on the most beautiful day of the year. Here at Canter's, open from the early, early morning, 'til the early, early night, it is always the Golden Hour.

Four different mustards and a huge bottle of Tabasco welcomed us to our table, and I immediately ordered Chris and I cans of Dr Brown's Cel-Ray (a celery seed flavoured soft drink, much better than it sounds) and we got stuck into the menu. Someone outside had said to us that Langer's (a shop of a similar ilk) was "better because they make their own bread". I asked our wonderfully indiscreet server about Langer's and this bread malarkey, and she promptly told us that Canter's make their own too, and that she had worked at Langer's, "but the owner was such an asshole, I went home after my second day and never went back."

Our excellent corned [salt] beef sandwiches were served with two different pickles [lacto fermented and pickled?] and extra Russian dressing on the side, because "if we didn't, everyone just asks for it anyways." The thoughtfulness of this, the quality (and banter) of the service generally and of

course, the food and that ceiling, made this a truly great sandwich shop, even if perhaps, not one you'd swap Katz's for.

The following morning, I hit Mel's Drive-In [8585 Sunset Boulevard] for breakfast. It was without doubt, one of the coolest buildings I've ever been in. Designed by Lane and Schlick in 1962, this joyful piece of (apparently) Googie architecture (Jetsons meets Happy Days) was a lesson to the world in how to do breakfast. I ordered corned beef hash (when in Rome) with eggs and an iced latte (which came in a pint glass!). "What eggs you like?" the waitress asked. "I'm not sure," I said unhelpfully. "Fried?" "Poached?" she said rhetorically.

So I went for poached, adding that I find really runny eggs a little creepy. She said she did too, and we were bonded. My next iced coffee was on the house and I was presented with two free sausages with my food because "they're good". God bless America.

After I'd digested breakfast (publisher) Chris and I met at our hotel bar for a drink. The restaurant for that evening was the second one I'd already booked, so he said he'd choose lunch. We strolled down Santa Monica Boulevard straight past Tail O' the Pup, much to my disappointment, and he stopped us suddenly at a fast food shack looking place called L.A. Buns & Co. There were a few immovable tables and chairs embedded in the sidewalk and a hatch you ordered and collected your food from. I was pleased to note that like my sandwich shop ('Hot Sandwiches and Booze') they were able to describe their business in four words: 'Hamburgers and Mexican Food'.

"I find really runny eggs a little creepy"



**"There's something
about LA, some
mystical togetherness"**

"We're here for the hamburgers," Chris said to me, and ordered "two L.A. Cheeseburgers please." This was not some bougie burger with 70% this cut and 30% that one, it was a lesson in more important ratios. Something all those bougie burgers could learn. It was also perhaps, the only thing I ate in LA that was truly more than the sum of its parts: burger, bun, American cheese, (bought in) Thousand Island Dressing, raw onion, lettuce and tomato. Nothing more, nothing less. "Shit," I said after my first bite. "What you thinking?" Chris asked, looking nervous. "This is why burgers got famous," I replied. "Only the Big Mac has equally perfect proportions." Chris looked pleased. We ordered a fish sandwich too to celebrate, but it wasn't that great. Even a stopped clock tells the right time twice a day.

Walking into Yess Restaurant [2001 E 7th Street] in the Arts District for the last supper, I did an intake of breath. It felt like a church, and I for one was here to worship at the altar. Having had chef Junya's extraordinary cooking ten years ago, out the back of long gone Koya in London, I knew what was coming. Our dinner included the best salad I have ever eaten (stone fruits in a shiso dashi), the best tofu I have ever eaten (silken, with something called 'salsa macha') and the best sashimi I have ever eaten. The fish (various bits of a giant tuna) was cut in thick, generous slices and served with what appeared to be, but weren't, incongruously

punchy condiments – a habanero and yuzu jam and a vicious mustard. The fish was rich and fatty and powerful enough to handle itself and everything was so Southern Californian and yet somehow, still so Japanese.

I had chosen Musso's and Yess for us to go to, so that at the very least I would leave LA with an idea of where its food and restaurant scene were a hundred years ago, and where they were today. Just as Musso's long ago introduced fettucine Alfredo and the pay phone to the people of Hollywood, Junya has introduced the city to the Japanese fish killing techniques of ikejime and shinkejime. His suppliers have changed their practices and now chefs all over Southern California are able to buy better fish, killed in a manner that improves things for the beast itself, and its eater.

Writing this, thinking back on my time in LA, what stands out is the service, the people and their relentless pursuit of excellence in everything from how you like your eggs in the morning, to how a tuna is cut up, cabs are driven, martinis are mixed and cheap burgers are put together. I don't care who or what rolls up where, or what it was Frank Lloyd Wright was really on about. There's something about LA, some mystical togetherness and kindly welcoming. Despite such obvious disparity, much of the city is still for everyone, the many not the few, and I commend it to each and every one of you. *ralph*

GO TH COCKTAILS OF HOLLYWOOD

*but actually in Orlando

Ralph's intrepid explorer, Gav Murphy, flew 4000 miles to drink in the gothic madness of Halloween (in August) at Universal Studios...

Words by Gav Murphy
Photos by Christina Petros

The last few years has seen people's interest in Halloween blow up more aggressively than a serial killer stalking a promiscuous babysitter. And with Americans just having to do things so much bigger, Universal Studios in Orlando now starts the Spooky Season in August with their annual *Halloween Horror Nights* celebration.

Look, I'm not having a go at it! I'm a huge fan of dusting any liquid possible with Halloween-flavoured nonsense and recently spent an amount I'm uncomfortable sharing on some pumpkin-spiced poop bags (for my dog, I swear). My love for Halloween is also why I flew from London to Orlando to be there on opening night as Universal transformed their entire park into a nine-week long goth party.

The main event of *Halloween Horror Nights* is ten themed haunted houses where you fumble your way through almost complete darkness while the best designed scary shit you've ever seen tries to make you jump. This year, visitors will get the willies stuck well and truly up them by slasher triplets, terrifying creatures from Latin America folklore, Dracula's naughty daughter and some stripper mummies. You'll also get a chance to step inside houses based on films like *A Quiet Place*, *Insidious* and *Ghostbusters: Frozen Empire*.

The houses are brilliant but for me, the bigger allure of these nights are the increasingly bonkers themed drinks that Universal conjures up for you to sup as you scream your way around the park. These drinks, which range from delicious to genuinely baffling, try to mirror the houses and are sold throughout the park at loads of lovely themed bars. They've fast become one of my main reasons to visit *Halloween Horror Nights* and if you're wondering why a themed cocktail could tempt me across the Atlantic, then strap yourself in and drink your way around Universal Studios with me.



A QUIET PLACE'S RAINING BLOOD

Old Forester Bourbon, broVo Spirits Lucky Falernum, DeKruyper Crème de Cassis, Blackberry Syrup, Lemon juice, and a hint of smoked sea salt
20 oz. Souvenir Lightbulb \$17.50
12 oz. No Lightbulb \$13.50

I'm a little spooky sucker for a souvenir glass so this was the first place I hit up on my boozy tour of the park. Based on the red light bulbs in *A Quiet Place* this bourbon-based offering is far fruitier than I thought it was going to be, which means the bourbon taste is suspiciously hidden. This isn't to say that the Universal drinks peddlers are tight with their pours - in fact, having drank-up a decent hangover here for 4 years now, I can tell you it is definitely the opposite. It probably says a lot about me that I think \$17.50 for a cocktail that comes in a lightbulb (that actually lights-up!) is a hammered-on, stone cold bargain. And if you're buying the cheaper version without the lightbulb, then you need to have a serious word with yourself.

5 Pumpkin-Spiced Dog Poop Bags out of 5



MONSTROS: THE MONSTERS OF LATIN AMERICA'S DEPREDADORA

Misguided Spirits Silver Rum, Cappelletti Aperitivo 'Mazzura', Mango Syrup, Pineapple and Lime Juices, Disco Inferno Bitters and Pomegranate Seeds.
20 oz. Souvenir Cup - \$17.50
12 oz. Single Serve - \$13.50

This weird little concoction starts off almost Negroni-like with the bitterness of the Cappelletti Aperitivo 'Mazzura' but then the frankly, silly amount of syrups and juices soften that out and it just becomes its own fantastical thing. This one is a good example of the genuine graft that goes into the design of some of these cocktails – they're not just lobbing in any old Costco-bought rum but a meticulously sourced Venezuelan spirit in keeping with the Latin America haunted house this drink is themed after. The strangely pale drink is topped off with Disco Inferno bitters, which gives the drink a spicy aftertaste that will slap the jet-lag out of anyone.

4 Pumpkin-Spiced Dog Poop Bags out of 5



GHOSTBUSTERS: FROZEN EMPIRE'S CLASS-V CONCOCTION

New Amsterdam vodka, St-Germaine Elderflower Liqueur, Kiwi Syrup, Honeydew Melon Syrup, Lime Juice, Vanilla Bean Essence, and fluffed marshmallow topping.
- \$15.00

I wanted to sample this cup of beautiful nonsense genuinely because it's one of the pricier offerings this year and I wanted to find out why. That's not to say it isn't delicious – the kiwi and the melon syrups hit you first with a smooth taste that almost becomes sickly before the elderflower blasts into your mouth to take the edge off nicely. If you're paying 15 bucks for a cocktail that looks like the *Ghostbusters* fan favourite character Slimer though, I'd expect it to come in some kind of ludicrously capacious ghoul mug instead of a little plastic cup. Listen, if *A Quiet Place* can have some bulbs, Slimer can have a sippy cup!

3 Pumpkin-Spiced Dog Poop Bags out of 5



DEAD MERIDIAN

Cuervo Tradicional Silver Tequila, Chipotle Pineapple Syrup, Basil Essence, and Fanta Orange, Garnished with a Pineapple Wedge
20 oz. Souvenir Cup - \$17.50
12 oz. Single Serve - \$13.50

Anybody who's been kicking about at an afters waiting for the corner shop to open will tell you that sticking any flavour of Fanta in a drink is less of a cocktail and more of a cry for help. How strange then that Universal includes various flavours of Fanta as its main mixer in a fair few of their cocktails... and even stranger that it sometimes works! The Dead Meridian's cheeky chipotle pineapple syrup splices out the heavy Fanta taste and while there's no way any human could get through more than one of these, to see Fanta as the main ingredient of a cocktail and it not taste of complete ass is one of the spookiest things I experienced this year.

3 Pumpkin-Spiced Dog Poop Bags out of 5



SINIST3R SPRITZ

New Amsterdam Vodka,
Aperol Aperitivo, Fanta Orange
20 oz. Souvenir Cup - \$17.50
12 oz. Single Serve - \$13.50

I've included this one not because it's a bold and beautiful American take on an Italian classic but because it's a prime example of how *Halloween Horror Nights* puts fun and frivolity ahead of any kind of semblance of pretentiousness. There's no cocktail Universal won't add a layer of marshmallow fluff or inappropriate dusting of cinnamon to if they think it will go down well. And as for the humble Aperol Spritz, which has graced Italian lips since 1919... get fucked, Italy! It's pumped full of Fanta now! Does it taste better? Absolutely not. Is it more of a laugh? One hundred percent, yes.

3 Pumpkin-Spiced Dog Poop Bags out of 5



INSIDIOUS" VEIL OF SHADOWS

White Claw Black Cherry Vodka, DeKruyper Crème de Cassis, Blackberry Syrup, Pineapple Juice, Sour Mix, and a Black Licorice Candy "Veil".
20 oz. Souvenir Cup - \$17.50
12 oz. Single Serve - \$13.50

The UK seems almost reluctant to embrace White Claw's barely-booze flavoured waters but the US have long been fans of the stuff and will chuck it in any old drink if they think it'll taste nice. Case in point, the Veil of Shadows, presumably based on one of the main pants-filling villains of the Insidious films, *The Bride in Black*. I love how the people behind the scenes at Universal are able to take a tiny element from a horror movie and make a whole drink out of it. And while the thick taste of cherry and dark berries isn't really for me, gulping down two of these has definitely made those films less scary.

3 Pumpkin-Spiced Dog Poop Bags out of 5



WHOLE HOG PUMPKIN ALE

20 oz. Souvenir Cup - \$16.00
20 oz. Single Serve - \$13.00

The final stop on this creepy pub crawl is one to definitely end your night with and it's the pumpkin flavoured ale, which you can find poured throughout the park. The taste of pumpkin is subtle compared to the beer so if you're into your drinks having the least amount of ingredients possible whilst also not feeling like a grumpy bastard for just drinking Bud Light all night, then this one's for you. And while some might baulk at the fact that a pint of this will set you back \$13, just remember it's 7% and worth every penny.

Look, if you wanted to save money then you shouldn't have come to a goth-filled amusement park where they sell pumpkin lager, alright?

4 Pumpkin-Spiced Dog Poop Bags out of 5

Halloween Horror Nights has become a sensational and much-deserved draw for Universal Studios and for me, it remains the best thing you can spend your adult money on. Fans will now spend the next year furiously searching for clues about next year's houses while I'll be dreaming of sinking some gloopy ghoul juice from a big scary cup. *ralph*



INK FOR ALL

**How shifting barriers are changing
the tattoo scenes around the world**

Words by Hannah Wong
Illustrations by James-Lee Duffy

When Joe Khay began his apprenticeship at a studio in New York over 20 years ago, his craft catered to a very specific niche. "I was tattooing Hell's Angels and gang members," he says – his training process was as intimidating as the clientele. Tattooing as a profession wasn't nearly as prevalent as it is today, and Joe struggled to find a shop that would take him under its wing and teach him. When he finally did, the result was a brutal one. "It was a learning experience through observation, repetition, and honestly, psychological abuse," he says, while also recounting a time when feedback was let's say... physical.

It wasn't what you would call a healthy workplace dynamic by modern standards, but Joe's options for making a living were limited. Coming from a poor immigrant family with few resources or connections, he never saw college as an option. So Joe got into the only industry that made sense to him at the time, using the skill of artistry he had come to develop through drawing and making street art. Joe and his contemporaries entered the business out of necessity. "When I started tattooing, we did it because it was all our hands knew how to do," he says.

"When I started tattooing, we did it because it was all our hands knew how to do"

Joe Khay

Fast forward to the late 2010s, and a college student at the Rhode Island School of Design was learning to tattoo under completely different circumstances.

Gabrielle Widjaja (who uses she/they pronouns) was earning their Bachelor's in Graphic Design when she began making digital illustrations with the program Procreate. They would regularly post these 'doodles' to their Instagram account, when a comment made them think.

"One of my friends commented on my doodles and was like, 'Are these tattoo flash? Because they look like tattoo flash,'" Gabrielle says. Flash refers to pre-drawn designs that a customer can choose for a tattoo instead of commissioning custom work – often held in a book for customers to flick through. As an art school student, Gabrielle had seen many peers buy stick-and-poke kits and give each other tattoos. Their own first tattoo was received in the dorm room of a friend. So when she read the Instagram comment, their immediate thought was, why not?

She bought supplies and began the journey of figuring out how to tattoo, watching YouTube videos and using their own skin to practice. "I would just test things out on myself," she says. "I would see how deep I was supposed to go [with the needle], and what happens when you use colours and use black." Widjaja tattooed their partner and close friends, and started doing free tattoos from their own living room while balancing this new art form and profession with a full-time job working as a graphic designer for a tech company. The weeks were packed and long. "On weeknights I would practise my illustration and practise tattooing, and then take my appointments on Saturday and Sunday," Gabrielle remarks.

As their skills improved, she began charging more to clients. In the aftermath of Covid, Gabrielle moved their practice into an artists' co-working space in Brooklyn's

Greenpoint as a safety precaution. From there, they went on to co-found the tattoo collective *Long Time*, with its own studio space and dedicated fan base, which has amassed nearly 50,000 followers on Instagram under the brand Gentle Oriental. In 2022, Gabrielle was commissioned to create custom art and flash for indie darling songwriter Mitski. *Long Time* even made waves on social media by tattooing directors The Daniels, famous for their breakout film *Everything, Everywhere, All at Once*.

Suffice to say, while Joe and Gabrielle share a medium for their art, their career paths bear little in common. A variety of factors could be at play to explain this difference – gender, race, education, age – but a fundamental one is apprenticeships.

Apprenticeships are a longstanding tradition in the tattoo industry. Before someone can begin tattooing in a shop, they have to train under a mentor until they are deemed ready to take paying clients. The duration of the experience depends on how quickly the apprentice learns; most take a year or more. For London-based artist Clara Sinclair, who runs a private studio, these experiences provide essential foundational knowledge about tattooing. "With an apprenticeship in a shop," she says, "you can learn how a shop runs, management, business, administrative skills, drawing tips and tricks, and most importantly, you can watch other artists tattoo."

But as Joe Khay found out as a teenager in New York, securing the apprenticeship can be a challenge in and of itself. Shops have limited space for trainees, and making the cut requires an impressive portfolio and a personality that fits the shop's culture. It's also a sizeable financial investment. For Joe, training was completely unpaid, with "compensation in the form of experience." For others, the shop providing the apprenticeship might ask for a sum of

money as payment for its teaching services.

This was the case for Brooklyn-based tattooist and member of *Long Time*, Melanie Lee. For her, the price tag came as a shock. "Shops wanted me to pay them in the \$10,000-plus range," she exclaims. "It's a huge financial undertaking. They demanded a lot of time as well. I had a full-time job when I started this, but they wanted me at the shop five days a week. I told them I couldn't pay them and also be there all those days." Melanie already had a large existing body of work using other artistic mediums when she began cold emailing studios for apprenticeship opportunities. She made sure to only contact places that aligned with her own art style and seemed like a good cultural fit – aka "not the kind run by biker dudes." Still, the resulting experience was mixed.

On one hand, Melanie's mentor taught her valuable skills during her year of apprenticeship. He provided guidance on everything from how to improve her grip while tattooing, to how to navigate customer relations. The one-on-one training, Melanie feels, was vital. "My mentor is still a resource for me," she says. "We have this prolonged relationship where I'm three years in and I can still call him." The downside was the shop experience itself, which Melanie tells us she did not enjoy and found the working relationship complicated. When she finished her year as an apprentice, she severed her relationship with the studio itself, choosing only to maintain contact with her mentor.

This outcome isn't unique. Apprenticeships are notorious for demanding intense labour for low wages, excluding applicants from certain backgrounds, and engaging in exploitation tactics that leave many apprentices feeling burned.



But the tradition of apprenticeships is changing. As the Internet has grown in popularity and accessibility, so has tattooing. There are now resources online where aspiring tattoo artists can learn everything from the setup, to the technique, to which products to use or avoid. This type of free education has started to break down what was once the largest barrier to learning to tattoo.

Many artists in New York City and right across the world have begun to bypass the apprenticeship process completely, preferring to be known as 'DIY' or 'self-taught' and operating independently of a shop. Like Gabrielle Widjaja, they might learn from a combination of tattooing their own skin, giving out tattoos to friends, and leaning into resources like YouTube.

"You can learn off of people you're never gonna meet – someone in Tokyo, or someone in Siberia?"

Joe Khay

Joe has seen the platform's effects on younger tattooers, and he considers the change a positive one. "I think YouTube is a good thing because you can learn off of people you're never gonna meet," he says. "You can learn from someone in Tokyo, or someone in Siberia. It's wonderful because you can pick up tips from these people."

On the other side of the world in Mumbai, tattoo artist and shop owner Zaheer Chhatriwala agrees that self-taught tattooing has opened up the art to people in areas where formal training might not be available. As someone who's been tattooing for 15 years, he's seen the Indian modern tattoo scene evolve and really gather pace in the last 20-25 years. "The ideal process around the world is to get an apprenticeship or mentorship under another artist, but a lot of artists in smaller parts of the country are self-taught," he says.

Back in New York, Melanie Lee respects self-taught artists despite not being one of them herself. She understands that learning independently prevents new tattooers from being taken advantage of financially. "The financial barriers to a lot of apprenticeships make tattooing unattainable, she says. "So I can never fault someone for going that [self-taught] route."

That's not to say the DIY option is without risks. Proper hygiene is a big one. In order to keep a sanitary workstation, artists must wear gloves, use industry-grade ink and disposable needles, wrap all surfaces with plastic wrap, and use proper aftercare materials, just as a start. These kinds of disciplined health and safety measures are instilled during apprenticeships, but may be forgotten or never learned in the first place by DIY tattooers. But even with the potential drawbacks, DIY tattooing still offers a radically accessible approach to a profession that once had enormous barriers to entry. Aspiring artists now have the option to learn the craft at no cost and at their own pace. That represents a huge change from even a few years ago.

In the end, as Melanie says, it's all about investing the proper effort and realising you get back what you put in. "I think you can definitely be a wonderful self-taught artist



- clean, safe, talented," she says. "It only becomes dangerous when people don't take it seriously."

Tattooing has, by all measures, evolved quickly. For New York-based artist, Vivian Shih, her earliest memories of tattoo culture are full of intimidation. "It was a walk-in-shop, run-down and grungy, and there were only men there," says Vivian, recalling her own first tattoo in 2010. It was impressed on her then that tattooing was only by, and for, a specific type of person. Because of this, she never considered tattooing a viable career. Instead she says she felt discouraged. "There was a lot more gatekeeping back then. It was less accessible. They told me, 'It's really hard to do unless you start young' – so I didn't." It would be another decade before she finally took up tattooing professionally at the encouragement of a friend. Melanie

Lee has a similar memory from early in her life, of learning that tattooing was for a part of society and culture to which she didn't belong. "I grew up watching Miami Ink and LA Ink, and it was like, only a certain type of person tattoos," she says. But in an era where tattoo tutorials exist on YouTube and stick-and-poke kits can be purchased on Amazon, the industry looks vastly different than it did even a few years ago. Learning the medium doesn't require a particular background or upbringing. "Now it's like, you can be any type of person – you can go to college, you can go to grad school, but still tattoo," Melanie says. Even though Joe Khay came from a different generation of artists and still considers himself a purist when it comes to apprenticeships – he supports this expansion of the talent pool. "I think that as times are changing," he says. "We have different demographics of people who are more interested in the community

and the job. There's definitely less hard biker dudes, more artsy kids, a lot more women in the industry, which is awesome. I don't think tattooing should be based on gender or culture. The work needs to speak for itself."

"Certain taboos and stereotypes have changed for the better... it's been recognised as an art form now"

Zaheer Chhatriwala

In Mumbai, Zaheer Chhatriwala concurs, adding that artists and clients have diversified in tandem. "As the industry has grown, a lot of barriers have been broken and all kinds of people from various backgrounds are getting tattooed and taking up tattooing," he says. "Certain taboos and stereotypes have changed for the better... it's been recognised as an art form now."

Over her 14 years in industry, Clara Sinclair has watched the 'stereotypical' tattooer persona in London fade as well, replaced by something much more diverse. "When I started it was vastly male dominated, now more women/non-binary and queer artists have appeared, making room for shops that are more inclusive," Sinclair says.

"When I started it was vastly male dominated, now more women/non-binary and queer artists have appeared, making room for shops that are more inclusive"

Clara Sinclair

As for any gatekeeping or intimidation that still exists in tattooing, Gabrielle Widjaja says she and other DIY artists have managed to combat it by building community with one another outside of the mainstream. "We just kind of carved out our own space in the industry over the past four or five years," she says. "We were like, 'Well, if there's no space for us in the industry traditionally, we're just going to make our own path.'"

To Melanie Lee, the answer to gatekeeping is to ensure future generations of artists will never have to face the barriers she did. She says becoming someone else's mentor is a goal of hers, if time and resources ever allow for it. "If you're serious about it and want to try it, you should be able to try," she says. "I'd love to nurture someone's passions and bring them into tattooing as someone who can add to the community." *ralph*

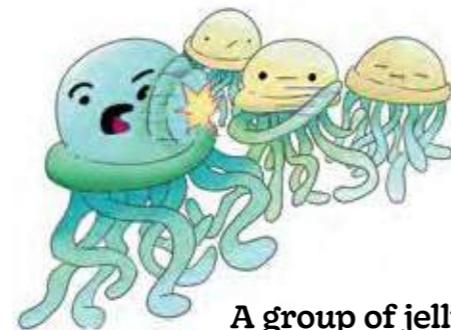
DON'T Google This

Things we heard that might be true

Illustrations by Dak Stiga - @dak_drawsyep



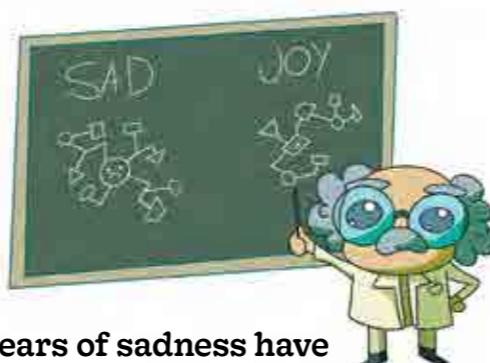
It's illegal to walk around New York City with an ice cream cone in your pocket



A group of jellyfish is called a "smack"



Until 1948 there was an Olympic medal for town planning

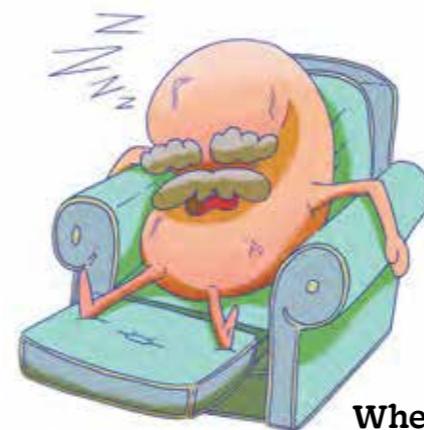


Tears of sadness have a different chemical makeup to tears of joy



Too much salt water made sailors turn into pirates

There is nothing in the nursery rhyme to suggest that Humpty Dumpty is an egg



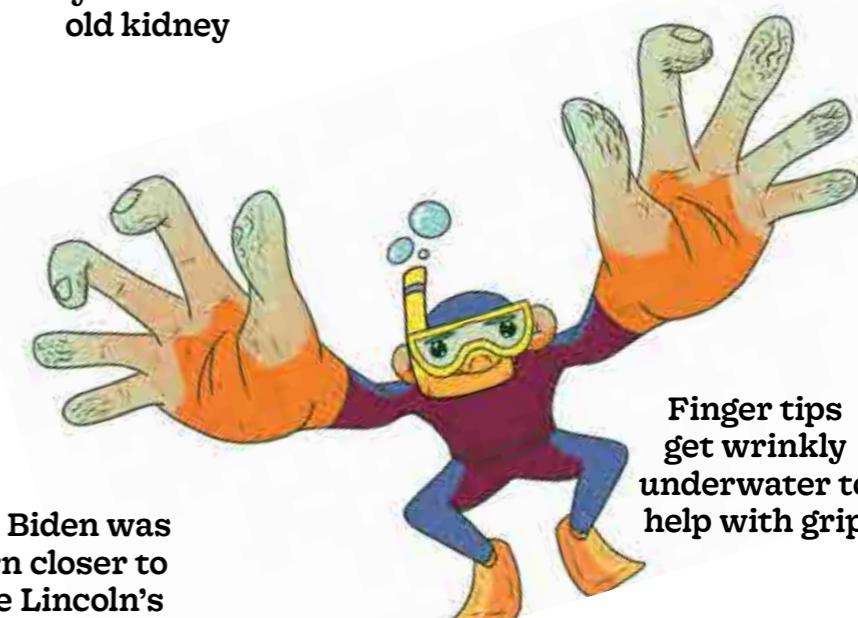
When you have a kidney transplant, they leave in the old kidney



An owl's "twit twoo" is actually a call and response between two owls



Joe Biden was born closer to Abe Lincoln's inauguration than his own



Finger tips get wrinkly underwater to help with grip



People with blue eyes are more sensitive to light



Napoleon III used a fax machine

POPCORN PIRATE

Our favourite online reviewer gives us their opinion on...
scents from north London off licenses that cost £5 or less

Eau dear God!

I failed the sensory writing module of a course in narrative non-fiction because I hate adverbs even more than adjectives. So this is going to be uniquely (adverb) challenging. I'm going to try and capture the spirit of these scents, as well as the exact sound each one causes me to make. Here goes.



BANDIDO

"Urmmhm"

A bit itchy on the nose, but it's got lilac notes and hints of Personal Trainer. Considering the state of the packaging, surprisingly I don't hate it.



KISS ME IN PARIS

"Ooff"

It's a big, fresh punch in the kisser with candy floss top notes that give strong Haribo. Straight up horrible. Had to leave the house.



I AM FEEL

"Ooohhuh"

I am feeling like a girl's toilet in the 90s. Perfect for the HR manager's secret santa.



FRENCH COFFEE

"Ahweaa, I mean"

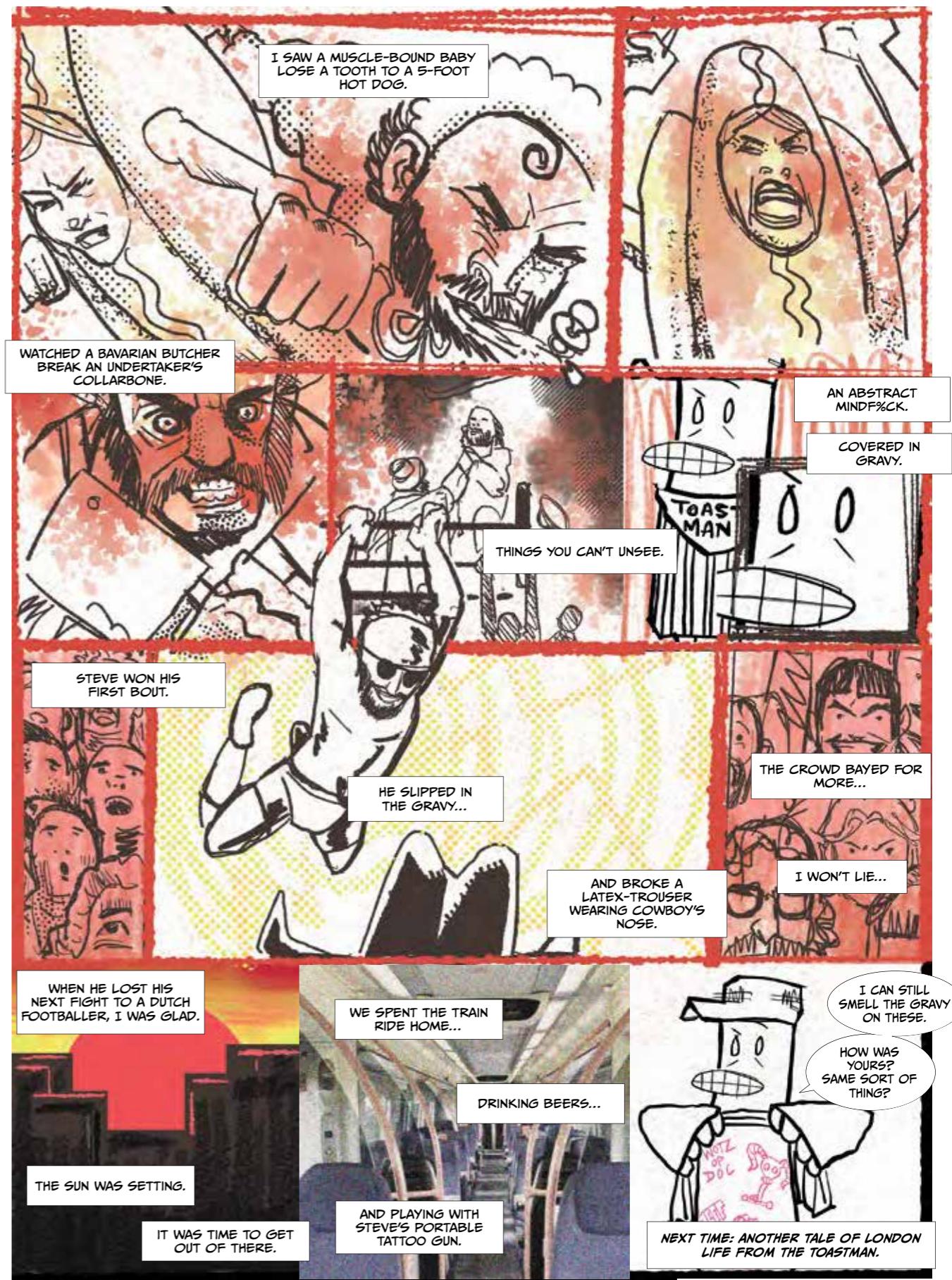
If you set fire to a bin outside of Starbucks, and warmed your hands around it, your shirt would smell like this.



TOP GUN

"Uuaarggh... come on, ooh"

Picture the scene – your smoking hot one night stand woke up a couple of minutes before you, went to the bathroom for a dump and swilled his mouth with Listerine, then jumped back into bed with you. This is the smell that followed him in.



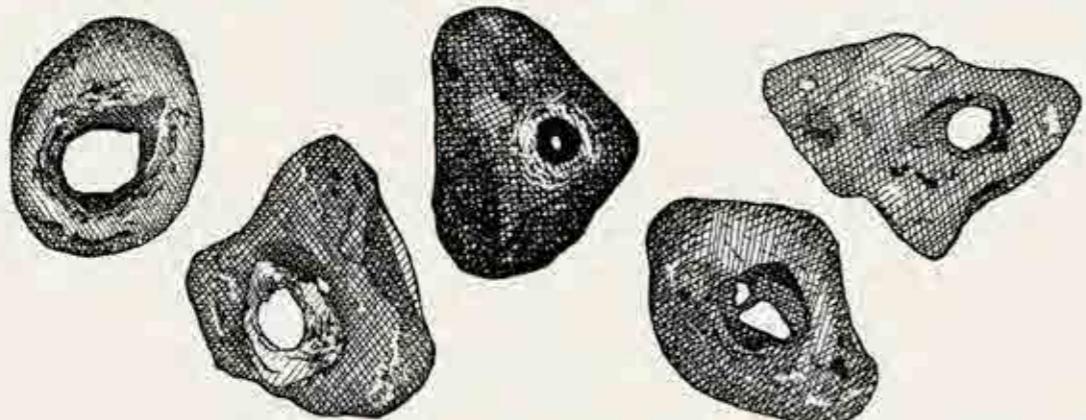


PORCHES SHIRT

LP/CD OUT NOW



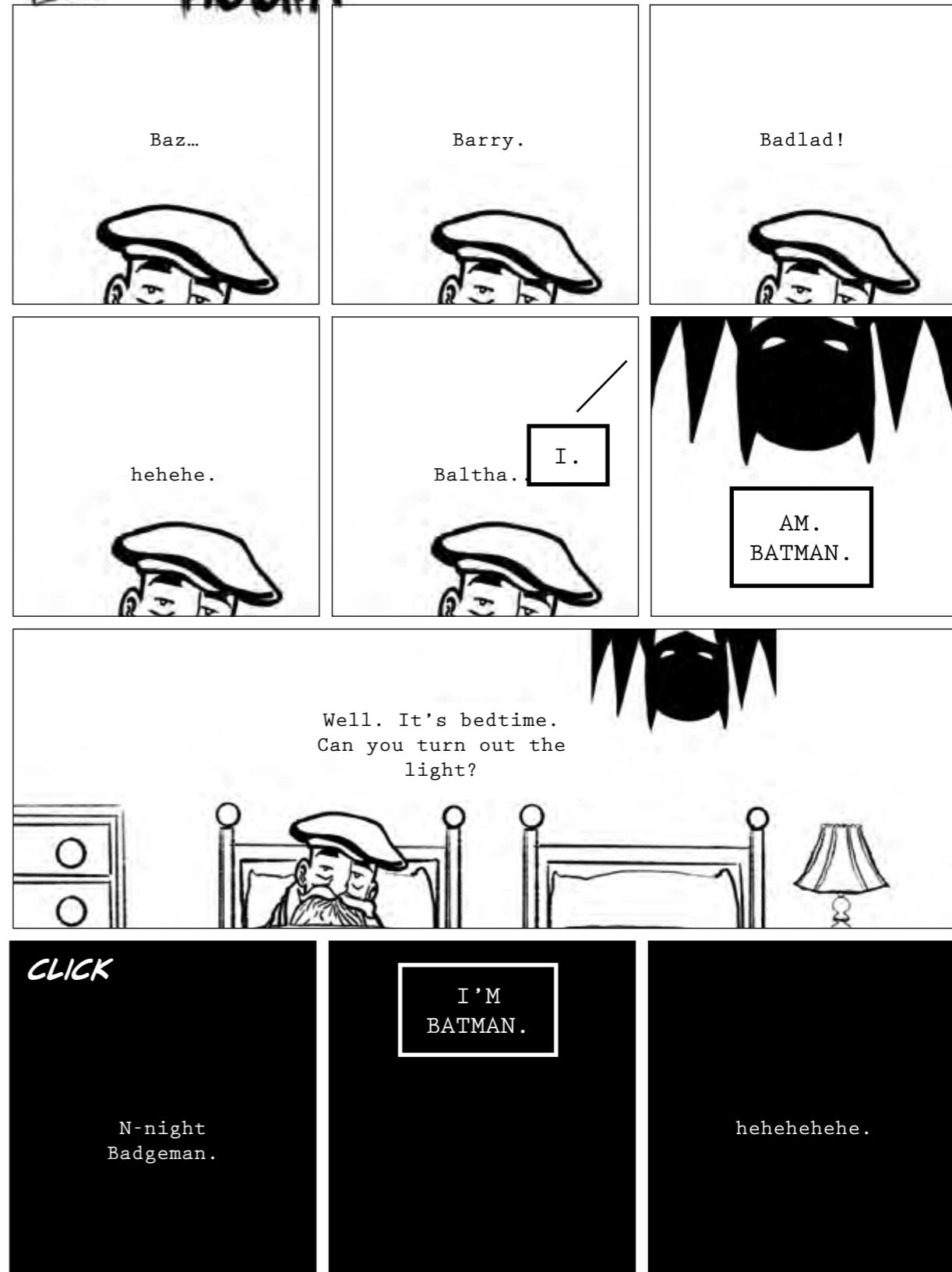
HAYDEN THORPE NESS



ROBERT MACFARLANE WORDS
STANLEY DONWOOD ILLUSTRATIONS
LP/CD OUT NOW



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