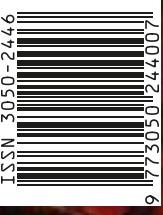


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FLAVOR FLAV

FAST FOOD
SIMPSONS

OLIVIA
TIEDEMANN

MUMBAI
COMIC CON

LA
TAKEOVERS

Ralph

THE MANY
FACES OF
**BURN
GORMAN**

POP CULTURE FOR THE FUN OF IT

Dinner's on Me

WITH
**JESSE TYLER
FERGUSON**

SONY MUSIC

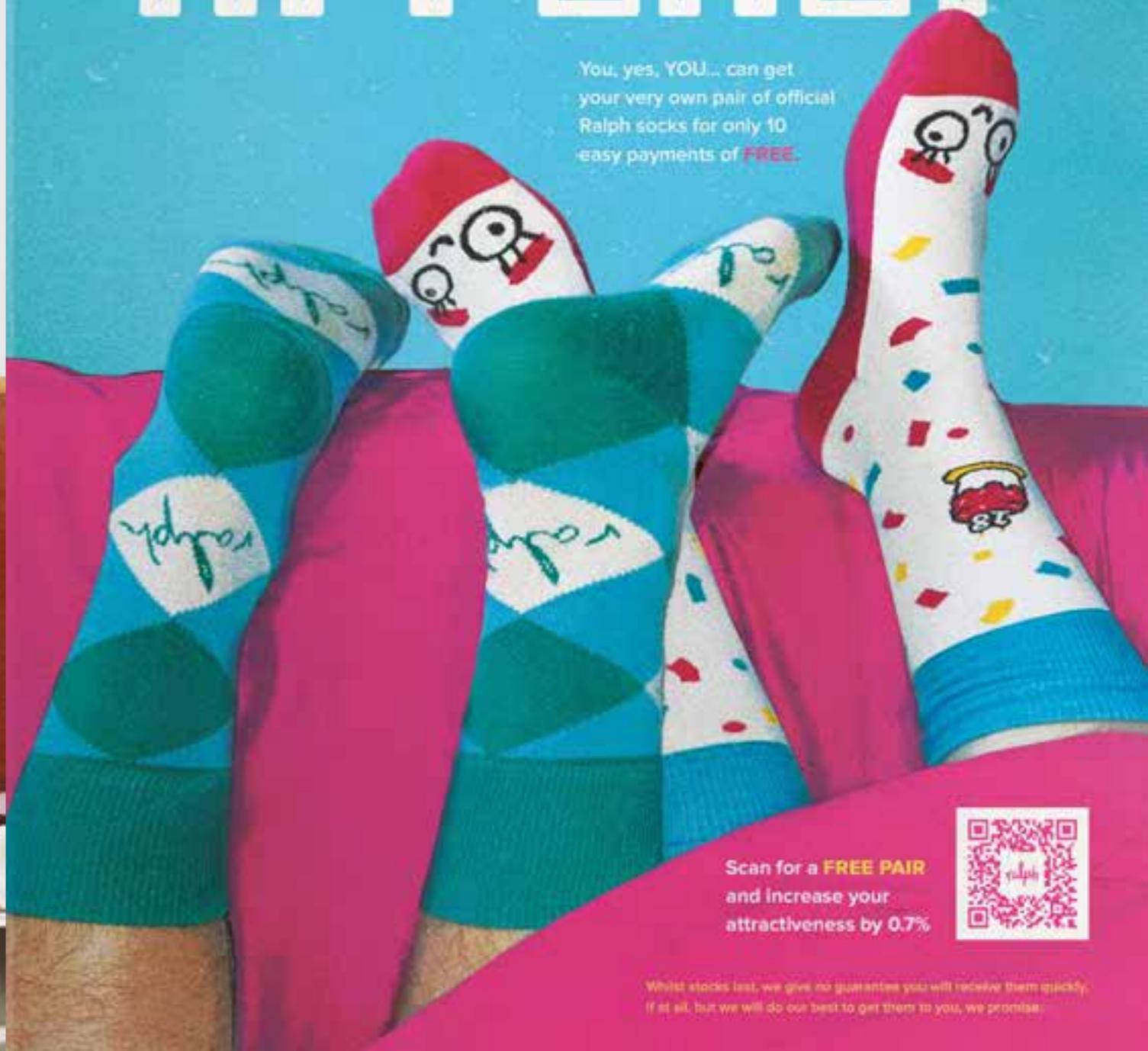


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A

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Editor's Letter

Why so serious?

I know that this *gestures at the world*, is probably the main reason, but a couple of things happened to me this year that made me think "why aren't magazines as fun as they used to be?"

The first was when I met James Brown, founder and editor of the infamous 90s magazine Loaded for a coffee. His work has inspired mine as an editor and we agreed there was a lack of funny, weird features happening today. He famously packed a LOT of fun chaos onto his pages, and I really wanted to do more on mine. Then, Thing Number Two happened a couple of weeks later. Chris, the publisher of this mag called me up saying he wanted to start a magazine with the strap line "Pop Culture For The Fun Of It" then asked if would I edit it. The planets aligned, I guess, and I got my opportunity to do more odd stuff and make a magazine celebrating pop culture, well, for the fun of it.

Two and half months later here we are: Ralph Issue 1, where we ask Flavor Flav what the weather's like where he is, get the showrunner of The Simpsons to tell us what fast food items Bart, Homer, Lisa, Ned Flanders et al would be, find out why Japan's music has been influencing the West for decades, get the inside line on chef Olivia Tiedemann's best New York pizza spots, have pints with buzzy band Fat Dog, do a fashion shoot at Mumbai Comic Con and tons more.

As The Specials famously sang, "Enjoy yourself, it's later than you think."

Here's Ralph #1, have fun.

Josh Jones

Editor
Josh Jones
joshjones@ralphmagazine.com

Art Director
James-Lee Duffy

Comedy Editor
Alexandra Haddow

Food Editor
Max Halley

Comics Editor
Maddie Brewer

Copy Editor
Isaac Muk

Publishers
Chris Hassell
chris@ralphmagazine.com
Iain Barrington-Light
iain@ralphmagazine.com

Ralph Ambassadors
Andy Knowles
Gregor Stevenson

ralphmagazine.com
@ralph.mag

Contributors:

Matt Adam
Kareem Black
Bimini
Patrick Clarke
Tej Datar
Jeff Definitely
Chloe Laight
Jimmy McIntosh
Atoosa Moinzadeh
Bill Oakley
Aiyush Pachnanda
Kevin EG Perry
Popcorn Pirate
Andrew Rae
Hannah Slaney
Stephanie Sian Smith
Gregor Stevenson
Brian Tran
Dan Wilton

Thanks to:

Ahilya Bamroo
Clare Bogen
Danielle Bowes
Sara Burn
Hope Corpus
Datta Dave
Elizabeth Ehrman
Flavor Flav
Jon Fosse
Alix Frank
Santanu Hazarika
The Golden Heart
Tom Holmes
Jeff Innocent
Juno Jones
Simon Jones
Lauren Kemp
Mia Khalifa
Aoife Kitt
Delaney Laux
Legacy
Colleen Maloney
Reema Maya
Mitsuki Nagasawa
The Blue Posts
Anastasia Roe
Matthew Salacuse
Jamie Shardlow
Richard Singh
Brian Bowen Smith
Luca Trevett
Gina Winje



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Advertise in Ralph
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Cover shot by Dan Wilton at The Blue Posts Soho
Burn wears Wax London, jewellery by Duffy
Back cover illustration Andrew Rae

DELIVER US FROM THIRST



LUCKY SAINT
ALCOHOL FREE
Superior Unfiltered Lager

What's The Weather Like Where You Are?

The Ralph Gallery

Fat Dog

Liner Notes

Bimini's Bangers

Why Bowie, Bambaataa & Belleville Three bow to Japan

Haddow You Do

What if The Simpsons characters were fast food meals?

Max's Dispatches

Olivia Tiedemann's favourite pizza places

Cover feature - Burn Gorman

Takeover in Los Angeles

Don't Google This

Mumbai Marvels

AI, Art And Morality

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Ralph's from London so we thought
we'd ask some cultural titans the
most British question ever:

WHAT'S THE WEATHER LIKE WHERE YOU ARE?

Interviews by Josh Jones
Photos by Hannah Slaney
Illustration by James-Lee Duffy



“April is the cruellest month”



Jon Fosse

Nobel Prize Winner for Literature
Oslo, Norway 23rd April 2024

**“Sunny and bright where
the heat is just right”**



Flavor Flav

World's Greatest Hype Man
Las Vegas, USA 10th May 2024

**“Not the hot girl summer
I had in mind – I was aiming for
ice teas, not oral rehydration salts”**



Ahilya Bamroo

Multi-Hyphenate-Digital-Creator

Pondicherry, India 16th May 2024

**“Like humidity and an
ocean breeze are fist fighting”**



Mia Khalifa

Fashionista

Miami Florida, USA 16th April 2024

THE RALPH GALLERY

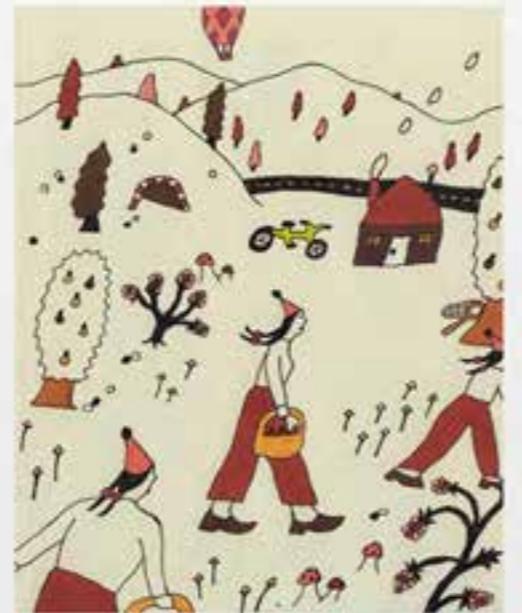
Ralph's Comics Editor, Maddie Brewer, ups the culture level of this magazine by 1000 and has curated the artists we should all be following.



Peter - @petersteineck

Peter Steineck's hypnotising illustrations have my eyeballs working overtime to take in every last goopy detail. I love this piece in particular: at once organic in its shape language (like flowers, entrails, and worms) – and eye-bleedingly artificial in its colour and crisp digital execution. It's like you're stuck in the jungle on a really great acid trip. Peter is also a talented motion designer, and even in his still illustrations there's always a strong sense of motion in the way that he draws your eyes, almost circularly, around his abstract tableaus.

There's something very decisive about his work – very clean and perfect in its execution – which is contrasted by the chaos within that feels almost like it's about to spill out into our dimension. And if it did? It looks like it would be very satisfying to poke it.



Samantha - @spamhour

If I could choose, I'd want to live in the warm and charming world of Samantha Maurer's illustrations and paintings. Her linework and her characters, often rendered deceptively simply, are so full of life. Her illustrations are often almost like a children's picture book in their whimsy, but also have such a strange and surreal edge to them, almost like being inside of a pleasant daydream. The way that she captures the beauty and calm in the mundanity of everyday life makes me feel like I should appreciate the little things more. There's something almost meditative to her work, appreciating one of her paintings feels like taking a big deep breath. Not only is Samantha a talented illustrator, but she's also a tattoo artist – and who wouldn't want a little slice of her world to carry around with them forever!



Joe - @joeccappa

When it comes to cartoons, Joe Cappa is the master of the grotesque. His capacity to transform everything, from family photos to beloved pop culture icons, into something so cutely repulsive that you can't look away is totally unmatched. The world that his art exists in seems so familiar at times that it's almost comforting, until he pulls the rug out from under you with something so shocking, disgusting, subversive, or surreal (often all of the above) that you can't help but to laugh as you cringe. Not only is he a fantastic comics artist and illustrator, but an accomplished animator as well. His grimacing characters have also leapt into our dimension, in a number of live action films and music videos he's made, employing the use of some seriously iconic paper mache sculpted heads.



Maggie - @mtseng.art

Every time I see one of Maggie Tseng's paintings I'm absolutely starstruck, like I could look at them for hours and keep finding something new to ogle. The richness of color, the myriad textures, and the complex diffusion of light in her saturated dreamscapes always transport me to another world that I feel like I can almost taste. The recurring presence of her 'Star Babies' throughout her illustrations, as well as the other fictional creatures sprung from her imagination almost seem like they're pulled from some kind of ancient tarot-adjacent folklore. I love the cheeky re-imagining of Botticelli's The Birth of Venus in this illustration, with her Venus curled up, recumbent in her decadent oyster shell. The whole thing feels luxurious. Maggie is not only a master of painting in the small scale, but also a talented mural artist – and I can't imagine anything more beautiful to put up on a wall for everyone to enjoy.

FATDOG AT DOG AT DOG AT DOG
FATDOG AT DOG AT DOG AT DOG



Pub chats with South London's hottest rockers

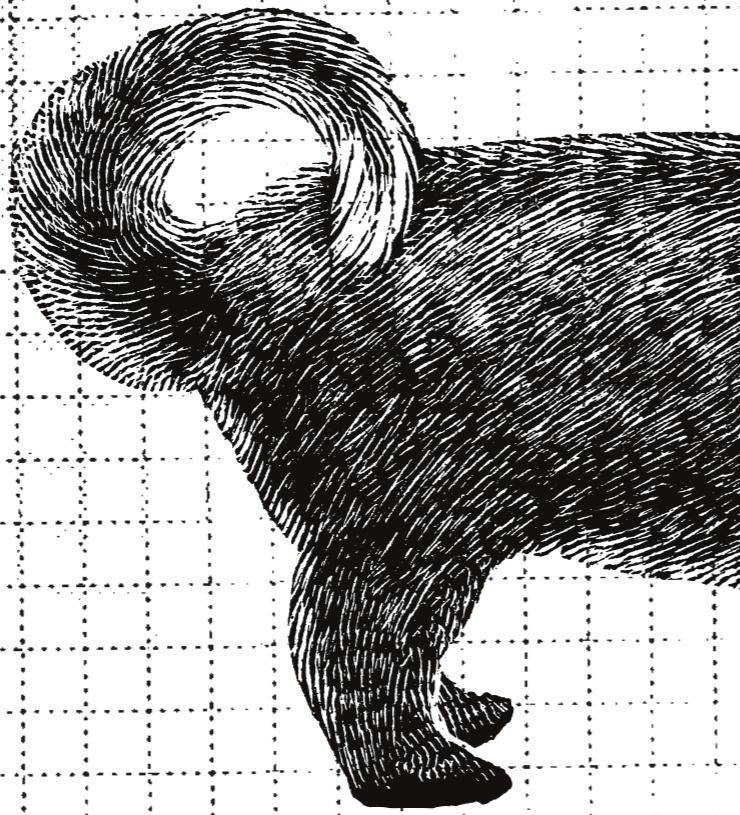
Words by Jimmy McIntosh
Photos by Aiyush Pachnanda

We're in the wrong pub. It's a miserable and drizzly Wednesday afternoon (also World Goth Day) in South London's Brixton, and I'm sat with Fat Dog in the Prince of Wales. Except it's not the Prince of Wales they were expecting. "I really don't like it here", mutters Chris Hughes (synths), as he sits down with two pints of lager. "It is happy hour though". Hughes is joined by Joe Love, frontman and leader, and Morgan Wallace, the group's saxophonist. To be fair, the pub isn't very Fat Dog - a band that spiritually grew up a little further down the road amidst the art and chaos of The Windmill, the live music venue that birthed the Fat White Family, Shame, black midi, Squid, et al. This Prince of Wales is emblematic of the new Brixton: polished, gentrified, and full of 2013's idea of quirky. Everything Fat Dog isn't.

Started by Love during lockdown, Fat Dog has morphed into a visceral, frenetic melting pot of a band, as unplaceable as they are genuinely brilliant. There's a bit of the electro-industry of KMFDM or first-album Nine Inch Nails. The indie dance of The Presets or Twisted Charm. Ska. Klezmer. EBM. The melodic minor scale. There's an inherent video game silliness to it all too – drummer Johnny Hutch performs in a latex dog mask (bassist Ben Harris completes the quintet), and the band's stories are littered with surreal non-sequiturs. From their oneiric music videos – 'Running' sees the band act out bizarre rituals involving a cattle skull – to their spiritual live shows, you really do get the sense that they're having an awful lot of fun being Britain'suzziest band. Those energetic and frenzied gigs quickly earned the band a dedicated following and the attention of the industry, and in 2023 they signed to Domino (home of Arctic Monkeys, Jon Hopkins, and Hot

Chip) and released their debut single, the seven-minute-long psychedelic epic 'King of the Slugs', which was produced by the legendary James Ford.

A band this exciting deserves a proper pub. So, after a quick call to Ralph's esteemed editor, we decide to take a short stroll in the South London rain to the other Prince of Wales. "Oh, this is much better", Hughes comments as we walk in. And it is: a handsome 1930s estate pub, complete with dart board, a Morrisque carpet, and the cheapest drinks this side of HMP Brixton. After manoeuvring a group of slightly confused locals, we sit down and, over an hour after initially meeting, finally press record on a selection of ever-more trivial questions.



How are you all feeling today?

- C A little bit tipsy. A happy, happy guy.
M Damp, from the bike ride over here.
J Very good.

Where do you stand on goths?

- C My favourite thing to do whenever we're in a small town on tour is find them.
J It's like goth safari. There's always two of them, and they're always 19 and smoking fags in a stairwell.
C And they always either love each other and are in a relationship, or they fucking hate each other because they're stealing each other's job. The only goth in the village.

What happens after we die?

- C Spectator mode.
J Maybe you get written into the best cartoon series. I wouldn't want to be in Spongebob. I'd hope it's more like classic Simpsons.
M South Park.
C I think every time you die you get put into an alternate universe where you haven't died from whatever it is you did.

If you could name a storm, what would you name it?

- C Dave Fuck.

What's the best hour of the day?

- M Probably 9am.
C 6am. The sun's rising. Especially in the winter. I used to work as a cheesemonger, and had to get up really fucking early. Watching the sun rise before everyone else is really nice.
J I'd go for 10 o'clock at night: you've done your bits, time to chill.

Where do you think Fat Dog will be in 15 years time?

- C Wheelchairs. Assisted living
J Yeah, except we're all helping each other. Actually, that sounds like a fucking nightmare – I'd rather kill myself now.

If you owned a pub, what would you call it?

- C The Four Skins.
M That's enough of an answer.

What is the worst genre of music?

- M Electro-swing.
J Yeah.
C It's so fucking awful. But our next album is mostly electro-swing.
J 'We No Speak Americano' is a banger though.

If I was Nardwuar, what piece of tat from your past would you most like me to gift you?

- M Johnny's drumsticks, we haven't seen them in a while.
C An album called *The Greek Sound* by Mikis Theodorakis, which I used to go to sleep to. But I've lost it, and I can't find it anywhere, and it's not online.

What's the longest you've been awake?

- M When we flew back from LA I was awake for 31 hours, which feels like a long time.
C The longest I've been awake was about three days.
J People don't really do speed anymore, that's the thing. It used to be really cheap – you could get it in for £5 a gram.
C Make Speed Great Again.



What's your drink of choice in a pub?

- C Real ale. My favourite is either Harvey's Best from Sussex, or I really like Shere Drop, from Surrey Hills Brewery. It's really fucking good.
M Elderflower cordial.
J Kronenbourg.

Do you have any strange megafans?

- C I've got one from my DJing.
J She comes down to the gigs.
C My dad makes his own video edits of me.
J Somebody gives us boiled eggs after every gig.
M She leaves them under the drum carpet, and we only find it when we've packed down the stage. It said "To Joe" on a boiled egg.

How would you describe your upcoming album in five words?

- M Five is quite a lot, normally it's a bit lower than that.
C "Did the best we could".^{ralph}

Fat Dog's debut album WOOF. is out September 6th via Domino Records.



CASA DEL SOL

TEQUILA

A stylized black and white illustration of a phoenix rising from its own ashes, symbolizing rebirth and renewal.

The image consists of a circular arrangement of text. The outermost ring contains the question "DOES ZOE WIGGINS RUN THE COOLEST NIGHT IN BROOKLYN?". This ring is repeated three more times, each slightly offset from the previous one, creating a total of four concentric rings of text. The text is in a bold, sans-serif font and is colored a light beige or cream color, which stands out against the dark green background of the image.

KINER NOTES

Words by Atoosa Moinzadeh
Photos by Kareem Black

“I THINK OF BEING FREE, BEING FLY”

Forty or more New Yorkers are tightly packed into Legacy, the record store in DUMBO, each sharing what the '70s meant to them. It's National Record Store Day (which coincidentally fell on 4/20 this year) and what's taking place is a show-and-tell of records that embody the funk genre and getting high. "Synthesisers, basslines, heaviness," a woman quips passionately. Funkadelic's Maggot Brain, Curtis Mayfield's Super Fly, and Earth Wind and Fire's That's the Way of the World can be spotted in their hands amongst a sea of wax. Collectors young and old, novice and seasoned – everyone in this room is here for a common goal: to discover, and to bond.

"People like to talk about music, but sometimes they don't have the space to nerd out," a young woman named Zoe Wiggins says to me of the gathering the following morning. Donning a red varsity jacket commemorating the event, her current nail set is inspired by Kaytranada's 99.9%. Sitting on one of Legacy's sofas, a neon pink sign with the word "forever" in cursive glows behind her as she speaks. "Music is everywhere, but it's also a treasure that you have to open your mind to."





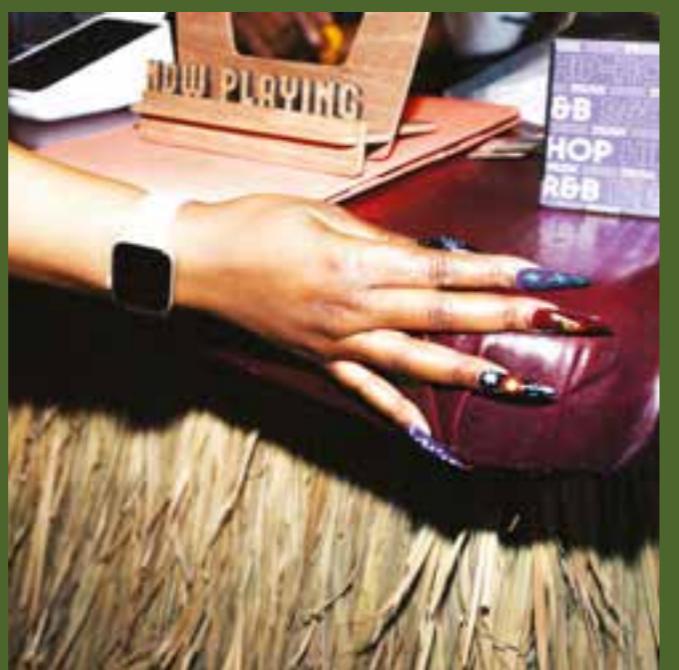
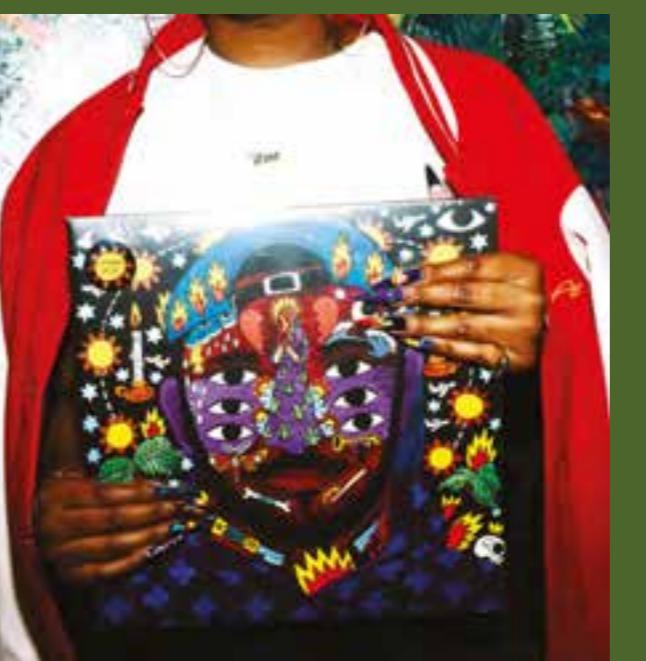
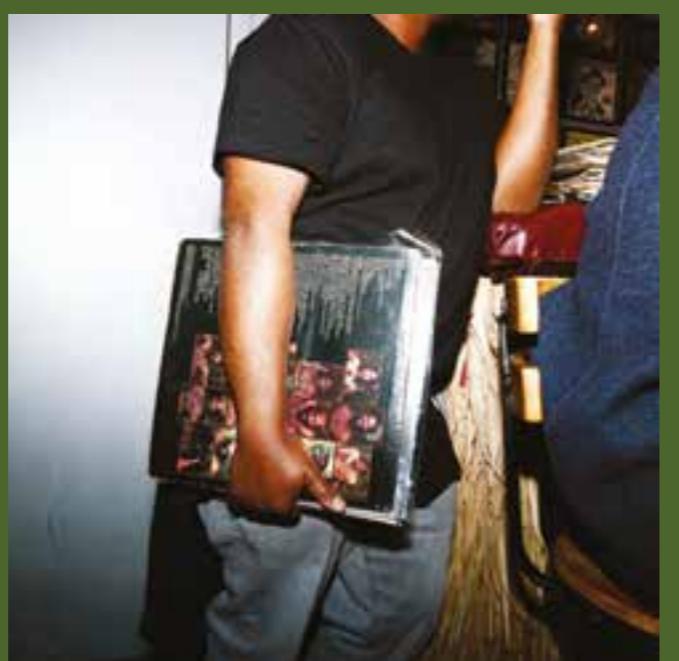
“I SEE VINYL AS A CULTURAL CONSERVATORY FOR BLACK ARTISTS”

Wiggins is the founder of Liner Notes, a monthly vinyl collecting club “where music lovers and connoisseurs share passion, stories within community, and celebrate the music and history of Black artists.” Its attendance has practically quadrupled over its short lifespan, and become a favorite way for its regulars to get out of the house. “It’s great to just see people being excited – so excited, in fact, that they line up at the end to get a head start on the next one,” Wiggins beams.

“What’s the next theme going to be? Can you give me any hints?” and they have this determination. ‘Okay, I’m going to go dig in my collection. And if I don’t have it, I’m going to find it.’”

Headed up by three friends – Haile Ali, Victorious De Costa, and Barkim Salgado – Legacy DUMBO opened its doors in 2021, making it one of few Black-owned record stores in the United States (they comprise just 3% of the business, on both brick-and-mortar and large scales). Wiggins, who shopped there, built relationships with the owners and began to work volunteer shifts. “My first official Record Store Day dig was here,” Wiggins remembers. Amid stores like Record Mart, New York City’s oldest, shutting down left and right, Legacy triumphantly grew to host artist meet and greets, throw release parties, and make TV appearances just in time for its two year anniversary. “Ali told me about the event

programming there and I saw another way to support this vital business,” Wiggins says of Liner Notes, which started in December 2023. “I was like, ‘What about having a book club? But for records?’” Wiggins also heads up the Claw Archives, a nail art page “in homage to finger crowns on Black hands,” and has put a lot of passion behind preserving culture. “I see vinyl as a cultural conservatory for Black artists,” she adds with conviction. “I think a big part of Liner Notes and similar traditions is the heirloom aspect of it – physically passing down history through crates.”

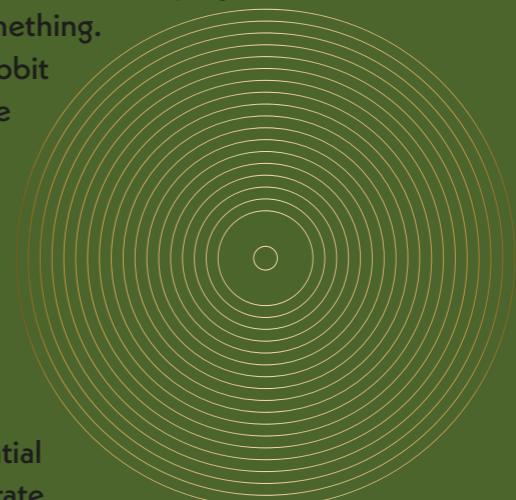




Born in Brooklyn New York, Wiggins is “a through and through native New Yorker” from a multi-generational family of musicians, and was raised in South Jamaica, Queens on Linden Boulevard. “I would be listening to A Tribe Called Quest and be like, ‘I grew up there, I can see that outside,’” Zoe recalls of hearing “Check the Rhime” at a young age. Wiggins regularly attended church (coincidentally, the same one LL Cool J did) and absorbed the musical language of gospel, learning theoretic principles like vocal arrangements, layering, and composing; becoming fluent in hymns, sheet music, keys. Her grandfather Johnny Robinson, a ’70s deep soul balladeer, regularly sent her family demos in the mail. “I wasn’t really one of the kids who was like, ‘Oh, that’s the old folk’s music.’ I was actually interested in it,” she says. A spark was lit in Wiggins, now 31, early on: “I think that’s always been something about me – trying to find the source of something. I would find myself in rabbit holes, looking for sample sources, before even Google was a thing.”

While never pursuing singing or an instrument herself, that spark – an investigative, curious mind – became an essential skill as she spent years crate digging as a teen into adulthood, even as streaming grew in popularity. “Tribe came to be one of my favorite rap groups, and I think part of it is how they sampled,” she says. “When I got older, I went back and I found a lot of the jazz samples that they used. They mix so many different genres within their music, and it opened up my mind to so much.” Like many millennials,

“I WOULD BE LISTENING TO A TRIBE CALLED QUEST AND BE LIKE, ‘I GREW UP THERE, I CAN SEE THAT OUTSIDE”



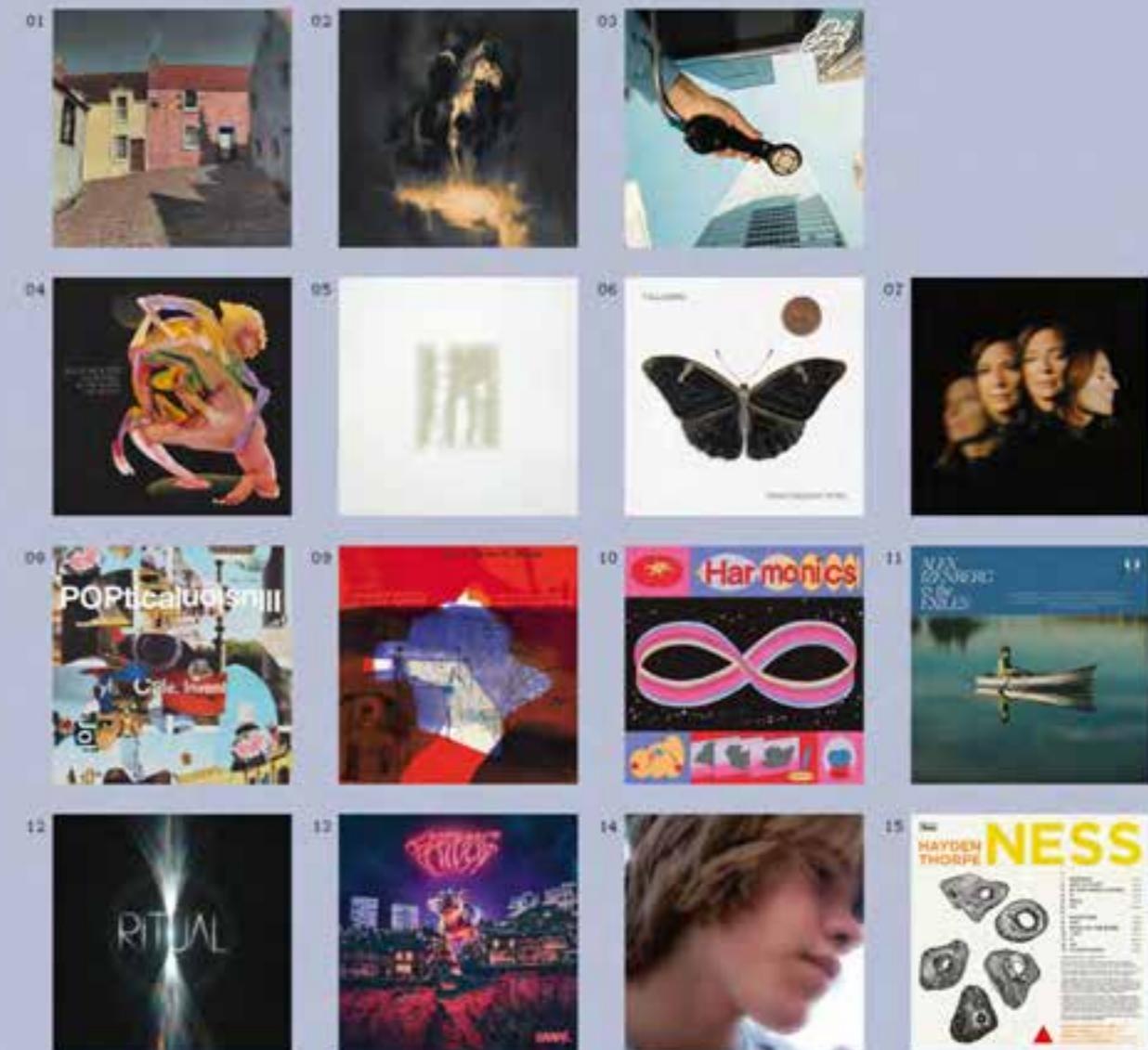
Wiggins witnessed the transition of analogue to digital – permanent and physical to The Cloud and ephemeral – referring to her generation as “the bridge.” Wiggins’s motivation to start Liner Notes couldn’t be more clear, but combined with the hunger to own and hold media from the United States to Japan, so is its pertinence to the current cultural moment.

At last night's event, Wiggins decided to present Memphis High, a rare gem by none other than her grandfather, Johnny Robinson. "He was at the advent of when funk was just becoming a theme," she says of the man who also passed his own record collection down to her. Robinson's story, she points out, is not uncommon—he's one of many Black foundational artists whose work has been overlooked, and profited off by others. "It was dope to share the story of someone I knew and held dear, and bring some awareness to an underappreciated artist. The people who come to this event often share stories that otherwise wouldn't be told if they didn't have the proper space."

It's not lost on Wiggins either that the name of the space Liner Notes is held in — Legacy — feels serendipitous. "Passing these stories on to future generations, my kids... there's something rudimentary, more real, about a record that helps someone connect with something larger. Just put the needle down." *ralph*

"THE PEOPLE WHO COME TO THIS EVENT OFTEN SHARE STORIES THAT OTHERWISE WOULDN'T BE TOLD IF THEY DIDN'T HAVE THE PROPER SPACE"

FOR ALL SEASONS



1. BILL RYDER-JONES - Iechyd Da
2. ANNA CALVI - Peaky Blinders Season 5 & 6 (Original Score)
3. REAL ESTATE - Daniel
4. JULIA HOLTER - Something In The Room She Moves
5. FAT WHITE FAMILY - Forgiveness Is Yours
6. VILLAGERS - That Golden Time
7. BETH GIBBONS - Lives Outgrown
8. JOHN CALE - POPtical Illusion
9. STEPHEN PASTEL & GAVIN THOMSON - This Is Memorial Device
10. JOE GODDARD - Harmonics
11. ALEX IZENBERG - Alex Izenberg & The Exiles
12. JON HOPKINS - RITUAL
13. FAT DOG - WOOF
14. PORCHES - Shirt
15. HAYDEN THORPE - Ness

2024 PROGRESS BAR



This is the only
resolution we have...
we made it ourselves
If you can work with
it great if not
forget the dentist.



Bimini's Bangera

We asked DJ, artist and total
National Treasure, Bimini what will
be the soundtrack to our summer

Summertime Blues (feat. Nathan Nichols)

Chris Lake, Sammy Virji, Nathan Nicholson

She's Gone, Dance On

Disclosure

No Time (feat. SadBoi)

E Interplanetary Criminal, SadBoi

Lobster Telephone - Edit

Peggy Gou

If U Like Me - Edit

DJ Seinfeld

saving flowers

salute, Rina Sawayama

365

Charli XCX

SLEEP TONIGHT (THIS IS THE LIFE) Bimini Remix

Switch Disco, Bimini

Always Forever

Romy

Big Man

Self Esteem ft Moonchild Sanelly



SCAN TO LISTEN





WHY BOWIE, BAMBAATAA & BELIEVETHREE BOW TO JAPAN

J-Pop is riding high in the Western music charts but when you think about it, Japanese music has been heavily influencing the entire worlds of rock n roll, hip-hop and dance for decades. The Quietus' Patrick Clarke investigates.



Last summer, pop duo YAOSOBI's single 'Idol', a glossy bombardment of a song and the theme for the anime series *Oshi no Ko*, became the first Japanese single ever to breach the American Top 10. Performances at Coachella the following April fizzed with the electricity of an act at the crest of the zeitgeist. Just prior to that, at a state dinner hosted by President Biden for Japanese prime minister Fumio Kishida, YAOSOBI had been brought along as guests.

The band, vocalist Ikura and producer Ayase (who doesn't reveal his full name, not even to the White House who he says had him listed as "Mr. Ayase" on the invite) had been stars in their homeland since 2020's viral sensation 'Yoru ni Kakeru', but within three years their ambitions had turned global. It was not just increasing fame that garnered them their seats at the president's table, but the way they've now become the personification of a wider cultural shift, held up as the faces of an industry, not just mere popstars. It's the same shift that makes girl group XG's Billboard cover feature – the first the magazine's American edition has ever offered to a Japanese band – feel that bit more significant. As Katsumi Kuroiwa, the CEO of the Tokyo company Avex who created XG's label XGALX, told Billboard Japan last year, the imprint was founded "with the aim of creating global hits", with XG envisaged as the "breakthrough artist" in a long-term mission to help Japanese acts "thrive in the mainstream music world".

XG sing in English, almost certainly in an effort to bolster that quest for global popularity. And yet, that doesn't seem a prerequisite when it comes to J-pop finding success. According to entertainment industry data providers Luminate's Midyear Music Report for 2023, Japanese is now the joint third-most-listened-to language by US music fans after English and Spanish, equal with French at 8%. That's particularly significant given less than 0.5% of the US population can actually speak Japanese themselves, and also because it puts Japanese ahead of Korean in fifth

place. It's arguable that as K-pop begins to decline from its all-conquering peak, J-pop is simply filling a power vacuum. That said, it's worth taking a step back to look at the wider relationship between East and West. Expand your perspective, and this new wave of J-pop is really just one small part of an enormous puzzle, a back-and-forth of inspiration that goes back centuries.

It's hard to know when exactly Western classical music first arrived in Japan, but a piano brought over by the German physician Philipp Franz von Siebold during his employment in Nippon in the 1820s, and still in the possession of the Kumaya Art Museum, offers a hint. So too do recordings from the Meiji era (1868–1912) of German romantic music, and the fact that in 1869 a westerner, John William Fenton, a visiting Irish military band leader, composed the music for Japan's first national anthem, his Western style melding with lyrics selected from classical Japanese poetry.

From the outset, inspiration flowed the other way too. Rudolf Dittrich, for instance, an Austrian employed as a music teacher at the Tokyo School of Music at the end of the 19th Century, began composing pieces inspired by the woodblock prints of the revered artist Utagawa Hiroshige, and published popular piano arrangements of traditional Japanese songs on his return to Europe. The trend continued through the early decades of the next century, from the Japanese interest in jazz and blues during the Taishō period (1912–26) on the one side, to the French pianist Claude Debussy's use of the iconic Hokusai artwork *The Great Wave off Kanagawa* as the cover of his score for 1905's *La Mer* on the other.

And yet, from the advent of pop music in the second half of the century, the relationship between Japanese and Western music is commonly presented as far more one-sided – Japan taking from the West and not vice versa. This goes for the renewed popularity of

Western jazz and blues in the years following the Second World War, with occupying Allied troops entertained by Japanese musicians playing familiar hits filtered through their native style, to the 'New Music' scene of the late 1960s and 1970s, which took heavy inspiration from American singer songwriters like Carole King, Neil Young, Brian Wilson and Joni Mitchell, and the arrangements of Motown and Philly Soul. Then American funk and disco held sway as New Music evolved into City Pop in the 1980s.

Scratch beneath the surface, however, and it was still a two way exchange. Take David Bowie's Ziggy Stardust. Ziggy is so iconic that he is still the archetypal rockstar half a century on from his creation, his lightning bolt logo serving as shorthand for the entirety of rock and roll. Wild and alien, transgressive and beautiful, his invention was the moment that David Bowie transformed from a musician to arguably the West's most influential individual cultural figure of the 20th century.

Ziggy would not exist were it not for Japan. Specifically, he would not exist were Bowie not to study under Lindsay Kemp, the renowned choreographer who also taught Kate Bush (who notably wears a traditional kyudo archery glove on the cover of 'Running Up That Hill'). Central to Kemp's ideas – shapeshifting, subversive, intense, erotic and queer – was the Japanese tradition of Kabuki theatre. Combining drama, music, dance and intense makeup, it's traditionally performed only by men. Those taking on female roles – called *onnagata* – were of particular interest to Bowie, whose genderfluidity was crucial to Ziggy's appeal. So too, we can assume, was the Kabuki incorporation of hanamachi – walkways that run throughout the audience to foster greater immersion.

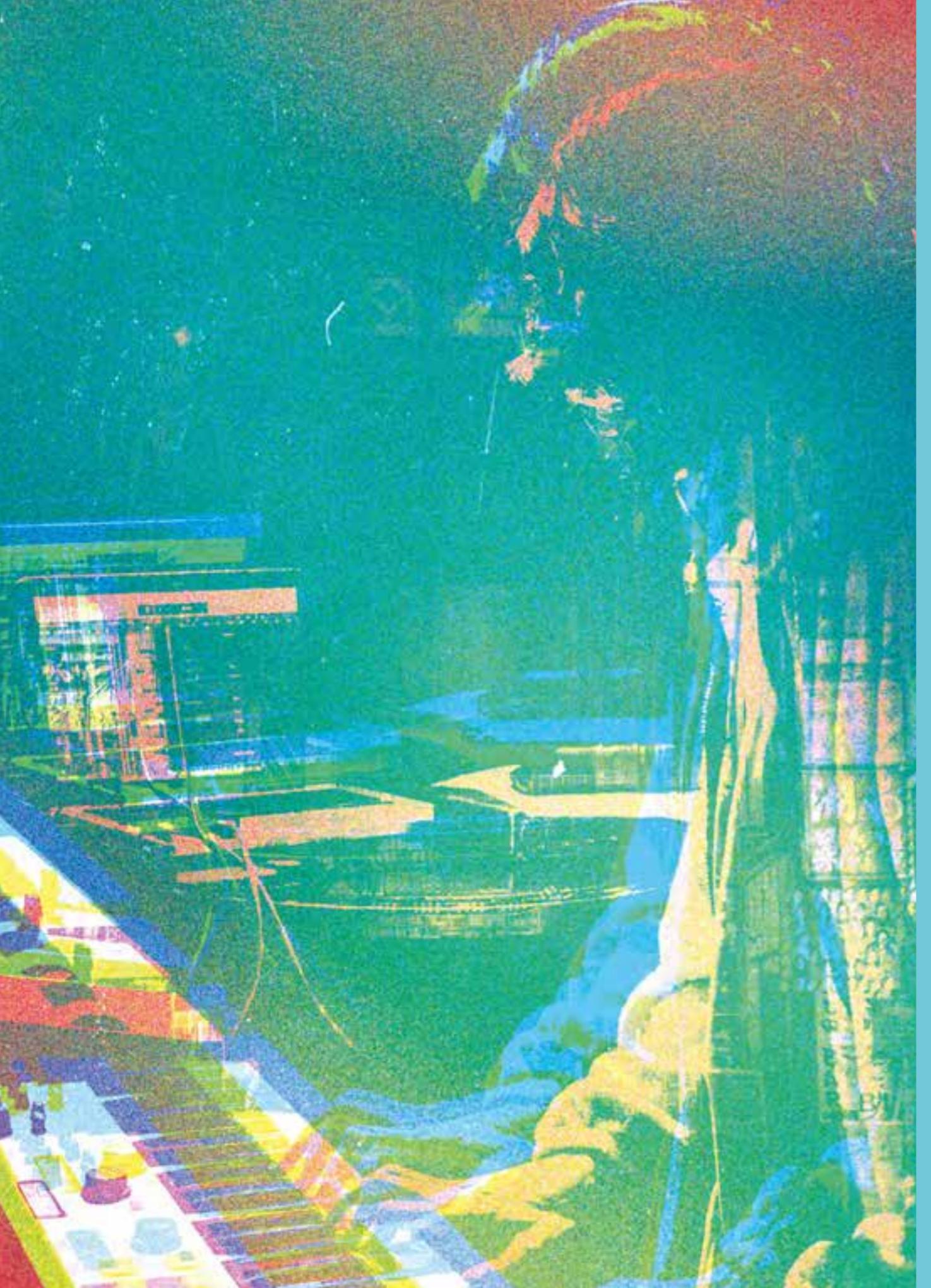
Though he evolved from Ziggy, reshaping pop music countless times over in the proceeding years, Bowie's fascination with Japan endured. He employed the designer Kansai Yamamoto for a succession of iconic

ZIGGY STARDUST WOULD NOT EXIST WITHOUT JAPAN

outfits – an asymmetric knitted bodysuit for the Aladdin Sane tour, and the black vinyl 'Tokyo Pop' bodysuit with its striking semi-circular legs – and the photographer Masayoshi Sukita for some of his most enduring images. Bowie developed a particular kinship with the city of Kyoto which pops up multiple times throughout his lyrics, from the city's Saiho-ji temple that inspired 'Moss Garden' on his *Heroes* LP, to the city's role as a place of refuge in 'Move On' from *Lodger*. He also cited the controversial author and poet Yukio Mishima, polarising for his right-wing political views and refusal to conform to societal norms as a source of fascination throughout his career. In the 1983 film 'Merry Christmas Mr. Lawrence', which employs some of Mishima's themes, Bowie then crossed paths with the great Ryuichi Sakamoto, with both performing lead roles and the latter providing the film's soundtrack. Mutual admirers throughout the decades that followed, when Bowie died Sakamoto said it was one of his greatest regrets in life that they didn't reconnect properly one more time.

Sakamoto's influence not just on Bowie, but on wider music in the 20th century, is of colossal significance, not least for his role in the Yellow Magic Orchestra, which he formed with Haruomi Hosono and Yukihiro Takahashi in the late 1970s. All three had been pioneers before they started the project, not least Hosono who had been part of New Music outliers Happy End, a band whose controversial decision to sing Western rock in their native tongue was a watershed moment. With YMO's name reflecting a coy sense of humour and an aim





to subvert 'exotic' western stereotypes, their music was a joyous embrace of the ridiculous and the sublime – video game sound effects, traditional Japanese scales, effervescent synthpop, and most significantly of all, electronic beats. As Japan underwent an economic boom during the 1970s, with that came a wave of technical innovations that would themselves reshape global culture. In YMO's case the most crucial developments came in samplers, synths and drum machines like the Roland TR-808, which Hosono considered sonically comparable to the traditional Japanese wadaiko drum.

Where through Bowie Japanese art had redefined rock music, YMO would leave their greatest mark on two other great musical traditions. The first is Detroit Techno, whose founders Juan Atkins, Derrick May and Kevin Saunderson – aka the 'Belleville Three' – would listen to the band constantly in their basements with the lights off, soaking it in as they started making electronic music of their own. The second is hip-hop. Afrika Bambaataa was among the viewers when YMO were invited to perform two songs on the American variety show *Soul Train* in 1979. At that time Bambaataa was the most innovative among a host of young DJs playing block parties in The Bronx as hip-hop developed, constantly seeking something with which to wow an audience who were ravenous for something new. In YMO's sprightly, impulsive 'Firecracker,' which he located after a deep dive through the record bins of New York's Village, he found it. A few years later he included that song, as well as 'Computer Game,' in his legendary *Death Mix 2*.

As both dance music and hip-hop exploded and diversified, YMO's influence stayed a constant. Tellingly, it was most easily found at the cutting edge. In 1993, the likes of The Orb, 808 State and Orbital all contributed to a tribute remix album *Hi-Tech/No Crime*. The likes of J-Dilla and De La Soul would follow Bambaataa in sampling 'Computer Game / Firecracker'. YMO's playful approach

J-DILLA AND DE LA SOUL WOULD FOLLOW BAMBAATAA IN SAMPLING YMO'S 'COMPUTER GAME / FIRECRACKER'

to Eastern scales was embraced again by the likes of Four Tet, and their collision of funk and video game sound effects by early grime producers in the UK. Of course, YMO and Japanese electronica were not the only things that all these artists were listening to. Their German counterparts Kraftwerk, for instance, were just as foundational in both genres' evolution. Bowie, too, was as fascinated with Berlin as much he was by Kyoto. The point, however, is that Japan is as crucial to the DNA of Western music as anything else, despite the fact it receives far less recognition; Kraftwerk are a household name, YMO are not.

Even today, with the internet having expanded artists' available influences hundredfold, Japanese music is shaping the vanguard. Hyperpop, perhaps the most innovative genre of the millennium, with its slick and playful riposte to the darkness that defines other underground music, draws heavily on the uber-cute, maximalist aesthetics of kawaii culture, evidenced musically in singers like Kyary Pamyu Pamyu. The genre's inventor, AG Cook of PC Music, also ran a parallel project in his early days called Logo Magazine, which he has said was inspired by publications covering the

rebellious 1990s subculture, gyaru. In jazz, at the other end of the spectrum, Shabaka Hutchings has recently abandoned the saxophone – despite being one of its greatest modern players – in favour of schooling himself in the shakuhachi, a traditional bamboo flute that takes years to master. Thundercat's wildly inventive psych-funk reflects an adoration of hypercharged anime soundtracks. In indie music, such as Mac Demarco's love of the Japanese electone player Sekitō Shigeo that the riff for the former's 'Chamber Of Reflection' is lifted wholesale from the latter's 'The Word II'. In pop, Japan-born, but America-based from the start of her career, Mitski has incorporated the traditions of butoh theatre, in which performers draw on messy emotions but depict them with repetitive and precise gestures.

It's not just ancient Japanese practises like Kabuki and butoh that contribute to this influence; the country's newest, gaming, also looms large. Since Taito's 'Space Invaders' broke through as the first blockbuster arcade game in 1978, ushering in the form's golden age, Japan has led the world in the area. Five years later, the Nintendo Entertainment System would prove similarly revolutionary for home gaming, followed by Sega's Mega Drive two years after that. By today's standards, these platforms were limited in their abilities, that restricted toolset fostered innovation as game developers sought ways to subvert the boundaries. The same could be said for the soundtracks of these games, where genuine musical geniuses like Koji Kondo (the man behind iconic themes for the Mario series and The Legend of Zelda) were faced with sound chips were so limited that they could deliver only a few sounds, and forced to think outside the box. To mimic the kind of polyphonic music that was impossible to play on the systems, for instance, they'd instead use rapid arpeggios. Once again, the Yellow Magic Orchestra's demonstration of what could be possible from computerised music became a key touchstone, with the band's Harumi Hosono returning the favour in 1984 with his

album *Video Game Music*, based entirely on samples from Namco games.

As these video games were embraced by Gen X youth in Europe and North America, so did their soundtracks. Fast forward a decade or two, and as that generation came of age and began shaping the music industry to their own vision, this influence returned under the guise of Chiptune. Take the 8-bit intro to Beck's Dust Brothers-produced 2005 track 'Girl', the minimalist electro melancholia of Postal Service's *Give Up* album, or the playfulness of Crystal Castles' self-titled debut album. In grime and dubstep, producers drew heavily from the sharp, jerky impact of the games they'd played as children. It wouldn't be long until these sonics were appropriated by the mainstream, becoming ubiquitous on party playlists through the likes of Ke\$ha's 'Tik Tok', the biggest selling song of 2010.

This is how mainstream pop music is usually formed: innovators exploring revolutionary sonics, which are then watered down for mass consumption. Following this logic, it's not hard to see how the likes of Bowie, Bambaataa, Bush and The Belleville Three have been fundamental in changing the face of Western music, and every one of them was themselves fundamentally changed by the art that came to them from Japan. Zoom out a little to consider how many artists they've inspired in turn – it's no exaggeration to say there are few musicians alive who wouldn't claim at least one of those four among their influences – and you could argue that Japan has influenced almost every single thing we listen to. In another half century, those at the vanguard of the new generation, the likes of Mitski, Demarco, Hutchings and Cook, will likely be revered in a similar fashion, and so too will their love of Japan have shaped their reams of imitators and successors. The incoming wave of J-pop is therefore nothing new. It's merely an increased moment of visibility for Japan's enduring, titanic cultural force that will outlast us all. *ralph*



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DRINK IN THE SPIRIT OF GLASGOW



BATMAN
&
Rodin

So, now we've
lived together
for a year...



...I'd like to
sculpt you Batman.
Would that be...



I'm ready.



Some hours later

This has been
such an honour...



to share this
experience...



with the
Dark Kni...



... are
you asleep?



No.

Finally.

... you hate
it...



It's not that.
It's just...



Is that really
how you see me?



By Josh Jones & Jeff Definitely

WE CAN'T
PRINT THAT, JEFF!

HADDOCK JON DO



As Ralph's Comedy Editor, one of UK comedy's rising stars, Alexandra Haddow meets stand up legends and chats the craft of making people laugh. For this issue she went for drinks with the iconic Jeff Innocent – winner of British Comedian of the Year, Best Live Club Comedian and Comedian's Comedian awards...

Words by Alexandra Haddow
Photos by Stephanie Sian Smith

Jeff Innocent has been entertaining comedy audiences for almost 30 years, but recently went stratospheric thanks to Instagram. I first met Jeff at a rowdy gig under a railway arch, waiting to go on and see what fate awaited us on stage. I'd heard of him before, of course, and had no idea what to expect. I definitely didn't think he'd compliment me on my sartorial prowess. "I like that, a tweed mini skirt with an Adidas zipper. That's fucking cool," he said, clad in his own, almost identical top. From then on I've always looked forward to being on the same bill as him. At nearly 70, Jeff is not only an incredible comedian, performer, and teacher, but he also, in the best possible way, doesn't give a fuck. His jokes about being from a criminal background, looking like a "racist grandad" despite his liberal views, multicultural family, and extremely interesting life, make him one of the most unique acts on the circuit. He might look like bad news, but Jeff Innocent only makes good headlines.

Jeff! It's so nice to see you. The first time we met, you complimented me on my style, AND you've called your tour show 'Smart Casual' – how important is what you wear on stage to your act? Do you think a lot about planning outfits?

I would say it's crucial. I'm always mucking about with younguns saying "You think it's always about jokes? It's not about jokes it's about what you're wearing!" Getting dressed is part of my ritual of getting ready for gigs – I don't want to sound pretentious but that's when I sort of transform into Jeff Innocent. I stop whatever else I was doing, pick out what I'm going to wear, out comes the ironing board out, and get the look right.

Was Jeff Innocent a nickname or is it just so that nobody ever knows the real you?

Well, during the 1970s, there was a criminal called George Davis, and he got arrested for a crime he didn't actually commit. All his friends created the 'George Davis is innocent' campaign. My name is Geoffrey Davies, I was on a bus, and I saw 'G Davis is innocent!' When I started doing comedy I didn't have a stage name, but when I saw that it sparked something in me. So I changed the G to a J, and Jeff Innocent was born. It works for me as well because when I've done interviews previously, it makes for a good headline.

Pew, there was part of me that was worried it was an alibi. What did you do before stand up? Are you allowed to say?

Ha! Yeah, I think people misunderstand sometimes about my criminal past. Not that I've never been in trouble, I'm a working class bloke from East London. But I'm the Michael Corleoni of my family, I went to University and all that.

You would say that, Jeff.

True! Directly before comedy I was doing an MA in cultural studies, and for the years before that I was a window dresser for men's fashion on the King's Road. For a shop that doesn't exist any more, called Lord John.

This explains the fashion!

Yeah! This is why can spend ages in clothes shops and it doesn't tire me out.

You talk about all sorts of things on stage very openly that we often don't expect from older acts, so tell us, what's a comedown like at 69?

I don't know what on earth you're talking about Alex.





Why did you wink just then?

Next question please!

Fine. You've recently become Instagram famous. What are the best things about reaching this level of fame late in life?

The nicest thing is that my mum, who's nearly 90, finally understands, after 27 years, that what I do is actually a proper job. She found out about my new found fame and success quite randomly, when her hairdresser showed her a clip of me on Instagram and said, "Have you ever seen this comedian? He's brilliant" and she said, "That's my son!".

The fact that I've become famous via clips of my stand up on Instagram, means that I have finally developed my own audience, who like my style of comedy, and will buy tickets to come and see my live shows. So based on that I've been able to sell out a 60 date national tour of UK and Ireland. Doing solo shows in theatres and art centres also means that I can perform for an hour, or more, rather than the 20-minute sets that I'm used to doing in comedy clubs. It's giving me a bit more scope to expand my ideas and do longer routines, and become a better comedian.

The only disadvantage to being my age (69) and reaching a level of success is that I might not be around for long enough to enjoy it for very long. But if I've inherited my mum's genes, I'll probably have a few years yet.

(Jeff also once told me that one of the downsides to being recognised publicly was that he couldn't kick off at someone if they annoyed him, which he likes to do on a regular basis)

Who do you admire on the circuit and who are your heroes?

At the moment, the comedians that I admire tend to be newer comedians from a non-English cultural heritage, like Andrew Mensah, Sharon Wanjohi and Michael Odewale. Who, because of their African background, offer a fresh and original take on their experience and identity. I'm also a fan of up and coming comedy phenomenon, Dan Tiernan.

(Wow Jeff, I'm right here)

As for heroes. I've always been a massive fan of Alexei Saye and Max Miller, for their game changing brilliance. And Tony Allen, for his influence on the way in which stand up comedy should be understood and performed. I am totally indebted to him for any success I've achieved.

Are any topics off limits for you?

No. Part of the problem with 'taboo' topics is that they are often performed for shock value, where the comedian wants to be edgy and controversial. If you know what you're doing, if 'know who you are', and have a genuine and truthful take on a topic, the audience will trust you and go with you.

What does your family think about your new found fame?

My wife and family at home are suitably unimpressed. They keep my feet firmly on the ground. When I got home from winning The British Comedian Of The Year, and £10,000, my wife reminded me that I've got to put the rubbish out.

Keeping you grounded! Your tour support Sam Picone got in touch with you about starting to post videos online, were you up for it straight away or did you think it was a load of shite until a few of them took off?

When Sam, my tour support and the architect of my Instagram fame, explained to me what was happening with my clips and what that means, I didn't totally understand, because I was unfamiliar with social media. I actually thought that 'going viral' was a bad thing, like being cancelled. I always welcomed his intervention, but it took me a while to realise and embrace the life changing implications. Even after reaching 100,000 followers on Instagram, I didn't understand, as he did, because he is very media savvy, that it would mean that there is now an international audience who would buy tickets to come and see me live and that I would sell 500 seater venues, I have to admit, that in my ignorance, I doubted his vision and optimism. But he has been proved right and I am ever thankful.

Has there ever been a point where you've thought about giving up?

No, never! At the risk of sounding pretentious, being on stage and making people laugh is my destiny and a privileged way of earning a living.

Any retirement plans?

Absolutely no plans or retirement. I couldn't afford to retire. And, why would I want to stop doing the thing that brings me so much pleasure in life? So I'll carry on until I can't physically or mentally do it anymore. Apart from dying in a hotel room after a sex and cocaine binge, dying on stage would be my favourite way to go.

Do you do anything else other than comedy?

The other thing I do apart from comedy is to indulge in my main interest, which is Jamaican music, by being a DJ, on the radio and at parties and music events. I also spend a lot of my time in vintage and charity shops, looking for clothes, obsessively. (Jeff was

early to this interview because he'd been round Spitalfields for hours, trawling for clothes) I'm also a lover of dogs, specifically sight hounds and own a whippet/greyhound cross, who I train and take racing whenever I can.

That couldn't be more on brand. You recorded your special at the Stratford Royal, and the last time you were on that stage was as a kid, did it all feel a bit poetic?

Yes, selling out two shows in the same day was indeed a particular thrill. Not just because I had performed on that stage a couple of times as a child in youth theatre productions. But because it's my local theatre, with a celebrated tradition of serving the local community. So I've been in the audience there on many occasions over the years. To be the main act on there, that everyone has come to see, and to see my name up in lights outside the venue, was beyond my wildest expectations.

Well, what a note to end on. Jeff, when is the special out and how can we watch it? Where can we catch you next?

I'm not sure when the special is out, why would I know? I'm waiting for Sam to come back from his off-grid backpacking tour of Asia and continue furthering my fame. He's also going to be editor of the special. But if anyone is interested in coming to see me, all the tour dates, and how to buy tickets, are on my website, jeffinnocent.com. Or on Instagram, @jeffinnocentofficial - I hear it's quite big now. *ralph*



WHaT if The SiMPSONS CHaRaCTeRS WeRE FaST FOoD MeaLS?

To answer this important question, we went straight to the top... to the mighty Bill Oakley. Former writer and showrunner of *The Simpsons* - and the genius brain behind the iconic 'Steamed Hams' scene - Bill's also got his fingers in the food critic pie. There's no one on earth more qualified for this.

Words by Bill Oakley
Illustrations by James-Lee Duffy



NED FLANDERS

Six-Inch Oven-Roasted Turkey Sub with Lite Mayo from Subway

The most wholesome one in town. Reasonable, respectable, bland beyond belief. Absolutely no fun at all.

MARGE SIMPSON

The Jamocha Shake from Arby's

The unsung hero. Serves as the rock, anchor, and backbone to an assemblage of sometimes unpalatable oddballs.

ABRAHAM "GRAMPA" SIMPSON

Hot Dog from Nathan's Famous

Ancient, shrivelled, and salty.

BART SIMPSON

The Animal-Style Double Double from In-N-Out

Sloppy, in-your-face, and fun. An archetype of laid-back, casually-cool American youth culture that has long outgrown its youth but still delivers.

MILHOUSE VAN HOUTEN

Cheesy Roll-Up from Taco Bell

Unambitious, unimpressive, forgettable, but perfectly okay if your standards are low. Your 13th or 14th choice but, on the up side, doesn't ask too much of you.

HOMER SIMPSON

The Crunchwrap Supreme from Taco Bell

A self-indulgent, jaw-dropping grotesque that is singular in its ability to delight. The ultimate only-in-America creation that other nations love to deride but secretly crave and envy.

MAGGIE SIMPSON

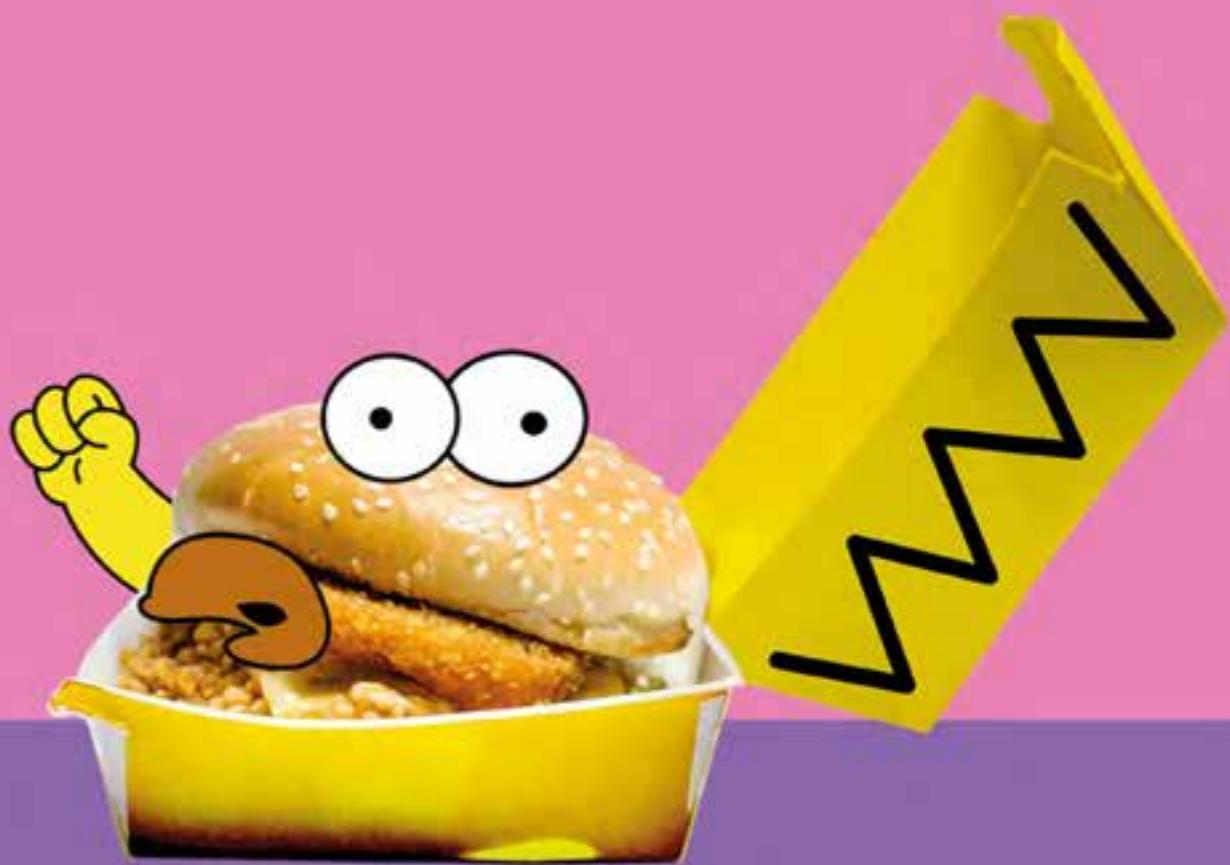
The (late-lamented) Fried Apple Pie from McDonald's

Small but powerful. Mess with whatever lurks inside and risk getting burned.

C. MONTGOMERY BURNS

Hot Mustard McNugget Sauce from McDonald's

Venerable and powerful. Not loved by many due to caustic, acerbic nature.





- LISA SIMPSON**
The Veggie Shack from Shake Shack
Unique. A smart, thoughtful, admirable loner. Embraces "farro" and "quinoa" even though those words are entirely unknown in their world.
- PRINCIPAL SEYMOUR SKINNER**
Plain Baked Potato from Wendy's
Stalwart, formidable, and zestless. Commands respect but not loyalty or enthusiasm. (Personally, I just think they're neat.)
- KIRK VAN HOUTEN**
French Fries from In-N-Out
Pale and flaccid with a vastly-overinflated sense of own awesomeness.
- KRUSTY THE CLOWN**
The Famous Bowl from KFC
An in-your-face freak show that has always been inexplicably popular.
- RALPH WIGGUM**
The Ice Cream Machine at McDonald's
Defective or perhaps just broken.
- MOE SZYSLAK**
Chicken Nuggets from Burger King
The less said, the better.
- WAYLON SMITHERS**
Fries from Five Guys
High class, top of the game. Delivers (over-delivers) regularly and effectively. The sidekick to a justifiably-criticised price-gouger.
- TROY MCCLURE**
The Original Chicken Sandwich from Burger King
Been around since the 1970s but can still occasionally delight the less-than-discriminating.

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

DISPATCH #1 - TEN YEARS OF MAX'S SANDWICH SHOP:



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



It's the beginning of November 2014 and my friend Will and I have nearly finished building my sandwich shop, on a stretch of road between London's Finsbury Park and Crouch End, which a neighbour has cruelly described as 'where restaurants go to die'.

One too many of my infuriating interior design suggestions and BAM! Will's finally snapped. He is not only large, but angry, looking like he wants to kill me, and holding a nail gun. "Look," he says, PHUMMING another nail into the wall. "We're nearly done, why don't you fuck off for a week, and leave me alone?"

The day before the nail gun incident, while painting the shopfront, a man (now a great friend) appeared at the bottom of my ladder and asked what I was doing. Coming down the ladder a bit cross, I rudely told him I was doing what it looked like I was doing: stripping badly applied orange paint off the front of this shop. He introduced himself as Tony the Butcher from the eponymous shop across the road. "Not up there," he said. "What are you doing *in there*?" I apologised and told him I was opening a late-night sandwich shop. "Sandwiches?" he asked. "At night?" "Yes," I said. "Sandwiches?" he said again. "At night... That's a shit idea."

Will was right, I needed to get out of there before I lost the rest of my social niceties, drove him mad and had a fucking breakdown. Distracted by the build and my impending sense of doom, I had told everyone, over-confidently assuming everything would be alright, that I was opening a sandwich shop, without really thinking what might go in them. As I was to sell my sandwiches at night, I realised the ideas I'd had so far were lacking in originality and fundamentally far too lousy. The four things written in my notebook from that time are:

1. Variations on chicken escalope sandwiches I got, hungover in caffs.

2. Hazy remembrances of pesto chicken and olive sandwiches from the Balan's Sandwich Shop on Old Compton Street (long since defunct).

3. Deli sandwiches: mortadella, mozzarella, artichokes etc., from Dino's (15 Charlotte Place, London) I'd had while working in a restaurant opposite.

4. Marginally jazzed versions of supermarket sandwiches – prawn crackers in prawn sandwiches, miso in egg mayonnaise, that kind of thing.

I was in trouble.

Instead of going home and thinking about it for a week, I rashly spent half the shop's first three months rent on flights to New Orleans and five days in a hotel. I had heard of the city's famous sandwiches – Po' Boys and Muffulettas – and consequently blindly considered it the planet's hub of sandwich creativity.



That very day I made up with Will, apologised for being such a pain and headed to the airport.

Like a tourist in London never leaving the West End, I spent all five days in the city's French Quarter eating said sandwiches and waited in vain for my inspiration to come.

By the final night I'd had nine fundamentally similar sandwiches and thought all was lost. Blind to the limitations of my search and unable to face any more breaded seafood, deli meats or shredded lettuce, I returned to Molly's Irish Pub (732 Toulouse St.) which I had loved and got shitfaced. I drank beer and bourbon for many hours and played pool throughout. Near closing time (6am), I was playing against one of the barmaids and telling her about my failed sandwich odyssey. "You been to Verdi Marte (1201 Royal Street) yet?" she asked. "That's where we all go." I had been. It was

an extremely bad shop, with an extremely good sandwich kitchen out the back open seven days a week, 24 hours a day.

Looking in my notebook I'd had a sandwich there called *All That Jazz* (ham, turkey, shrimp, cheese, mushrooms, tomatoes and house-made 'Wow Sauce'). Banging as it had been, inspiration wise, it didn't get me closer to what my sandwich shop might be about. "Never mind that," she said. "Get the roast beef." I headed back there and ordered it.

There had been roast beef sandwiches listed on the menu in loads of the places I'd been, but I had skipped them thinking it a busman's holiday I could do without. I got back to my hotel (*Dauphine Orleans*, 415 Dauphine St.) and sat on the bed. Maybe some rare roast beef would be a break from the rain. I took the sandwich from the bag and it was hot, which immediately seemed odd. I unwrapped the paper and knew

HOT
COLD
SWEET
SOUR
CRUNCHY
SOFT



something was happening – roast beef or steak wasn't this saucy. Was I having my moment? It turned out when Verti Marte (and all of Louisiana? All of America?) say "roast beef", they don't mean rare roast beef like we do in England, they mean a kind of braised beef. Stew, really. I'd got stew in a sandwich. It was the dawning of a new day and my tiny mind was blown! How had I been so shortsighted about what could go in a sandwich?

The next morning, on my flight home, I filled half a notebook with mad ideas and my shop's identity began to emerge. Looking back in it now, I have written (in capitals) 'HOT COLD SWEET SOUR CRUNCHY SOFT' – which became my shop's sandwich mantra. In amongst the pages of indecipherable crap it also says 'ANYTHING CAN GO IN A SANDWICH', 'THINK OF PLATES OF FOOD NOT SANDWICHES'

and 'HAM, EGG 'N' CHIPS.'

That roast beef sandwich, and my thoughts on that flight, directly determined the initial quietness, and later successes, of my sandwich shop and I guess, the joys of my life just generally. To acknowledge that, I decided to celebrate the shop's 10th anniversary by returning to New Orleans. I would stay in the same hotel and vowed to venture further afield than the confines of the French Quarter. After going to Verdi Marte obviously.

I checked in, dumped my bag, bought some cigarettes, and headed to Molly's for a quick sharpener. When I got to Verdi Marte it was even rougher round the edges than I remembered. The sandwich bit out the

back was clearly still on form though. The blackboard menus were still there and the list of sarnies equally comprehensive.

I'd come a long way, so I ordered the roast beef sandwich and an *All That Jazz*. I took them back to the hotel, sat on the bed and revisited my moment. True to form the *All That Jazz* was all wonderful, but the roast beef? Terrible. Inspiration comes in many forms. I sat and wondered why we never use mushrooms at the sandwich shop, and why shrimp and meat combinations are somehow

always relegated to surf 'n' turf novelty.

Next on my list was city legend Donald Link's Cochon Butcher (930 Tchoupitoulas) in the Warehouse District, for a sandwich called *Le Pig Mac*.

I walked in, read the menu, and there were sausages on it, so I

ordered some. Donald is a baller – the fit out was clearly expensive and everything that could be (even mustard), is made in house. Donald also charged me \$12 for what seemed to be half a pint of craft beer, which as a restaurant owner, I admire the balls of. *Le Pig Mac* was truly excellent and pleasingly like the bougie Big Mac it was intended to be. The sausages? Amazing. The andouille was correctly firm and smoky but the boudin was top class. Steamed and soft, filled with rice and enriched with chicken livers and black pepper it was utterly delicious.

After this seminal sausage and a night on the razz, I went to bed and got up late to meet an old friend: the shrimp Po' Boy. Just a minute from my hotel was Killer PoBoys, a shop someone at Cochon Butcher had recommended. I had the *Seared Shrimp*

– blackened Gulf shrimp, pickled carrots, daikon, cucumber, Sriracha aioli and fresh herbs. The French Quarter sure has upped its game. The best and juiciest shrimp I ever had in a sandwich – it was delicious, balanced, full of contrasts, in the perfect bread and a VAST improvement on the dried-out, breaded shrimp, shredded iceberg and tasteless, flaccid tomato of the more touristy Po' Boys of my previous visit.

Through the magic of the internet I have become friendly with Mason Hereford, owner of one of the world's great sandwich shops, Turkey and the Wolf (739 Jackson Av.). I walked to the Lower Garden District and met Mason inside. He brought me an extraordinary amount of food for one person and invited me to come back to their staff party the following day, which turned out to be a crawfish boil and one of the great gastronomic experiences of my life. A lesson in deliciousness of course, it was even more so, a lesson in conviviality and the importance of sharing the pleasures of the table. You can see in the photo, the rest of the shrimp, the corn and the sausage is yet to be added!

The sandwiches in Turkey and the Wolf were a revelation. Mason's famous *Bologna* (mortadella) sandwich was brilliant but my favourite was his (vegetarian) *Collard Green Melt* (see photo). A club sandwich of braised greens, spicy Russian dressing and coleslaw, that he based on one of his dear friend Dan Stein's legendary pastrami sandwiches.

Dan owns Stein's Market and Deli (2207 Magazine St.) and is a mensch who comes across grumpy and was famously car-jacked and pistol-whipped late one night outside his shop, only to return to work the following day. His shop is to New Orleans what Katz's is to New York: An institution of the highest quality, that you go to almost as much for the

spectacle as for the things they put between bread. Stein's has a great variety of breads (many made in house) and



his menu is what deli dreams are made of. His twist on the pastrami is to cut mountains of it really, really thin and bang it on the grill adding a whole new dimension to the traditionally steamy affair. Sitting in Stein's for an hour or so, listening to the staff working and enjoying themselves, I was reminded of my own sandwich shop.

Dan invited me to return the next day when they were closed. We chatted for a few hours, shared the roast beef sandwiches (from somewhere else) he and his buddy Mark always have on a Monday while they do shop admin stuff, and I felt lucky. The assumption I had made ten years ago, that I thought I'd got wrong, about New Orleans being one of the world's hubs of sandwich creativity, has turned out to be true after all.

Dunking my sandwich into a pot of gravy, with one of the world's great sandwich makers, I realised, as I had at Mason's staff party the day before, that I was experiencing first hand, the famous 'Southern hospitality'. Many people in the restaurant industry forget that this isn't just a business, it is the hospitality business, and these guys, here in New Orleans, never forget it. *ralph*





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A SLICE OF LIFE



Brooklyn-born chef Olivia Tiedemann has had a wild couple of years with over 4m people now following her indie rock infused, bird-flipping cooking videos. We asked her where the best pizza in New York City is...

Photo by Brian Tran



L&B Spumoni Gardens

2725 86th St, Brooklyn, NY 11223

Spumoni Gardens is my #1 pizza spot for a few reasons. Primarily because it's fucking fire, but also because it's really nostalgic for me. My dad used to bring me and my siblings there as a treat. It's a cheese under the sauce square slice scenario, and it is my all time favourite.

Nino's Pizza

9110 3rd Ave, Brooklyn, NY 11209

Nino's in Bayridge is a really solid classic NY slice, and it's a few blocks from where I grew up. My only gripe is that it's cash only, and I too am trying to evade taxes.

John's of Bleeker Street

278 Bleeker St, New York, NY 10014

Obviously iconic and amazing, quintessential NY slice. Crispy bottom, not too much sauce or cheese happening. Perfectly done piece-a-pizza.

Lucali

575 Henry Street, Brooklyn, NY 11231

I had this for the first time very recently, and I was pleasantly surprised – it was kind of different than I thought. You can't really go wrong with a NY slice, most places are pretty good, so I like when there's something a little different going on. The cheese on the Lucali pizza was really fresh mozzarella and brought a different flavour to your typical shredded mozz corner slice kinda place. Crust was crackers crispy and I loved the basil. A bit more dynamic than a regular slice and sometimes you wanna be fancy. Loved it.

Prince St. Pizza

27 Prince St A, New York, NY 10012

My first job as a teenager was in Soho by Prince St Pizza and I went there on my break sometimes. The pepperoni square is amazing and greasy and a very decadent treat. Really good.

from
**BEAT
BOXING**
to
**BEETLE
JUICE**

**BURN GORMAN'S HIP-HOP
TO HOLLYWOOD JOURNEY**

Words by Josh Jones

Photos by Dan Wilton

Art Direction by James-Lee Duffy

Photo Assistant: Max Gorman

Jacket by Wax London Jewellery by Duffy



Burn Gorman appears for our photoshoot in London's Soho like he does in his movies: silently and unannounced. He's just suddenly there in the room. Wearing an anonymous black jacket and jeans, he's sidled into the coffee shop we're waiting in before we can get into today's location: The Blue Posts pub, Berwick Street. You might expect someone who's played many villains to be serious, intimidating even. But his trademark serious rugged cliff of a face cracks into a broad smile as he appears by the table, his eyes light up, and he grabs a coffee as he sits down with the crew. "I like to present a moving target," he says, sipping his drink and slumping down on a banquette. It's something of a credo for his career... to be intentionally anonymous.

A moving target he may be, but since his acting debut in 1998, his TV and movie filmography contains some of the biggest hits of the near three decades he's been acting, working with huge co-stars and directors. Burn's appeared in Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight* and *Dark Knight Rises*, Guillermo Del Toro's *Pacific Rim* series



and award-winning animation *Pinocchio*, Guy Ritchie's *Layer Cake*, as well as movies like *Watcher*, *Lift*, *The Hunger Games: The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes*, *Enola Holmes*. Later this summer, you'll find him in the much anticipated sequel to *Beetlejuice*, alongside original cast members Michael Keaton and Winona Ryder – more on that later. You'll also have seen him in cult TV shows such as *Game of Thrones*, *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia*, *Torchwood*, and *The Offer*. "I'm a character actor," he explains. "Which means, in England at least, you're an ugly bastard. It's essentially an actor that's not the star or lead of the piece. All the actors I admire and look up to are character actors."

Burn has garnered a cult following playing on screen baddies and he certainly has the face for the role. He can glare with the best of them. It's a face that's taken more than enough blows (on film at least), I mention to him. What's it like getting absolutely decked by Anne Hathaway in

Dark Knight Rises? "I seem to get punched by a load of actresses," he jokes. "Is my face that annoying? Gillian Anderson smacked me full in the face once, and I was in *Enola Holmes* a few years ago and I had this fierce fight scene with Millie Bobby Brown. Anne Hathaway smacked me in the face in rehearsals while she was holding a fucking gun. She clumped me right in the face with it – by mistake obviously! She sent me a beautiful letter and a beautiful silver pen to apologise for doing it though. It's my face isn't it? It's just incredibly punchable."

Shirt by Wax London





“Anne
Hathaway
smacked me
in the face
while she was
holding a gun”



Punchable it may be, but up close as we take the photos, Burn's face is probably the most versatile thing I've ever seen. It moves with a life of its own. Tongue in, tongue out, big grins, severe stares, eyebrows arch and eyes sparkle. Underneath the face he can make his limbs like rubber, trying out elastic body shapes he's akin to a silent movie comedian using every facet of his body to express himself. He's a photographers dream. None of this is by accident – that face is a fully trained visage. "I was studying Experimental Eastern European Theatre up in Manchester," Burn explains as we do the interview a few days later at London's Mondrian Hotel, Shoreditch. "I thought you had to suffer as an artist." His interest lay in Russian experimental and physical theatre pioneers like Vsevolod Meyerhold and Jerzy Grotowski. "I toured Hungary, Poland, Romania - most of Eastern Europe performing physical and experimental theatre, Theatre of the Absurd etc." His interest was in the formation of Meyerhold. Quick acting history here for you – two strands of acting came out of Russia: Stanislavski, which, when it went to New York became the beginnings of method acting, and was taken up by the likes of Stella Adler and Marlon Brando, while the other was extreme expressionism in painting, art but particularly in theatre, and pioneered by Vsevolod Meyerhold whose devotion to using the body as a canvas made him one of the groundbreaking forces in modern international theatre. "I was, and still am, also influenced by the silent

movie and make up artist, Lon Chaney who was known as the man of a thousand faces," continues Burn. "I'm quite judgemental about the 'traditional' school of method acting. I think the Americans do it amazingly and they're the best screen actors in the world. But I'm attracted to the legacy of theatre – even from pantomime onwards in England. And all the great actors, from Garrick and Shakespeare onwards."

It was Shakespeare that was the spark for Burn to venture into acting. Burn's dad was a

"hippy lecturer" who travelled the world.

"My sisters were born in Africa and I was born in America as he happened to be teaching at UCLA at the time," he says with a shrug. "Then we came back and I was bought up in a commune that sort of turned into what some people have called a cult – so make of that what you will.. It's still going unfortunately, and is much more of a halfway house thing now but me and my sisters are currently



working through our trauma." While on "day release" from this cult, and working in hotels in Stratford-Upon-Avon, it was the presence and shenanigans of some of the greatest actors the country's produced at the Royal Shakespeare Company that inspired him to take up the art. "The RSC did a fringe theatre festival every year and they often needed extras so me and my friend went along," he says. "I remember seeing the actors getting pissed. They basically drank and shagged – there's nothing else to do in Stratford." Being around actors he found intoxicating –



“They were out of control – they had this magic life and would run across the road during performances, have a pint and then go back on”



Jacket by Wax London Opposite Page: Shirt by Wax London Jewellery by Duffy

in every way. "They were just out of control – they had this magic life of acting and would just run across the road during performances, have a pint and go back on." Burn was there when Robert Stevens was doing King Lear and Kenneth Branagh was doing Hamlet. "I thought 'Fuck it, if they can do it, I'll give it a go,'" he says with a glint in his eye.

Burn committed himself to theatre. "A lot of the people I worked with were nerds, they weren't that interested in fashion and music. Some of them were almost theatre nuns, they'd give up almost everything." The lightbulb moment that there was more to dedicating himself to just theatre and being a "servant to this unseen thing" called acting, was far from glamourous. It was when he was touring eastern Europe in a minivan in his 20s, performing physical & experimental theatre. While driving through a remote forest in Poland, their touring van, heavily loaded with the actors and sets for the production, got a puncture in the middle of the night. Pulling over at a truck stop they unloaded everything to be able to change the wheel. It was only when they



had loaded all the sets back into the van that they realised that the truckers who stopped there used the ground as a toilet: ones AND twos... "All our sets were covered in it," he says incredulously. "We had it all over our clothes and I was sitting in this dark van thinking 'So this is showbusiness?' he sighs. "It was a real moment of clarity, freezing cold, covered in human shit in the arse end of Poland." That was the moment he realised he had to do something else, and open his horizons – it couldn't just be theatre.

Based in Manchester, Burn's first big break was in Britain's long-running soap, Coronation Street, which is filmed in the city. He was cast, ironically, as a cult leader for 16 episodes. He, like many actors based in northern England, was given his break by casting director Judi Hayfield. "I was awful, fucking dreadful," he laughs while my enquiry about his one episode role as a beatboxer at a house party on the UK's other monster soap, Eastenders, is met with silence, a dramatically raised eyebrow and a steely side eye.



“My beatboxing was definitely some kind of self-soothing thing. I’m aware now of what an odd kid I was”

Born almost exactly a year after Kool Herc gave birth to the genre, hip-hop, beatboxing and breakdancing has inspired and influenced Burn all his life. "Even when I was working in hotels I was always into music and always DJing and collecting," he says. "Hip-hop was very, very influential on me. I remember tuning my radio into Mike Allen's hip-hop show on Capital FM or Westwood on Radio 1." His American upbringing gave him a inside line to the latest releases via a friend who'd send him cassettes of groundbreaking artists like KRS-1, Kool Moe Dee and Mantronix. Very much part of a breaking crew, Burn was "always popping and locking and then beat boxing came through that". His nickname as a youth was BB Burn, which evolved into Beatbox Burn, but its origins are really quite humble. "My mum used to cut my hair so badly, it looked jaggedy like a broken bottle," he laughs. "So it was actually Broken Bottle Burn before it became BB Burn." There is an obvious connection between the movement and form involved in breaking – especially with the popping and locking that Burn was interested in with its expressive use of the body and the physical theatre that he trained in. "I hadn't thought about that!" he exclaims. "That's a very good point. I remember the Rocksteady Crew coming to London and that sense of aggression and



battle yet it was also a performance." Gorman downplays his skill as a beatboxer – he's long since retired (don't ask him to do it) but as a youth he was obsessed with it. And he was good at it too - Burn was the winner of the inaugural International Beat Box Convention back in 2003 (yes it is on YouTube). "My beatboxing was definitely some kind of self-soothing thing," he says.

"I am aware now of what an odd kid I was. Looking back there must have been – well, there is – some neurodivergence." A fun fact here is that Burn actually set up a beatbox collective called *Drool School* with Alex Tew, who created the infamous Million Dollar Homepage in 2005, and then went on to co-found Meditation and Sleep app CALM. "Beatboxing to me was about recognising patterns and self-soothing that way," Burn says. "I noticed that all of us seem to have ticks and some kind of neurodivergence."

Coronation Street seems like a long time ago now for the actor – the day after speaking to us, Burn was jetting off to LA to take up his role in acclaimed, Academy Award-winning director Bong Joon-ho's first ever animated feature film. Working with true auteurs seems to be a habit for Burn and I ask him if these elite level directors are easier to work with than those at a lower level. Are they more open to

Jacket and Shirt by Wax London Jewellery by Duffy





“Working
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they are
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scene”



Shirt by Wax London Jewellery by Duffy

letting actors try new things in a scene. Burn nods. "Working with people like Guillermo del Toro and Tim Burton, they are 1000% open to changing the scene," he agrees. "They don't even question you. They've employed you because they know you can do it. Chris Nolan was like that too. They don't give you loads of notes, they're watching the scene. They're not hidden behind monitors, they're right there in it with you. I've noticed that the people who really at the top of their game are always open to ideas and changes to scenes. I think at that level they know they've assembled the right team for their project."

Speaking of Tim Burton, what was it like working on *Beetlejuice*? Burn exhales and whispers, his voice almost shaking with awe at his experience on set. "It was SO good," he enthuses. "It felt like a dream getting that job. I made sure I was on set at 8 in the morning even if my call was 6pm just to watch a master at work. Witnessing Michael Keaton work as *Beetlejuice*... he's totally free. There was this shorthand between him and Tim Burton – they'd just mutter a few things to each other but they'd totally understand what each other meant. Then you'd watch the next scene and you'd see them time things perfectly – the camera would pan across and Michael's face would be in exactly the right position. Everyone was masters of their genre. It really did feel like a dream."

As we start to wind things up I mention that there are Reddit forums and many YouTube comments on videos of scenes he's in, proclaiming Burn a hugely underrated actor. The "legend of Gin Alley" line he spits at John Snow while he plays Karl Tanner in *Game of Thrones* is something fans love and repeat across the fandom. "Oh really?!" says a bashful Burn with genuine surprise. "That's nice to hear. 25 years ago if you'd asked what I wanted to be I'd have said, 'I'd like to

come in, present a moving target, not be able to be ridiculously pigeon-holed, try and do different performances, try everything. Remain under the radar." He mentions how the John Updike quote 'celebrity is the mask that eats into the face' is "fucking true in Hollywood". He's glad to have kept away from that side of things – even when he's staying in LA, he's out in the Valley, on the fringes, living where the film crews, rather than the actors, live. "I don't get stopped in the street," he says. "I've got my privacy. I've got a life and that is so important to me. I'd rather be that person where people scratch their head when they see me and say, 'Isn't that that guy, the one... what was he in again?' I'd rather keep ducking and diving and present a moving target. That's my career adage!" *Ralph*

TRANCE OVER IN LOS ANGELES

Inside the new documentary
on LA's wildest subculture

Words by Kevin EG Perry
Photos by Matt Adam
Stills by Adam Roberts

Tyres squeal and clouds of smoke fill the air as a vintage Camaro spins in a wide donut across an intersection in south Los Angeles. It skids to a halt just millimetres from a boisterous circle of onlookers risking life and limb for a front row spot. The crowd howls with delight, filming on their phones, glancing lasers off the rims, huffing nitrous oxide from balloons and daring each other to pull up even closer to the bumper next time.

This chaotic spectacle is known in LA as a 'Takeover'. Hundreds of spectators turn up to a hastily chosen road junction and transform it into a hedonistic car show where the main attraction is skilled amateur drivers drifting in high-horsepower vehicles. Sometimes it looks like something out of a Fast and Furious film, at others it's more like a dangerously high stakes game of bumper cars.

The roots of the Takeover scene can be traced all the way back to suburban drag races and America's long-standing cult of car worship, while the style of driving comes straight from Japanese drifting. In the 1990s, car obsessives in north California's Bay Area started turning donuts for fun, creating 'sideshows' in the process. When sideshows came south to Los Angeles they mixed with the city's existing lowrider and muscle car culture and became amped up even further. At first, largely the preserve of petrolheads, things changed during the pandemic when bored kids with nowhere else to go started turning out in huge numbers, broadcasting the whole thing over social media and hurling yet more fuel on the fire.

Needless to say Takeovers are by no means legal, but so far cops have struggled to shut them down. Drivers switch locations frequently and have learned to hop in and out of jurisdictions to stay one step ahead of already overstretched police and sheriff's departments. For now they exist as a lawless subculture, understood by few better than Miami-based filmmaker Adam Roberts. His new documentary *Slide* takes a death-defying step straight into the centre of the circle pit, and introduces the wild cast of social pariahs who've made this high-octane subculture thrive. Ahead of the film's release, Ralph caught up with Roberts to talk about getting guns drawn on him by the cops, seriously dangerous driving and why he thinks Takeovers are here to stay.





Hey Adam, when did you start going to Takeovers?

It was 2022, towards the end of the whole lockdown thing. Takeovers had been going on all through the pandemic – no one was out, so it was the perfect time to do it. I'd been thinking about making a documentary to get me out because I'd been so cooped up. I wanted to do something crazy. This Takeover stuff presented itself, and I leaned into it.

What was that first one like?

It took me about two months to actually successfully get to one, because you have to get the street addresses before you show up. Then when you get there, you don't know what's going on. Did I miss it? So one day, it was still daytime, my friend Jason was driving and he was like: "I think we got it!" We realised we were in it, this train of cars all going towards the spot. When we got there and saw the smoke rising it felt like hitting the jackpot!

For a documentary maker, it must be a gift that this is a subculture that comes with built-in stunts.

It seems a little easy in a way, besides the fact you've actually got to go there and get it. Then you've just got to turn the camera on, and keep it steady! That was one of the things I learned after the first few times I went into the pit. It's so chaotic that you're moving a lot. Handheld makes for some good footage, but once I started putting it on a gimbal it became so much more fluid.

As well as these daredevil drivers spinning around, you also have a crowd insane enough to stand as close to the car as they can, while also shining lasers at it.

Yeah, the spectators really make it. From what I understand, Takeovers in 2016 to 2018 were much smaller. If you were there you either had a car, or you were with some people who had a car. There was no huge crowd. Now, with the internet, it's massive. Also I personally think, I don't mean this in a bad way, it's just the way the culture goes... but the Mexicans are so festive. They come up with all these crazy things! You'll go and there'll be the lasers, they'll have piñatas, they'll have blow-up dolls. All sorts of crazy stuff. The crowd itself I would say is very mixed, but there's a big chunk of Hispanics and they definitely bring a lot to the festivities. I think that's what it is. The spectators want to do their part, you know what I mean? There's people who like to get close to the cars – that's their thing. If people can't afford to drive or have a car, they still want to be part of it in some way.

How dangerous is it?

People get fucked up, but there's something about the cars when they spin around and knock people... it doesn't cause as much damage as something like drag racing. A lot of times people die because they're going so fast. If they crash, or hit somebody [drag racing], there's a big chance of someone dying. At a Takeover, when they're spinning the car, part of the game is hitting people. As wild as it is, that's part of it. Some people would say that's completely moronic, but some people would say that about the Running of the Bulls too, you know what I mean? There are people in this world who climb buildings for fun. There are people in this world who say hey, I'm not here for a long time. I'm here for a good time.

What are the cops doing?

The address is always changing, so it's very easy to skirt the law. If you have an illegal party, it can get shut down. Every time a Takeover gets shut down, they just change the address. That's actually one of the most dangerous parts about it, the going to and from. They're stomping on the gas and cars are coming from left, right, behind, in front. You don't know what's going on. That's definitely super hairy. I talked to the cultural historian Al Profit for the film, and he says the police just don't have the manpower. Not to mention everything else that's going on in that city. At the end of the day, when you lay it out on the table, as chaotic and crazy as the Takeovers are, when you put that against the homeless situation, or car thefts, what do you prioritise? They have a lot of meetings about it, but the people who run the Takeovers have figured it out. They've cracked the code. They know how to jump from area to area, and where the unincorporated areas are. They've outsmarted the cops. What are they going to do?

Your film is bookended by this intense, dramatic footage of a Takeover driver on the run from the police and begging to get into your car. What was going through your head when that was going on?

That night started off with us doing some balloons [of nitrous oxide] and going to a Takeover. As we were leaving, that kid was walking away. He'd been driving one of the cars and now he was trying to get away from the cops. He came over to the car while I was still filming, so I basically just kept my mouth shut. Eventually he got in, and then we went for that ride. The whole time the kid is asking: "Will you say you were driving?" I'm like: "Hell no!" Then we got pulled over. Guns were drawn - that's when I dropped my camera. I had another guy with me filming, so me and him are in the back seat. I could tell he was not happy at all. The cops let us go. The kid told them we had nothing to do with it. For all the shit he was saying about us saying we were driving, he took the fall in the end. The thing is, when I got pulled out of the car the first thing the cop said to me was: "Hey buddy, we were just watching you with your red balloon!" I didn't know what the fuck he was talking about until I realised somebody must've posted me on Instagram doing nos.

The cops were watching the stories!

That's the funny thing, all these dudes who do the Takeovers love posting themselves. They'll post themselves in a high speed chase with the cops! The cops watch all that stuff.

What do you think the future looks like for Takeovers?

I really think that culture, that driving style, will keep expanding. Where older people were into racing, I think younger people like to drift. Even if the chaotic and craziness of the Takeovers dies down – and that depends on the state of the city – but I think that style of driving is just going to keep getting bigger and bigger, like skateboarding. I'm not saying it's going to be an Olympic sport, but it could be! A lot of people told me I better film this scene before it goes away. From my standpoint, I don't think it's going anywhere. *ralph*

For more information on SLIDE follow Adam @shuttershot45

DON'T Google

This

Things we heard that
might be true

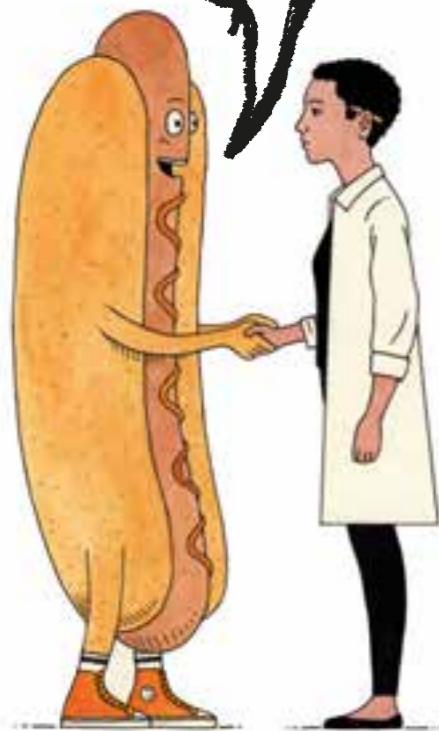
Illustrations by Andrew Rae

Jack the Ripper
was active when
Nintendo was
founded

Nobody knows
how headache
tablets work



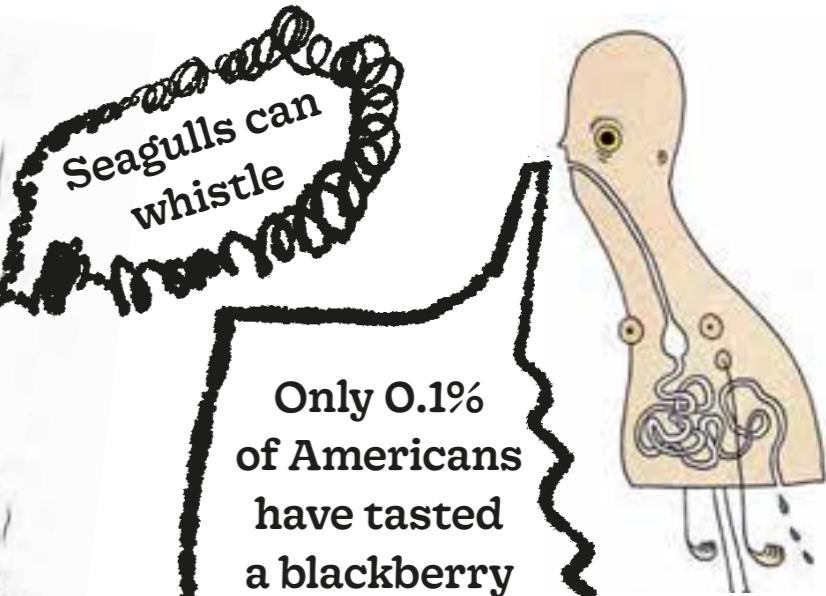
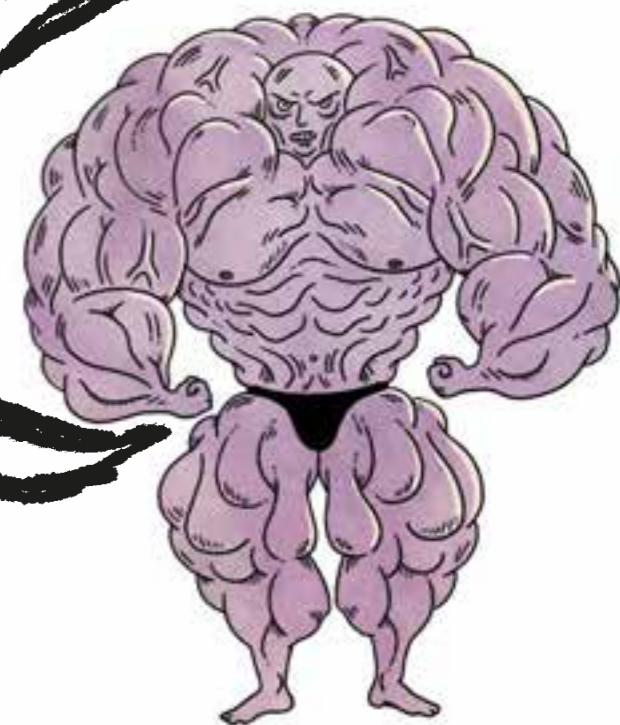
When you feel tired
your body creates
alcohol so you're
actually feeling
a bit drunk



The collar bone
in humans is a
left-over from
our fish ancestors



James Bond has his
cocktails shaken not
stirred so the poison
settles at the bottom



Only 0.1%
of Americans
have tasted
a blackberry



MUMBAI MARVELS

INDIA'S COSPLAY HEROES

WE WENT IN SEARCH OF THE BEST STREET STYLES AT MUMBAI COMIC CON

Photos and Interviews by Tej Datar

DARTH VADER

ACTUAL NAME:

RAJ

WHY DARTH VADER? I'M A BIG STAR WARS FAN.



ALLISTER



ACTUAL NAME:
AITHYA SUNESH
WHY ALLISTER?:
SINCE CHILDHOOD I'VE
LOVED GHOST TYPE
POKEMONS AND I LOVE
THEIR VIBE.

BATMAN



ACTUAL NAME:
ADITYA K
WHY BATMAN?:
BATMAN IS MY
INSPIRATION, I LOVE THE
ENERGY, THE PURPOSE OF
HIM IS VERY RELATABLE.

BRIMSTONE



ACTUAL NAME:

SURVA

WHY BRIMSTONE?:

I RESEMBLE HIM AND
COSPLAYING HIM
ENHANCES HIS ENERGY.

JIRAYA



ACTUAL NAME:

SHARIB

WHY JIRAYA:

HE IS JUST LIKE ME.

KAMISATO AYAKA



ACTUAL NAME:
GARGI
WHY KAMISATO AYAKA?:
I RESEMBLE HER AS A PERSON.
I LOVE THE ENERGY.

SAITAMA



ACTUAL NAME:
SHARDUL
WHY SAITAMA?:
HE IS STRONG.
DESTROYS WITH
SINGLE PUNCH.

MITSURI KANROJI



ACTUAL NAME:

DEBLINA

WHY MITSURI KANROJI?:

I LOVE HER. SHE'S A HUGE
INSPIRATION.

ARTHUR PENDRAGON



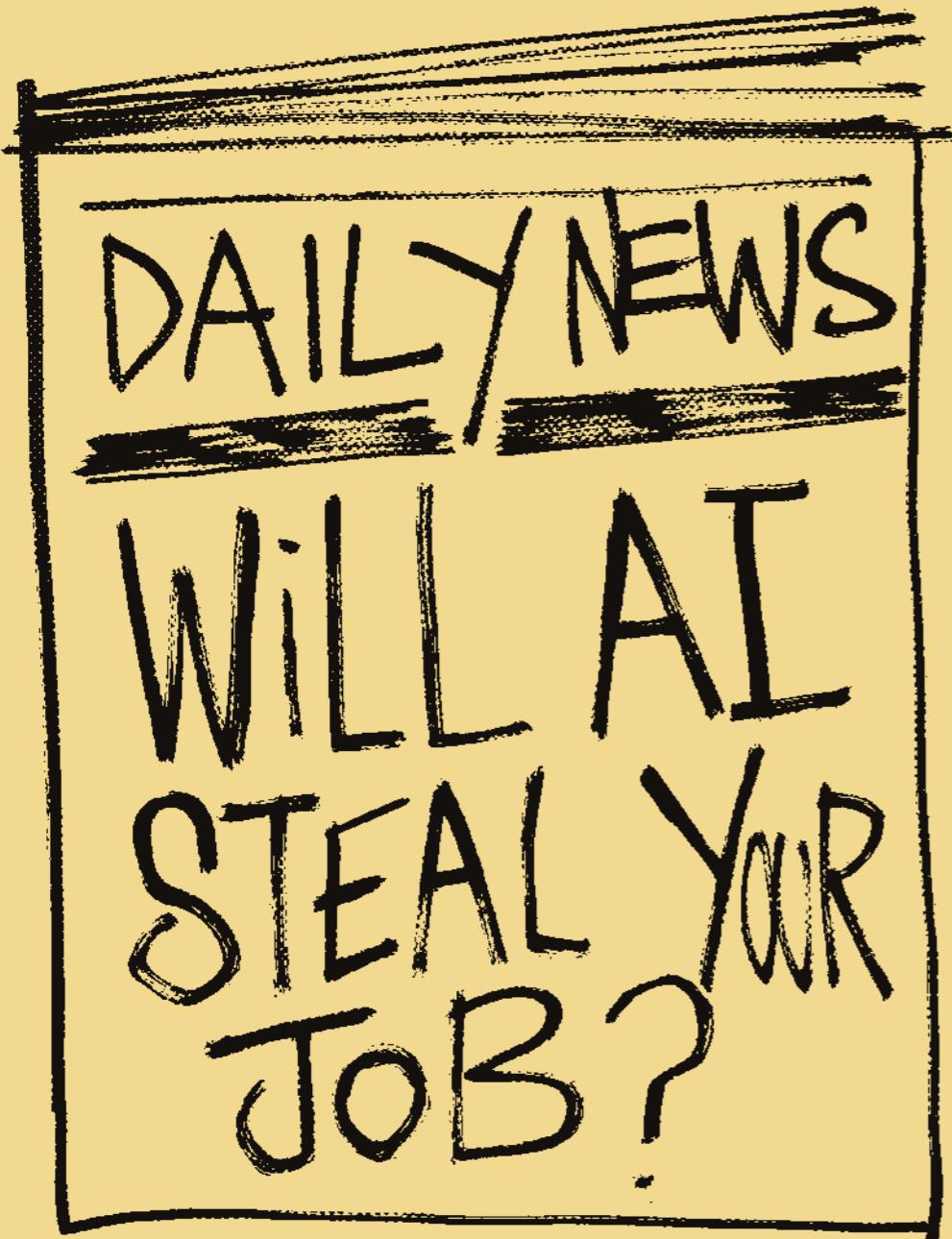
ACTUAL NAME:

SHASHANK K

WHY ARTHUR PENDRAGON?:

I'M A FAN OF THE FATE UNIVERSE,
THEY HAVE CRAZY DIALOGUES.

AI, ART AND MORALITY



Words by Chloé Laight
Illustrations by James-Lee Duffy

AI isn't new. In internet years, effectively it's an old man.

But instead of dying a dignified death or being the one at the family party you avoid like the plague – shrugged off as irrelevant and past it – they're the most popular person here, talked with and about abundantly and at an alarmingly increasing rate.

Before the deluge of various chatbots and generators – accessible and free ones like say Midjourney and ChatGPT – artificial intelligence seemed something that Future Us™ had to worry about. Something that came in the form of Sophia: easy to spot and easy to not get involved with, especially when you work in the creative industries. Because AI could never take our jobs, right?

Because we're specialists, we tell ourselves. Trained in arts and culture from writing to painting, often with five years down the pan and a 90 grand dent in our bank accounts for the privilege. And that's something you can't replicate. Something that separates man and machine. Something clients, accounts and big brands should pay for. Right?

And yet, from essay papers to advertising headlines, lyrics to actual scenes in actual movies, AI has planted its roots firmly in the soil of creativity. You only need to cast your mind back to the SAG-AFTRA strike of yesteryear to truly see the impact this is having on the industry across the globe with the ever-growing worry of job-taking and the issue of consent taking centre stage.

But, as AI becomes easier to use; and easier to access – already half the population are using it on a daily basis* – does that mean that the lines between AI and the morality of using it in art will be blurred?

"AI is the easiest thing in the world to have one take on."

"AI IS THE EASIEST THING IN THE WORLD TO HAVE ONE TAKE ON"

Sam Finn is an AI artist. Under the handle @ai.s.a.m, he's been working across film, TV and advertising for the past decade. He's well-versed in the AI debate, particularly the outcry and outrage from the creative industry. When he works for film (and for some big-time, big name directors he's currently under NDA for) AI takes a more traditional role: helping him concept art and visualise scenes and settings. By blending genres and art styles, he believes AI has actually let him be more creative. "Art creation is time pressured, especially commercial, and AI completely rejuvenated my creativity. Completely. I was stuck. Most of the time I was battling the technology to get what I wanted. If I wanted a person sitting on a horse in the desert, with a cool jacket on, the amount of programmes I would have to use to get that is insane. Using AI to streamline, made me concentrate on art, and learning about art history and all of these terms that I didn't know because I was just concentrating on aesthetics."



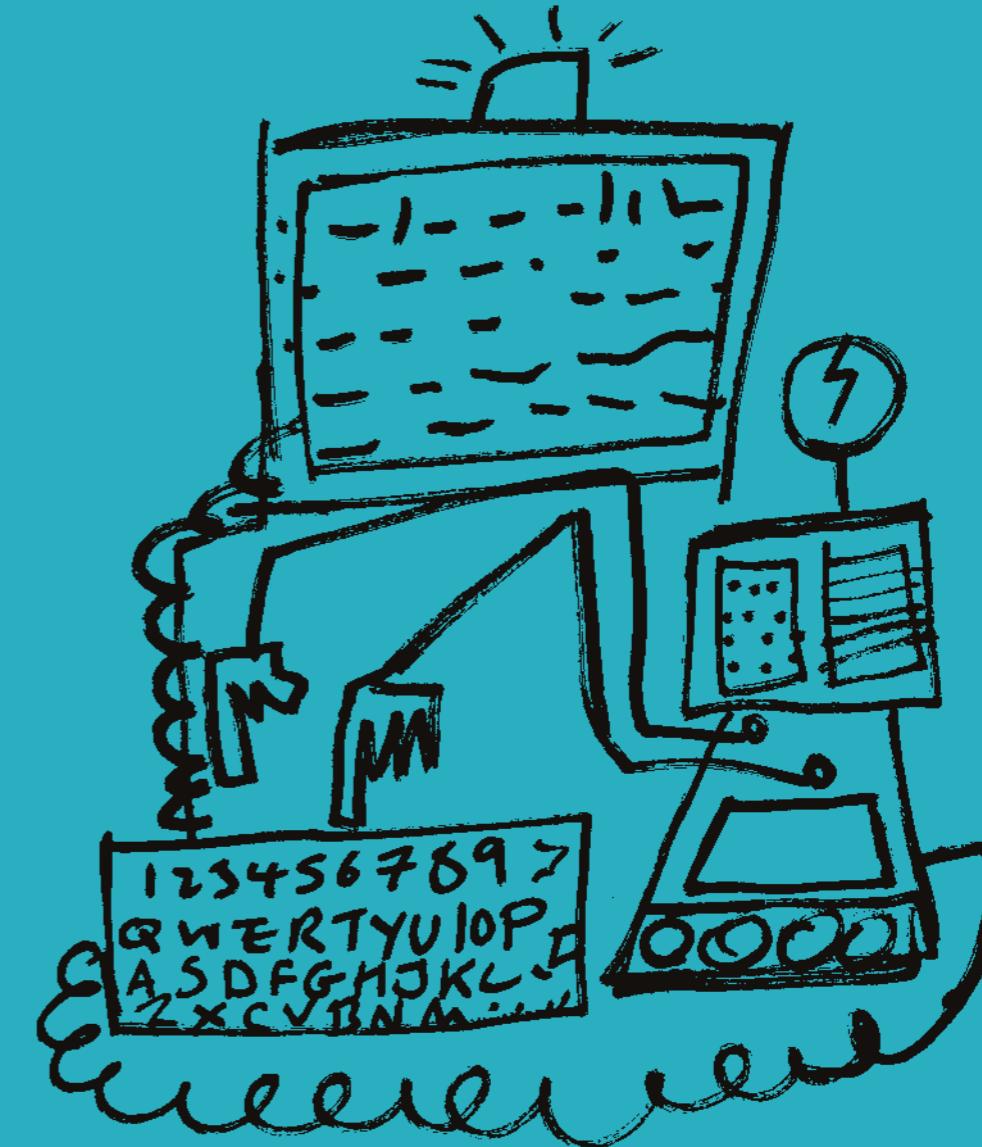
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Now, there is something to be said about giving you time back to focus more on the other aspects of creativity you're interested in, but, of course, it comes down to the age-old kicker – isn't the struggle of creating things kind of the whole point? For an independent artist, frontman of The Howlers Adam Young, AI is the antithesis of creation. "Music, like any art, is informed by experience, emotion, understanding – or lack thereof. Music is about connecting with the consumer by shared experience – and by definition, a computer cannot feel those things. It cannot accurately reflect human experience, and so has no place in creating works of art. Of course, technically it can – but wherein lies the meaning?".

Running the risk of equating struggle with artistic credibility, AI technically shouldn't be able to create emotive, relatable creations. However, as more versions,

updates and add-ons become available, AI's memory is getting better. And what is memory if not experience? For some, however, the argument about morality and AI isn't even one of creativity. Job losses are "reported" (even if it's just from your friend's dad over dinner) at an alarming rate, with a media feeding-frenzy, pouncing on the anxiety surrounding it like a fresh kill.

"The idea that AI is stealing art – it can do the complete opposite, and make new things and be more creative – instead of being stuck in this cycle of everybody trying to recreate each other's work. That's the reality of the creative industries. Everyone is recreating each other's work"



Independent bands and labels are being hit big time with the introduction of AI into the music industry. "The use of AI is becoming more and more dominant particularly when commercial viability is concerned. Spotify, for example, has an AI arm that comprises a number of writers that use AI to create instrumental style compositions. Then, they place this work into their own editorial playlists, effectively eliminating the opportunity for non-AI creators". For Adam, corporations using this technology are supplanting the community it's supposed to work for, taking away vital chances for independent artists to be heard or bolstered, and in a way, taking away means of income. And that's what it all boils down to. Money. "The world we live in is motivated by profit, and making it quicker and quicker. We've already seen the sanitization of expression in favour of cheaper production: architecture, fashion, food. Art is no exception - all three major labels have AI wings. The world's biggest distributor has AI employees".

Despite working – or not working – our way through this time of uncertainty, Sam believes the opposite is true. AI, with its accessibility and capability, allows art and the jobs associated with it to be more attainable to those who may not have had a foot in the door, so to speak. It all feeds into what he calls democratising art creation.

Sam says, "We haven't seen the full positive outcomes that will come of it yet. It's a privilege to be able to do a photoshoot, most people can't afford to do that. So I want to see what a person without access to money, studio space, models or crew – what are they making? We're going to see all these voices, all these visualised ideas, of people that didn't have a voice before or didn't have an output for it."

Not only positive for more marginalised art communities, but Sam believes that using AI to separate himself via the medium of

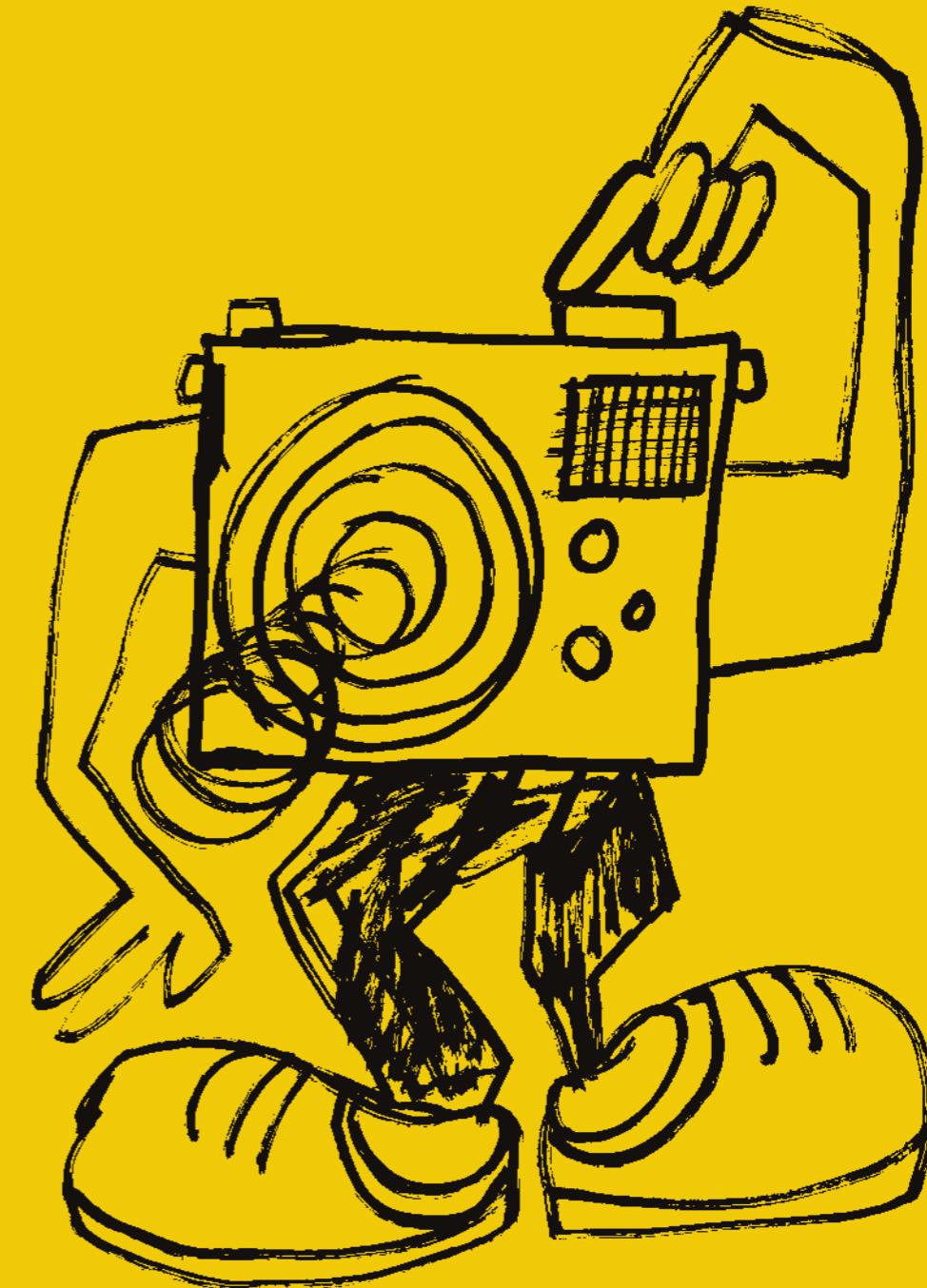
creativity has actually helped secure jobs. When sending and receiving pitches, he would see the same Pinterest images in all of them. "The same shit! Every mood board. I haven't pitched for anything without every single piece of artwork in it being custom-made. Aimed, targeted, bespoke and on purpose".

In an era where originality seems to be a lost art form, could AI then be the knight in coded armour? Is the reason *Everything Everywhere All At Once* has fully cemented itself in my brain as the only original film in the past decade because of how it used technology; harnessed technology to create something new? Instead of relying on the traditional. The known. And we're about to be able to create this for ourselves. When Sora, OpenAI's new video model is released - we're bound to see drastic change. Like Paul Trillo, the ability to feed it two or three-page prompts, and the generator to cycle through and understand it to create seamless, realistic and gloriously cinematic shots is incomprehensible. But absolutely feasible.

So, yes. The future of AI is scary.

It's uncertain and it's full of misinformation and misinterpretation, especially when we're talking about it in the context of morality in the creative space. Whether or not jobs will be replaced or whether personal creativity will lose out to profits, it's not yet to say - but, if there's one thing that's true, it's that we've moved away from a time of innocence on the internet. These technological, artistic advancements are still a relatively new thing that we have to deal with, but they're absolutely, resolutely not going anywhere. AI is something that we'll have to learn to adapt to. It's a re-education process, and there's always a cultural change to every revolution.

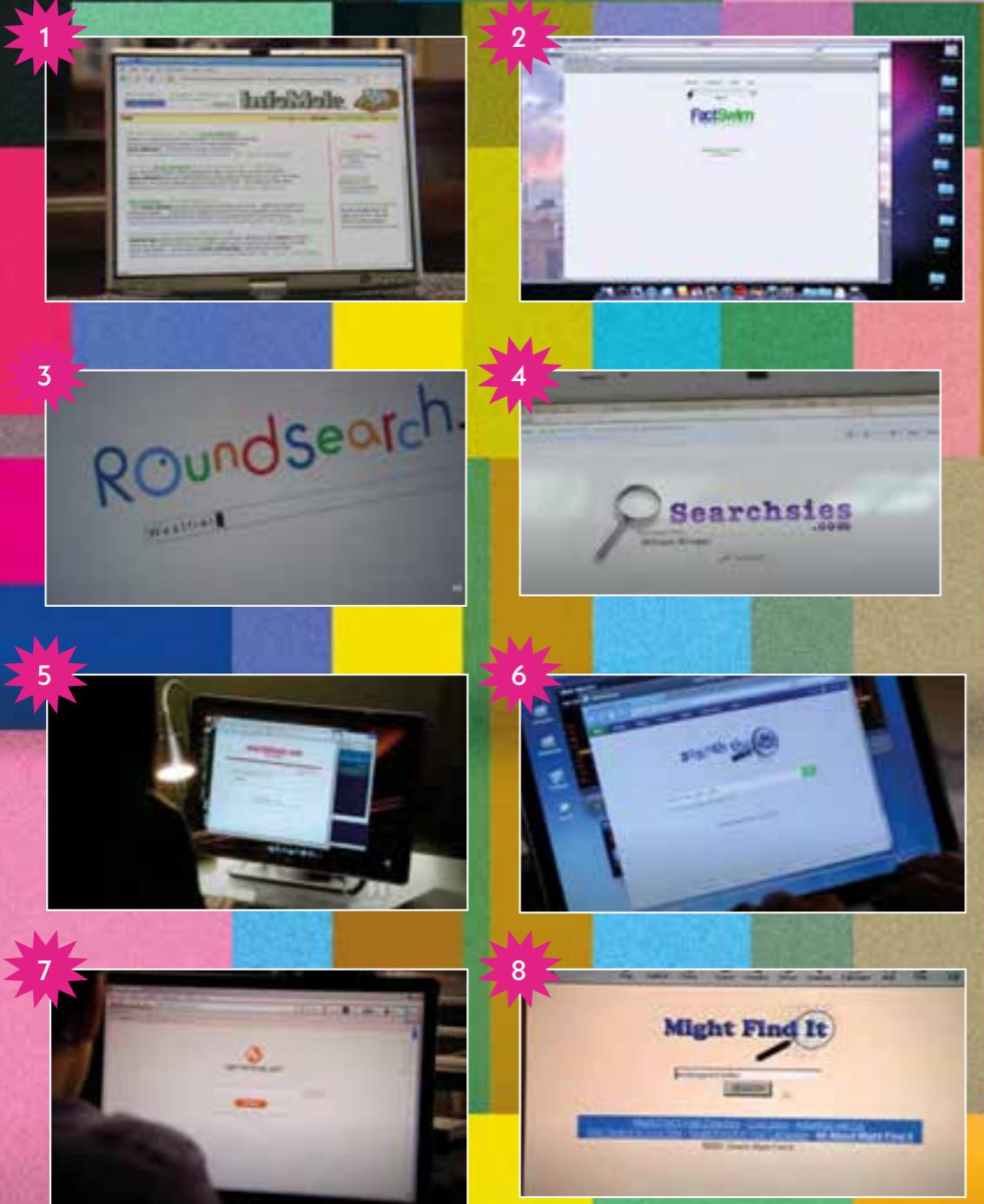
There's always an adjustment period, and it looks like we're in ours. *ralph*



Need a bargain bin Google?

You're in the right place, mate.

Can you guess which productions made up their own moody search engines instead of paying for a license? Answers at the bottom of the page. Don't believe us? Bing it!



POPCORN PIRATE

Our favourite online reviewer gives us their opinion on... some Instagram accounts

"I'd like to contribute to Ralph," I said. "What can I do?" I'm into film and literature, I can wax lyrical about feminism, parenthood, comedy, cooking...

"I can research like a pro," I said. "What do you think?" Apparently, the editor wanted a non-clickable, typed out guide to some randomly selected Instagram accounts, because famously the internet is brilliant IN PRINT.

Still, if you don't have reception where you are and you're missing that scroll, you're going to love this short guide to these accounts:

The Crisp Master @crisp_master

"Photos of my early 90s crisp packet collection."

Nostalgia, but make it packets of crisps... For a brief period in the '90s it was popular to put crisp packets in the oven and shrink them to make earrings. Anyone who claims it wasn't this planet's finest decade must have missed this. The Crisp Master knows.

Matthew & Paul @matthewandpaul

"Two guys and a guide dog"

Also, quite a few cups. Matthew is a prankster (occasionally) dressed as a hot dog. Paul is almost completely blind and has a guide dog called Mister Maple. In the wrong hands this account would be dark AF but in reality it's this very sweet guy pranking his very sweet and almost completely blind husband and hilarity ensues. MATTHEW!

Teppei Kojima @teppei_kojima501

小島 鉄平

Contemporary Bonsai Producer

In 2023 I misjudged the vibe of a summer fair in east London (where I don't live) and arrived at a small hall run by the community (who I don't know) having swung five glorious pints of IPA in the sun (which I cannot handle). The next day I found out I had joined the E17 Bonsai Appreciation Society since (luckily for my overdraft) none of the trees on display were for sale. It was a tiny Japanese Maple that absolutely did me in. So fucking cute.

Ice Cream 07 @ice.cream_07

"アイスクリーム図鑑"
*Ice cream encyclopaedia

There's something universal about ice creams. This account is Japanese, and although the translation is available, it's not necessary because there's pics of ice creams. Still, it's worth clicking translate because although I'm sure in its native language the reviews are sensible, the AI translations are often abstract AF.

"I ate it from the beginning to the end."

The Tiny Italian @thetinyitalian

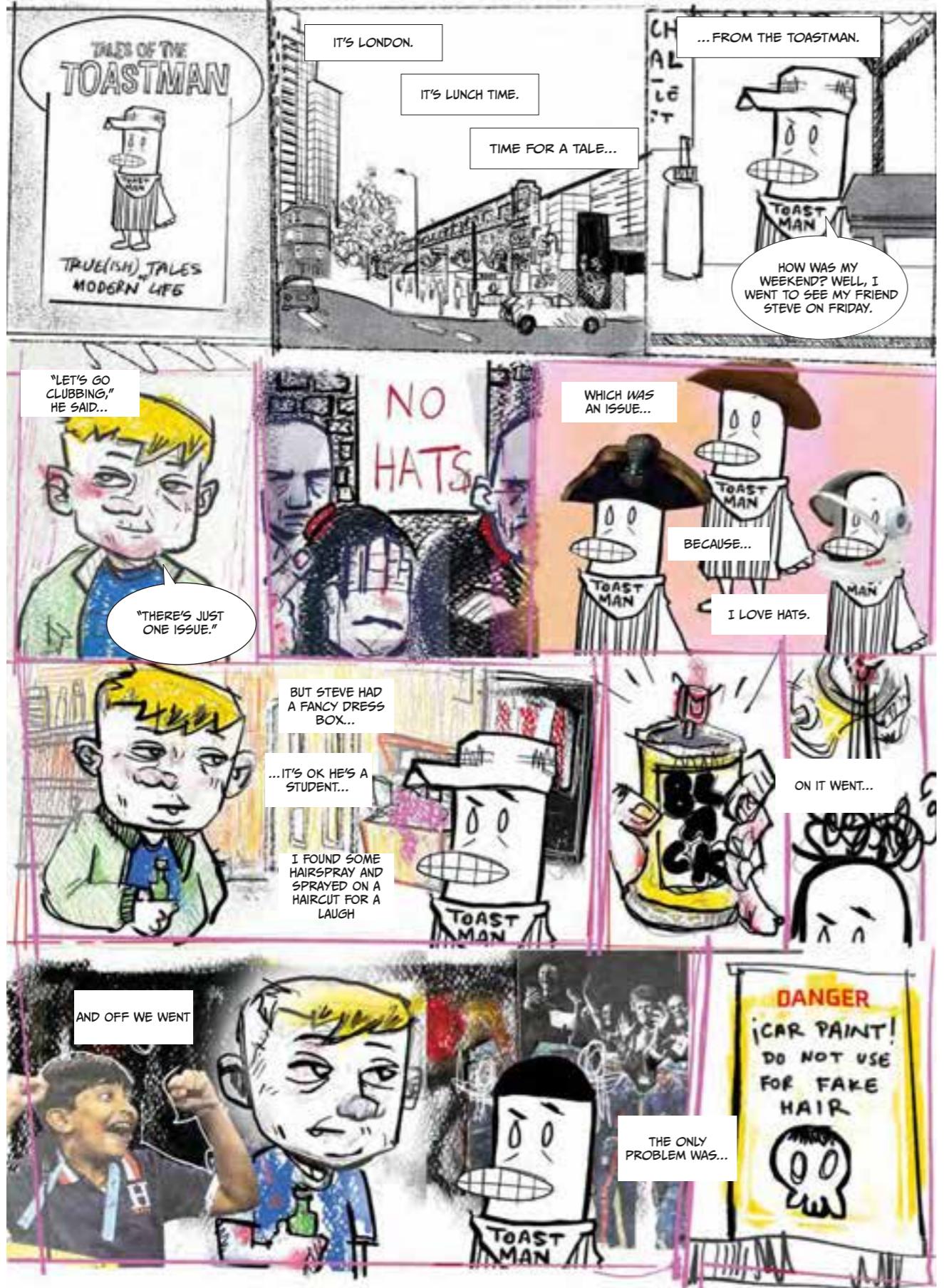
"Paola Maggiulli 🇮🇹 Self Care Cookery Teacher"

I'd never thought about it before watching Paola teach self-care through cooking, but there could be a deep affinity between southern Italy and Essex. I think it's the unique combination of compassion, lipstick and beans.

Unicorn Stew @theunicornstew

"Digging up weird and wonderful food from history"

In the seemingly endless crossover of culinary wannabes and people with phones, the average insta is awash with dirty hands squeezing meats, ASMR hellscapes of chopping, chewing and sizzling, fast cuts of cubed carrots and proper chefs being mean to people with sheet pans. Don't get me wrong, I'm watching with the best of them, but once in a while, JUST OCCASIONALLY it's nice to actually learn something. Pause that thumb for Unicorn Stew; a unique blend of sensible, historical, educational and edible. He makes the Last Supper, he swamps an egg for Jane Austen's White Soup and he handles a sheep's head to recreate the first Burns Night supper, *spoiler - it makes eye contact, it's a bit much... I couldn't find anything about him boiling magic horses so I guess his name is Stew. Well done, Stew.





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