Fire Island

Arcade Fire's Toronto Island performance encompasses their career.

Arcade Fire's Win Butler performs at the Toronto Island concert. *TOM CARDOSO/THE VARSITY*

Luke Savage
VARSITY STAFF

The sun was setting and the air was sweltering as Arcade Fire took the stage at Toronto's Center Island on August 14. Following a charged performance by local favourites The Sadies and a soulful, exuberant set by newcomer Janelle Monae, the Montreal band stepped out to thunderous applause before playing eighteen songs spanning their entire career.

Having released their third studio album *The Suburbs* earlier in August, this was the first time many of the songs had been performed live in Toronto, and the island concert's huge crowd was a mix of young and old, urban, suburban, and rural. I discovered that several of the people standing next to me throughout the performance had travelled from Woodstock, Ontario: a smallish city situated in the province's agricultural heartland — and also the biggest town nearby during much of my childhood.

On one side, Woodstock had an ever-struggling mall, which chain stores would briefly colonize before abandoning due to poor business. By the time I stopped frequenting the city after moving to Stratford for high school, the emaciated concrete structures of the strip had been completely abandoned, while the other side of the city had exploded with growth. Walmarts, Best Buys, Future Shops, and McDonalds' had sprung from the earth, bringing with them a burgeoning sprawl of urban development. Columns of identical homes had sprouted like dandelions and the city's old boundaries disappeared. Like in so many other cities across North America, this growth was rudely interrupted by the toppling of the global financial pyramid in 2008.

Bust and boom, boom and bust.

Win Butler, a native of a similar sprawl outside of Houston, Texas, who has fronted the Arcade Fire since its formation in 2003, once commented that there was something deeply suburban about the band's music. "I think we have a drive to find a semblance of universality, which to me seems innate to kids from the suburbs. You relate to different kinds of things than someone who grew up in a super-rural environment or in a really dense big city, where there's an actual culture."

This was in 2004, predating *Funeral*, the album that propelled the Arcade Fire to success. Yet each record the band has produced has increasingly affirmed these words: aesthetically unbound to any particular musical haven, instead fluctuating within a pastiche of different themes, moods, and instrumentations.

Funeral is an often dark, yet ultimately uplifting album, conceived during a year when several of the band members' relatives passed away in tragic succession. *Neon Bible*, the follow-up which emerged three years later, blends in its title evocations of the most synthetic and the most sacred, while its sounds layer the earthy textures of *Funeral* with both the electronic buzz of synthesizers and the hallowed hum of church organs. *The Suburbs*, the band's newest creation, and the centerpiece of its Toronto Island show, is no less expansive, and even more ambitious.

Like the real-world sprawls in Woodstock and Houston — idyllic but sculpted with sterile precision — The Suburbs juxtaposes feelings of serenity with desolation and emptiness.

Inspired by fraternal band-mates William and Win Butler's childhood in the Houston sprawl, the record uses suburbia as a canvas for an exploration of consumerism, urban existence, and modernity. Like *Funeral* the album is heavily self-referential, with particular themes, melodies, and lyrics recurring across its sixteen tracks. But unlike *Funeral*, in which these connections felt somewhat spurious, there is a real structure to *The Suburbs*, making it the most effective Arcade Fire record to date: the opening title track is a true conceptual preamble to the rest of the record in a way that "Neighbourhood #1 (Tunnels)," the opening track from Funeral, wwas not.

The album opens with a jovial but vaguely dissonant chord progression as Butler sings:

In the suburbs I
I learned to drive
And you told me we'd never survive
Grab your mother's keys we're leavin'

You always seemed so sure
That one day we'd fight in
In a suburban world
your part of town gets minor
So you're standin' on the opposite shore
But by the time the first bombs fell
We were already bored

These opening stanzas, with their simultaneously sublime and dystopian overtones, set the tone for the rest of the album, which wavers between oppositional moods and emotions, sometimes meshing them together. Like the real-world sprawls in Woodstock and Houston, idyllic but sculpted with sterile precision, *The Suburbs* juxtaposes feelings of serenity with desolation and emptiness.

At the Toronto Island concert, the band played much of *The Suburbs* along with older material, with relentless energy and a powerful, symphonic sound. The rendition of the *Funeral* classic "Rebellion (Lies)" prompted the entire audience to repeat the melodic refrain dozens of times after the band finished playing. "Wake Up" was accompanied by a vibrant light-show which briefly turned night into day. The album's final track (save the short epilogue "The Suburbs, Continued") also appeared near the end of the concert. The pulsating "Sprawl II, Mountains Beyond Mountains" is a soaring sketch of a never-ending suburbia spilling over the horizon. Despite its theme, the song is somehow uplifting: the gloomy suburban wasteland left by the booms and busts of the past 50 years never sounded so glorious.

They heard me singing and they told me to stop
Quit these pretentious things and just punch the clock
Sometimes I wonder if the world's so small
Can we ever get away from the sprawl?
Living in the sprawl
Dead shopping malls rise like mountains beyond mountains
And there's no end in sight
I need the darkness, someone please cut the lights

Hawksley Workman
MILK
Hawksley Workman's latest album Milk breaches new territory for the indie-glam-rock musician. Following the January release of his darker grunge album Meat, Milk takes on a completely different vibe, experimenting with synthesizers and quick-lip lyrics to produce a euro-pop sound. While Milk does not number among the best of Workman's twelve albums, in taking a leap out of his comfort zone, he comes out with an album that stands on its own.

Milk's concept is bold, unabashed lust and Workman's use of strong rhythmic beats only emphasizes this theme. The album has a few softer and mellow tracks, like "Devastating," a song that caters to Workman's romantic, rather than his lustful side. For the most part, however, Milk is filled with fast-paced tunes and explicit lyrics that are clearly meant for sweaty gyrating on the dance floor.

The album has a rocky start, with many tracks that begin to dwindle and tire less than a minute in (the opening track "Animal Behaviour" being foremost among these). Milk starts to pick up steam half way through as Workman finds a happy medium between his new synth-based sound and the alternative musical style of his previous work, producing something more than the generic synthesized rhythms pumped out of club speakers. The album hits its peak at its finale with up-beat, infectious tracks like "Snow Angel" and "Not Your Parents' Music," tunes that are more than likely to soar high on the charts this year.
—ARIEL LEWIS

Dangermouse and Sparklehorse
DARK NIGHT OF THE SOUL
Much has changed since this highly collaborative and ambitious package first appeared on record store shelves over a year ago as a blank CD-R and a David Lynch helmed book of photography. Some contributors (Iggy Pop, The Flaming Lips' Wayne Coyne) have made, respectively, fascinating and career defining records. Reversely, some, (Dangermouse & James Mercer) have continued to work together to produce a surprisingly underwhelming album, and two others (Mark Linkous, who effectively is Sparklehorse, and Vic Chesnutt) have committed suicide.

These recent recordings, as well as the inevitable revisiting of Linkous' and Chesnutt's discographies, alter Dark Night of the Soul into a surprisingly, if not disconcertingly, easy listen. The production flourishes of Dangermouse, while ornate and beautiful in their own right, don't provide an affecting backdrop for the album's intensely personal lyrical arc. Wayne Coyne on "Revenge" and Jason Lytle on "Jakyub" and "Everytime I'm With You" are too enigmatic in their own right to fully submerge themselves into the collaboration and all three tracks end up sounding like Flaming Lips or Grandaddy B-sides.

On "Little Girl" and "Angel's Harp" performances from Julian Casablancas and Blank Francis are uncharacteristically stale. Only the title track, in which David Lynch sings (Chants? Gargles?) a distorted hymn over top of a hynotic film-noir loop, seems to capture the haunted intimacy and retro re-appropriation that make (or made) Linkous and Dangermouse such singular artistic voices in the first place. The whole record leaves me feeling kind of etherized, which perhaps, in light of Linkous' untimely death, may have been the initiative all along.
—NICK MCKINLAY

M.I.A.
MAYA
From the poptress who brought us "Planes Planes", the world's favorite truffle french-fry-eating-artist envelopes her third album in a caucophony of noise that's sure to shock rather than please. The melodies of "Teqkilla" and "Story To Be Told" are almost undetectable beneath lavish layers of epileptic beats.

That being said, when M.I.A puts down her guns and addresses her man as opposed to the Man in "XXXO," the track comes out crystal clear: a perfect mixture of the unexpected and listenable qualities that solidified her reputation as a popstar in past hits. "Born Free" however, while being more to the credit of Suicide's "Ghost Rider" than M.I.A's musical prowess, nonetheless demonstrates she can hone in her vocals, and offers listeners a heavy, violent breath of fresh air.

When disregarding the talents of producers Diplo and Rusko, she seems to fall flat on her face, pimpled with non-sensical trivialities and what seems to be a desperate attempt to justify her recent "life choices" with experimentation. "Meds and Feds", might be her album's shining moment in this experimentation, but a killer opening riff is tripped by the introduction of sonic disunity. Soon it all comes back together, guaranteeing concert-goers at least one genuine fist-pumper.

The rest of the album falls short. While M.I.A once demonstrated the skills necessary to rise above her peers, it now seems she's on her own ladder, alone, avoided for fear of being contaminated with that shallow, loopholed fuss. Restraint imposed by third-parties would undoubtedly do her—and our ears—some good.
—DANIEL PORTORARO

Art, Hipsters, Bikes, Oh My!

Cycling AND aesthetics? Monthy art crawl has both!

Alana Leprich
VARSITY CONTRIBUTOR

Spinning along on my white roadster, I slowed my pace and approached the main gate of Trinity Bellwoods Park on West Queen West, and was greeted by a flock of artsy-types with bikes. There were shaved heads, big glasses, and a woman doing an impromptu performance-piece consisting of falling to the grassy ground.

I assumed that I was in the right place for Art Spin, a free monthly art crawl, in which participants ride in a team of bicycles to get to each gallery, guided each month by a guest curator or artist.

Participants met at Trinity Bellwoods at 6:30 p.m. This month's leaders were Michael Paré, the president and founder of Queer West, a weeklong series celebrating queer arts, and Rui Pimenta who is the founder, coordinator, curator, and leader of the crawl. The two explained that participants of the art crawl are led to a variety of galleries in the city, where they are greeted by the curators and forced to interact with a group of art-enthusiast strangers.

At just past 7 p.m., approximately 20 wanna-be art connoisseurs pedaled into the sunset. The group was made up of an eclectic mix of individuals: largely students, couples, professionals, and amateurs. Following the leader, we did a lap of the park before hitting our first gallery, Lausberg Contemporary. One of two global locations, Lausberg is unique in Toronto, featuring local artists alongside international artists. Their idea is to foster our own scene while keeping in touch with the global. Greeted by Pimenta's explanation of the space's mandate — and some well-appreciated refreshments (no free booze, sadly) — we were encouraged to explore the summer exhibition, a collection of sleek, non-representational pieces by various artists. Although fairly subdued and undemanding (read: boring), it was like wading into a kiddy pool of the toured galleries.

Our second stop was InterAccess, a space focusing on new media works. As Pimenta, the fearless leader of the gaggle of cycling art enthusiasts, explained, this space is an important creative hub for digital art, featuring a gallery on the second floor and workshop on the first. Their latest exhibition, Kunstkammer/Wunderkammer, seeks to mimic a cabinet of curiosities, a European practice in which oddities and artifacts are collected and displayed. In this exhibit, however, antique oddities have been replaced with eclectic new media pieces - a banana plant which emits noise when petted, jellyfish-like constructions which gyrate when exposed to sound, a small canvas painting with moving gears – which are displayed in the dim lighting of the second floor. Several of the pieces demand engagement, assigning the viewer an active role. Sometimes you are required to do more than stare at art, tilt your head, step back and sigh. This exhibit was my favorite of the evening: visual enough to catch my attention, sinister enough to make me ask, weird enough to keep me — like a shadowy playground.

Show and Tell Gallery is a quiet but modest space, currently showing two artists — Anthony Lister and Niall McClelland — in a whimsical double-feature exploring such ideas as punishment and reward systems and perpetuated adolescence, with a tongue-in-cheek sass all-too-often absent from recent contemporary art.

PM Gallery boasts the latest works of Keith W. Bentley's. The gallery owner and curator, a fan of Bentley's work, explained his somewhat macabre process — due to his unique fascination with Victorian 'hair art', Bentley is known for working extensively with hair as a creative material. This latest collection is a series of pieces constructed from found art and horse hair. The pieces aim to immortalize bodies which have since passed, embracing the morbid and calling attention to the unnatural. I found the pieces affected me exactly in the ways the owner had warned: I was simultaneously attracted and repulsed. The black hair against the white walls was visually striking. The idea that these once living creatures had been replaced and used like our earlier 'readymades' is conceptually haunting. Looking at one piece, I turned to a viewer on my right and remarked it gave me the creeps -"you know, kind of like when you pull that gross clump of hair from the shower drain?". But then I realized he was bald, and couldn't relate.

The evening ended at a quiet bar, locking up our velocipedes and heading for the patio. The group who sat before me, from all walks of life, were incredibly down to earth, affable, keen to listen and eager to tell stories. Nothing breaks the ice between people like hair art.

Art Spin is a monthly art crawl on bicycles. It happens on the last Thursday of the month, and will run until September. Art Spin is a free event, and open to anyone regardless of cycling ability. `

Dolph Lundgren, the Great God Kratos

Lover, fighter, God. Punisher, Drago, Expendable. Pecs, biceps, packages. Yes, the Varsity sits down with the legend.

Will Sloan
ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR

Dolph Lundgren and Brandon Lee are hiding in a house, surrounded by enemies, trying to think of a plan, in the 1991 film *Showdown in Little Tokyo*. "We're in trouble here, champ," says Lee. "There're more bad guys here than we have bullets."

Lundgren, shirtless in skintight shorts, hands Lee some ammunition. Lee watches Lundgren stride across the room, then cocks his gun. "Just in case we get killed," says Lee, "I wanted to tell you…"

Lundgren looks up from stuffing weapons in his belt.

"You have the biggest dick I've ever seen on a man."

Lundgren pauses, and smiles slightly. "Thanks. I don't know what to say."

Lee grasps his gun. "How 'bout, 'Don't get killed'?"

Lundgren picks up two swords and holds them in both hands. We see him from a frontal view. His abs are deep; his pecs are round and hard. "Don't get killed."

Nineteen years later, I am shaking hands with the owner of said dick, at a roundtable interview where he is promoting Sylvester Stallone's new action film *The Expendables*. Forbiddingly tall, with a huge chest and a face carved out of marble, Dolph Lundgren is one of the few action stars who looks even bigger in person. He is also one of the few members of the Expendables who doesn't appear surgically mutilated. At 52, he suggests a pumped-up late period Robert Redford, but with a heavily-lined face and bleach-white hair recalling Klaus Kinski.

"Let me ask about keeping your musculature," says a reporter. "How much do you work out on a daily basis?"

"Well, it depends. If I fly to Canada at 1 and get up at 5:30 to go and do a talk show, then I don't get time to work out that much, but I do about four or five times a week. I try to do martial arts twice a week, and I try to do weights twice a week, that's kind of my basic. And then I'll add another day of martial arts or I'll add a day of cardio or I'll do some more weights…"

His partially unbuttoned shirt shows a smooth, tanned chest. His shirt clings to his torso as if about to burst. I can see his nipples.

* * *

"He's starred in more action movies than almost anybody else, maybe except Clint Eastwood, so he knows a lot," says Lundgren of his *Expendables* director, Sylvester Stallone. "It could be something simple like, for instance, 'Dolph, just use your charm in this scene. You don't have to act. Leave that to De Niro or whatever. Just be charming.' He has very simple, effective things that he can do as an actor. Y'know, you don't have to go into, well, 'What's your backstory? What's your [character's] childhood?'"

Lundgren earned immortality as Ivan Drago, the steroid-pumped Russian Communist in *Rocky IV* (1985), another Stallone-directed film. To create the perfect fighter, Drago's Soviet handlers worked him day and night, draining him of all humanity. He was a walking vessel, a guinea pig for drugs and exercise, showing no remorse even when killing Apollo Creed in the ring. "If he dies… he dies."

In the training montage, Drago reached his physical peak. While Rocky chopped wood and climbed snowy hills in isolated, backwoods Russia, Drago let his sinister Soviet handlers use punishing scientific experiments to enhance his perfect body. Drago in a little red jumper, his pecs cleaving as he strains to lift a weight… Drago's ass cheeks, firm and stationary as his legs worked the exercise machines… Drago's shoulder glistening as it takes a steroid shot… these were the images that made Lundgren a star.

When Rocky and Drago finally met in the ring, the light refracted from both their sweaty, crevviced bodies, but it was the blonde, fair-skinned Drago who appeared to glow. Drago was a "super athlete," said his handlers. They might have added, "And a super man."

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"Yeah, there is a bit of healthy competition," says Lundgren of the *Expendables* cast — a tough-guy rogues gallery including Jason Statham, Jet Li, Mickey Rourke, Terry Crews, and, briefly, Arnold Schwarzenegger. "You're next to other guys who have their own movies, or may be bigger than you, or better actors, or bigger, with bigger arms, or have more money, or they run the state, whatever it is. But, y'know, everybody has some shortcomings, and I think in that company everybody gets to be a bit of an underdog and feel some of their own inadequacies, and I think that's a good thing. Everybody feels they're part of a team." But Lundgren is not homogenous with other men. Even among the Expendables he looks superhuman, towering over Stallone and Statham, and beating even Li in a martial arts battle. He is more than just a man.

Nowhere is the Man v. Lundgren dichotomy greater than *Masters of the Universe* (1987), Cannon Films' *Conan/Star Wars* mashup, starring Lundgren as 'He-Man,' great warrior from the planet Eternia. Transported to 1987 Middle America, this titanic swordsman in shoulder pads and a leather speedo was surrounded by donut-eating cops and stringy-haired teens and young, rail-thin Courtney Coxes.

In *Masters of the Universe*, He-Man fights the villainous Skeletor (Frank Langella) for the Cosmic Key, which stands to make its possessor the all-powerful ruler of the universe. "KNEEL BEFORE YOUR MASTER!" says Skeletor to He-Man. "You are no longer my EQUAL! I am more than man! MORE THAN LIFE! I… AM… A… GOD!" But Skeletor receives his comeuppance, and by the end it is He-Man – the true Master of the Universe — who wields the key. Light emanates from his body, and his mighty voice can be heard across the galaxy. He has completed the transition from Man to God.

"I… HAVE… THE POWER!"

* * *

"Any actor will tell you that to play yourself is the hardest thing, because you never think you're enough," says Lundgren of the demands of playing both a complicated character and, well, 'Dolph,' the action icon. "In this case it's difficult for me because Gunner is this crazy guy who has a lot of problems, he's very flawed, he's a bit nuts — more so than I am, I think. But at the same time you want a little bit of charm to come through so that he's likable on some level, so it's that kind of balancing act."

In film after film, Lundgren faces the paradox of embodying both god and man, and in *The Punisher* (1989) we see the most unvarnished glimpse at the dark side of his persona. He is Frank Castle, a cop turned vigilante after the mob killed his family, now responsible for the deaths of 125 gangsters. He kills everyone in his path; the police are helpless to stop his wrath. A god in exile, we join him in his hideout in the city sewers, where he meditates, his sweaty, naked body dripping mud and soot. His inner monologue is despairing.

"I still talk to God sometimes. I ask him if what I'm doing is right or wrong. I'm still waiting for an answer. And until I get one, I'll be out here. And until I get one, I'll be out here. Waiting. Watching. The guilty will be punished."

In *The Expendables*, Lundgren plays the group's most unstable member, a weak-willed addict, easily manipulated by the enemy into becoming just another faceless henchman. He is the latest in a long line of Lundgren gods who fall from grace.

"You're often vanquished in films," says a reporter. "I'm thinking it takes a big man to take that over and over."

"Yes," Lundgren smiles. "What I thought was cool about the character [in *The Expendables*] is the fact that there's actually something happening to him. He doesn't just walk around with a gun and shoot people, he actually has a bit of a dilemma, and he's a flawed character, which obviously is much more interesting to play because you have something to do, something to think about when you're sitting in your trailer."

"When I see that you and Stallone and all those action guys are in a movie together," I say, "I come in with certain preconceived notions. Do you ever feel hindered or restricted by expectations? Do you look for ways to subvert them?"

"Yeah, well, it's a great genre to be in, action movies will always exist, they'll go on forever, and you have a huge audience, especially overseas where the audiences are, I think, more loyal… But obviously, yeah, you try to stretch and do things you haven't done before. As an actor, this role, even though he is the guy who blows people away, I thought, 'Yeah, look, I get to have some flaws, and play a guy who's a bit pained,' and I thought that was good. Y'know, it's enough for people to maybe take notice and see something they haven't seen before."

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In 2009's *Universal Soldier: Regeneration*, Lundgren re-visited one of his most famous roles: Andrew Scott, A/K/A 'DR13,' deceased Vietnam vet turned re-animated killing machine. Dormant since 1992's *Universal Soldier*, Andrew is reactivated to fight and destroy Luc Deveraux (Jean-Claude Van Damme), his part-man, part-machine enemy from the first film who had gone into hiding to rediscover his humanity. Andrew Scott feels no such compulsion.

Lundgren continues to work prolifically, particularly in the direct-to-DVD realm, but has never quite cracked the action A-list, perhaps because his characters lack the self-effacing humour of Sly or Arnie. We can imagine having a drink with Rocky Balboa, but Drago the fallen god seems too mythic for such mortal trifles. In many ways, Andrew Scott is the ultimate Lundgren creation: Beefy as He-Man, tragic as Gunner, emptier than Drago, with more brute force than the Punisher, and with as big a dick as the *Showdown in Little Tokyo* guy (presumably), he is Lundgren in excelsis.