

THE

Title

GOOD MEN ARE HARD TO DEFINE

SPRING
2018

THE
2ND
ISSUE



EVERYONE TAKE YOUR SEATS:

Josh Radnor's Second Act

IS ABOUT TO BEGIN



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THE CONTENTS OF THIS ISSUE WILL ADDRESS THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

SUBTITLES ON

Because culture can be like *Narcos*—you mostly get it, but a bit of translation helps

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1
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2
The answer is first, just like on *Jeopardy!*

S.T.A.G.

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A. THE HANDSOMIST²

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Q. Is there anything I can wear that says "My church is a mountain, and my communion is that hiking trail, man. But I don't go to church all that much these days, what with living in the city and all. I'm not an animal"?

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ON THE COVER

Photography: Ian Maddox
On Josh: Suit and shirt by Theory; tie by The Tie Bar



Photo: Ian Maddox

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THE NEW FRAGRANCE



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Don't Dress Like Chandler Bing

It's good advice, but is there a deeper meaning?

I REMEMBER 1998.¹ It wasn't that long ago. How could it be two decades since then? Does it go by this fast for everyone? Is my generation the only one to have aged into adulthood without passing a clear marker, some transformational doorway we pass through to become official grown-ups? Or have I just stumbled on the most obvious observation about getting older: It doesn't feel like it's happening until you realize it has?

Still, it's hard to deny that my generation is the most eagerly nostalgic cohort to come of age. It's not like other generations don't look back with fondness (#MAGA); we just do it sooner and more often. All that instant nostalgia (Remember Pokémon? Remember *Boy Meets World*? Remember Motorola Razrs and ICQ and Che Guevara T-shirts?) slows time. If the past is always with us, do we ever grow up?

Here's where I stick a thermometer into a theory to check if my take is hot enough. It is.

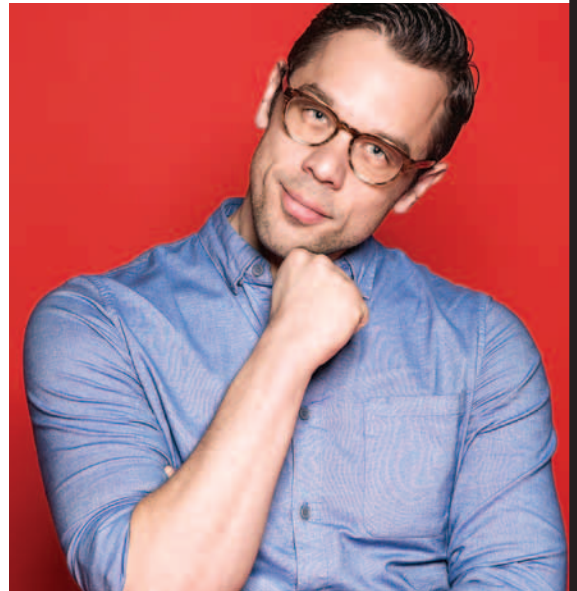
I blame fashion—specifically men's fashion.

Basically, every generation broke with the fashion of the generation before. Some natural blurring around the edges notwithstanding, you have a clear picture of how men in the 1960s dressed compared to men in the '70s and '80s. And if you watch *Friends* or *The West Wing* on Netflix,² you

can certainly see how tailoring has changed³; but still, if men today dressed as they did 20 years ago, they wouldn't actually raise that many eyebrows. At least not in the same way it would in 1998 if someone were to dress like it was 1978. I notice it myself when I wear my work uniform of jeans and a V-neck sweater: I could travel back in time 10, 15, even 20 years and still look normal.⁴

Since we don't dress all that differently from how we did in our youth, it's hard to remember we aren't in our youth. But what's the take away here? Sure, fashion hasn't changed all that much, but isn't it a chicken-and-egg sort of thing? Yes, but it can still be a good reminder to pay attention to details, because that's where change really happens. Notice the cut of your suit, the size of your belt buckle, the break in your trousers. The words you say. The rights that have been extended. The way you communicate. All those details add up to some big changes. I think it's called progress.

And yes, there's an analogy there.



1

We hope you do, too, since we've got a killer oral history about a seminal hip-hop song from exactly that time period.

2

Back when *The West Wing* was on Netflix. How cold is it that they took away the Jed Bartlet administration right when depressed liberals need him most?

3

"Hello, Mr. Tailor, sir? Please build me a suit that completely hides any shape my body has. It's 1998 and I want the silhouette of an amoeba, please."
"Certainly, sir. If you could just remove that oversized bowling shirt, with the sleeves that extend past your elbows despite it being a T-shirt, I'll take your measurements, which I'll completely ignore."

4

Well, I might "look gay," but that's only because in 1998 gay panic was all the rage. Not that there's anything wrong with that. [Only, yes, there was something wrong with that.]

Greg Hudson
Editor-in-Chief

Title

THE 2ND ISSUE

SUB

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TLES

Translating
Entertainment
and Culture

On

Re-Born Ruffian

Who says you can't feel happy singing about death? Not Luke Lalonde.

Text: Samantha Edwards



Photo: Matt Barnes



I'M 25 MINUTES into my interview with Born Ruffians' front man, Luke Lalonde and he's already talking about existential dread, the inevitability of death, the cosmos. "Tumbling down into this spiral of endless nothingness can start to freak me out, but, actually, dying can be kind of comforting in a weird way," he says, inhabiting, in that moment, every leather-clad outcast you met in high school. Lalonde speaks like a rock star, which isn't much different. He reveals that one of his earliest memories as a child is sobbing in his mom's bed after learning that when you die, that's it. "Clearly, I didn't grow up with religion," Lalonde laughs. He tells me that, even now, when he thinks about death too much, he gets "that feeling of sinking" in his chest. Sitting in this quaint coffee shop in Toronto, I'm imagining that feeling as a black hole expanding until it breaks through his rib cage.

Born Ruffians' new album, *Uncle, Duke & The Chief*, is steeped in death.¹ Paradoxically, it's also a very fun album to listen to, rife with catchy guitar melodies that swirl around the warbling keyboard, handclaps and feel-good vocal harmonies.

Some of the album's death references are obvious. In the song "Forget Me," which Lalonde wrote the day his musical hero David Bowie died, he sings "Some day a white light will come for you to comfort you" over a jaunty acoustic guitar. Other times, they're more subtle, like in the vintage-y "Working Together," which is about a couple debating terminating a pregnancy. But the references make sense; Lalonde is familiar with death. In 2015, his dad was diagnosed with cancer and spent years undergoing chemotherapy and radiation.

2018 marks the 10-year anniversary of Born Ruffians' debut album, *Red, Yellow & Blue*,² a playful collection of lo-fi, left-field rock songs that was a surprise hit. So much so that Lalonde, bassist Mitch DeRosier and drummer Steve Hamelin, who were all 21 at the time, quit school to tour it.

With *Uncle, Duke & The Chief*, the band returns to its original form. Writing the songs in a converted church in small-town Ontario and finishing in Oregon, Born Ruffians recorded the album live off the floor, using full takes instead of "Frankensteining" several clips together afterwards in the studio. Though they'd become more polished over the previous 10 years, on this album, they sounded like they were 21 years old again. "It doesn't sound like like every wrinkle is ironed out—like it has to be this masterpiece," Lalonde explains. If they liked a take, they'd use it, even if there were mistakes, he tells me.

And while a band getting back to basics is pretty standard narrative for selling a record, whether its music supports that story or not, this album is undeniably related to Born Ruffians' first breakthrough record. And not related in a mom's-best-friend-that-was-always-around-growing-up-so-you-just-called-her-"Auntie Carol"—even-though-there's-no-blood-relation kind of way but related in the way you're related to your baby pictures. These songs are confident and sharp while still maintaining the playful, herky-jerky sound that launched the band's career a decade ago.

That new-but-old sound ends up working as a counterbalance to all the death that snuck into the album. Staying young keeps death at bay. Rebirth steals death's sting. These songs make you feel like you can live forever.

¹
OK, it's not as dark thematically as, say, Neil Young's 1975 album, *Tonight's the Night*, written in the months after two of Young's close friends died of drug overdoses, or Mount Eerie's bleak and beautiful *A Crow Looked at Me*, in which singer-songwriter Phil Elverum openly grieves the loss of his wife. But death weaves itself throughout the album.

²
Lalonde hasn't listened to *Red, Yellow & Blue* for over 10 years. When he thinks about the band's first catalogue, he feels the same way that one might when reading a cringe-worthy old diary that dredges up buried memories.

Take Two

2018: The Year of Second Chapters

Text: Rick Mele

L I AM NEESON becoming an action hero in his late 50s. Robert Downey Jr. going from uninsurable to Hollywood's highest-paid leading man.¹ José Bautista transforming from a fringe utility guy into the Jays' bat-flipping super-slugger. Tide Pods going from laundry detergent to millennials' snack of choice. (Sorry, Bagel Bites.) That's what we mean by

"second chapter." Basically, a second chance. 2018 is an opportunity to collectively turn the page after the seemingly unending horrors of 2017. So here's to the pop culture second chapters we're keeping an eye on this year. Because it's never too late to turn the page.



It's OK to Laugh at John Cena Again

WHEN JOHN CENA first started at the WWE, he was—how do we put this politely to a six-foot-one, 250-pound behemoth?—kind of a joke. With his corny backwards hat and chains, Celtics jerseys and jorts and terrible, terrible raps, Cena looked like he'd gotten kicked out of the Funky Bunch for giving Marky Mark body image issues.

So Cena was forced to do what every successful wrestler has done: rewrite his persona. Within a few years, he was the good guy. The champ. The face of the WWE. Hollywood came calling. And they did what seemed to make the most logical sense: They made Cena an action hero. (It worked for The Rock. And Hulk Hogan...kind of.)

But, well, when it came to Cena—star of *The Marine* and *12 Rounds*—no one cared.² So, just like in the ring, Cena had to reinvent himself (again). This time, he wouldn't take himself quite so seriously. He poked fun at his meathead image in *Trainwreck*. Traded one-liners with Tina Fey in *Sisters*. Hosted *SNL*. Went from cracking bones to cracking jokes. Now he's got a starring role in *Blockers*, alongside Leslie Mann and Ike Barinholtz. John Cena's funny again. Only this time, it's intentional.



An Incomplete List
of Everything

Andrew W.K.

Has Been Up to Since
His Last Album

IT'S BEEN almost a decade since the self-described “King of Partying” released his last studio album. His latest, *You're Not Alone*, dropped recently. Here's a sampling of what the most interesting man in music has been up to in between.

Co-owned a nightclub/concert venue in New York City.

Hosted four seasons of a kids' game show, *Destroy Build Destroy*.

Released *Gundam Rock*, an album made up entirely of covers of music from the Gundam anime series and available only in Japan.

Gave a seminar at a My Little Pony fan convention.

Became the unofficial mascot of the Pittsburgh Penguins' back-to-back Stanley Cup wins.

Was reportedly named the U.S. Cultural Ambassador to Bahrain.³

Set a world record for “Longest Drum Session in a Retail Store.”

Landed a book deal to write *The Party Bible*.

Guest lectured at Oxford on “The Philosophy of Partying.”

Writes a weekly advice column in *The Village Voice*, covering such topics as “How Do I Become a Good Person?” and “What's Better? Nachos or Tacos?”

Hosted a weekly show on Glenn Beck's radio network.

Formed his own political party, The Party Party, to “unify and unite” the American people.⁴

Toured the United States with “The Power of Partying,” a concert/motivational speaking series.

Offered to pay a U.K. fan's speeding ticket after he was pulled over while partying too hard to Andrew W.K.'s latest single, “Music Is Worth Living For.”

DON'T CALL IT A COMEBACK

Tracy Morgan's second chapter already happened: The comedian seamlessly transitioned from stealing scenes on *SNL* to doing the same on *30 Rock*. Then, in 2014, a tragic car accident put Morgan in a coma and took the life of his friend and fellow comic James McNair. It's been a long, hard road back to comedy for Morgan, but his *second* second chapter is finally around the corner thanks to *The Last O.G.*, a new sitcom co-created by Jordan Peele and co-starring *Girls Trip*'s Tiffany Haddish. It's time for Morgan to get back to being one of the funniest people on TV.

MORGAN ON THE ACCIDENT

It's been said that comedy equals tragedy plus time. Here's Morgan's best bit from his 2017 Netflix special, *Staying Alive*.



“Everybody knows I got hit by the fucking Walmart truck. It could've been worse—I could have got hit by a Bob's Discount Furniture Truck. You know they ain't got no fucking money.”

Where's Jon Hamm's Second Chapter?

ONCE THE LIVING embodiment of prestige TV, Jon Hamm has been searching for his second act ever since *Mad Men* went off the air three years ago. He's tried the square-jawed leading man thing, he's done comedy on both the big and small screens and he's popped up in blockbusters and small indies. He's played a handsome baseball scout, a handsome FBI agent, a handsome secret agent and even a handsome hologram. (Are we sensing a pattern?) It's not that the man hasn't worked. He just hasn't found his groove yet.

This spring, Hamm will play another broken—and handsome, let's not forget handsome—man tortured by a tragic past in *Beirut*. But past performance has always been a poor indicator of future success. In reality, Hamm's most compelling post-*Mad Men* roles have come when he's played jerks, villains, the bad guy—from his Emmy-nominated turn as a self-absorbed cult leader in *Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt* (which was funnier than it sounds) to his greasy, neck-tattooed bank robber in last year's *Baby Driver* (which was more effective than it sounds). So forget trying to chase the ghost of Don Draper. Maybe it's time for Jon Hamm to break bad. He's already tried everything else.



1

Also known as “the Reverse Charlie Sheen.”

2

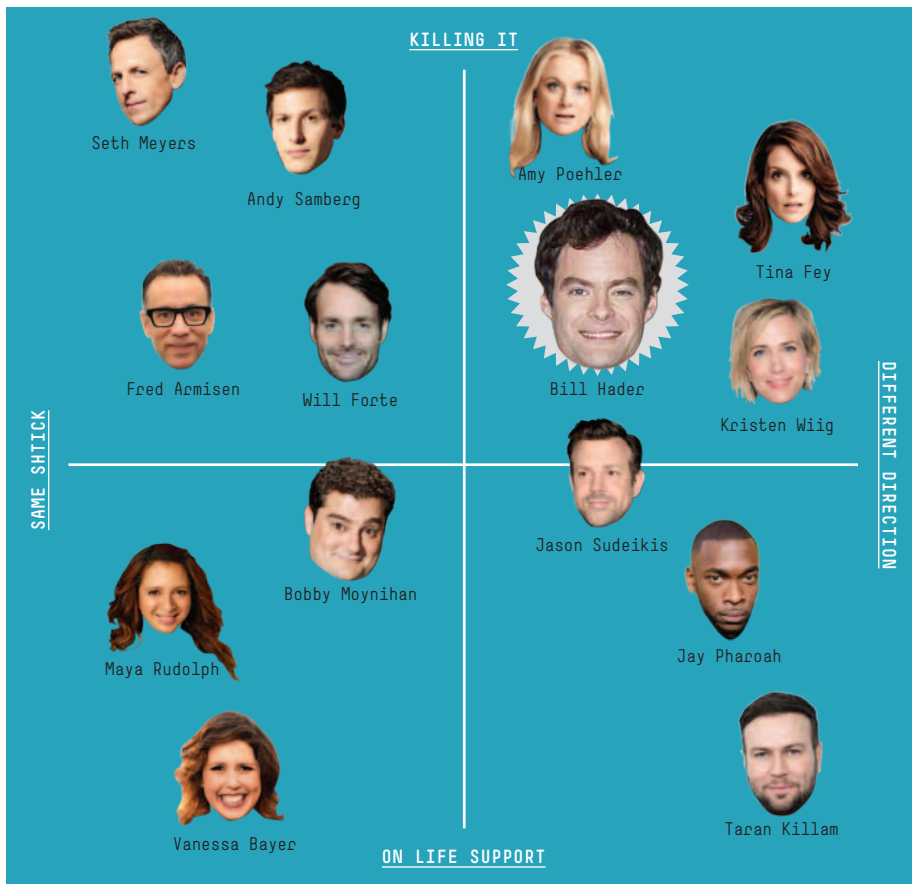
This actually shouldn't have been surprising: The list of wrestlers who failed to make it as actors is substantial. Bill Goldberg, *Universal Soldier: The Return*; Triple H, *Inside Out*; Steve Austin, who has starred in 15 films and had a recurring role on *Nash Bridges*—so take that, Dwayne Johnson.

3

This one isn't actually true.

4

Spoiler alert: It didn't work.



Giant Shoes to Fill

THE NEXT TIME you find yourself feeling ancient in a group of bubbly Gen Zers, mention André the Giant. If they recognize him at all, it'll be as the kindly brute from *The Princess Bride* or, maybe, as a character that Jason Segel has played. (They probably don't even know he's the face on the OBEY logo.) That's a damn shame. In the '70s and '80s, even putting his mammoth heft aside, nobody loomed larger. André single-handedly heaved the WWF into the popular consciousness, palled around with fellow icons like Wilt Chamberlain and left a deluge of incomprehensible drinking stories (156 beers in a single sitting! Entire bottles of brandy before dinner!) in his wake.

On April 10, the new HBO documentary *André the Giant* will look to reignite his oversized legend. Featuring interviews with Hulk Hogan, Vince McMahon and Billy Crystal, the film digs into André's titanic triumphs inside the ring and the depths of his physical and psychological struggles beyond it. The doc marks a second chapter for producer Bill Simmons, too. Simmons was the brainchild behind ESPN's much-lauded 30 for 30 series, and this is his first shot at bringing that same golden touch to premium cable. Much like the man himself, though, *André the Giant* seems too big to fail.

God of War courtesy of Sony

Finding Life After SNL

BILL HADER left the NBC sketch comedy flagship for greener pastures in 2013, and now he's got his own upcoming HBO series, *Barry*, in which he plays a hitman eyeing his own second chapter: an acting career. But it's not easy knowing when to leave *Saturday Night Live*: Jump ship too early and no one outside 30 Rock remembers your name. Stay too late and you risk becoming an SNL lifer. (See: Thompson, Kenan and Meadows, Tim.) Here's a look at how Hader and his fellow former castmates' post-SNL careers compare.



THE GODS MUST BE CRAZY

Thirteen years ago, the video game *God of War* redefined the action-adventure hack-and-slash genre. It spawned two sequels, a prequel, a pair of side-quels, multiple imitators⁶ and cemented its protagonist, Kratos, as one of PlayStation's most iconic characters. So what do the *GoW*'s creators over at Sony's Santa Monica Studio do with their award-winning recipe when it's time to make the next chapter? They scrap it so they can build the fucker again from the ground up.

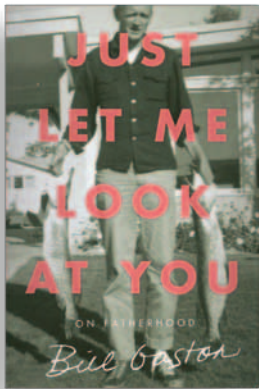
Gone are the frenetic button-mashing gameplay, the fixed cinematic camera angles, the ancient Greek mythology setting and Kratos's signature double-chained blades. What we have now is a sombre, bearded, paternal⁷ Kratos navigating the nine realms of Norse mythology. The camera has moved close—to over the shoulder—and your primary weapon is now the boomerang-like Leviathan Axe.⁸

Luckily, what hasn't been scrapped is *GoW*'s signature brutal over-the-top violence. Expect a healthy dose of decapitations, eviscerations, amputations...pretty much all the 'tions.

God of War will be available exclusively for PS4 on April 20.

Compare and Contrast

Sometimes, two books come out at the same time and deserve to be read together—they probably also deserve to be reviewed together, for either *The New Yorker* or your high-school English class.



Just Let Me Look at You

Bill Gaston

If you write a memoir about your father and there isn't some kind of darkness at the centre, did you really write about him at all? Gaston writes with tenderness (another essential component of any parental memoir) about his father, fishing and drinking.



Motherhood

Sheila Heti

Having addressed blow jobs and cocaine (and, sure, morality and identity, too) in *How Should a Person Be?*, one of this country's coolest writers takes on the murky subject of motherhood in a similar postmodern way.

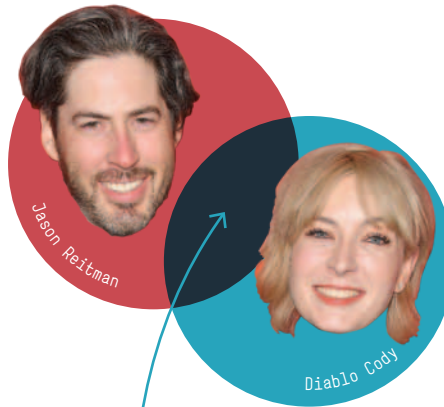
Straight Outta YouTube

REMEMBER TAY ZONDAY, the “Chocolate Rain Guy”? Or Psy,¹⁰ even? Those guys had their day in the viral sun and were mostly never heard from again, at least on these shores.

That's the trajectory we expected for Rich Chigga,¹¹ the Indonesian teen comedy-rapper whose music video “Dat \$tick” sent the Internet ablaze back in February 2016. “Dat \$tick” was the platonic ideal of a YouTube oddity: It starred the then-16-year-old Rich Chigga—in a Sunday school-ready pink polo and khaki shorts—spouting hard-as-nails trap flows about squeezing glocks and hitting the strip club. It was equal parts funny and shocking on first blush, and it wasn't unreasonable to expect that the pseudo-artist behind it would soon fade into the forgotten outskirts of the blogosphere.

But a funny thing happened instead: Rich Chigga stuck around. Emboldened by that unexpected success, he kept making music, and the Internet watched in awe as a juvenile sketch comic morphed into a legitimate hip-hop artist right before its eyes. Now, at the ripe old age of 18, he has dropped the problematic moniker and delivered his debut album, *Amen*, as Rich Brian. It's heady, atmospheric and astonishingly vital—the kind of record that parlays instant fame into actual staying power.

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ICONIC DUOS: CINEMA EDITION

When a pair collaborates and totally crushes—essentially proving that they are better together than they are apart—why do they ever stop? Aaron Sorkin and Rob Reiner made two near-perfect films together. Nora Ephron and Meg Ryan made three. Steven Soderbergh and Channing Tatum are, thankfully, still working together. Ditto chocolate and peanut butter.

This month, the dynamic duo of Diablo Cody and Jason Reitman release their third collaboration. *Tully* is about the relationship that develops between a *Bravely Less Attractive* Than Usual Charlize Theron and *Woman We Will Secretly Love* Forever Mackenzie Davis. Interesting fact: Both Cody and Reitman made films without each other, but you probably didn't see them.⁹

5
10 and 15 seasons, respectively.

6
I'm looking at you, *Devil May Cry*.

7
You are now paired with a competent bow-and-arrow-wielding minor, à la *The Last of Us*.

8
Think *Thor's* hammer but, you know, an axe.

9
Apologies to all the *Jennifer's Body* stans out there. And to the three people who saw *Men, Women & Children*.

10
My deepest apologies. “Gangnam Style” will be out of your head in a week or two, I promise.

11
Hey, remember when we all thought it was OK to identify ourselves and others as “wiggers”? We all thought the word “wigger” was somehow not hugely offensive?



A Lesson in MAINTAINING GRACE UNDER FIRE from HARRISON BROWNE

Text: Ben Kaplan Photo: Vanessa Heins

THE FIRE INSIDE Harrison Browne, a barrier-breaking hockey player who has been fighting for transgender rights for a decade, has morphed from anger to joy. He was born Hailey Mildred in Oakville, Ont., and is currently the only transgender athlete playing professional sports. He's the centre for the Metropolitan Riveters, based in Newark, N.J., to be exact. If he has his gender reassignment operation, he will outwardly become who he's always known he was internally, despite bigotry, homophobia and a tempestuous relationship with his parents, which he refuses to discuss. However, a single testosterone injection would immediately disqualify him from playing professional hockey in the National Women's Hockey League, a job that he loves and that provides him with an escape, solace and a second family.

"Everybody deals with choices. It's just that mine are magnified, and I think that's made me grow up faster than most 24-year-olds," says Browne from his home in Jersey City, N.J., where thus far the Riveters are off to an undefeated season. (The playoffs begin on March 17.) "Everybody's battling something; everyone needs to figure out a way to survive," he adds. "I've learned a lot on my journey. Most importantly, I've learned how to be comfortable in my skin."

Last March, Browne pulled what he calls "a Brett Favre" and announced his retirement in order to proceed with the operation. But in August, he reversed his decision and chose to defend last year's Riveters championship cup.

He knows that the next step of his life is looming, just like he knows there will always be prejudiced trolls unafraid to make their vitriol public.

Still, though he's oscillating between the end of one life and the start of the next, Browne is at peace. We spoke to him about keeping his head.

How often do you grapple with "the decision"? Can you ever forget?

Compartmentalizing is a skill I've had to develop my whole life. Some days are better than others, but for the most part I'm enjoying myself playing the sport that I love, surrounded by my friends. I'd love to transition, but right now I'm in the body I'm in and I'm trying to be thankful and take it day by day.

University of Toronto professor Jordan Peterson has been in the news¹ for his refusal to use gender-neutral pronouns, while you describe being referred to by your true pronoun, "he," during a Riveters game as a watershed moment. Can you explain the weight of a word?

It's a matter of life or death. A simple statement can do serious damage. Pronouns seem simple, but when one is your identity, it can be an overwhelming experience, both positive and negative. I'm an athlete, and hockey is where I lose myself, so to hear it for the first time on that stage—"he" in an arena—brought back memories of 'she' and 'her' and the hurt I felt and the stuff I endured. Suddenly, it didn't matter anymore. None of it did. A pronoun can be an overwhelming experience.

Why hockey?

It's always been my safe space. Anybody who has played it can resonate with the fact that your team becomes your family. I've never had relationships like I have with my team.

1

And is in this issue, actually.





“Hockey gives me an outlet to just be me, even if it is only for a few hours. It isn’t about gender. ‘Athlete’ is a genderless term.”

Sexual abuse isn’t the same as bigotry and discrimination, but the culture appears to be waking up in general. You saw how that judge in the United States struck down Trump’s transgender military ban. Will these things help the next 14-year-old transgender person struggling to fit in?

The military ban was dirty. I loved that fight. You don’t have to be transgender to fight against discrimination, and when everybody comes together—just like with #MeToo and #TimesUp—I see hope. The shift in culture is a necessary corrective; people are not wanting to be caught in these constructs of society. They’re saying “Why do I have to live like this? This isn’t right!” I hope it helps the next 14-year-old. All I want is to help my community feel safe.

You came out in high school but then later realized that what you are is transgender. Can you talk about how your identity evolved?

I was in a single-sex environment—an all-girls school—and felt attracted to women, and that made me different from my friends. Once I switched schools at 14, I didn’t feel comfortable in the place I was, in the box. I was hanging out with girls, feeling the pressure to conform, to wear women’s makeup and clothing. Everyone wants to fit in during high school, and I did everything I could not to create waves. It got really bad for me during puberty, and I just did not want to be in this body. I knew I did not want to be a mom, I did not want to be a grandmother, I did not want this for my future. This is not who I am. Then I learned the term “transgender.” I’m transgender. That’s what I am.

And now you’re stuck in that body to do what you love. That says a lot about how much you love playing professional hockey.

When you’re playing your sport and you’re in the zone, there’s nothing that can get in the way. In that moment there is nothing else on your mind. Hockey gives me an outlet to just be me, even if it is only for a few hours. It isn’t about gender. ‘Athlete’ is a genderless term. And that feeling...I still get that feeling. You know, I thought I was ready to retire last year. I figured I’d put on a suit every day and the sport would fade away. But I wasn’t ready. I want to hold on to this for as long as I can. Listen, both of my outcomes are exciting. Both are necessary. Either I’ll be a professional athlete or I’ll be in the body that aligns with who I am. Either way, I know I’ll be ready when I walk down that path.



The Resumé of a Contemporary Man

Robin Black

FREELANCE MMA ANALYST

MISSION STATEMENT:

Will trade talking for money.

OVERVIEW:

- Two decades in the entertainment industry, with a specialization in hosting.
- Unmatched knowledge of combat sports/hair metal bands.
- Uncanny ability to pull off over-the-top clothing, with a specialization in leather pants and gaudy blazers.

EMPLOYMENT HISTORY:

Robin Black & the Intergalactic Rock Stars (1998–2007)

Position: Lead singer, high kicker, shit disturber.

Summary: “[Robin Black and the Intergalactic Rock Stars] were a spectacle. There were dancing girls and epic solos. Pyro, feather boas and nipple piercings. We even had a glitter cannon. They’re cannons that shoot glitter all over the faces of the audience. Every night we’d perform for literally dozens of people. The only thing holding us back from musical superstardom was the fact that I have no musical talent of any kind. But in the ‘90s, you didn’t need musical talent to be successful! You barely had to be good looking. Case in point: Smash Mouth.”

Reason for leaving: “While the band was on tour in the U.K., we were surviving on a diet of vodka, Red Bull and trucker speed. After a fantastic gig in Nottingham, I overdosed. Right then and there, I decided to do something safer than rock ‘n’ roll. I decided to take the TV thing more seriously; I also decided I wanted to fight a man in a cage.”

MuchMusic (2001–2007)

Position: On-air personality.

Summary: “If I had a cool outfit and said a bunch of outrageous shit, I got a lot of attention. They let me make fun of other artists with Ed the Sock. They let me promote my music and hype my concerts on the air. In 2006, I became the mean judge on the VJ Search. For months I got to brutally mock a bunch of talented young kids while they chased their dream. It was great. Then, Much paid me to train and pursue my real passion for the documentary *Robin Black: Cage Fighter*.”

Reason for leaving: “Not to sound like a grump, but MuchMusic stopped being MuchMusic. In 2006, there was less of a place for people doing something weird. I also began training in earnest for my fight debut.”

Mixed Martial Artist (2008–2012)

Position: VP, Personal Development and Acquisitions. Just kidding: I was a cage fighter.

Summary: “A lot of people in the world of MMA wanted to see me get my ass kicked. They didn’t like my haircut or my makeup. But I gave everything to prepare. I even suffered from overtraining syndrome: My body betrayed me and I spewed from both holes in the middle of a supermarket. I fought nine times. I won some and lost some, but fighting made me a better man.”

Reason for leaving: “Fighting, to me, is the pinnacle of human expression. My time in the cage taught me so much about myself and the world. I love MMA more than I love almost anything, but you’ve got to know when to call it.”

Fight Network (2009–2017)

Position: MMA analyst and commentator.

Summary: “After two days, the head producer said I was the worst fucking host he had ever seen in his entire life. They downgraded me to commentary. And, shit, that’s what I’d wanted for years. Commentary led to an analyst position. That led to my fight breakdowns, which amassed hundreds of thousands of views online and caught the attention of Joe Rogan, who invited me on his podcast.”

Reason for leaving: “It is what it is.”

Freelance MMA...thing (2017–present)

Position: Podcaster, host, storyteller.

Summary: “I’ve ventured into a lot of really interesting places, including my one-man show *Robin Black LIVE*, which blends a bit of comedy, storytelling and philosophy to document some of the crazier jobs I’ve had. (See above.) Bruce Lee once said (and I’m paraphrasing): Be like water. You put water into a cup, it becomes the cup. You put water into a teapot, it becomes the teapot. I honestly live that way.”

IN MARCH 2017, Robin Black was leaving Las Vegas. He had been nominated for Analyst of the Year at the World MMA Awards for his work at Fight Network. Black didn’t win, but, like an actor pretending to be happy for Meryl Streep, it was a thrill for him to be nominated. It meant that after trying to break into the business for years, he finally belonged in the world of mixed martial arts. Two days after the awards ceremony, Black’s entire department at Fight Network was laid off. Eight years at the cable channel and he was out of a job.

No sweat. This wasn’t the first time Black had been faced with the pressure and thrill of starting over. In that way, he is the quintessential contemporary man, trading job security for freedom and ambitious why-the-fuck-not-ness. The only difference between him and your average worker is the kinds of jobs on his resumé: glam rocker, cage fighter, talking head. Less than a year after leaving Fight Network, Black is busier than he’s ever been. And that’s not just some phoney thing he says to sound positive. Judging from Black’s resumé, there’s a lot to learn. Take a look.

Text: Graham Isador



Common Sense Financial Info for Couples

You probably have some questions.

Text: Jessica Wynne Lockhart

WHEN IT COMES TO asking your partner to move in, the question is almost always about love (and, if we're being honest, convenience). Rarely is it about the most financially advantageous way to file your taxes. But while talking budgets isn't exactly sexy, it is critical when you're starting your life together. Here's what you need to know.

TWO BANK ACCOUNTS OR ONE?

That was a trick question. According to financial planner Shannon Lee Simmons, author of *Worry-Free Money: The Guilt-Free Approach to Managing Your Money and Your Life*, the answer is actually "three."

"One thing that leads to fights is seeing money as 'what's mine is mine and what's yours is yours,'" she says. She advises opening a joint bank account for household expenses and hanging on to your individual ones for discretionary spending.

It's not just a strategy for developing money management skills—for common-law couples, it's also a contingency plan, or what Lee Simmons adorably calls an "eff-off fund."

"It's important to have your own stash of money so that, at any point, you can walk away from a job or relationship that you're not happy in," she says.

WHAT ABOUT A JOINT CREDIT CARD?

The better question here is: How comfortable are you sharing a credit rating? Either way, have at least one card solely in your name to build your credit score.

HOW SHOULD WE SPLIT BILLS?

Even if you are equal partners in your relationship (and of course you are!), that doesn't mean you have equal income.¹ "When you have one partner making \$30,000 and one making \$100,000 and you're splitting bills fifty-fifty, it can breed resentment," says Lee Simmons. She suggests paying shared expenses in an equitable—not equal—fashion.

I'M COMFORTABLE SHARING MY SALARY, BUT DO I REALLY HAVE TO SHARE MY PARTNER'S DEBT, TOO?

1
What with ladies only working 77 per cent as hard...

2
First, make sure you are not living in a Lifetime movie. Nine times out of 10, you're going to find out, too late, that you've been living with a grifter. If you survive, that is.

3
Also called a marriage agreement. The term "pre-nup" is misleading: The paperwork can actually be drawn up even after the deed is done.

4
Case in point: Stieg Larsson, the author of *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, had a heart attack at 50. As if dying prematurely didn't make him enough of a jerk, there was no will. That meant that the rights to his estate—valued at some \$50 million—went to his estranged father and brother instead of to his partner of 32 years.

5
Hot tip: As convincing as these arguments are, if you're about to pop the question, divorce and death probably shouldn't factor into your proposal.

SUBTITLES ON

Not necessarily. However, own up to what you owe, and if you do decide to attack debt as a team, keep in mind that it can improve your household's net worth and overall cash flow.²

WE'RE GETTING MARRIED. I'M PRETTY CONFIDENT THAT WE'RE GOING TO DIE HOLDING HANDS DURING THE NIGHT. WHY DOES ANY OF THIS MATTER?

Straight up, marriages (and in some provinces, common-law relationships) are financial partnerships. If you don't visit a lawyer or financial adviser prior to the big day, you're essentially signing a financial document without legal representation.

"The problem is that people still think of marriage as a religious ceremony, but it's a legal contract," says Darren Gingras, executive director of The Common Sense Divorce, a family mediation service. "It's like you and I starting a business and incorporating; all of the debts and assets come under the name of the business."

Even if your spouse's name doesn't appear on your bank account, house title or pension, they're still entitled to half of everything if you split up. The only way to protect your assets is by signing a pre-nuptial agreement³ or, for common-law couples, a cohabitation agreement.

SO, BASICALLY LOVE IS DEAD AND I SHOULD JUST LIVE IN SIN UNTIL THE END OF TIME?

The good news is that there are still legal and financial arguments for why marriage is advantageous. For starters, children aren't covered by cohabitation agreements. Secondly, suppose you die prematurely without a will? If you're not married, your estate will go to your blood relatives—like your younger brother whom you don't even like very much.^{4,5}

Ultimately, being financially savvy isn't just about protecting your assets in case true love doesn't conquer all—it's also about protecting the person you love right now.

MORE CULTURE

MORE STYLE

MORE ADVICE

MORE STUFF¹



THE Title

MAG.COM

   @THETITLEMAG

¹ More footnotes!

S.W.I.

“Stuff That’s Actually Good”

A.G.T.

THE




NICE

Photo: Adrian Armstrong
Styling: Jo Jin



GUY'S

The image features four luxury watches with metal bracelets arranged on a solid red background. At the top left is a Hamilton watch with a white dial and an open-heart window showing the mechanical movement. Below it is a Shinola watch with a dark green dial, two sub-dials, and a date window. At the bottom left is a Timex watch with a white dial and Arabic numerals. At the bottom right is a Longines watch with a white dial and Arabic numerals. The watches are shown from various angles, highlighting their design and craftsmanship.

You want a watch—one that when people notice it, they say “Hey, that’s a nice watch.” Because you’re not ostentatious. You’re not into wearing a status symbol on your wrist. You might want that someday—and there’s nothing wrong with wanting a beautifully crafted luxury timepiece—but right now, you just want a watch that’s nicer than it needs to be but not too flashy. Plus, the upside of getting a nice watch is that it won’t cost as much as your car. Here are five of the best watches under \$1,500.

Bulova
\$475

Hamilton
\$1,345

Shinola
\$1,100

Timex
\$180

Longines
\$1,200



AN INTROVERT'S GUIDE TO TRAVEL

TRAVEL IS ONE of the few activities we willingly, even joyfully, undertake that breeds humility. People aren't blowing up their Instagram stories with tales of unemployment, hospitalization or being stuck in the bureaucratic hell of the justice system.¹ But when you travel to an unfamiliar place, you are confronted with how little you know about where you are. It's why travel can be so life changing and rejuvenating. Travel can make us childlike, full of wonder. Reborn.²

But, damn it, it can also be exhausting. There's the jet lag, but more than that, there are the crowds: from the goblins who line up way too early to board your flight to the throngs of other tourists embarrassing you in front of your cool new local friends to the impossible-to-please fellow travellers who won't settle on a simple place to eat until they've asked every one of their Twitter followers for recommendations. It's other people who make travelling hell.

So why not just go it alone like in *Eat Pray Love*?³ You'll get all the spiritual and cultural benefits of travel without the maddening crowds. Here's where to go when you want to go it alone:

1

Marriage and parenthood also require humility and, generally, are considered by most to be good things.

2

This time with braids and a tattoo of a newt on our ankle!

3

Or so we've heard.

LAS VEGAS

Whether you're looking for sex (obviously), drugs (recreational cannabis is legal) or rock 'n' roll (Donny and Marie!), you can basically get anything you want in Sin City. Lately, that even includes something called authenticity.

Text: Greg Hudson



←
Shepard
Faurey,
*Copacabana
Welfare*

Mike
Ross, *Big
Rig Jig*
↓

LAS VEGAS IS a throbbing beacon in the desert built on one thrilling, all-consuming notion: You deserve it. Indulge in your fantasies, your lizard brain desires, be pampered, eat more, win money.⁴ The city is engineered to convince you of what you long suspected: **YOU DESERVE IT ALL!**

Of course, every city contains multitudes, and certainly Vegas is no different. But for the casual traveler, there are three Vegases that stand out: There's the Strip Vegas, which is what we all think of when we picture Sin City; and there's Luxe Vegas, which hovers like a ghost above the Strip Vegas, exclusive and enticing, welcoming if you know where to look. Where the Strip Vegas can, in some spots, seem like an aging beauty, hiding under expensive makeup, Luxe Vegas is fresh and even elegant, albeit in a "new money" kind of way. These are the Vegases on billboards and pamphlets. If they speak to you, you're not alone. But to the introvert, they seem awfully loud.

And then there is New Old Vegas, which has been growing in popularity lately. Think of it as a kind of millennial-led revitalization of the parts of Vegas that were left behind when Sin City got rich and famous—the Detroit of Vegas. It's here, in the city's

original downtown, you'll find dive bars with real live regulars, neon signs that once shed their light on rat pack contemporaries, beautiful street-art murals and, since 2013, the Life Is Beautiful festival.

And even though an introvert, especially a cynical one, would attempt to write New Old Vegas off as a pandering, overgrown Urban Outfitters, it wins me (a cynical introvert) over. In a city filled with artifice and fantasy, this part of the city feels authentic, and authentically energetic, without a single frosted tip or fake tan in sight. Look: Just down the street from the city's oldest cocktail bar, that might even be a bookstore.

The Life Is Beautiful festival—along with Justin Weniger and Ryan Doherty, who started and run the art and music fest every September—is responsible for all of this renewal. As Weniger and Doherty bought up block after block, building after building, they commissioned artists to make the walls come alive, too. And the music—last year it was Lorde, Muse, The xx, Gorillaz, Chance the Rapper and a rogues' gallery of DJs and smaller acts. It's your regular music festival—kids in clothes you don't understand, the smell of reefer, giant bouncing crowds—but somehow that feels miraculous in a place where every hotel has a Grammy-winning pop star, or Donny and Marie Osmond, putting on a show every night.

And, sure, there are still people everywhere, and thinking isn't exactly easy with the music, but what drains an introvert is artifice. It takes energy to pretend we feel great in groups. It's amazing how soothing a bit of authenticity can be.⁵ In a city devoted to giving you what you want, you can find some peace, too. You deserve it, after all.

↓
Felipe
Pantone,
Untitled

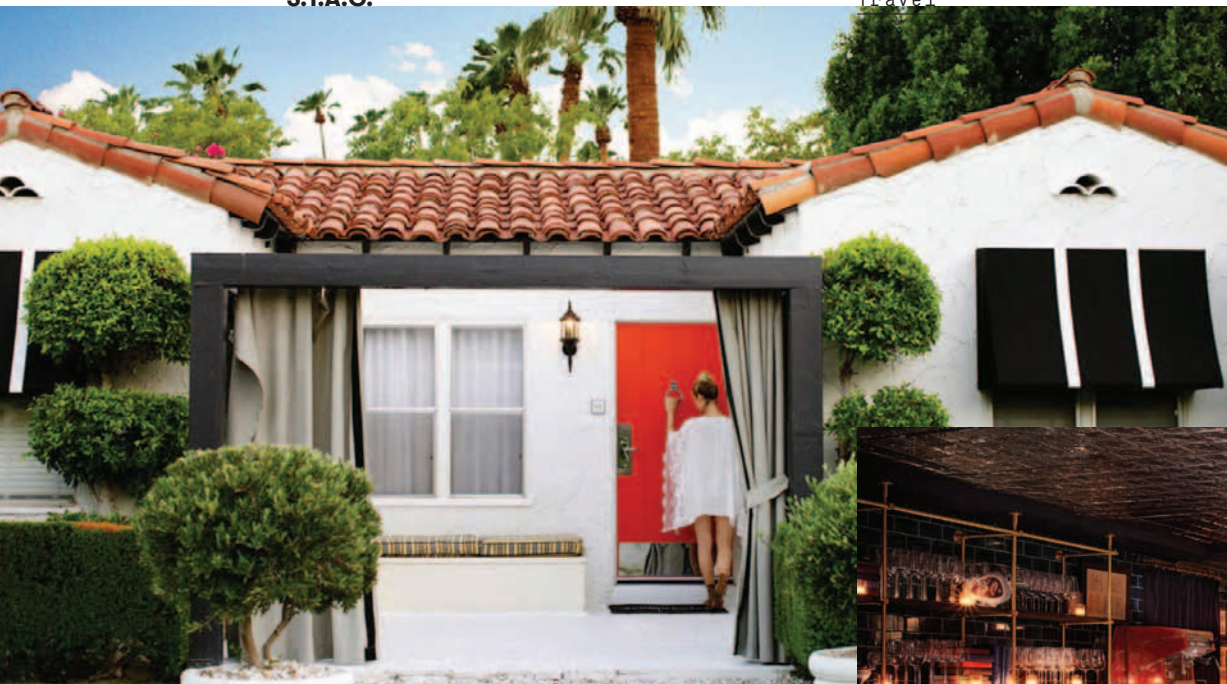


Courtesy of Las Vegas Tourism

→
The
Golden
Spike

⁴
Lose money too, actually.

⁵
Oh, and you can always book a helicopter tour of the Grand Canyon if you really want to be alone.



←
Bungalows
at the
Avalon Hotel

PALM SPRINGS

The California destination has been home to former presidents, retired mobsters and more celebrities than you can shake a palm frond at. If it's good enough for them, it's probably good enough for your next escape.

Text: Chris Johns



I'VE GOT THE big scalloped hot tub all to myself. Families and kids are doing their splashy thing way out of sight at the other end of the property. Couples and party people are across the hedges floating around on enormous inflatable swans or canoodling in cabanas, but I'm undisturbed, reclining with a book on a bright yellow daybed beneath a sprawling, shady orange tree. It's glorious.

I checked in to my bungalow at the Avalon Hotel Palm Springs a few hours ago, and, aside from ordering a mescal cocktail and some excellent shrimp tacos poolside, I haven't spoken to a soul since.

The desert has always drawn introverts searching for the ultimate in peace and quiet (I'm looking at you, Jesus), and while the city of Palm Springs may not lack for creature comforts, it still fits the bill.

Eventually, though, even the relative seclusion of the hotel starts to feel too busy, and I manage to pull myself away from the lush grounds for a pilgrimage out to the real desert. I'm heading 45 minutes north, skirting along the Big Morongo Canyon Preserve and west through the Yucca Valley over to Joshua Tree National Park. With the park's bizarre, voluptuous rock formations and iconic Joshua trees, there's hardly a more otherworldly

→
Joshua
Tree
National
Park



Photos: Bungalow, courtesy of the Avalon Hotel; Counter Reformation, courtesy of the Parker Hotel; Joshua Tree, NPS/Robb Hannawacker

landscape anywhere. A few tourists shoot selfies in front of the trees at the edge of the parking lot, but all it takes is a short walk to bring me fully into the landscape and away from any other people where it's just me and the blazing sunset.

On my way back into town, I pull into the tree-lined driveway of the Parker Palm Springs and drop the car with the valet. Inside the groovy *Three's Company* meets *Saturday Night Fever* lobby, I ask the

concierge where Counter Reformation, the hotel's "secret" new restaurant, is. She leads me past the firepit and through the back garden to an unmarked door. Inside, it's all black tin ceilings, pink tiles and 17th-century ecclesiastical art. There's even a decommissioned confessional.

As the name suggests, there are no tables, just cane chairs arranged around the black-topped bar. I settle in and drink Gargane-ga and eat slices of *jamón ibérico* and caviar-topped quail eggs off of toasted brioche. I do allow myself to get into a conversation with the woman seated on the bench beside me about the correct pronunciation of the Italian grape varietal Falanghina (fah-lahn-GHEE-nah), but other than that, I focus exclusively on the meal.

For my last morning in town, I grab a cruiser bike from the front desk attendant who has kindly printed me a map to some of the city's most renowned mid-century modern architectural treasures. There's the tidy bungalow, nearly hidden by manicured shrubs, where Marilyn Monroe spent some of her final days, Elvis's space-age A-frame "Honeymoon Hideaway" and, of course, Richard Neutra's Kaufmann House, widely regarded as one of the world's most important ones. I'd love to get a closer look inside, but these houses are built for privacy as much as comfort, so I coast back into town.

Escaping the mid-afternoon heat, I wander into the Palm Springs Art Museum. There amidst the Chihuly glass pieces and Zapotec urns, the Sid Avery portraits and the Diego Rivera nudes, I find myself drawn to one painting in particular. Stephen H. Willard's *Silent Interlude* starts out on the desert floor, the dune lines shaped by the wind like Zen gardens, and expands to encompass snowcapped mountains and a slash of sky. A few scrubby trees are the only living things in the painting. Alone with the painting, I can't help but feel that the artist found inspiration in solitude. Far from desolate, though, the painting simultaneously evokes openness and introspection. It's glorious.



↑ Counter Reformation

Iceland courtesy of Creed

ICELAND

Meditation at 1,651 metres

MINDFULNESS, it seems, comes easily when you're 1,651 metres above sea level and staring at the spout of the massive pot of liquid hot magma that's boiling beneath your feet. I'm at the top of a glacier on Eyjafjallajökull, the Icelandic volcano that famously erupted in 2010. Obviously, it's sleeping now. In fact, it's the most serene moment during an otherwise very manly launch event for The House of Creed's fragrance Viking. I climbed right to

the tip of this black rock outcropping to get a 360-degree view. I'm not ashamed to admit that the sight of Iceland laid out beneath me causes a lump to form in my throat. (It's the wind that brings the tears, though.) Ah, perspective! I revel in the sensation for a moment before blasting down the mountain on a snowmobile with the rest of the group.

- Coleman Molnar



WINNIPEG

The Woke Capital of Canada

IF, LIKE ME, you've spent the last eight months or so feeling interminably shitty—distressed by the unpardonable actions of your biggest pop cultural heroes; disquieted by the propensity for repulsiveness put forth by, oh, I don't know, your entire garbage gender—then let me suggest a suitable place of refuge: the Canadian Museum for Human Rights in Winnipeg.

Opened in 2014, it's a \$351-million, 24,166-square-metre cathedral of wokeness. You'll find no absent facts or convenient editorializing anywhere in the museum's snaky, sculptural, labyrinthine halls. Its galleries include no-holds-barred deep dives into virtually every major immorality committed on our nation's soil—Indigenous residential schools, the Chinese head tax, the imprisonment of "enemy aliens" during the First World War—alongside hard-hitting explorations of the struggles for women's suffrage and same-sex marriage, among others.

It might seem counterintuitive to plunge yourself into that

kind of historical heaviness when you're actively trying to escape the present-day evils flooding your Twitter feed. But the museum's artful arrangement is such that, as you scale its seven levels, you're led upward through the darkness toward the light. Yes, you'll shed tears at all the pain we've inflicted upon one another over and over again across centuries. But you'll also see just how far we've come and how hard some Canadians are working right now to keep pushing us forward. By the time you reach the peak—the appropriately named "Tower of Hope," perched 100 metres above the city—you'll feel mended and motivated, ready to fight another day.

Oh, and—not for nothing—Winnipeg is home to some pretty great places to eat and imbibe, too. We'd recommend Peasant Cookery for dinner and Sous Sol for cocktails after. That's not a bad way to take a break from the news cycle, either.

— Yang-Yi Goh

↓ Canadian Museum of Human Rights



NEW ORLEANS

The Big Easy might be one of the world's premier party destinations, but the more chill among us shouldn't miss out on the city's subtler pleasures—you know, the ones that don't involve drunken co-eds and beaded-necklace-fuelled sexual harassment.

Text: Briony Smith

WHERE TO STAY:

The Hubbard Mansion Bed & Breakfast (hubbardmansion.com) is quintessential southern hospitality—without the southern racism: The columned, antique-stuffed mansion offers fancy four-poster beds and a big, gorgeous porch. Best of all: Owner Don Hubbard is a famous civil rights activist; it's a real privilege to listen to this charming raconteur's stories over a tasty breakfast. Walk off that bacon with a quiet stroll through the surrounding Garden District, where you can take in the towering, brightly coloured heritage homes and their ludicrously lush foliage, along with the peaceful Lafayette Cemetery No. 1—one of the oldest in town. Yes, it is, in fact, where Les-tat from *Interview with a Vampire* is "buried."

WHAT TO DO:

Download the RTA app, buy a transit pass and then hop on the impossibly cute vintage trolley car that trundles down St. Charles Avenue and wend your way across the city to the French Quarter. Take your morning coffee on one of the many benches



Cane & Table
→

←
The French Quarter



↑
Commander's Palace

in Jackson Square; you'll need that caffeine to hoof it through both of the info-packed history museums across the way. Visit the Cabildo (louisianastatemuseum.org/museums/the-cabildo) first to learn how Louisiana came to be and all about the fascinating history of New Orleans, and then head next door to The Presbytère (louisianastatemuseum.org/museums/the-presbytere) for eye-popping Mardi Gras and Hurricane Katrina exhibits. End your day at the Ogden Museum of Southern Art (ogdenmuseum.org); its collection—including Bo Bartlett's massive *Young Life* masterpiece—is electric and ever changing. (Try to go on a Thursday, when they stay open late and have live blues music and southern eats.) Not up to chatting with strangers? Blend into the sweaty crowd swaying to the live music at dive bar Vaughan's Lounge for horn-heavy funk on Thursdays or jazz club The Spotted Cat Music Club (spottedcatmusicclub.com) for traditional and modern tunes, day and night.

WHERE TO EAT AND DRINK:

Everyone from President Obama to Duke Ellington has eaten at Dooky Chase's Restaurant (dookychaserestaurant.com) since it opened in 1941 (and functioned as a base for the civil rights movement in the '60s). Go for the lunch buffet and stuff down all the fried chicken and gumbo you can handle. (Don't forget to save room for peach cobbler!) Hit up Cane & Table (caneandtablenola.com) for happy hour and sip its OG cocktails like

the Luck I've Had, a fresh take on the locally beloved Sazerac featuring mescal, white Armagnac, Bittermens Habanero Shrub and grapefruit. (The bright patio makes the perfect backdrop for a tasteful solo selfie.) The award-winning Commander's Palace (commanderspalace.com) boasts an old-school fine-dining vibe and a surprisingly reasonable tasting menu that will make you weep, thanks to down-south seafood deliciousness like Lobster and Grilled-Corn Pudding and Champagne-Brined and Pecan-Smoked Redfish. Come nightcap time, stay the hell away from the mega-rowdy Bourbon Street and dip over to Bar Tonique (bartonique.com) instead for cozy ambience, five-dollar classic cocktail specials and truly talented bartenders. Wine lovers can grab a bottle and some delish veggie tapas or a cheese board at Bacchanal (bacchanalwine.com); head outside to its epic backyard patio, where you can enjoy your vino in peace under the stars accompanied by a ragtime trio. Finish off your night with a steaming-hot paper bag of plump powdered beignets from the open-24-hours Café du Monde (cafedumonde.com). Then hit the gym like The Rock the next day.

Photos: French Quarter / Paul Broussard; Commander's Palace courtesy of Commander's Palace; Cane & Table courtesy of Cane & Table



LONDON

Sometimes fandom is the only excuse to travel you need

IN 2007, my last year of high school, I fell hard for Tottenham Hotspur—which, if you're unfamiliar, is an English Premier League team, not a Scottish actress you haven't heard of yet. The reasons why aren't important.⁶ What matters is the depth with which I fell: This was a long-distance infatuation of the highest order. I'd crawl out of bed at 7 a.m. on Saturdays just to watch Spurs—as they're known to supporters—cough up leads to lesser teams over grainy illegal streams. I'd spend long hours scouring British news sites for the latest transfer rumours and pay exorbitant cross-Atlantic shipping fees to acquire vintage Tottenham gear on eBay. Once in a blue moon, I'd spot another Spurs fan in the streets and share some friendly banter, but I never went out of my way to seek them out. For me, this was a solitary exercise, a fandom entirely my own.

And then, last April, that changed. White Hart Lane—Tottenham's

ramshackle, century-old stadium in North London—was set to be demolished later that summer. If I was ever going to see my team play live in their original home, it had to be now. I pulled the trigger on a red-eye flight to London, splurged on the best ticket I could afford on StubHub and took off on my own. After a decade of waiting, I was finally consummating my long-distance relationship.

You know how if you imagine something enough for any real length of time, it will always disappoint you in the end? That didn't happen here. That Saturday was dreamlike perfection—the end of *Groundhog Day* come to life. The dreary London skies gave way to a spotless sunny 21°C. Stepping into that proud and ancient ground, casting my gaze upon its pristine pitch, made my throat seize up. Belting out chants and songs with the unyielding crowd—and howling hysterically after all four of Spurs'

goals that day—loosened it up again. After the match, at a pub a few blocks from the stadium, I shared brews and swapped stories with guys who hadn't missed a home match in 40 years, with married couples who'd met in the stands, with people who, like me, had flown in just for the game from Sydney, Philadelphia and Singapore. My point is this: Go where your people are. Because no matter how much you think you love something in isolation—when it feels like a love affair just between you and it—you will love it that much more when it's everybody's. Come on you Spurs. — YG

6

Partly, it was my birthright: They'd been my dad's favourite club growing up. But, more than anything, the Monty Python fan in me loved how preposterously British the name sounds: Tottenham Hotspur. It rolls off the tongue in a way that, say, "Oklahoma City Thunder" simply doesn't.

HONG KONG

Lay low like Snowden

HONG KONG is the world's fourth most densely populated country. It's the perfect place to have a panic attack—or blend into the crowd. When former U.S. intelligence contractor Edward Snowden leaked a cache of classified NSA documents—making himself the most wanted fugitive in the world—it is here that he sought refuge. His hideout of choice: the Mira Hong Kong. With an 1,672-square-metre spa, a Michelin-recommended Cantonese restaurant and indoor access to one of the city's favourite shopping malls, there's no need to step outside the sleek design hotel. But if you make the bold choice to venture outdoors, make sure to grab your room's complimentary Wi-Fi device: 24/7 connectivity means you won't have to ask a local for directions when you get lost trying to find the city's best dim sum.

— Meghan McKenna



Style

Grooming

Accessories

Advice

The

HAND

SOM

LIST



TOP TO BOTTOM:

Valentino,
Patrik Ervell,
Hermès,
Kenzo,
Balenciaga

TAKE A HIKE

Northwest Coast casual.

Text: Matthew Biehl

SOMEONE OUGHT TO check on New York's designers because if the Spring 2018 collections are any indication, the folks running fashion there are feeling a bit cooped up. The collections embrace (nay yearn for) the great outdoors, with clothes that seem more appropriate for trekking across mountain ranges than for climbing the corporate ladder—or even for running errands on the weekend. Think of these pieces as the next evolution of athleisure, only they add a touch of functionality along with comfort.

Spring streets are going to be full of wetsuit-inspired layers, rock-climbing-esque shoes and beefed-up backpacks mixed in with the usual spring suit separates, shorts and polos. Before you write off the looks as Pacific Northwest propaganda, slip on a new waterproof jacket—see the pullover anoraks shown at Balenciaga and Louis Vuitton or the colour-blocked windbreakers from Kenzo and Patrik Ervell. For those who want the look but with an added dose of luxury, Hermès crafted its coat from leather and Valentino added patterns and pink accents to its parka—you know, like Reinhold Messner¹ used to wear. Actually, despite their looks, these clothes probably aren't going to get you to the top of Mount Everest, but they will keep you dry and looking stylish during an unexpected downpour downtown—and that's a feat in itself.



FORM AND FUNCTION

Add a rugged yet refined touch to your look with bags fit for the outdoors.



Louis Vuitton, \$4,336



Coach 1941, \$530



Michael Kors, \$295

1

The Italian mountaineer (pictured top left) who made the first solo ascent of Mount Everest in 1980.



HERE COMES THE GROOMED

Text: Matthew Biehl

Biotherm Homme

T-PUR ANTI-OIL & SHINE

A proprietary blend of Airlicium and mineral perlite, this moisturizer boasts 24-hour hydration and absorbs sebum to keep oil and shine at bay throughout the day. Even if you're nervous or overheating, you'll still be putting your best face forward. \$42, biotherm.ca



Tom Ford for Men

CONCEALER

Waking up with a zit on your wedding day is a well-worn trope mined for comedy in movies and TV, but you won't be laughing if it actually happens to you. Cover up any surprise blemishes with a touch of concealer and your guests—and spouse-to-be—will be none the wiser. \$51, holteenfrew.com



Hermès

TERRE D'HERMÈS LIMITED EDITION H BOTTLE 2018

The wisdom of "when in doubt, go with a classic" always holds true, even when it comes to picking out a fragrance for your wedding. Wrapped up in limited-edition packaging, this eau de toilette's blend of citrus, flint and pepper is a refined and masculine scent that you'll want to wear again. Enjoy the memories it holds when you do. \$205 for 100 mL, hermes.ca



LAB SERIES

MAX LS POWER V INSTANT EYE LIFT

Whether you didn't sleep the night before or dark circles are your constant companion regardless of your sleep patterns, Power V Instant Eye Lift will have you looking bright-eyed for your big day. It tackles puffiness and lines around the eye thanks to a blend of naturally derived extracts that moisturize and promote natural collagen production. \$71, labseries.com



House 99

SOFT TOUCH BEARD OIL

It's no longer taboo to get hitched rocking a beard, so don't feel pressured to shave it off—but do make sure you use a beard oil to keep it soft for your first kiss as a married couple. And if David Beckham's new grooming line House 99 makes you look a fraction as good as he does, that doesn't hurt either. \$35, shoppersdrugmart.ca



American Crew

TECHSERIES CONTROL FOAM

Make sure you don't have a hair out of place from before you say "I do" to when you shut down the dance floor. American Crew's latest product offers long-lasting hold along with a boost of volume and a touch of shine for any hairstyle. \$22, americancrew.com



A WEDDING IS STRESSFUL—especially when it's your own. But it's also exciting and not at all oppressive. On such an important day, the last thing you want to be worrying about is how your skin looks or whether your hair is behaving. Do yourself a favour and use products that will keep you groomed to perfection, from the ceremony to when you drive off in a shaving-cream-covered sedan. That way, you can focus on the things that really matter—like saying the right name during the vows, not spilling anything on your tux and, sure, marrying the love of your life. That too.

SOME

WE'RE GONNA GO OUT ON A LIMB HERE: You probably own a good pair of jeans, decent leather dress shoes, a couple of suits that fit you the way magazines like ours recommend and maybe a grown-man hoodie or two. Foundational stuff, you know? And that's all great. Good job by you.

Now, all you have to do is build on that foundation once or twice a season. Pump in some fresh blood, as it were, to show that you're still keeping up and staying relevant—the same way you scroll through Spotify's "New Releases" tab every week, even though we both know you'd rather just listen to *Vitalogy* for the nine-billionth time instead.

Here's what that update looks like for the warmer months ahead.

The nine things you need to piece together a killer spring wardrobe.

Michael Kors,
\$895



BLAZE UP

No one ever wants to wear a blazer in the sticky midsummer sun. But sometimes circumstance (like when your high-school buddy idiotically decides to get married outdoors during a record heat wave) requires you to. When that happens, find one made from light, breathable cotton with zero lining or padding. Your sweat glands will thank you.

ASS

Stüssy,
\$60, at
Urban Outfitters



GET BUCKETS

When a hat immediately calls to mind both Jack Lemmon in *Grumpy Old Men* and every rapper worth his salt between 1988 and 2004, it goes without saying that said hat deserves a place in your wardrobe.



Bather,
\$85

BY LAND OR BY SEA

How many times have you found yourself driving by a lake, a pool or even a goddamn waterpark on a scorching July weekend and wanting desperately to go for a dip but not wanting to be that creep swimming in his underwear? Stay prepared by copping a pair of trunks that don't look like trunks—like, say, these handsome chalk-striped ones—and then sub 'em into rotation as your new fave shorts.

Dockers,
\$90



SOFT SERVE

If there's one thing this impossible-to-kill "athleisure" trend has proven, it's that being comfortable and looking fly don't have to be mutually exclusive. Now—thanks to their Smart 360 Flex technology—the mad geniuses at Dockers have found a way to make sharp, office-ready chinos that are as soft and stretchy as your standby sweats.

SEMBLY

REQUIRED

Styling:
Jo Jin

Photography:
Adrian Almström

Text:
Yang-yi Goh

H&M,
\$60



Tiger of
Sweden, \$200



Marni, \$950,
at Holt Renfrew



CAMP FRIENDS

Were you stoked about last year's Hawaiian shirt renaissance but now you're pretty much done with all the pineapples and hula skirts? Meet your new best friend: the camp shirt, so named for its buttonless, open-necked "camp collar." It's got all the breezy, beachy vibes you've come to love, but it's pared down in subtle solids and less kitschy patterns.



Givenchy, \$440, at Holt Renfrew



Warby Parker, \$150



Bailey Nelson, \$175



Dita, \$860, at Spectacle



Bailey Nelson, \$205

THROWING SHADE

Bottom line: You need sunglasses. We're not going to tell you exactly which ones to buy because, frankly, that really depends on the size and shape of your head. Go try a bunch on and see what works for you. These are five of our faves right now.



Our Legacy, \$150, at Neighbour

ON SAFARI

Look, according to our art director, we had no room on this page for any extra pictures, so you're going to have to do me a favour: Look up "Jack Nicholson Safari Jacket" on Google Images. The first three photos are the reason you need one immediately.

Brunello
Cucinelli,
\$2,950,
at Via Cavour



Banana Republic, \$195



Prada, \$790, at Harry Rosen



Saint Laurent, \$790, at Holt Renfrew



Suicoke, \$265

GRAPHIC CONTENT

Put down that two-pack of crewnecks. Trust us: You own more than enough blank, basic T-shirts. Instead, it's time to stock up on some artful, grown-up graphic tees—think less "that *Beavis and Butt-Head* joint you wore to first-year poli-sci" and more "the kind of thing Justin Theroux would rock with a suit."



Idea, \$60, at Neighbour



OLD DOGS

There's nothing really new about this summer's coolest shoes, and we're perfectly OK with that. You need a good pair of loafers, some non-dorky sandals, low-top sneakers in a seasonally appropriate hue and simple suede bucks that'll match up nicely with your white jeans as well as your seersucker suit.

WHY I STOPPED WEARING DEAD MEN'S CLOTHES. MOSTLY.

Text: Pedro Mendes

“T HIS IS DISGUSTING,” my mother said, holding a pair of psychedelic trousers I’d brought home from a thrift store. “Someone could have died in these.”

I was 17—old enough to shop on my own but young enough to want to share my haul with Mom. The blue and red paisley on the outside of the pants looked faded but mostly clean. The inside, however, was covered with stains. Yellowish stains. “I’m going to wash these before you even think about wearing them,” my mother insisted.

The pants emerged from the basement laundry room stain-free. But my mother was still revolted by the idea of someone else’s clothes—someone who might be dead—rubbing against my skin. She had grown up poor in rural Portugal, so wearing other people’s clothes was not inconceivable. For her, though, those other people were family. Family you knew didn’t have hepatitis or shingles. But I didn’t care. I was young and immortal. Plus, they were just clothes—vintage clothes that were cool and cheap: a siren song teenagers can’t ignore.

My love affair with vintage clothes didn’t end with my teens, but it didn’t really get serious until I was in my mid-30s, when I decided to stop dressing like a teen. When the time came to put away my soccer jerseys and jeans, I discovered that the world of vintage clothes wasn’t just costumes for dress-up parties. It was full of suits, jackets, ties and classic shoes. They weren’t on-trend, which I didn’t mind, but they were affordable. Instead of spending \$5,000 on a tight-laced Tom Ford suit, I could have a slightly baggy, wide-lapelled vintage three-piece for around \$100. With my mother’s voice in my head, however, I always dry cleaned before wearing.

I’m pretty sure that no one died in any of the vintage clothes I wore, but I did discover that most of them were from dead people. The jackets themselves provided the clue. As I learned more about classic menswear and tailoring, I knew to look for the tailor’s tag in the breast pocket. It would reveal not only the maker and when it was made but for whom. With a little internet sleuthing, I could find out about the previous owners—and almost every time, they’d died. Family members had donated the clothing to a thrift store or clever vintage shop owners had scoured estate sales.

And so I built up a closet full of dead men’s clothes. The suits were stylish in a slightly old-fashioned, *Talented Mr. Ripley* kind of way. And with a few alterations, they fit me relatively well. But despite all this, I eventually had to stop wearing dead men’s clothing. I was being pigeonholed, by friends and the internet, as “that vintage guy.”



Photo: Getty



People assumed that I only listened to '40s swing music and watched *Downton Abbey*. (The latter may be true.) That I was a regular at the annual Tweed Run (which I've never attended) and spent my evenings cleaning and sorting my spats (which I don't own). Never mind the fact that no one listening to swing music in the '40s would have had spats. But there were other assumptions. At the extreme end of the spectrum, my clothes signified that I longed for the days of white, male, patriarchal privilege. That my wardrobe, my donning of vintage ties, suits and hats, was an outward symbol of regressive thought. If only all bigots wore zoot suits, maybe fewer people would vote for them.

The truth is, however, that despite all of today's problems, the world is a better place than it was 100 years ago. I know this. I'm a big fan of the internet, vaccines and social justice, thank you very much. I am happy to live in the here and now, even if my clothes sometimes evoked another time.

Personal style was another reason I stopped wearing dead men's clothes. No matter how well made or how well fitting a vintage garment may be, if it was custom-made for someone else, it will never fit you as well as a garment should. Not to mention that it's difficult to find a piece that fits reasonably well, is in good condition, goes for a fair price and is not victim to the fashion extremes of its era. I prefer moderation: lapels that are neither wide nor slim, jackets that are neither long nor short, a fit that is neither tight nor loose. I don't try to evoke a certain era with my wardrobe; I am simply striving for elegance. And so I had to follow the same path these dead men had: invest in my own custom wardrobe.

I will admit, however, that my current custom commissions wouldn't be so successful if it hadn't been for those years of wearing vintage clothes. It was, after all, a relatively inexpensive way to learn: You simply re-thrift what you don't like. For instance, I was drawn to loud patterns until I tired of all the attention. I also experimented with lots of ornamentation before settling on understatement. All the while, I fell more and more in love with tweed as I tried various patterns and colours. So while I have moved away from vintage clothing, I would still recommend it as a good starting point for those early in their sartorial journey. As long as you wash everything before you wear it. Because you never know.

There is only one vintage suit left in my wardrobe: a chalk-stripe blue flannel three-piece. The lapels are a bit wide but look rakish. The shoulders are slightly roped, *à la française*. Seventies style, yes, just not bold. And after extensive tailoring that cost twice as much as the suit—shortening the jacket, slimming the chest and vest, lengthening the trousers—it fits so well that most people think it was made for me. However, the suit is heavy, weighing almost as much as I do. So heavy, in fact, that when I had it altered, the tailor wondered if I'd ever wear it. "It's too warm," he insisted. "You'll be sweating as soon as you put it on." So I save it for blisteringly cold days.

The suit was custom made in 1972, just after I was born, for Al Patte, a Canadian mining executive. His obituary is not hard to find. He died a few years ago, just after I bought the suit. He had been in a long-term care facility after suffering a major stroke. I assume this was when his family decided to part with his old clothes. He was exactly the age I am now when he had the suit made. Men like Al invested in quality and in classic, personal style, which allowed me to learn and develop my own. And I suppose that that is the final lesson vintage clothes have taught me: to pay it forward.

I just pray to God that my family cleans the stuff before dumping it at the Goodwill.

FANISHING

A person is sitting on the floor of a boxing ring, wearing black tights and white sneakers. The background shows the ropes of the ring and a brick wall.

**YOU AREN'T READY FOR THE FOR BIG SHOW
UNTIL YOU HAVE THE PERFECT KICKASS JACKET.
SOMETIMES OUTERWEAR DOESN'T JUST COMPLETE
YOUR LOOK. SOMETIMES IT IS YOUR LOOK
(ESPECIALLY WHEN ALL YOU'RE WEARING
IS A PAIR OF TIGHTS).**

Photos: Matt Barnes

Styling: Marc Andrew Smith



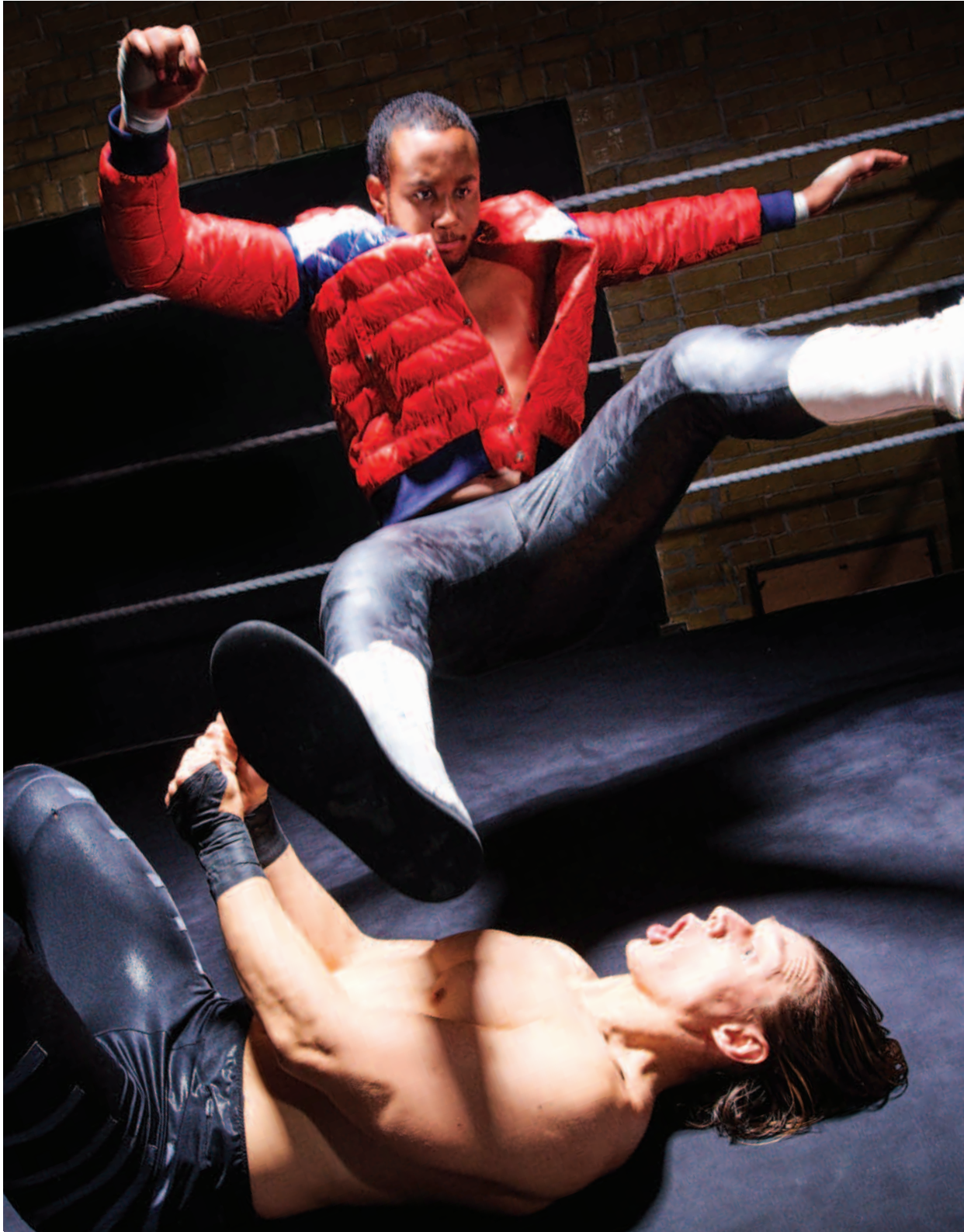
Coat
\$180
H&M

MOVIES



←
Shearling
jacket
\$9,300
Gucci

→
Down
jacket
\$1,320
Moncler
at
Holt
Renfrew





←
Windbreaker
\$475
**Stone
Island**
at
Holt
Renfrew

→
Leather
bomber
\$5,450
**Giorgio
Armani**
at
Harry
Rosen



Hooded
jacket
\$1,520
Marni
at
Holt
Renfrew

Souvenir
jacket
\$330
Diesel
at
Harry
Rosen









→
Hoodie
\$390
Belstaff
x SOPHNET
\$390
Vest
Belstaff
\$355
at
Harry
Rosen

←
Bomber
jacket
\$895
Versace
Collection
at
Harry
Rosen

Shot on location at **Superkick'd Studios**,
Toronto's raddest pro wrestling school.
Check them out at superkickd.ca, or
they'll kick our ass.

→
Safari
Jacket
\$1,585
Dries
van
Noten
at Holt
Renfrew

←
Nylon
jacket
\$1,750
Gucci



Grooming:
Claudine Baltazar
for MAC Cosmetics /
KEVIN.MURPHY /
Plutino Group



THE ORAL HISTORY OF “NORTHERN TOUCH”

Text: Yang-Yi Goh

58 / SPRING 2018

thetitlemag.com

Illustration: Kegan McLeod

A **DECADE INTO THE DRAKE ERA**, it might be difficult to remember that Canada wasn't always a force to be reckoned with in hip-hop. For a long stretch there, the Great White North was considered the laughably square antithesis to everything cool about rap. “Back in the '90s, people would call music ‘Canadian’ as an insult,” Vancouver rapper Red1 remembers. “Like, ‘Yo, I don’t know, that just sounds so...*Canadian*.’”

That all changed in 1998, when Red1's fast-ascending group Rascalz—alongside a cross-country crew of emcees—delivered “Northern Touch,” a hip-hop anthem so indelible, with a music video so bombastic, that it instantly became the song of the summer in a country where a friggin’ Nova Scotian fiddler was considered a musical bad boy.¹ In one swift, wholly *no-tooorous* motion, “Northern Touch” launched a baker’s dozen worth of careers, from Kardinal Offishall to Director X; legitimized an ostracized genre to a skeptical nation; and firmly entrenched itself in the hearts and (later) iPods of an entire generation of Canadians.

To mark the seminal hit’s 20th anniversary, we tracked down all of the heavy hitters involved—that’s right: Rascalz, Checkmate, Kardinal² and Thrust, *CHOCLAIR* comin’ down wit’ the...you get it—to uncover the full story behind the song Seth Rogen once aptly christened “the ‘Stairway to Heaven’ of Canadian rap music.”

1
Y’all remember Ashley MacIsaac, right? Yikes.

2
Kardinal Offishall was actually the only person on the song who declined an interview, but I did steal a quote of his from a 2013 Canadian Press story by John Chidley-Hill.



PART I: SETTING THE SCENE

The early to mid-1990s was a barren period for mainstream Canadian hip-hop. There hadn't been a homegrown rap hit since Maestro Fresh Wes's "Let Your Backbone Slide"³ in 1989, and there was little support for the genre throughout the domestic music industry.

Craig "Big C" Mannix (manager of A&R, Sony Music Entertainment Canada): The industry did not understand that urban music—black music—was commercially viable in this country. When I got my first label job in '93, the head of the marketing department told me: "I don't understand why we even have you in here as an urban specialist. There's not enough black people in Canada to justify marketing this music." That was shocking. My answer to her was "You think only black people listen to rap music?"

Checkmate: Canadian hip-hop was very fragmented at the time. There was no hip-hop scene anywhere but Toronto. Everything else, including in Vancouver, was very indie and very disjointed.

Alan Cross (host of *The Ongoing History of New Music*): For many years, it wasn't practical to have a hip-hop-based radio station in Canada. In order to have a Canadian radio licence in the late '80s and '90s, you had to devote 30 per cent of your playlist to Canadian content. There simply weren't enough quality homegrown hip-hop acts to make it legally feasible to meet that quota. We had to wait for a critical mass of talent to break through before radio could embrace this music 24/7.

PART II: ORIGIN STORIES

In the late '80s, a collective of rappers and breakdancers called **Ragamuffin Rascalz** formed in Vancouver, taking on other crews at parties across the city. By the early '90s, the group had (thankfully) dropped the "Ragamuffin" and whittled itself down to four key members: **Kemo**, the producer/DJ; **Red1** and **Misfit**, the emcees; and **Sol Guy**, an aspiring rapper-turned-manager.

Kemo: I met Red1 in Grade 8, but I didn't like him at first. He was an arrogant little 13-year-old. By Grade 12, though, we'd reconnected—I was really into DJing, and he was into rapping. It was a natural fit.

Red1: We met Misfit and Sol Guy at different dances around the city, and we all started hanging out. Sol was one of my best friends, and we'd meet up every night and write raps. He went by 'Sol G the Boy Wonder' in those days. He could write lyrics but had a bit of a...timing issue when it came to laying down the tracks with Kemo.

Kemo: I was the only one with the balls to tell Sol: "Yo, you suck. You shouldn't rap." He caught feelings and left for a while. And when he came back, he was like, "You know what? I want to manage." It was the best fucking decision the guy ever made in his life.

3
Unless
you count
Snow's
reggae-
inflected
"Informers"
and I'd
sincerely
implore
you to do
otherwise.

Red1: He took it seriously from day 1. He was going around with his little book and talking to people and arranging things. That was the move that got us to where we are. Me and Fit, we only cared about rap. Kemo only cared about making beats. Nobody was really there organizing and taking care of this business situation or negotiating on our behalf. When Sol came in, all of that went to the next level. We made our first album, *Really Livin'*, booked tours across the country—all of that.

Sol Guy: Eventually, I got a job at BMG in Toronto. Before I left Vancouver, I told the guys, "Yo, we're going to get signed to a record deal." I must have been an annoying little shit, because I was constantly telling everyone at the label: "Yo, you gotta sign my group! You gotta sign my group!" Finally, they were like, "You're not gonna shut up about this, are you?" I said, "Nope." And they said: "OK. If it works, it's on you. And if it's a disaster, it's on you." And I knew it would work.

Meanwhile, in Toronto, a group of like-minded artists, performers and producers were beginning to make some noise. They called themselves "The Circle." Three prominent figures in the mix were **Chocclair**, a smooth Scarborough emcee with a ladies' man persona; **Kardinal Offishall**, whose music was infused with the dance hall and reggae of his Jamaican heritage; and **Thrust**, a true rapper's rapper with a New York-tinged flow.

Jully Black (singer-songwriter): The Circle was a whole group of us—Kardinal Offishall, Saukrates, myself, Kid Kut from Baby Blue Soundcrew—who had attended a music camp called Fresh Arts in 1994. For an entire summer, we were paid minimum wage by the Jobs Ontario Youth program to learn production and songwriting. It was unreal. We wound up meeting Chocclair because his manager at the time, Lee, had a nice, affordable studio where we would go to cut demos.

Chocclair: The whole Circle, we would always show up to everybody else's studio sessions to hang out, work on beats and freestyle.

Thrust: There was so much music getting made back then. We were in there recording stuff constantly. There are entire unreleased albums the public has never heard.

PART III: MAKING THE SONG

After signing to BMG, Rascalz released its second studio album, *Cash Crop*, in 1997. It sold relatively well, thanks to the minor success of its singles "Soul Obligation" and "Dreaded Fist." Around that same time, Vancouver DJ Jay Swing tapped Kemo for a new beat to use on a mixtape he was working on.

Jay Swing: I made mixtapes all the time, with all the brand-new music out at the time. And I used to always get emcees to give me something original to introduce the record. It came time to do this tape, and

The Oral History of “Northern Touch”

Kemo had this superhot beat, and we had Rascalz and my guy Checkmate hop on the intro. It was just some raw mixtape shit.

Kemo: It was just another beat—one out of a whole batch I’d made. I found this sample that EPMD⁴ had used on an old song, and I loved flipping⁵ samples and making them my own.

Jay Swing: I went out to Toronto, because I was working for Sol at BMG at the time, and I brought copies of the tape for everybody. Sol heard that intro and was like, “Yeah, this is a dope beat. Let’s use it for this compilation we’re working on.”

Mannix: It was the heyday of MuchMusic compilations—*Big Shiny Tunes*, *MuchDance*. A bunch of the labels would partner up to share their resources and repertoires to make the best tracklisting, and then MuchMusic would brand it and push it out. I thought it was time for a *RapCity* compilation. Much said, “Put it together and we’ll see.” As we were compiling the tracklist, we decided we should put some original music on there that would make people say “I need to buy this for that song you can’t get anywhere else.”

Sol Guy: I called up Kemo and told him, “Yo, we’re going to flip that track you did and get some of the Toronto guys on it.” That’s when Big C reached out to Choclair, Thrust and Kardi.

During the summer of 1997, Rascalz and Checkmate—a hard-hitting emcee from Victoria—reconvened at a B.C. studio to record new verses for the yet-untitled posse cut. Then the tapes were shipped out to Toronto for Choclair, Thrust and Offishall to add their parts.

Red1: Each verse was only 16 bars,⁶ and since we were a group, that meant Misfit and I only got eight bars apiece. We sat down by the pool at Kemo’s house, and Fit wrote his parts and left lines for me to fill in, and I wrote parts and left lines for him to fill in. It was easy to write, because even though we’re both so unique as individuals, somehow that uniqueness always fit together like Voltron.

Misfit: Having only eight bars on the song...it’s more of a stretch than a workout.

Checkmate: I found out we were recording it the night before. I wrote a couple of bars and then crashed. I wrote the rest of my verse on the bus to the studio, which was out in a suburb called Burnaby. I wanted my verse to have that West Coast flavour. A lot of the lingo and the slang in there is unique to the West Coast.

Choclair: Rascalz mailed us the tapes from Vancouver—there was no email back then; it was a big two-inch audiotape—and then Thrust and I went into the studio to do our verses. Back then, everybody wanted their verse to be last, everybody wanted to be the anchor. So

me and Thrust literally did paper, rock, scissors to see who would be last. And I lost.

Thrust: It was the quickest song we’d ever done. Me and Chocs did our verses in one take each, and then Kardi showed up to do the hook. We were in and out of the studio in an hour and 20 minutes.

Choclair: Me and Thrust started thinking about the hook, and I don’t know why this popped into my head, but I suddenly went, [sings] “We notorious!” Then Kardi got to the session, and the three of us collaborated on the hook. We sent Kardi into the booth, ’cause he had that explosive voice—all that energy—and it just came out amazing.

Cardinal Offishall⁷: I think this might have been the first year that I actually had allergies. The day that we did “Northern Touch” I probably sneezed literally about 500 times. I had a box of Kleenex by my side that day. That’s one of those days I won’t forget, because we were at the studio, everybody was there and I was just sneezing like a friggin’ maniac while all this history was being made.

Red1: Kardi’s hook got you from the jump. I remember I pressed play and it was just, “YO, WE NOTORIOUS!” I was like, “This is craaaaaazy. Kardi killed that!” I knew it was a hit right away, but at that point, I just thought it’d be big in the underground, among hip-hop kids.

Sol Guy: Everything about it just worked. It was high energy. It was right in the pocket of what was happening. It was current. Kemo made an incredible beat. And each emcee was so radically different: Choclair was the lover; Kardi was the larger-than-life animated character; Red and Fit were this incredible duo, the most recognizable West Coast cats at the time; Checkmate had this West Coast gangsta style; Thrust was old-school Toronto.

Mannix: After the song was made and we had a tracklisting for the compilation, we went back to MuchMusic. They turned us down, because they’d never really wanted to do it in the first place. They said they didn’t feel comfortable putting out a compilation with an explicit sticker on it and we refused to use radio versions. That was their out.

PART IV: INITIAL RELEASE

“Northern Touch” lay dormant for months. But near the end of 1997, on a whim, Sol Guy presented the discarded single to his bosses at BMG.

Sol Guy: We played it for the label, and they decided to service it [to radio] as a 12-inch.⁸

Craig Mannix: It began to pick up steam. The college radio circuit picked up on it immediately, and then it started to trickle out to certain places in the States—it got featured on Hot 97 [the biggest urban station in New York City].

4
The seminal late '80s New York hip-hop duo. The song in question is “Get the Bozack.”

5
Definition: Recutting and remixing existing music into something wholly new.

6
Definition: The number of lines each rapper has to deliver, vis-à-vis the time signature of the beat.

7
This is that stolen quote I mentioned earlier.

8
Meaning the song was pressed to vinyl records, which were then sent out to radio DJs to put on the air.

The one potential roadblock to the song's path to success? DMX's "Get at Me Dog," which was released the same year and whose beat featured the same sample as "Northern Touch."

Chocclair: The song finally gets released, and all of a sudden here comes [DMX's voice] "WHERE MY DOGS AT? WHERE MY DOGS AT?" It's the exact same beat, and we're like, "Oh no, this American guy is going to come in and swallow up all the oxygen in the room."

Red1: Here's this massive Ruff Ryders artist, DMX, and everyone's going to think we're biting. I was really disappointed, because I thought for sure it meant our song wouldn't get played. But it ended up having the opposite effect.

Jay Swing: In the clubs, DJs would play the DMX record and then go straight into "Northern Touch." You'd never play one without the other. And that was just at the club level. People requested the shit out of it on the radio.

Sol Guy: This buzz was building, and the label came back and said, "We need to do a video, we need to put this on the album, because this thing is going."

PART V: SHOOTING THE VIDEO

To direct the video, Rascalz turned to a 22-year-old named Little X. Despite being relatively untested, the Toronto native checked all the boxes: He was a disciple of Hype Williams (the hottest name in hip-hop videos at the time), hungry for a break and familiar with all the major players involved.

Director X⁹: I was the director version of the rappers: not a big star, not super-successful, but I was making moves in the industry and people were noticing.

Red1: It was a no-brainer. We had to get X, because we needed that look. Hip-hop was getting that gloss—more refined—it wasn't all about that roughness no more. X brought that refinement.

Director X: I knew I wanted to do an in-studio performance video. We'd never really seen that in Toronto—or in Canada, for that matter—done with that style. It was such a staple of hip-hop, and that was part of the excitement.

Checkmate: It was February in Toronto, which was a new kind of winter for me. I was cold the whole time. I'm a skinny guy, too, so that doesn't help.

Thrust: We all sat in the dressing room for hours, everyone was talking, kicking it. We had a Nintendo in the other room with *GoldenEye* going on—that was the classic on the 64 at that time. There was some sharpshooters there.

Misfit: There were jokes going back and forth from the Toronto crew, the Vancouver crew. You had to be prepared and on your toes.

Jully Black: I remember hanging out on set that day and just thinking, "Wow, OK, something is shifting in a great way." They'd created this bridge for Canadian hip-hop, and it was a beautiful thing.

Director X: It was the first video for Melyssa Ford.¹⁰ She was dating one of my best friends' brothers at the time, and we were looking for models.

Craig Mannix: I make a cameo where I'm smoking a cigar, because Chocs mentions me in his verse. He goes, "Down with Goldschläger"—that was his drink of choice back then, don't know why—"Big C puffs the weed." They were all so young at the time. I was the only guy they knew back then who smoked.

Director X: It felt like we were getting there. The music was sounding right. These guys looked like stars. And now we had a video that looked like a cool American video. We were on our way.

PART VI: MAJOR SUCCESS

Suddenly, "Northern Touch" was everywhere. The video hit MuchMusic and was immediately selected for "heavy rotation"—a rarity for hip-hop videos at the time. The re-released *Cash Crop* album, now with "Northern Touch" tacked on as a bonus track, went Gold.

Checkmate: Jay Swing was in Toronto a week or two after the video dropped, and he called me up and was like, "Bro, I kid you not, there's kids ciphering outside on the street right now, and they're literally rapping your verse."

Chocclair: I started getting calls from across the country: 204, 604, 403—all these area codes. They're like, "Yo, that song is dope!" "Yo, who's that girl on your lap?" And I'm like, "What are you talking about?" At that point, I hadn't seen the finished video yet, and there was no YouTube to check it out right away. I was dying to see it. I was still working at a day-care at the time, too, and the parents would come to pick up their kids, look at me and go, "Yo, aren't you Chocclair?" It was crazy.

Red1: I remember telling Sol, "Yo, it's like I'm living in a dream." I'd wake up in the mornings, and I'd sit in bed and laugh sometimes for a good five minutes. I used to leave my TV on when I'd sleep, and some days I'd wake up to my song playing on MuchMusic. That was so surreal. I felt like I'd pulled a fast one.

Craig Mannix: For a lot of the Canadian players, it was a major moment. Chocclair got signed off of that. Thrust had a record deal off of that. Everybody. Melyssa Ford went on to become a huge deal. X began directing massive videos. Mr. Morgan, who was Kardi's manager at the time and runs Drake's OVO Sound label now, still talks about "Northern Touch" as this seminal point in his career. It was the biggest thing any of us had been associated with up to that point.

⁹
Around 2010, he stopped feeling so "Little."

¹⁰
Ford would go on to become one of the most recognizable hip-hop models of the era, appearing in the videos for Jay-Z's "Big Pimpin'" and Usher's "Yeah!" (among others).

PART VII: ON THE ROAD

Once “Northern Touch” was a bona fide hit, the label sent all of the artists out on a nationwide tour.

Chocclair: I had to quit my job at the daycare because I couldn’t go on tour and be in and out of these kids’ lives. June 1998 was the last time I worked for somebody else. From that point on, it was music full-time.

Sol Guy: That tour was electric. We weren’t apologizing for being Canadian rappers anymore. We were accepted. We felt like stars. We were rolling from city to city, and the shows were packed. We had levelled up.

Chocclair: It was one of those rock star moments where you could stick the mic out into the crowd and everybody sings all the words. I was completely blown away.

Red1: We were all living on the same tour bus, and I just remember all the wildness that went on at the shows, backstage. We’d go out to eat after and get drunk with everybody. There were so many stories of “Yo, last night, you know what happened to *me*?”

Thrust: The best parts of that tour I can’t even talk about. All kinds of pranks and crazy stuff out in the middle of nowhere—but I’m sorry, man. I swore an oath. I’ll say this: It was off the *chain*.

PART VIII: THE JUNOS

At the 1998 Junos, prior to the release of “Northern Touch,” Rascalz won Best Rap Recording for *Cash Crop*. But when they realized their award would be handed out at a separate dinner, the night before the televised awards, they decided to turn it down.

Red1: It was a tough decision. We were new to the industry, and we weren’t sure if turning down the award would get us blackballed or blacklisted. But at the end of the day, this was bigger than us. We did it for urban music. They did the same thing to reggae, to R&B, to hip-hop—none of our awards were on the main night. It just felt like such disrespect.

Kemo: What’s funny is that we didn’t even get to turn down the award onstage. The event started at seven, and we got there at 7:02. We were walking to our seats, and someone told us we’d just missed them call our names. That’s how quickly they moved past the hip-hop award. They were like, “Go to the media room and speak to the press.”

Sol Guy: We had a little speech that my mom helped us write, and we got up there and read it. It basically said that the Junos were meant to celebrate Canadian music, but we didn’t really feel like we were invited to participate. On behalf of not only hip-hop but the other genres of black music and the artists and the community that we represented, we were turning this down until we were included in the celebration.

Mannix: The industry was up in arms. They were like, “How dare these guys do that?” But the urban community supported what they did. They were tired of being marginalized the day before at the dinner. Why couldn’t hip-hop be on the main stage? Why couldn’t hip-hop be televised?

Sol Guy: We didn’t realize it would be the headline about the Junos both nationally and internationally. It got written up in *Billboard* magazine, and I got an angry call from my boss at the label. “Why are you causing trouble?” I was like, “Whatever, I’m part of the Rascalz. I don’t care!”

A year later, at the 1999 Junos in Hamilton, Ont., Rascalz were once again awarded Best Rap Recording—this time for “Northern Touch.” Not only were they presented with the award at the televised ceremony but the entire crew opened the show with an electrifying performance of the song.

Craig Mannix: It worked out, because the next year they released this massive song. And the mainstream was like, “Oh, maybe there is something to this.”

Red1: It was one of the top three most nervous moments of my life. After the year before, there was so much focus on us. We had to go out there and represent hip-hop and the culture and show everyone that we worked our asses off and deserved to be there. I remember practising non-stop, because I wanted everything to be flawless.

Checkmate: It was at Copps Coliseum in Hamilton, which is already a big venue. We were sitting next to Céline Dion and Sloan backstage—all these people. You’re not really thinking about the television audience; you’re thinking of the immediate crowd right there. It’s a big performance, there’s a lot of equipment around and you’re just trying to get through it without falling on your face or getting burned by the pyrotechnics.

Sol Guy: We rocked it. It was a crazy moment. It felt like our point had been made. It felt like we were ushering in a new chapter for Canadian music.

Red1: That was the night that solidified everything with my girl. We sealed the deal that night. Twenty years later, we’ve got a couple of kids and we’re still together. So that was the highlight of the night for me.

Thrust: It’s the same way that Vince Carter affected basketball. When Vince showed up in Toronto, he made an impact on the game. Next thing you know, 20 years later, there’s all these Canadian players in the NBA. It’s that same feeling. If we didn’t do what we did and smash down those walls, the way wouldn’t be clear for everybody now to be able to come in and present their art. We’re part of the collective energy that made that happen.

Text:
Greg Hudson

Photos:
Ian Maddox

MR. RADNOR'S OPUS

Josh Radnor—you know, the guy from *How I Met Your Mother*—
thought he was just teaching me the guitar.
He really taught me about life.



Suit and shirt
Theory
Tie
The Tie Bar

BEFORE

he hands over his guitar, Josh Radnor—actor, director, newly minted singer-songwriter and, now, guitar teacher—has me repeat, word for word, a kind of mantra.

Radnor: No one...

Me: No one

Radnor: is good...

Me: is good

Radnor: at guitar...

Me: at guitar

Radnor: when they start...

Me: when they start.

Radnor: Including Eric Clapton, Jimi Hendrix and Jimmy Page, you know what I mean?

I do know what he means, because I'm certainly not good. When you try something new, there's always the secret hope you'll discover prodigious depths of talent you didn't know you had—like Jason Bourne, only without the brainwashing and violence. But Radnor is being very patient with me. This is the first time I've attempted to play a chord on the guitar. I'm pressing my short, sausage-like fingers on what I think is the right spot to make his guitar warble out an A minor.

When I first met Radnor earlier, he declined to shake hands because he didn't want to infect me with whatever cold he was fighting off. But he forgets that while he's teaching me chords. (Music is more important than medical protocol.) He adjusts my hands into Kama Sutra claws I'll never be able to remember. When he tells me I got something right, I swallow a foolish pride, like a kid acting nonchalant in front of his much cooler big brother.

What's interesting is that I *have* an older brother who would offer to teach me to play the guitar when I'd come into his room while he noodled. I never let him. Music was his thing. No sense trying to make it my thing, too. What this means is Josh Radnor is touching me in ways I've never let another man touch me.

I HAD some preconceived notions about Josh Radnor.

We like to think that we're sophisticated enough to differentiate between a character and the actor who plays them. And yet some characters slip through our media-savvy filter, especially when there are circumstantial similarities between the two. I'd wager this happens more for sitcom actors than, say, Daniel Day-Lewis.

Radnor was Ted Mosby on *How I Met Your Mother* for nine years. And the problem with that, as far as my preconceived notions go, is that after that long, Mosby and his overly sentimental, aggressively romantic, easily wounded, sensitive ilk who were prone to pine for lost loves instead of moving on and being happy¹ started really bugging me. And while I knew I wasn't going to be interviewing Mosby—the zany, lovelorn architect who, in middle age, sounded a lot like Bob Saget—part of me thought I might as well be. This was not rational or fair. But it's not something Radnor is unfamiliar with.

"It's like people who loved the show actually don't want you to do anything else in a weird way," he says. "There's a thing where people want to put you on a shelf with a certain kind of label. I've always chafed under that because I feel like a complicated, multi-faceted, multi-dimensional being. Like a human being. Some days I feel funny, some days I feel humourless. I want to paint with all those colours."

¹
The Ted Mosby type is also the Ross Geller type (only less socio-pathic) or a Cameron Crowe character type.

Suit
H&M
Sweater
J. Crew





Soul / Funk / Disco / R; B

/ R; B

BY ROBINSON

SOUL / FUNK / DISCO / R; B

SOUL / FUNK / DISCO / R; B

SOUL - R - MISC "H."

SADE

ROSS (solo)

DAVIDE TRICHERA

ANSON

ROBBY CONNECTION
ROCKWELL





**"THERE'S A THING
WHERE PEOPLE
WANT TO PUT YOU
ON A SHELF WITH
A CERTAIN KIND
OF LABEL. I'VE
ALWAYS CHAFED
UNDER THAT
BECAUSE I FEEL LIKE
A COMPLICATED,
MULTI-FACETED,
MULTI-DIMEN-
SIONAL BEING."**



Pants
Citizens of
Humanity

Blazer
COS

Sweater
Vince

Shoes
Vince
Camuto

Styling:
Ashley Zohar
for
The Wall
Group

Grooming:
Sonia Lee
for
Exclusive
Artists/
M.A.C
Cosmetics

Still, there are undeniable similarities between the heart Mosby wore on his sleeve and the one Radnor sports on his. The difference is that Radnor wears his honestly, without any shade of pretense or performance. You look at the heart he's wearing on his sleeve and you wonder if you could pull off that look, too.

The promise of Josh Radnor is that you can. But it takes work.

MEN CAN

be wary of self-improvement,² of trying new things. Maybe it's laziness, but more likely it's that taking up a new skill—like, for instance, learning to play the guitar at 42, starting a band with a famous singer-songwriter and touring the record you helped write with him³—is a tacit admission that we aren't perfect. We know that we aren't perfect, of course, but to survive day to day, we ignore that.

"By the time we get older, we've zeroed in on what we're pretty good at and what we've been rewarded for professionally—what we get applauded for," Radnor explains. "Whereas when you're a kid, you suck at everything so you're kind of used to trying new things. When you're an adult, it's so vulnerable to be bad at something. 'Why would I do this when I'm good at other things?'"

We're in an expansive back room of a Los Angeles record store. The walls are covered with framed posters shouting about obscure exploitation films. Boxes of records are piled near a bar stocked with oversized liquor bottles painted to look full. Like every guitar player in history, Radnor will sometimes strum distractedly while we talk. It feels a little like a late night college dorm room conversation. Only, he actually knows what he's talking about.

And what he's talking about has my brain ticking, ready to blow. Epiphanies aren't always about learning something new. Just as often, they erupt when something you held at the periphery of your thoughts is explained in a way that it suddenly feels universally, urgently true.

And here's mine, courtesy of Josh Radnor: We call our fear of failure Satisfaction. We like who we are, so we don't need to learn to play the guitar. Or quit smoking. Or learn Spanish. Or listen to our wives. On a global scale, becoming a perform-for-crowds-of-paying-fans kind of musician in your 40s isn't miraculous. But on a personal level? Ha. That seems unimaginable. And it isn't like Radnor is preternaturally immune to fear. He's just selective about how he metabolizes it.

"The good side of it is 'Oh, we can always be learning and growing and trying new things, and that's exciting,'" he says. "The shadow part is some sort of chronic restlessness or dissatisfaction. 'I could always be better.' It's a question of what your motor is. If I'm doing it because it's bringing me a lot of joy and it's just opening up new vistas, great. But if I'm doing it because I feel like a piece of crap, I don't think good stuff really comes from that. But that's a voice I have to deal with."

2

This is a broad statement and, as such, is unfair to all the women who resist self-improvement. But at the same time, isn't it also kind of true? It sure seems like retired women take classes, travel, wear scarves. Men dig in, get depressed... and become the president.

3

Spoiler alert: This is what Josh Radnor has done.

4

Incidentally, this theme is often explored in the short stories of George Saunders. He is my favourite author. And the only reason I'm not relating the conversation I had with Radnor about Saunders is because I've made a rule that I'm not allowed to mention Saunders in every magazine I write for. But if you want the story, send me an email!

Being on a hit sitcom admittedly affords you a little more freedom to try new things. Radnor is not unaware of his privileged life. He's very careful not to sound ungrateful. Actually, he's very careful not to be ungrateful.

But gratitude—or something that looks a lot like it—can keep you from trying new things. Don't be greedy. Be happy with what you have. Stay in your lane. Radnor's career is evidence that that mentality is bullshit. He pursues his passions the way a survivor of some calamity embraces life.

Why not do theatre? Why not write and direct a couple of films? Why not join up with Ben Lee and become a singer-songwriter? And then, why not return to TV in a show created by the professional tear-jerkers behind *Parenthood*? That last one is called *Rise*. In it, Radnor will play a music teacher. He is very well prepared for that role.

"I found that I really have to fight the urge to compare and to be competitive because it's such a demon. I don't really see anyone having my particular career," he says. "It's a very odd, idiosyncratic thing that's very particular to me, so who am I competing against? I am just trying to follow some sort of inner GPS around. I've felt very artistically fulfilled in the past couple of years."

It's a pretty handy GPS.

IF THIS

were a movie—or if celebrity journalism was, you know, important—an editor would break in here and tell me that I've lost my objectivity. That I'm too close.

And yeah, by the end of our chat—and guitar lesson—I legitimately admire Josh Radnor.

Is that overly earnest? Definitely. I want to say that that's appropriate since Radnor is nothing if not earnest. Only, he doesn't see that.

"I don't like earnestness without some sort of friction or examination," he says. "My favourite art is what I call 'dinged up optimism.' I feel I'm constitutionally an optimist, but I used to be naive about it. Because things don't always work out. What then?"

If you're normal, you go back to what you know you're good at. You find safety. If you're like Radnor, you make something else. You create.

"Dinged up optimism"⁴ is actually the perfect way to describe both Radnor and what I find so impressive about him. Because, yeah, it's easy to be cynical about men like him—dudes who publicly strive, who refuse to stop growing. It's also easy to project my shit on others, especially when you see some of yourself in them. But the answer isn't to ignore that negativity entirely. You don't have to snuff out your cynicism.

Just don't let it stop you from picking up that guitar and pressing your fingers hard into the strings, so hard that it hurts, until you don't notice the pain because, suddenly, you're making music.

"Life is a struggle," says Radnor. "The trick to life is to find what you love to do and struggle with that."

As regulation approaches the cannabis industry, modern, well-designed and properly funded businesses are getting ready to take over what the unruly grey-area pioneers started. When the sun sets on the Wild Weed West, will any of the cannabis OGs who brought us to this point be left standing?

Text:
Coleman Molnar

Photos:
Grady Mitchell



Weed Is Dead.

**Long
Live
Weed.**





ANDREW GORDON can't take five steps across the Lift Cannabis Expo showroom floor without running into someone who needs a handshake or a hug.

As the director of operations at Aura Cannabis (one of 18 Vancouver dispensaries to receive a business licence granting them permission to operate within the city) and one of the country's few professionals who has proven himself capable of getting a multi-million-dollar dispensary concept up and running and making multi-millions, Gordon has cultivated a reputation for being someone with the skills, experience and optimism required to succeed in this uncertain business. It's the kind of reputation that pays dividends in hugs, handshakes and job offers, especially at an event like this one that brings the biggest players in the cannabis space together in the epicentre of pot in Canada.

"It's better to be kind than right," he says, carving his way through the 200-plus booths and thousands of visitors crowding the floor of the Vancouver Convention Centre. "And we as an industry need to be mindful of that because, fuck yeah, we're right! There's no doubt we're right. Of course we're right. That's easy to prove—just look at the situation." He's trying to provide some context for the changing attitudes—and subsequent businesses—in the cannabis space. He speaks quickly,

with the confidence of someone who knows exactly how precipitous the cliff they're dangling from is because they scaled its face to get there. "But can we do it with humility and grace and understanding and meet people where they are?" It's a rhetorical question, of course. The hugs and handshakes are the answer.

Pushing through the front doors and out into the coastal air, Gordon is greeted by a side of the city's weed scene that, unlike the rapidly evolving ecosystem inside, is much the same now as it was in the '90s. Hundreds of people are gathered outside the convention centre, passing—always to the left—the source of the rich smell that hangs in the air. Inside, only business cards and cannabis-related products are exchanged, not the drug itself. But out here, you can get whatever you want—no paperwork required. There are no licensed producers here.

A dozen or so vendors have set up tents along the sidewalk, offering different strains by the gram, pre-rolled joints, edibles or, what likely represents the most herpetoid risk in the vicinity, glass rigs at \$2 a pop for "dabbing" (a method of vaporizing concentrated cannabis that involves a blowtorch and at least two hours of free time afterwards). Far from the polished professionals inside, these folk represent Old Weed—these are the risk takers, the true, dirty pioneers who grew cannabis in the basement and sold it on the streets, answering the cries of the bud-starved masses long before dispensaries started popping up and swiping credit cards on every corner. Here, sweaters are baggy and worn, signs are handwritten and the baggies all come from the dollar store.

Having dispensed the requisite hugs to a group of peers outside, Gordon lights a joint, a sativa-dominant blend of Sunkiss CBD mixed with Aura's in-house strain, Electric Kush. Not surprisingly for someone with his base level of positive energy, he prefers the uplifting effects of sativa. As the doobie travels counter-clockwise, followed by several more, the group's attention is drawn to the foot of the impromptu market, where a man with an unkempt beard and wild eyes has begun a spirited, if poorly enunciated, proselytization, waving a bag of weed the size of a stack of Bibles over his head. His message is almost unintelligible—"Marijuana something something! Legalization or death something something!"—but somehow familiar, too. It seems to be a classic sermon of Old Weed. He's preaching about freedom and resistance, with a note of anger and something else in his voice. Paranoia? He might want to consider going inside, where the air is free of smoke and full of optimism. He might cool down.

Inside, New Weed reigns, making the future of cannabis feel imminent and rife with promise and profit and hugs. Out here, the shouting continues.

IN DECEMBER of last year, *The Georgia Straight*, one of Vancouver's more resilient free alternative weeklies, published a story highlighting several cannabis shops to which the writer (presumably a millennial) would feel comfortable sending her mother (presumably a baby boomer). Listed as the most mom-friendly dispensary in the area was Aura (Gordon's latest project), located in the Cedar Cottage neighbourhood on Kingsway Street, between a printing shop and a hair and nail salon, both of which have Korean characters on their signs.

It's a warm and contemporary environment that Gordon likens to an Apple store, hesitating only slightly with the comparison. In the store, locally sourced products, like bath bombs to relieve your stress and hemp dog treats to relieve your best friend's, are professionally packaged and thoughtfully arranged on the shelves. The sounds and smells have been selected, with Aura's core demographics of working professionals, active seniors and pet owners in mind.

"One thing I always bring to the shops I work in is a diffuser," says Gordon. "When you have a working professional or a senior in the environment and it reeks of bud, you alienate them pretty quickly, but when they

WEED IS DEAD. LONG LIVE WEED.

come in and they don't smell bud, they're open and receptive. They're already attuned to the idea that you're doing something different, so they appreciate that."

As the country inches toward legalization, businesses are becoming more competitive, finally able to tap into the capitalist competition that ultimately drives a better consumer experience. For decades, those in need of weed were forced to take whatever they could get, which often meant buying from strangers from Craigslist, meeting up with a friend of a friend in a public place with \$80 cash or shopping from a dispensary that looked more like a stoner's dorm room than a place of business.

At Aura, the products are arranged in a modern, minimalist fashion at the back, and there's a large space for seating and community events like yoga in the front. Of course, this layout will change with the forthcoming renovations. In fact, much change is coming to the single-location dispensary. With the capital and corporate structure in place and a game plan in execution, Aura is poised to grow from one store to 20 within the coming six months.

But not all dispensaries are so built to scale, ready to hit the ground running once the anticipated legislation changes occur. A glimpse at the maps available on the Vancouver city website reveals just how many dispensaries are simply operating on the principle of getting in while the getting's good; of the 99 currently in the Vancouver area, 18 have attained the \$30,000-a-year business licence, 21 have filed for it and 60, represented by red dots on the map, are non-compliant operations.

One of the most famous of those red dots is Cannabis Culture, the Vancouver institution founded by Canadian Marc Emery, "the Prince of Pot." With eight locations across the country—including its headquarters at Victory Square in Vancouver's Gastown district, which remains the undeniable heart of cannabis in Canada—Cannabis Culture has taken heat from lawmakers in multiple provinces for selling pot to pretty much anyone over the age of 19, culminating in the closure of multiple locations in Montreal and the arrest and expulsion of Emery and his partner from the business in early 2017.

"Their evolution into the dispensary sector really accelerated that intensity around enforcement," says Gordon. By ignoring the faint regulatory lines being drawn by the government in what Emery referred to as an act of "peaceful civil disobedience,"

they contributed to an erosion of credibility for the industry. "All that social licence that we'd accumulated in that year and a half or whatever just went 'shwooop,' right out the window."

Still, for now, Cannabis Culture's five Vancouver stores continue to turn a profit, even without the \$30,000 piece of paper that Gordon has framed and hung on display in his shop. In most of the locations, the look and feel of Old Weed remains—where Aura is bright and modern, with local art hung on the walls, Cannabis Culture is dark and crowded, with stickers bearing phrases like "Work Free Drug Place," and where Aura's staff offer informed opinions on the efficacy of its products, Cannabis Culture's seem happy just to be stoned at work.

"That's not their point, that's not their mission, that's not their fight," says Gordon. "Just because it doesn't align with me, I can't judge them. But what I can say is 'You're sharing this sector with us, so be considerate of the other stakeholders whose image and profile are reflected by your activities. Please! Because it takes a lot to get where we are. I run a 100-per cent-illegal business with a business licence, and that took a lot of work. And now, you coming in and doing this activity really changes the community and the conversation around this issue.'"

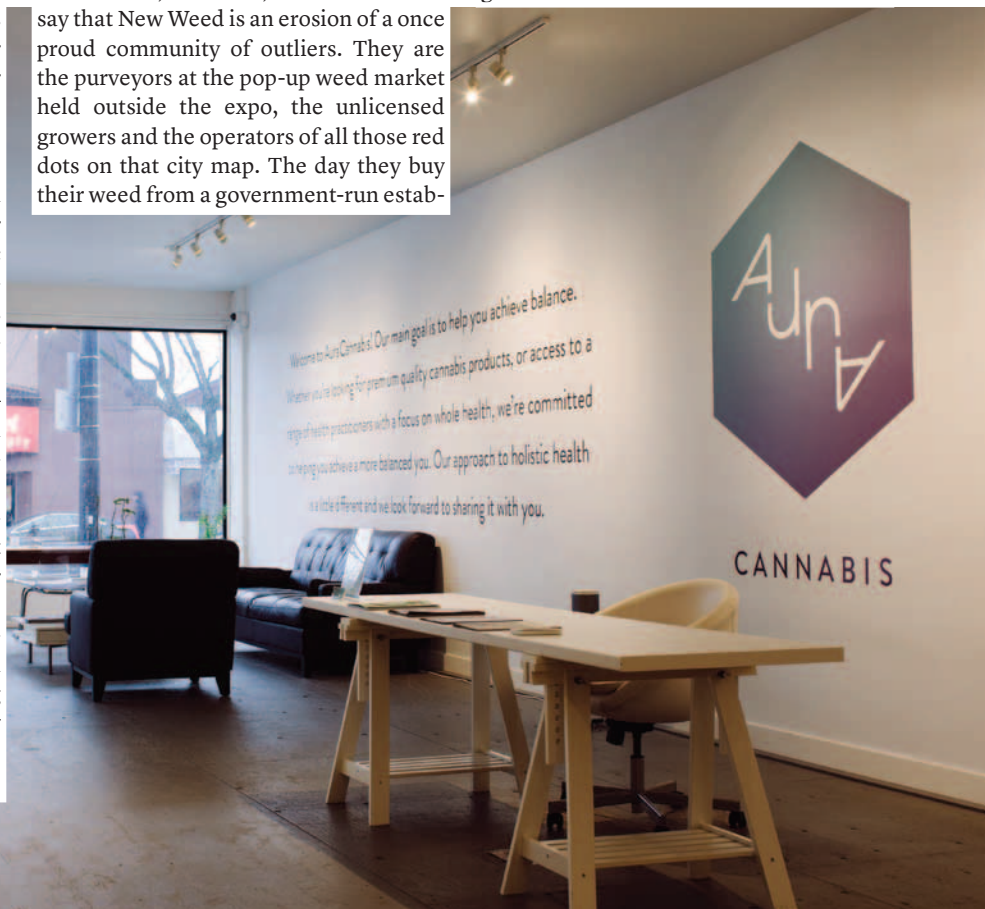
There are, of course, those who would say that New Weed is an erosion of a once proud community of outliers. They are the purveyors at the pop-up weed market held outside the expo, the unlicensed growers and the operators of all those red dots on that city map. The day they buy their weed from a government-run estab-

lishment will be the day they stop smoking. And that's not going to happen. Some, like the Old Weed preacher, are absolute in their defiance, smoke inhaled and ready to be blown into the face of anyone who dares to tell them how to use this, their sacred plant.

To Gordon, it's not just access or about creating a clean, modern space where people feel welcome. It's also about respect—respect for the regulators, respect for the consumers and respect for the communities in which they operate. Sometimes that means a handshake. Sometimes it means a hug.

"I want to see a change, but we have to change, too—to come into alignment," he says. "Because it's give-and-take and it's balance, and if we don't figure out a way to break out of that old mould and create a new opportunity that's going to be responsive to the community interests, then we're missing the point."

And, ultimately, some *will* miss that opportunity. If the red dots on the Vancouver city map are any indication, most will miss it. When The Law finally rides into the Wild Weed West later this summer, change will follow. Those who have done the work will adapt and welcome the future of cannabis consumerism. Others will be caught off guard and kicked back to the streets. Only, this time, their cries for legalization or death will be moot.



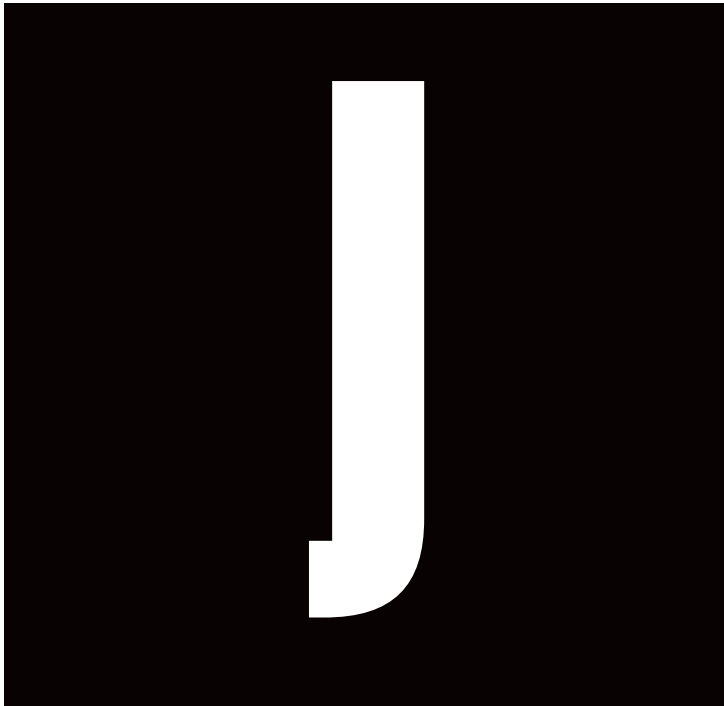
HE-

MAN

JORDAN PETERSON:
**WHY THE MOST CONTROVERSIAL
MAN IN CANADA IS ALSO
THE MOST MISUNDERSTOOD.**

Text: James Grainger





ORDAN PETERSON HAS the mien and intensity of that one cool high-school teacher you remember from your youth. He is curious and engaging, and he breezily references Jung, Piaget and Nietzsche while pausing to digress into off-the-cuff discourses on topics like the hidden alchemical symbolism in the Marvel Avengers movies.

That kind of intellectual heft, mixed with culturally savvy plain-spokenness, is the foundation of Peterson's rather remarkable popularity in Canada and internationally. He's part science nerd, part (maybe) misunderstood do-gooder, and if you've begun to chafe under the weight of watching what you say, Peterson may just be your intellectual superhero, fighting for your freedom of speech. His online talks attract tens of millions of views, mostly by men under the age of 30—the first generation of men raised to be politically correct and brought up with an awareness of their privilege that, because it's all they've known, they don't necessarily feel.

Peterson's new book, *12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos*, is aimed squarely at the fears, failures and aspirations of that masculine demographic. It's a group that is both under- and over-served. Most pop culture is aimed directly at it—so much so that for a small, vocal contingent, the thought of a woman wielding a lightsaber borders on blasphemy. And yet, with that attention comes a kind of permissiveness that has had some unintended consequences. But before we can discuss how Peterson addresses those consequences, I feel compelled to reference the giant rainbow-coloured elephant in the room that follows Peterson everywhere these days.

That elephant would be the three videos he posted in September 2016 in which he railed against Bill C-16, a proposed anti-discrimination law that added gender identity and gender expression to the Canadian Human Rights Act. Peterson argued that it was so poorly constructed and contradictory that it would restrict free speech and leave the door open for further restrictions on intellectual inquiry. Under the law, his lectures could suddenly be considered hate speech, he warned—partly because he refuses to use gender-neutral pronouns.

Although Peterson has gone on record saying that he is happy to address a student or colleague by the pronoun that fits the gender they present to the world, he draws a firm line against what he sees as an ever-changing list of pronouns that includes “ve,” “te,” “em,” “zie” and “zir.”

The ensuing media storm transformed the student-friendly University of Toronto lecturer into a whipping boy for the activist left, who saw Peterson as a transphobic alarmist and misogynist, and for free-speech advocates, he became a rebel bravely fighting back against the tyranny of liberal academia and gender politics. Unfortunately for him, his fight to protect freedom of speech also made him a hero for those on the fringes of the radical right who could cloak their actual bigotry in his legitimate critiques of left-wing excesses.

The backlash against Peterson soon went far beyond the usual protests, internet smear campaigns and calls for his firing. He was mysteriously suspended from both YouTube and Google for a short spell; his office was vandalized; and activists posterized his neighbourhood

with “Community Safety Bulletins” accusing him of “having open associations with neo-Nazi groups” and “campaigning against people of colour, Muslims and LGBT people.”

“I’ve had moments when I would have liked to have my old life back,” he concedes, speaking with me via Skype. “But I’m not complaining. What’s happened to me is a radical broadening of the good and the bad. The worst things that ever happened in my life occurred over the past year, but so did the best.”

Peterson does himself no favours by refusing to more actively disavow those right-wing-fringe supporters who have aligned themselves with his ideas, but he claims that their numbers are grossly over-exaggerated. “When you look at the YouTube comments sections for most [political] videos, they make you want to take a bath. On my site, maybe one comment in 50 comes from someone who needs a slap. As for the anti-Semites, their miserable, wretched carcasses pop up everywhere.”

Peterson is hardly an overnight success. His ideas on the connections between ideology, mythological and religious symbols and evolutionary psychology, explored in his book *Maps of Meaning: The Architecture of Belief* (1999), proved so popular with his students that he adapted them for a 13-part educational TV miniseries. He also began to make regular appearances on TV discussion panels.

It was his controversial take on Bill C-16 and his ensuing attacks on what he sees as the rise of an intolerant neo-Marxist postmodern left that got him labelled a defender of far-right beliefs. That label has so permeated public perception that a teaching assistant at Wilfrid Laurier University was recently reprimanded for showing a video clip, from Ontario’s public television channel, of Peterson discussing his views on gender-neutral pronouns.

For his supporters, irony and vindication rarely come in such big doses.

T

HE IDEA OF WRESTLING order and honour from a chaotic life event is one of the central themes in *12 Rules for Life*. The book draws on many of the

same scientific and cultural findings as *Maps of Meaning*, but here, Peterson has repurposed his readings of mythology, psychology and evolutionary theory into a philosophical self-help guide aimed primarily at millennials.

The chapter titles alone (“Stand up straight with your shoulders back,” “Set your house in perfect order before you criticize the world,” “Tell the truth—or, at least, don’t lie”) announce his intentions while evoking his tough-but-caring-teacher persona. The book’s title, especially the prominence accorded to the word “Rules,” is also a giveaway.

“There is such a huge underground clamour for rules,” Peterson says, “that I don’t think I could have picked a better word had I planned it. Our culture has talked about freedom for so long that from the bottom of our psyches we’re crying out for a conversation about rules and responsibilities and structure.”

Peterson’s recent experiences confirm this observation about rules. “One of the things that’s stunned me over the past year, talking to live audiences, is that as soon as I address the need for rules and the moral obligation to bear a burden and speak the truth, everybody falls silent, especially the younger men. They’re on the edge of their seats.”

Peterson’s message, when stripped of its biblical, mythological and philosophical allusions, is pretty straightforward: “Straighten the hell up!” he booms. “You’re a fucking mess! Grow up, adopt some responsibility,



have a goal, develop some conscientiousness!” He continues: “And these young men say, ‘No one’s ever said that to me, that I’m pathetic because I could be so much better!’ It’s so much better than saying they’re okay the way they are.” The stories and myths he introduces to young men speak to the core human desire for objective morals and limits (according to him)—a desire too often ignored by our consumerist postmodern society.

Despite how he’s perceived by his detractors, Peterson hardly fits the bill of a right-wing demagogue. He often tears up when speaking about the struggles of young men, and he goes to great personal lengths to help them access the better self lurking beneath their tats, slouching shoulders and man bun. “People need to accept social responsibility and an honourable function in life, because without it, they degenerate and die. The rules allow you to play the game, and the game allows you to erect a hierarchy of potential achievement.”



Cassandra Williams, a U of T student union member, poses in front of a sign at the Jordan Peterson protest/rally.

It’s no coincidence that Peterson’s message about rules and limits is falling on such fertile ground. Chaos, in the form of rapid technological change and the upending of traditional social structures and values, has been eclipsing order for several decades. “Excessive freedom is indistinguishable from chaos,” he says. “The rate of technological change alone is inherently destabilizing.”

Peterson is not casting aspersions on millennials—he says the cultural shift to a freedom-based ethos rapidly accelerated with the radical lifestyle experiments of the 1960s and ’70s. “Drug use, for instance, peaked among young people in 1979, the year I finished high school. It was all about dropping out but not tuning in. We didn’t join anything—you were a pawn of the state if you did. And we were taught not to trust adults. That’s crazy! You’re an adult from 18 to 80 and you have a culture that tells young people not to trust adults?”

The ensuing social chaos, Peterson argues in *12 Rules for Life*, has been particularly hard on men, many of whom struggle to find honourable roles for themselves within the emerging social and political orders. This shouldn’t seem controversial to say, but it is—compared to most groups, men have traditionally had it pretty easy. And yet suicides among Canadian men have become a “silent epidemic,” according to *BC Medical Journal* (hardly a men’s rights publication), and psychologists are having to develop new protocols for pornography addiction in males in their early teens.

It doesn’t help that many traditionally male attributes, such as aggression and a propensity for relating better to objects than people, are often equated in the popular imagination with undeniably negative masculine traits like physical violence and warfare.

“We don’t have any positive synonyms for ‘aggression’ anymore,” he says. “Why don’t we say ‘forthright’ or ‘indomitable’ or ‘assertive?’” Using stories from the Bible and classical mythology, along with scientific studies, Peterson passionately argues for the need for men to access and tame their innately aggressive nature.

The alternative, as history has shown again and again, is too terrifying to consider. Peterson has lectured about the

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AND STRUCTURE.
”

dangers of ideological extremism on the left and the right for most of his academic career, and he argues that we need to address “the threat of a genuine rise of a new radical right.”

“You have these men who are depressed and anxious and aimless and bitter and undertrained and undereducated,” Peterson says. “And then they’re assaulted with these accusations of participating in rape culture and toxic masculinity.”

According to him, the left’s emphasis on racial and ideological solidarity is only throwing fuel onto this fire. “The lefties are pushing identity politics so hard that a lot of young people on the right are also becoming identitarians,” he says. “Their basic attitude is something like this: ‘OK, you’ve convinced me that my fundamental identity is racial. But [what] you fail to understand is that if the game is race, then I’m going to play to win.’”

Statements like this go some way toward explaining the backlash against Peterson. His passion can come across as being strident, especially if you disagree with him (or think you’re supposed to disagree with him), and like many creative thinkers, he uses spoken dialogue as a means of inquiry, floating opinions and tentative hypotheses that he modifies later. It’s a dangerous practice in a connected world that remembers everything and where every statement is given equal weight, regardless of its context. This makes it easy for the

ideologically orthodox on both sides of the political divide to cherry-pick his remarks to endorse their ideological positions.

My own fascination with Peterson began after watching one of his online lectures on mythological symbols of masculinity. As a longtime supporter of feminism, I was skeptical of Peterson’s insistence on innate gender differences, but I couldn’t deny that the innately male traits he was describing—higher aggression and object relation levels, for instance—exactly lined up with my own observations of my 18-month-old son, Charlie. Although my wife and I are raising him in the exact same way as I raised his older sister, Charlie is clearly more obsessed with trucks, dinosaurs and construction sites than she was at the same age. Which isn’t to say that I agree with all of Peterson’s take on gender (or any other topic), but his erudite, research-backed and bracingly unsentimental analysis continues to clarify my own opinions.

A

ALTHOUGH PETERSON HAS BEEN accused of trying to further the aims of the alt-right, he claims to have rescued scores of men from right-wing extremism. “These young men tell me they were sick and tired of political correctness and being accused of racism and promoting rape culture. They felt like things were stacked against them and became attracted to the right wing. Then they watched my videos and realized that was a bad idea.”

So what’s next for the reluctant prophet of the disaffected? He is currently on a planned sabbatical that will see him speak to packed auditoriums in Europe, North America and Australia. He will no doubt be revered, ridiculed and tweeted about at every stop, but Peterson insists he won’t waver from his message of intellectual freedom and curmudgeonly grace under fire.

“There’s a line in the New Testament that we know as ‘Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth,’” he says, falling back into teacher mode. “Well, that’s not the right translation. The real one is ‘Those who have swords but keep them sheathed shall inherit the earth.’ That’s a very different meaning.”

James Grainger is a freelance writer and the author of *Hacmless*.

Radnor Rock

Sure, he started a Simon & Garfunkel-like duo with Ben Lee (aptly called Radnor & Lee) and plays a music teacher on the new TV drama *Rise*, but if Josh Radnor likes music so much, we thought, then why doesn't he prove it by making us—and, consequently, you—a totally rad(nor)¹ playlist? He said sure.²



1.
“Appointments”
Julien Baker

2.
“Heroin”
The Velvet Underground

3.
“Even the Darkness
Has Arms”
The Barr Brothers

4.
“Hey Laura”
Gregory Porter

5.
“Little Love”
Gabriel Kahane

6.
“Rooting for You”
London Grammar

7.
“From Silver Lake”
Jackson Browne

8.
“Look What They’ve
Done to My Song, Ma”
Melanie

9.
“Fatoumata Diawara”
Kanou

10.
“What I Know”
Trevor Hall

1

Sorry.

2

And, not for nothing, but the man was classy enough not to put any of his own tracks on it. But that doesn't mean you shouldn't check his stuff out.

porter
flying refined



So fly

Don't worry, we'll get you there in style, whatever your style.
You don't need to be as ridiculously handsome as our raccoon mascot.

CHANEL

