

Art is not a privilege.

fsm.

A journal for the arts | Independent and Free

Late-November 2022
Volume 2 | Issue 7



Molly Preston (writer & director) and Kevin Forrest (director of photography) and crew of *Freedom, WI*. Image courtesy of Jill Petracek



Photograph by: Ashyra K.

fsm.

fabricating something more is an arts review journal covering contemporary arts in the Greater Fox River Valley of Wisconsin. *fsm.* is committed to: providing critical reviews of the arts, by artists; highlighting upcoming, thought-provoking, local creative events; and offering an open platform for editorials discussing creative concerns, both local and otherwise. Both educating the community on the possibilities and importance of the arts as well as raising the level of local discourse about the arts are the goals of this publication.

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fsm. believes in paying for quality work. Our goal is to be able to pay our writers solely from community support.

fsm. is produced by a small staff of dedicated volunteers and seeks contributions from writers across the Greater Fox River Valley of Wisconsin. We locally distribute monthly to locations from Fond du Lac to Green Bay, Wisconsin.

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On the Cover

Photograph taken by Ashyra K., during the photo walk written about on page 4, "Developing a Superpower."

We would love your help with our mission!

fsm. is a community sponsored voice for the arts. If you would like to help support us financially, please consider one of the options below. Know that our content is free to the public, but is not free to produce, and we are proud to state that we pay those who contribute to the journal.

- Be a subscriber, for \$5 per month or \$50 per year. Visit <https://fsm.ink> and click the subscribe button on the bottom right of the page.
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- Contact us at hello@fsm.ink for advertising or sponsorship possibilities.

We are building the community that we want to create in.

2023, a Year for Growth.

fsm. made it through its second year, albeit it took us three to do it. We have shared a myriad number of voices, primarily through the freely distributed print journal, but also through video interviews, podcast episodes, poetry readings, and, most recently, our first organized exhibition. We have partnered with the Building for Kids Children's Museum, People of Progression, and the Photo Opp on arts accessibility projects. The curated calendar of events we print and share online is completely free, and we are particularly focused on events that may not have a large budget to advertise. We understand the importance of being a social justice ally, and will always find space for those who want to share what our community can be. Our mission is: "to facilitate growth in our community through art and action," and we are fully committed to that.

We would love your help.

2023 will be about reflection and growth for our organization. We are a 501(c)(3) non-profit, financially funded through local subscriptions and donations, advertising, and grants. Through an exceptionally tight budget, we have found a way to grow the paper in 2022 from eight to twelve pages an issue. The sixteen page paper you are holding is where we would like to be in 2023. Our expenses are simple: we pay those who contribute to the journal as well as the production costs to disseminate what is shared throughout our community, free of cost. Our board and staff are volunteer.

Your financial assistance can help us in the following ways:

We can maintain this paper at sixteen pages. With that space we can have more regular music, book, exhibition, movie, and performance reviews.

With the additional space means we will be paying more community creatives to write.

Currently, we print 500 copies a month. As we are growing into the Green Bay community, we need to be able to print more copies.

We would like to organize a few events in 2023, which are additional costs.

If you would like to give us a hand, there are some options. Through our website, <https://fsm.ink>, there are \$5/month or \$50/annual subscriptions. If you appreciate what we are doing, this may be a great option. Donations either by paypal or check are greatly appreciated. If you have a business, you can support the arts by taking out an advertisement with us. I'd be happy to talk to anyone about our budget, our goals, and what your help could do as we continue on our mission. You can reach me at: cristian@fsm.ink.

In art and action,
Cristian

Art in a Democratic Society

by Brandon Bauer

I am an artist and an art professor at St. Norbert College in De Pere. I have always believed that artists occupy a critical place in society and that artists must be active and engaged citizens. Art can be powerful when addressing pressing issues, speaking truth to power, and bringing others into the conversation and empowering them to act. Throughout my career, I have created work both implicitly and explicitly addressing politics and policy, but recently I have begun to focus specifically on the intersection of art and democracy in my teaching. As an art educator, I have been working to bring creativity and agency to civics education through the arts. One main source of inspiration is the work of the American educational reformer and philosopher John Dewey. In 1939 while witnessing the rise of fascism in Europe, Dewey wrote an essay titled "Creative Democracy: The Task Before Us," in which he concludes: "The task of democracy is forever that of the creation of a freer and more humane experience in which all share and to which all contribute." (1) Dewey believed that democracy was more than a political system. He believed in democracy as a way of life. He also believed that for democracy to be fully realized, it requires creativity. We live in a time like the one Dewey witnessed. We have witnessed our democracy directly attacked, a rise in political violence, and our civil society under the threat of authoritarianism fueled by polarization, conspiracy theories, and hatred.

In the past five years, I have begun bringing the intersection of art and democracy to my students and the community around St. Norbert College. I have curated exhibitions, engaged the campus in lectures with artists of national and international renown, created public programs, and specifically engaged my students in get-out-the-vote work. One prime example is a course I developed titled *Art in a Democratic Society*. This course was developed to cultivate creative civic engagement in students through a combined arts-based and service-learning educational approach. This undergraduate course was developed with three main components, an art studio component, a political theory seminar component, and a service-learning requirement. The service learning requirement of the course was designed to bring an active and experiential understanding of the basic mechanisms of our democracy beyond the abstractions of democratic theory explored in other aspects of this course. The course's first iteration was offered during the 2020 U.S. Presidential Election and has been offered each year since, including this fall during the Midterms. Students in this course study artists and artworks engaging with notions of democracy, take part in our campus get-out-the-vote efforts and engage in election-related service projects like becoming poll workers, engaging in non-partisan canvassing, and phone banking, as well as studying and discussing theories of democracy throughout the course. They do this while making art in response to the various course materials and discussions. In each offering of this and other similar courses, I have a virtual lecture series so that students can hear directly from artists and organizations from around the world working at the intersection of art and democracy or focusing on civic participation in their practice. This course and its iterations are designed to address the major components of what has been defined as a robust civics curriculum, as defined by organizations like the Center for American Progress, among others. A robust civics curriculum is often defined by the inclusion of comparisons of democratic systems worldwide, an understanding of the founding documents of democratic theory and practice (for example, the US Constitution and the Bill of Rights, among other documents), and a component of experiential learning through civic service. My courses do this, along with the added component of examining democracy through the lens of art and creativity.

As an artist who has pursued work that speaks to our political challenges, I have always believed that artists need social movements and that social movements need artists. This relationship between artists and social movements is often seen in the most visible ways. Artists are put to work making graphics, banners, or murals. In this way, artists often aestheticize the movements they serve. While this kind of work has created powerful graphic and political statements, I believe there is a much deeper and more impactful way in which the tools and training of artists and designers can be put to work in the service of democracy. I believe, as Dewey did, that creative democracy is the task before us. As Mary Jane Jacob states when analyzing Dewey's philosophy in her book *Dewey for Artists*, "as a creative act, democracy is perpetually unfinished, always in-progress." (2) It is artists who inherently understand the condition of the ever-in-progress, and artists who have the agency to create the ever new within this state. Artists are also adept at bringing others into that process. As one student commented about the *Art in a Democratic Society* course:

My experience with the content of this class in relation to the political turmoil the country faces today has been extremely educational. It has opened my eyes to how artists and the younger generations have an immense impact on the future of politics.

We are living in turbulent times with multiple compounding calamities confronting us. As noted by organizations like the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), we are again entering a world that is becoming more authoritarian, according to their recent Global State of Democracy report. (3) To address the most challenging issues we face as a country and a global community, we need functioning governments that are responsive to the people's will. In

our country, we have hostile forces entering the political arena who are actively working to subvert the mechanisms of democracy by every means at their disposal. They attack through fear, intimidation, and a deluge of conspiracy theories and falsehoods. They are probing the weaknesses in the system as it currently exists and exploiting them. As succinctly analyzed by the organization Protect Democracy, they are using the ways in which our system advantages authoritarianism. (4) There are solutions to this crisis. Democracy is not meant to be static. Democracy requires change and adaptation to thrive, to work continually toward that "more perfect union." We need a creative, active, and engaged pro-democracy movement to counter these undemocratic forces. Artists cannot sit on the sidelines. We must think critically and creatively and use the tools of our training to observe and critique, to reimagine and engage. We need to visualize the problems and work toward solutions. We need to imagine better futures and draw people into the conversation, encourage participation, and help people to see and act upon their agency. Through creativity and hard work, we can reinvigorate and reimagine what democracy can be and demonstrate how it can serve all people. As was true in Dewey's time, creative democracy is again the task before us as we counter this new rise of authoritarianism and work to bring a vibrant era of democracy into being.

- (1) Simpson Douglas J and Sam F Stack. 2010. Teachers Leaders and Schools : Essays by John Dewey. Carbondale Ill:
- (2) Jacob, M. J. (2019). Dewey for Artists. p. 81
- (3) International IDEA (2021). The Global State of Democracy: Building Resilience in a Pandemic Era. p. 3
- (4) Protect Democracy (2022). Advantaging Authoritarianism: Thee U.S. Electoral System & Antidemocratic Extremism



Protest Banner Lending Library works in the Let Us Vote! exhibition by Aram Han Sifuentes (SNC Bush Art Center Galleries)



Get-Out-The-Vote banner-making workshop in association with the Let Us Vote! exhibition by Aram Han Sifuentes, St. Norbert College

found/untitled

by Lyz Boveroux



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Students and mentors from People of Progression during the photowalk. Image courtesy of Mark Ferrell.

Developing a Superpower

by Cristian Andersson

Three non-profit groups: People of Progression, fsm., and the Photo Opp have partnered on an ongoing project for Black and African-American middle- and high-school students. Revolving around film photography, it is about learning a new process, experiencing new places, and sharing insights through art. The first day, detailed below, happened October 16th, 2022. A selection of prints taken by the students will be on display at Lawlss Coffee, Appleton, starting early December. One of the images taken that day, by Ashyra, is on the cover of this paper.

When I returned to the university to study photography, I was given a small button, black type on a pink background, that I pinned onto my jacket pocket. It read: ART IS NOT A PRIVILEGE. I think all of us students got buttons with different slogans, some silly and some sensible. Mine became a bit of a mantra for me, and it is printed on the back of every issue of fsm. I'm sure there are several interpretations of what those five words mean, but for me, it means this: the ability to create and share art is not only for the few but for all. To observe life, think of a question, and develop it into something artistic is just as essential to all of us as food and shelter. What is made doesn't have to be anything elaborate. It could be a whistled tune, a sketch, or a few rhyming lines. Why I think it is essential, available to all, and therefore not a privilege is because it is an individualistic expression of how we see the world. It becomes a recognition that we matter. And, if given a chance to develop, sharing our unique perspective can hold a lot of power.

Question: If your camera was a superpower, what picture would you take with it?
Tariyjah: I would take a picture of someone picking up trash to show that littering is wrong. It's killing all the plants and animals.

On a rather windy mid-October Sunday, after a month of planning, we set out on our first photo excursion. We had a few stops planned: a public land preserve, lunch, head to downtown Neenah, and then back to home base to talk about the day. Six middle- and high-school students were given point-and-shoot film cameras and some instructions on how to use them. There were a few goals for the day, but the big one was to create an experience for these students that they may not have had before. "Thought it was funny how they did not know how to use the cameras. It was great seeing them intrigued over the older technology," Lanise said, one of the People of Progression mentors. And it was great. There was some excitement in the unknown of what a picture would turn out like, if at all, when it isn't taken with a smartphone and instantly critiqued. That level of abstraction is

really intriguing. "Seeing the kids getting excited about learning something new. I love seeing people experience new art forms and opportunities," Rovell, another mentor, remarked about the day.

Question: If your camera was a superpower, what picture would you take with it?
Alyana: I would take a picture of nature. I think people should pay more attention to nature and get back to their roots.

Alayna really seemed to have resonated, as did so many of us, with being outdoors in the land preserve. Deb, the Executive Director of the land trust that is a caretaker for the land we were visiting, shared some powerful thoughts with us:

What many see of our work at the land trust, and is, in fact, our primary mission, is to preserve permanently natural spaces that are essential ecological habitats. We become stewards of the natural land. Through land donations, conservation agreements, and outright purchases of property critical to species of plants, animals, fish, and birds, we restore the spaces so these species can thrive.

But there is more to what we do. We are caretakers of private, protected conservancies and publicly-accessible preserves, like the Guckenber-Sturm Preserve, where we went on this photo outing. For the open lands to the public, we facilitate ways for people to passively interact with these natural habitats. Places where we can learn and wonder about nature. Be at peace. In fact, there is so much symbiotic history of people and the lands we protect. We cannot forget that this land was the home to many First Nation tribes. [The Omāeqnomenew-ahkew (Menominee), Ojéthi Šakówin, Hoocągra (Ho-Chunk), and Myaamia have been inhabitants of the lands in the region of the Guckenber-Sturm Preserve. You can investigate indigenous history through <https://native-land.ca,ed.>] It is vital for the land trust, charged with protecting these spaces, not only to find ways to make them accessible to everyone but also to look to the original inhabitants of these lands. I suspect there is much we can learn about how these First Nation tribes related to the flora, fauna, and fungi. And, as we dedicate ourselves to restoring these environmentally-significant lands, we aim to consider and honor those who have done the same before us.

continued on page 6.

Developing a Superpower, continued.

Question: If your camera was a superpower, what picture would you take with it?
Lamond Jr.: I'd take photos of taking care of the earth and getting rid of hate.

Cainan remarked, "I enjoyed seeing how curious the kids were about the land, the questions they had, and how excited they were about interacting with nature."

That was the magic of our time spent in the woods and marshy area. For a moment, we were taken out of the city. Our everyday routines were put on pause. We learned about the land and walked through the trails and amongst the reedy banks. And while we were together as a group, laughing and having a great time, something happens when you bring up the camera, peer through that viewfinder, and just focus. It is at that point when everything falls away, and you find yourself looking for that beautiful image to memorialize on film with the press of the shutter. Extrapolating out the superpowers mentioned above really speaks to the need for peace in our lives.

Question: If your camera was a superpower, what picture would you take with it?
Ashyra: If I could change anything with my camera's superpowers, it would be racism and world hunger.

Question: If your camera was a superpower, what picture would you take with it?
Peyton: I would take a picture stopping a white teacher from suspending a Black kid for the same thing a white kid did.

All of this circles back to the idea that art is not a privilege and that there can be power in the images that we create. It may be naïve to hope that a singular image could solve racism—there are plenty of images out there that have hoped to do just that—but I don't see it as a stretch to believe that an image, shown at just the right time, could change someone's personal belief. And that is a start.

Question: If your camera was a superpower, what picture would you take with it?
Lamarcus: The one that gives everyone superpowers.

Exactly.

After a few hours taking pictures outside at the land preserve and downtown

Neenah, with a wonderful lunch break and catching a surprise dance performance between, we headed back to People of Progression's office.

There, Mark and John from the Photo Opp had another surprise waiting for the students. While the disposable point-and-shoot cameras were fun enough to walk around and experiment with, back at the office was an extensive collection of 35mm cameras. The students immediately took to these more advanced cameras, and with instruction from Mark and John, they started working with all the manual controls. "I loved how much they wanted to engage in photography," Dartainia said, "seeing that excitement reminded me of why I started mentoring."

I asked Mark if he remembered taking his first image and how it felt. And if that had changed over time.

"I don't recall the first images I tried to create because I'm sure they were probably poorly exposed and out of focus if there was anything on the film when I got developed," Mark responded. "But I do remember the first time an image really excited me. It was on a school trip to the New York World's Fair, and it was a photograph of the Unisphere, a spherical stainless steel representation of the Earth, which still stands in Flushing Meadows-Corona Park in Queens, New York. When I saw it, I thought it was good enough to be on the cover of Life magazine. I showed it to everybody, and no that feeling hasn't changed."

It will be interesting to see how the students respond to their work, and I'm looking forward to Rovell and me matting them up and hanging the prints at Lawlss. Next steps will be classes on learning how to better operate the 35mm camera, as well as developing and printing their own work. And, in March, there will be an exhibition of their prints at Liminal Space Gallery in Neenah for Youth Art Month. But, beyond all that, I do believe that this is going to turn into an exercise in empowerment and new ways of creative expression. I personally am looking forward to seeing what these students choose to focus their lens upon. I bet there are superpowers in a lot of those cameras they will wield.

As Kristen from People of Progression put it when reflecting on the day: "Representation matters, as well as creating excitement about the new ventures they will go on."

The mission of People of Progression calls for the collective liberation of African Americans by empowering families with the tools, training, and supportive resources needed to organize and guarantee that their issues, concerns, and values are represented in their communities.

At the reedy marsh of the Guckenberg-Sturm Preserve. Image courtesy of Mark Ferrell.



to be seen, to create

by Hope Strenn

What is a poet?

A magician in which their metaphors cast incantations on the reader? A musician whose instrument is spoken word - rhythm and beat, paper and pen. A pretentious individual fueled by their own self obsession. A glutton for their own creation. Someone so incompetent that they believe their own words can be spaced and indented into chopped word salad and that in itself can make it meaningful. An out-of-touch sociopath. A contrarian. The devil's advocate. The voice of a generation. An elder. A veteran. A child. Who can dictate what poetry is? A rhyme or simile or a beautiful string of English words. Perhaps the sunset or the feeling you get when you drive down a hill that's a little too steep a little too fast.

What is an artist?

A necromancer who brings life to blank pages, resurrecting the concepts within their mind and in turn turning them to reality. Someone esteemed, focussed, talented. An individual who broods into their work, tormented and above others. The smell of paint and black coffee. Someone who creates something meaningful without meaning - a bold stroke of paint to display one's perception. A lump of clay. The way the angels paint the sky every day to each their own vision. Perhaps the child laying in the grass, declaring what they see. What is and what isn't.

What is a poet?

What is an artist?

Someone who places question marks

after every sentence

they write?

No.

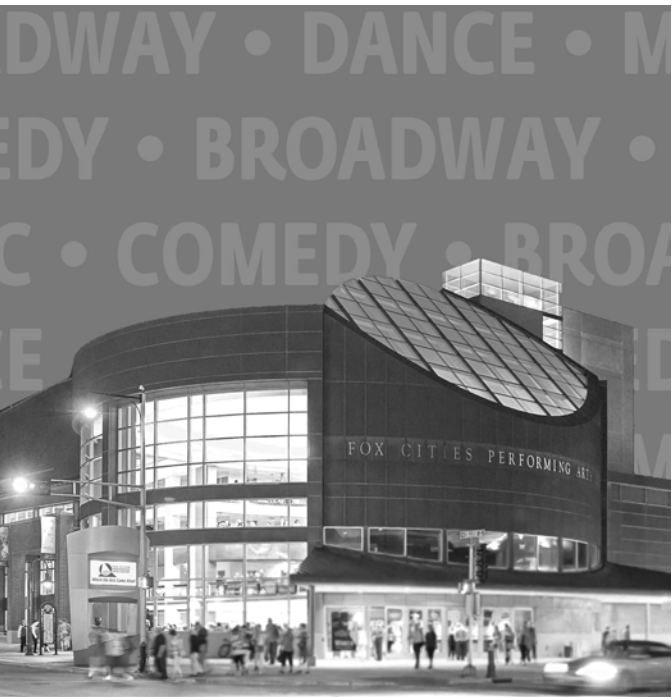
To be seen I must create.

To create I must be a poet.

To create I must be an artist.

-to be seen, to create

Photographers photographing photographers. Image courtesy of Mark Ferrell.



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What’s On Our Calendar

Thursday, December 1st

F Stop: Photo Exhibit

Genre: Visual Arts
Location: Oshkosh Public Library
106 Washington Ave, Oshkosh, WI
Time: 7:00–9:00 PM
Price: Free

Friday, December 2nd

newARTSpace/marketPLACE

Genre: Visual Arts
Location: newARTSpace
124a North Broadway, De Pere, WI
Time: 2:00 PM
Price: Free
About: Join us for a special curated pop-up holiday art marketplace featuring a wide array of art for sale by 8 local artists.

Ed Gein: the Musical 13th Anniversary

Genre: Theatre
Location: UWFFV Perry Hall
1478 Midway Rd., Menasha, WI
Time: 4:30 PM, 7:00 PM, and 9:30 PM
Price: \$15

Art Nite

Genre: Visual Arts
Location: Downtown De Pere
Time: 5:00–8:00 PM
Price: Free
About: A special evening of art and music in anticipation of the holidays at local venues uniting downtown De Pere through the arts! Other local businesses will have extended hours as well. Participating arts venues include Studio Rouge, One of One Gallery, The Art Connective, La Vie Taverne and newARTSpace.

Pegasis Holiday Special

Genre: Music
Location: The Tarlton Theatre
405-409 W Walnut St, Green Bay, WI
Time: 7:00 PM
Price: Free
About: Start your holidays off with stunning three part harmonies and smooth guitar.

Saturday, December 3rd

Rebecca Zornow Book Signing

Genre: Literature
Location: The Book Store
801 W College Ave, Appleton, WI
Time: 11:00–1:00 PM
Price: Free
About: Come meet Rebecca and check out her new book, “Dangerous to Heal”.

newARTSpace/marketPLACE

Genre: Visual Arts
Location: newARTSpace
124a North Broadway, De Pere, WI
Time: 2:00 PM
Price: Free
About: See December 2nd.

The Nutcracker Ballet

Genre: Dance
Location: Weill Center for the Performing Arts
826 N 8th St, Sheboygan, WI
Time: 2:00 PM, 7:00 PM
Price: \$25

Clique and Claque Opening Reception

Genre: Visual Arts
Location: Folio Art and Books
1922 University Ave, Green Bay, WI
Time: 4:00 PM
Price: Free

Silver and Gold: ASC Member Exhibition Reception

Genre: Visual Arts
Location: ArtSpace Collective
7 Merritt Ave., Oshkosh
Time: 6:00–9:00 PM
Price: Free

OCP Presents “It’s a Wonderful Life”

Genre: Theatre
Location: American Legion Post No. 38
3220 W College Ave., Appleton, WI
Time: 5:30 PM
Price: \$20–\$35

Dark Arts Circus Presents: Nu Metal Noel

Genre: Performance
Location: The Tarlton Theatre
405 West Walnut St., Green Bay, WI
Time: 9:00 PM
Price: \$15

Sunday, December 4th

OCP Presents “It’s a Wonderful Life”

Genre: Theatre
Location: American Legion Post No. 38
3220 W College Ave., Appleton, WI
Time: 12:00 PM
Price: \$15–\$30

The Nutcracker Ballet

Genre: Dance
Location: Weill Center for the Performing Arts
826 N 8th St, Sheboygan, WI
Time: 2:00 PM
Price: \$25
About: See December 3rd.

Brass and Organ Christmas Spectacular

Genre: Music
Location: St. Norbert College
315 Third St, De Pere, WI
Time: 7:00 PM
Price: Free

Tuesday, December 6th

Lawton Small Talks

Genre: Visual Arts
Location: University of Wisconsin-Green Bay
2420 Nicolet Dr, Green Bay, WI
Time: 12:30–1:00 PM
Price: Free
About: Join us for a brief artist talk with artists from the 50th Annual Juried Student Exhibition.

Leah Dobrinska Book Launch Event

Genre: Literature
Location: Kimberly Public Library
515 Kimberly Ave, Kimberly, WI
Time: 6:00–8:00 PM
Price: Free
About: Celebrate the release of Leah Dobrinska’s newest book, Death Checked Out. There will be an author reading followed by Q&A and light refreshments.

Wednesday, December 7th

International Film Series

Genre: Film
Location: Neville Public Museum
210 Museum Pl, Green Bay, WI
Time: 7:00 PM
About: Today we are watching Barking Water (2009, USA). Seminole Nation director Sterlin Harjo presents viewers with his own personal Oklahoma, which includes an eclectic mix of humanity. The film chronicles a road trip by a dying man and his former lover across the state to visit friends and his family in Wewoka, the capital of the Seminole Nation.

My Genius of Humanity

Genre: Theatre
Location: University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh
800 Algoma Blvd, Oshkosh, WI
Time: 7:30 PM
Price: General \$14; Student \$5; Seniors \$11; UWU Alumni; \$11
About: Inspired by the misbegotten journey of well-intentioned Armenian-Americans following World War II, the story examines the struggle of the Davidian family as they voluntarily emigrate to Soviet dominated Armenia in search of the perceived comfort of their ancestral home. The play reveals what “home” means to family and what family must do to remake home.

Oshkosh Public Arts Forum

Genre: Visual Arts
Location: becket’s
2 Jackson St, Oshkosh, WI
Time: 5:30 PM
Price: Free
About: We are inviting a diverse group of arts organizations, artists, arts educators, creative placemakers, community leaders, influencers, and the general public to join us in a collaborative conversation with the goal of creating a public arts organization in our community.

Thursday, December 8th

Digital Arts Fall Showcase

Genre: Visual Arts
Location: NWTc
2740 W Mason St., Green Bay, WI
Time: 4:30–6:30 PM
Price: Free

My Genius of Humanity

Genre: Theatre
Location: University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh
800 Algoma Blvd, Oshkosh, WI
Time: 7:30 PM
Price: General \$14; Student \$5; Seniors \$11; UWU Alumni; \$11
About: See December 7th

The HIVE: An Artist Collective for Teens

Genre: Visual Arts
Location: Wildflower Wellness Studio
101 W Edison Ave Suite 258, Appleton, WI
Time: 7:00–8:30 PM
Price: \$15
About: The HIVE is an artist collective for teens in the Appleton/ Fox Cities area held by Gretchen Wood. Classes are an open studio concept where everyone works on their own projects in the medium of their choice. Ideas and concepts will be developed and expanded with the goal of exhibiting and developing personal portfolios. Basic materials and art supplies will be provided, additional materials might be required.

Inscape Opening Reception

Genre: Visual Arts
Location: The Art Garage
1400 Cedar St, Green Bay, WI
Time: 5:00–7:00 PM
Price: Free

“Widowmaker” Book Launch Event

Genre: Literature
Location: Lion’s Mouth Bookstore
221 N. Washington St, Green Bay, WI
Time: 6:00 PM
Price: Free
About: Join us for a book launch event with Hannah Morrissey in celebration of her mystery novel “The Widowmaker”.

Friday, December 9th

My Genius of Humanity

Genre: Theatre
Location: University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh
800 Algoma Blvd, Oshkosh, WI
Time: 7:30 PM
Price: General \$14; Student \$5; Seniors \$11; UWU Alumni; \$11
About: See December 7th

Rembrandts of Excess

Genre: Visual Arts
Location: Foxley’s Art and Framing
623 W College Ave, Appleton, WI
Time: 3:00–7:00 PM
Price: Free

A Christmas Story

Genre: Theatre
Location: St. Norbert College
315 Third St., De Pere, WI
Time: 7:00 PM
Price: \$21

Winter Film Series

Genre: Film
Location: The 602 Club
602 N. Lawe St., Appleton, WI
Time: 7:00 PM
Price: Free
About: Join us for the 6th annual Winter Film Series @ the 602 Club. This time I’ll screen two by Hong Kong maestro Wong Kar-wai & two by ever esteemed New Yorker Susan Seidelman. Hope you can join us. Arrive at 6:30:pm for a little nosh. Films start at 7:pm — The 6th annual WFS programmer.

Trash Pandas, Sons of Kong, French Irish Coalition

Genre: Punk
Lyric Room
Location: 231 N. Broadway St., Green Bay, WI
Time: 9:00 PM
Price: \$8

Saturday, December 10th

My Genius of Humanity

Genre: Theatre
Location: University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh
800 Algoma Blvd, Oshkosh, WI
Time: 7:30 PM
Price: General \$14; Student \$5; Seniors \$11; UWU Alumni; \$11
About: See December 7th

One Night Only: “Art as Resistance”

Genre: Visual Arts
Location: SAGE Green Bay
225 Washington St, Green Bay, WI
Time: 6:00–9:00 PM
Price: Free
About: Curated by Diversity, Inclusivity, and Accessibility board member EJ Miller-Larson, the purpose of this exhibit is to highlight the power of art as a tool for societal change, and as a form of resistance against colonial legacies. View art from area BIPOC and LGBTQIA2S+ artists as they share their creative talents to speak up on current social issues.

Over a Pint: Kevin Troestler

Genre: Music
Location: McFleshman’s Brewing Co.
115 S State St, Appleton, WI
Time: 3:00 PM
Price: Free, \$5–\$10 donation suggested to the artist.

Rembrandts of Excess

Genre: Visual Arts
Location: Foxley’s Art and Framing
623 W College Ave, Appleton, WI
Time: 10AM–7:00 PM
Price: Free
About: See December 9th.

The 12th Annual Toy Drive

Genre: Music
Location: Gibson Community Music Hall
211 W College Ave, Appleton, WI
Time: 6:00–11:00 PM
About: The annual Toy Drive to benefit Harbor House featuring an art auction, raffles, and live music from: Christopher Gold & The New Old Things, Levi Besaw & Friends, Girl and the Gunn, Mark Steven Hillstrom, Andrew Johnson

A Christmas Story

Genre: Theatre
Location: St. Norbert College
315 Third St., De Pere, WI
Time: 7:00 PM
Price: \$21

94 Distortion, Voice of Addiction (Chicago), Smoke Free Home

Genre: 21+ punk show
Location: The Reptile Palace
141 High Ave., Oshkosh
Time: 7:00 PM
Price: Free

VomBom, The Stinkeyes, and the Drift

Genre: Music
Location: Missfits Tavern
317 N. Appleton St., Appleton, WI
Time: 9:00 PM
Price: Free

Bruiser Queen, Holly and the Nice Lions, Impetuous Riff-Raff

Genre: Music
Location: Frets and Friends
2105 University Ave., Green Bay, WI
Time: 9:30 PM
Price: Free

Sunday, December 11th

My Genius of Humanity

Genre: Theatre
Location: University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh
800 Algoma Blvd, Oshkosh, WI
Time: 2:00 PM
Price: General \$14; Student \$5; Seniors \$11; UWU Alumni; \$11
About: See December 7th

A Christmas Story

Genre: Theatre
Location: St. Norbert College
315 Third St., De Pere, WI
Time: 7:00 PM
Price: \$21

Monday, December 12th

SMITHworks Creative Writing Group

Genre: Literature
Location: Elisha D. Smith Public Library
440 First St, Menasha, WI
Time: 6:30 PM
Price: Free
About: Author Rebecca Zornow will cover how to develop characters readers fall in love with, and how to develop goals that get results.

Poetry Unlocked

Genre: Lit
Location: Acoca Café
500 W College Ave, Appleton, WI
Time: 6:30–8:00 PM
Price: Free
About: Poetry reading series. Typically two featured readers followed by an open mic.

Thursday, December 15th

BFA Studio Senior Exhibition Opening Reception

Genre: Visual Arts
Location: University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh
800 Algoma Blvd, Oshkosh, WI
Time: 6:00–7:30 PM
Price: Free

Dinner Program

Genre: Film
Location: Neville Public Museum
210 Museum Place, Green Bay, WI
Time: 5:00 PM
Price: \$27.50 for members, \$32.50 for non-members.
About: This month’s dinner program is The Hidden History of Dickens’ A Christmas Carol. With Rochelle Pennington.

A Christmas Story

Genre: Theatre
Location: St. Norbert College
315 Third St., De Pere, WI
Time: 7:00 PM
Price: \$21

Art After Dark

Genre: Visual Arts
Location: Bergstrom-Mahler Museum of Glass
165 N Park Ave, Neenah, WI
Time: 5:30–8:30 PM
Price: Free

Friday, December 16th

Opening Reception: e.j. solie

Genre: Visual Arts
Location: Liminal Space Gallery, Valley Academy for the Arts
139 N. Lake St., Neenah, WI
Time: 5:00–8:00 PM
Price: Free

A Christmas Story

Genre: Theatre
Location: St. Norbert College
315 Third St., De Pere, WI
Time: 7:00 PM
Price: \$21

Saturday, December 17th

A Christmas Story

Genre: Theatre
Location: St. Norbert College
315 Third St., De Pere, WI
Time: 7:00 PM
Price: \$21

Punch & the Murder Monkeys, Generation Why, Mungo Mountain, Super Mess

Genre: Punk
Location: Jambalaya
413 N. Main St., Oshkosh
Time: 7:00 PM
Price: \$8

Sunday, December 18th

A Christmas Story

Genre: Theatre
Location: St. Norbert College
315 Third St., De Pere, WI
Time: 7:00 PM
Price: \$21

Third-Sunday Acoustic Jam

Genre: Music
Location: The 602 Club
602 N Lawe St, Appleton, WI
Time: 2:00–4:00 PM
Price: Free
About: Come and play with a variety of folks with a variety of instruments! Bring a song to share, a tune, or simply an eager and musical heart.

Tuesday, December 27th

Poetry Reading

Genre: Literature
Location: Evergreen Manor
1125 Westfield Dr, Oshkosh, WI
Time: 6:30 PM
Price: Free

Wednesday, December 28th

Something to Talk About | An Art Exhibition from Alejandra May

Genre: Visual Arts
Location: The 513
513 W College Ave, Appleton, WI
Time: 5:00–9:00 PM

Belonging Through Poetry

Genre: Lit
Location: Online - Zoom
Hosted by: Appleton Public Library
Time: 6:00–7:00 PM
Price: Free
About: Every fourth Wednesday, Belonging Through Poetry will gather virtually to explore life’s big questions through great poetry. Join us as we create connections in our community (both near and far) through the themes and perspectives we find in poetry.

Ongoing Exhibitions Appleton

The Trout Museum of Art Reclaiming Identity | Guest Curated by Dakota Mace, August 26th–January 8th, 2023
A-I-R Exhibition Series, August 26th–January 8th, 2023
Art is Her: Elizabeth Kazda, November 1st–December 31st

Kimberly Richeson School of Art & Gallery Fusion: Kimberly + Menasha, October 28th–January 14th, 2023

Neenah Bergstrom-Mahler Museum of Glass Between Seeing and Knowing, October 9th–February 5th 2023
Liminal Space Gallery e.j. solie Dec 18th–Jan 15th, 2023

Oshkosh University of Oshkosh Jeremy Wineberg, November 10th–December 8th; **BFA Studio Senior Exhibition**, December 12th–16th; **UWO-Fox Student Show**, December 9th–January 27th, 2023; **Gerardo Monterrubio Exhibition**, November 10th–December 8th

ArtSpace Collective Silver & Gold, Members Exhibition. Dec 3rd–22nd.

Fond du Lac Thelma Sadoff Center for the Arts Strata Verse, November 17th–January 8th. 2023; Acts of Devotion, November 17th–January 8th 2023

Neville Public Museum 77th Art Annual, October 29th–February 5th 2023

Green Bay St Norberts College 2022–2023 Juried Student Art Exhibition, November 7th–December 2nd; Senior Art Exhibition: Rachel Stover, November 7th–December 2nd

University of Wisconsin-Green Bay 50th Annual Juried Student Exhibition, November 15th–December 15th; Nora Wesner: Arranging the Flashbulb Fragments, October 31st–December 13th

The Art Garage Second Annual 2022 a Year in Review, November 9th–December 31st; Define: ART, November 9th–December 3rd; Inscape, December 7th–31st

Sheboygan John Michael Kohler Arts Center I’ll Remember You as You Were, Not as What You’ll Become, October 4th–February 19th, 2023; Regional Responses to Albert and Louise Zahn, October 4th–February 2023; Otis Jouston Jr.: My Name is My Word, October 3rd–January 14th, 2023; Creative! Growth!, May 21st–May 19th, 2023; Sarah McEaney and Lydia Ricci: The Extra Ordinary, August 18th–February 26th, 2023; Sarah Zapata: a resilience of things not seen, March 1st–March 29th, 2023; In the Adjacent Possible, April 5th–February 19th, 2023



Still from the film *Freedom, WI*. Cast members Aimee La Joie (Penny) and Stephen George (Ephram.)

Q & A With Filmmaker Molly Preston

Portland-based filmmaker Molly Preston's first feature-length film *Freedom, WI*, shot in and around the Fox Cities (she called Appleton home for seven years) is currently in post-production. Appleton-based filmmaker Len Burruso posed a series of questions to Molly about the process of making the film. Find more about *Freedom, WI* at <https://www.freedomwifilm.com>.

Len: What is so special about the idea of place in your film?

Molly: Every town, city, state, and country has its own totally unique qualities. Where you are can affect how you interact with others, what situations you end up in, as well as your goals and dreams. I started writing the script when I was living in Appleton and it was inspired by ideas and feelings I had based on where I was at the time. Personally, I like to physically be in the space where I want a film to take place at least during some of the writing stage, so that I can get inspiration from the sounds, smells, and sights of the place. I was lucky enough to be able to come back to Appleton several times while I was writing the script.

L: Why not shoot it on the West Coast (Portland)? Did location play a character in the film?

M: It would have been logistically simpler to film in Portland, OR where I am based, but I really wanted the film to be authentically Wisconsin. I wanted our cast and crew to be in Appleton and the Fox Cities area, and to have the opportunity to experience a slice of life in the location that had a huge influence on the story and the characters. I also wanted to have a chance to give back to a community that I feel gave me so much over the near decade that I lived there.

Our home base was Appleton, but we filmed in several different locations around the Fox Cities. Our main character's house was in a beautiful home in Menasha (shout out to Grace and Jacob Rex!), Kaukauna's Mayor Tony Penterman helped us close down one of their main streets for us to use (the street sweeper even came the night before to make the street sparkle!), and we shot in a cemetery in Greenville that was nestled between a cornfield and cows. Most of our other locations were in Appleton, including Dance and Jim's Place. It was really fun to be back in a place that I'm so familiar with and have so many fond memories of, but to be approaching everything from a filmmaking perspective. Making a film in Wisconsin made me look at everything differently! The location definitely plays a character in the film. We wanted to feature architecture and landscape that feel unique to small town Wisconsin.

L: What were your days like on set in Appleton?

M: When we arrived on set, I'd have a conversation with Director of Photography, Kevin Forrest, about the scene and what shot we were starting with. When the actors arrived, we'd block out the scene, which isn't a full rehearsal, more of just a walk through of where they would be in the scene. Once blocking was good to go, Kevin and his team would get starting setting up the lighting and camera and I'd chat with the actors and other departments. I've worked with the Portland-based crew countless times and consider them to all be some of my best buddies. We are a pretty well-oiled machine, and it was really interesting to see how everything came together between them, the Midwest based crew, and the actors. Being on set is hard work, but we had a lot of fun! Everyone in the towns where we filmed were so kind and generous. It was wonderful when people would come up to us and ask what we were doing. We met a young, aspiring filmmaker when we were filming outside of Jacob's Meat Market, and we were able to have her come by our

set a couple of days so that she could observe and even help out our art department! That was a huge highlight for us!

L: From a cinematographic perspective, is there anything that drew you back to Wisconsin? The quality of light? The landscape?

M: Our Director of Photography, Kevin Forrest, was obsessed with the clouds! That may sound funny, because there are clouds everywhere, but in Wisconsin, the clouds are so huge, white, fluffy, and constantly changing. The clouds alone didn't draw us back, but also the way that the light hits the landscape and architecture. I bet that Kevin could describe it better than I can, but there's just something special and unique about the quality of the light in the midwest that we don't have in the Pacific Northwest!

L: How was the crew? Where they a local crew, a crew you brought, or did you fly in department heads or keys? What makes a great crew person in your estimation? What does a great crew person add to a film?

M: Our producers, camera department, grip and electric, sound mixer, and myself all came from the West Coast, primarily Portland, OR. Our art department, hair and makeup artists, and production assistants were all from the Midwest - Chicago, Milwaukee, Oshkosh, and Appleton! During the pre-production stage, it was very helpful to have the producers and director of photography in Portland. We were able to work together in the same time zone and in-person to work through the shot list, schedule, etc. When it came to the visuals - set decoration and props that we would see on screen, it was awesome having a local team headed up by Chicago-based Production Designer, Julia Carusillo. As a midwesterner, she knows the area, the styles, and the quirks that make the Midwest special. Filmmaking is unique in the way that it is a collaboration, but there is also a strict hierarchy within the crew. You might think, "hierarchy, that's lame," and I understand why that might come across as a negative thing, but I actually think it's great. Having a hierarchy means that everyone specializes in and totally owns their job. I think that this gives people the opportunity to really shine in their role. When someone takes pride in and owns their position, I think that makes for an excellent crew member.

L: What were some of your biggest challenges while shooting on location in Appleton?

M: The mosquitos! Honestly... they were everywhere! Our two leads, Aimee La Joie and Stephen George, ended up buying zapper rackets, which inspired our Director of Photography to buy more. In between takes there was a constant sound of "zap! zap! zap!" Surprisingly, no zapper rackets made it into a scene by accident. I'll have to add a disclaimer at the end of the film that says, "mosquitos were harmed during the production."

L: Can you tell us about any great memories you have from production?

M: So many to choose from! One of my favorite things about production was being able to share the wonderful parts of Appleton with people who I've worked with in Portland. Everyone out here knows how much I love Wisconsin, and it was really exciting to get to show them some of the places I talk about all the time in person! Some of the highlights were going to the Fox River House (and getting a round of proper old fashioned - with brandy of course!), getting cheese curds from Jacob's Meat Market, and filming at Dance and Jim's Place.

My absolute favorite scenes to film were on the final day of production. We filmed at Crutch of Memory, an awesome music studio and label, where we had a party scene with the Appleton band Dusk, that features my good buddy Julia Blair who is also our composer! It was beautifully lit and the set decoration was incredible! Any time we can do a scene with great music and dancing, it's always a fun time! Two of my best buddies (here's looking at you Elyse Lucas and Chris Dorn!) live just a couple of blocks away from the house where I was staying. They were so incredibly supportive and helpful in the years leading up to production and during the shoot itself. On our final day, they were featured in one of the party scenes, which was a really fun collision of my two worlds - Portland film friends, new friends from the cast and crew, and friends I've had for over 15 years! Our producer, Katie Dalziel, managed to get the wonderful folks from the Appleton Fire Department to drive one of their trucks with the lights flashing through one of our shots! That was pretty damn cool. It was the absolute perfect way to finish the production.

L: What was your cast like?

M: Our cast was amazing! Our two leads, Aimee La Joie and Stephen George, ended up becoming really close during prep and the production. Usually on set when an actor is wrapped for the day, they leave set, but anytime Aimee or Stephen finished before the other, they'd stick around to support the other. I loved that! All of our supporting actors, Melissa Shoshahi, Michelle Renee Thompson, Cory Hardin, Jessica Ambuehl, and Richard Baiker, were some of the kindest and hard working people I've ever met. It was an absolute joy getting to spend three full weeks getting to know Aimee and Stephen, and then getting to meet new folks who were on set between one and three days at a time. I consider myself to be extremely lucky to have had the opportunity to work with such talented and all around wonderful people!

L: Did you go through a long casting process or did you write the film with particular actors & actresses in mind?

M: Our casting director, Jen Elkington, made the casting process so easy! She reached out to specific actors we had found through Wisconsin and Chicago based talent agencies, social media, and through comedy. We had everyone send in a self-taped audition and then did call backs over zoom. Everyone who auditioned brought something different and special to the roles. When the folks who ended up in each role read their parts, something just clicked and felt right. I felt like I was getting to know the real characters and discovering something new about them, something I never could have seen by just reading words off of a page. It was a really exciting process!

L: Do you remember when you had the initial idea for the film?

M: I had the idea before I was working in film professionally. I was living in Appleton on College Ave., and worked two jobs, also on College Ave. - shout out to Brewed Awakenings and Dance! I really wanted to work in film but I didn't know how to achieve that, so I thought I'd try making a film with what I had available, with myself and my friends in all of the roles. I started writing *Freedom, WI* with that in mind, intending to create a short film. As I was writing, I felt that I had something special that I wanted to save until I had the skills and the means make the film in a professional manner, and I'm really glad I did!

L: Did you shoot with a particular set of lenses or a particular camera in mind for the film?

M: We shot the film on an Arri Alexa Classic. Our DP Kevin Forrest had used the Arri several times before, and we really love the look of it. Fun fact, we only used two lenses for the whole film - 14mm and 40mm Arri Ultra Primes! Using these lenses gave us a perfect opportunity to highlight both the characters and the locations that they were in.

L: Did you shoot in a particular aspect ratio or resolution for any specific reason?

M: We shot in 16:9. We considered a wider aspect ratio to capture the beautiful Wisconsin landscape, but ended up deciding against it. *Freedom, WI* is the story of friendship between two people, and we wanted to capture scenes with the two of them where we could be with them in a two-shot without having a ton of extra space on either side or having them far apart. The 16:9 aspect ratio allows for that, while still giving a wide enough view to feature the beautiful scenery.

L: Did you discover aspects of the story that you had not foreseen in the editing process?

M: I absolutely LOVE the editing process. In film, a story is created three times - first in the writing stage, second during production, and third in the edit. When I was editing, I tried to take off the writer and director hats and focus only on what worked for the edit. I had to make some tough choices and cut some shots (and even a couple of scenes!) but I believe that the film turned out better because of it.

L: How did the score and your composer play a part in your film?

M: Our composer, Julia Blair, is a good friend of mine from when we attended Lawrence University in Appleton together. We used a mix of songs from Julia's debut solo album, *Better Out Than In*, that was released earlier this year, and music that she composed, recorded, and mixed in collaboration with Amos Pitsch. We also used a few other tracks from bands and musicians that have a connection to Wisconsin, including Liam O'Brien, Yellow Ostrich, and Holy Sheboygan. Toward the end of the film, we see Julia singing with her band *Dusk* in a scene that is a big turning point for the characters. I loved the idea of hearing Julia's voice and music throughout the film before we see her in this scene. I'm hoping that some viewers make the connection when they see her on screen. I think it's a pretty fun little easter egg! Julia did an amazing job finding a really cool style and instrumentation for the score that adds cohesion, interest, and emotion. She's so talented!

L: How did costume, hair, and makeup play a part?

M: Our lead Hair and Makeup Artist, Jenni Schenk was amazing! She created looks for the characters that felt unique and appropriate for each and every one. The main character, Penny, is a bit of an angry young woman. Quite often in films, when there is a moody character, they will be dressed in all black or dark colors with similarly styled makeup. It was important to me to not stick to this stereotype. We had our lead in bright colors and fun 60s inspired dresses, which felt like a fun twist from what we might usually see.

L: What was the color grading process like? Did you work with a Colorist? If so, what did you try to emphasize, or what discoveries did you make in the grading process?

M: We're working with a Portland based Colorist, George Costakis. It's been wonderful sitting down with him and Kevin (our DP) for live sessions and watching George do his magic. He has done an excellent job highlighting the natural beauty of the landscapes, emphasizing specific design elements, and giving the film an overall look that fits just perfectly.

L: Would you come back and film again in Appleton?

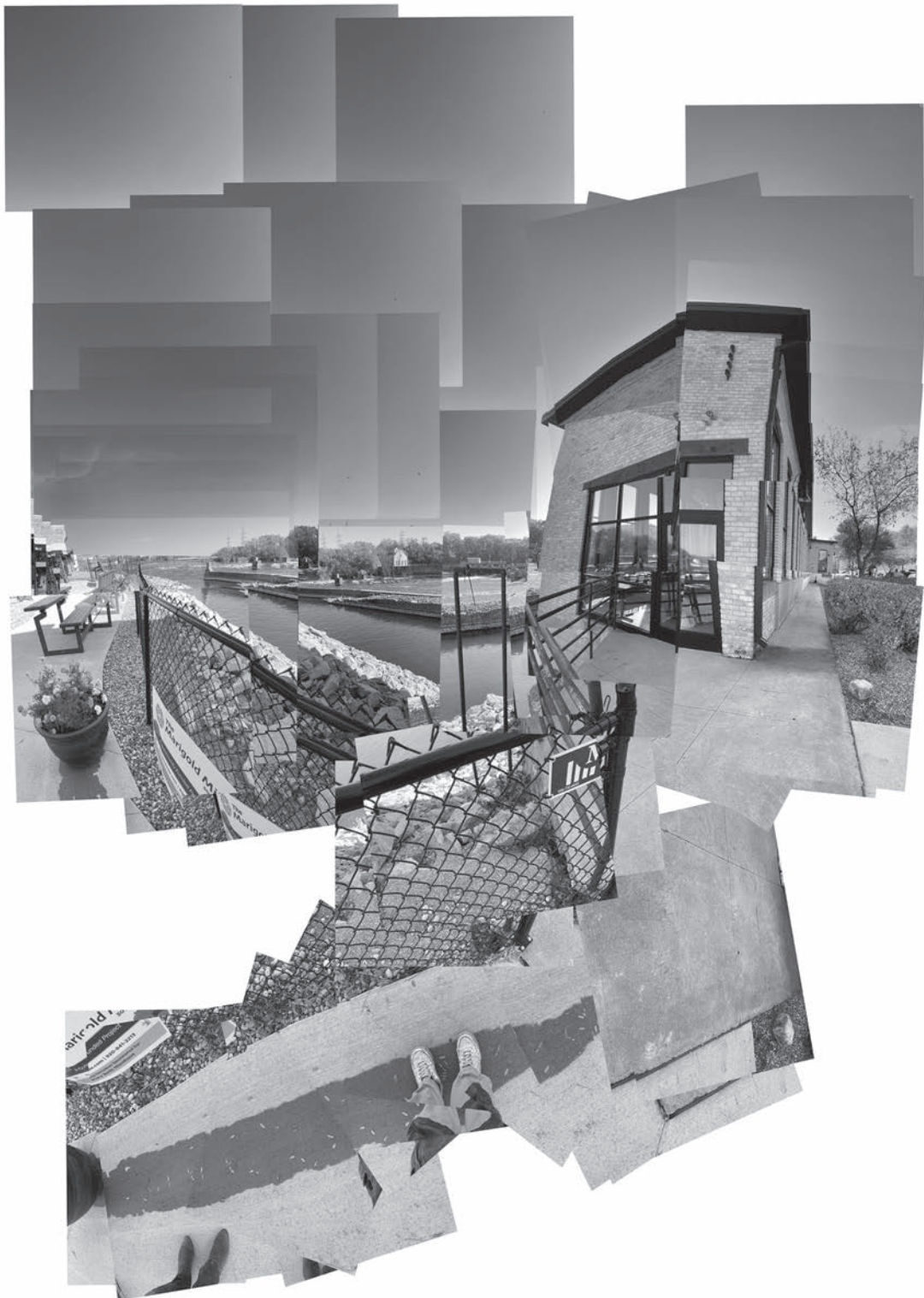
M: Definitely! Maybe one day I'll become known as the film director who shoots most of their feature films in Appleton, Wisconsin!



Crew from the film *Freedom, WI*. Image courtesy of Jill Petracek

Untitled

by Astra Medeiros



This might be
the most uncomfortable
bra
I have ever worn.

However,
this is currently just speculation,
as I am relatively young (relative to my mother, grandmother, aunts, and librarians in my life)
and I suspect
that I will have many bras
yet to wear and
be poked, prodded, bound, and squeezed by.

I will grow and shrink and find myself
a consumer of
[traditionally]
feminine attire
that is the love/hate conversation of many women
of various age
and size.

But, for now,
I will conduct a magic trick through my shirt sleeves
and hang it
on the arm
of
my chair.

Poetry selections

by Michelle Sharp

Selections taken from her Spring 2022 Zine. Find more of Michelle's work at: <https://www.michellesharp.net>

If she were brave, she would rip the lips off
anyone who dared to invade.
But she's not. She's polite.
So no lash but laugh, demur, defer, self-depreciate
and later scold the fawn who finds
self-preservation in hiding her fangs.

No-Man's Land

by Austin Segrest

The professor was a laidback white guy, maybe early forties. Everyone loved him, almost by default. He'd been a bartender, had a goatee and a heart condition. Although I would sign the petition for his permanent hire (which didn't happen), I don't remember him actually saying much in class. Now that I am myself a creative writing professor in my forties, and also a white guy, I often think of his cool, hands-off manner.

I remember two pieces of his poetry advice—both referencing popular music, and both, of course, about what not to do. One was relayed through a friend a year ahead of me: no Beatles allusions. My friend had written something about a warm gun.

Delivering his other caveat directly, he's sitting at a table, in my memory at least, at the front of the class. I'm hovering with others. He says something to the effect of, just don't make it sound like a country song. He leaves it at that, as if it were self-explanatory. I'm sure we were like, "yeah, duh. Country sucks."

But what did he mean? And why was this his advice?

What kind of country music did he have in mind? The high-production pop country acts of the day (circa 2000), like Garth Brooks and Shania Twain? Any country, period? Presumably, there was more to it than that he just hated country. Something about whatever idea of country he meant was antithetical to what he wanted us aiming for as poets. Was this his one piece of advice for all poets, or was it special for us, Emory University underclassmen?

Emory is in Atlanta, Georgia. Like a number—but by no means all—of my classmates at the time, this professor was not local, not from the deep south. I was. But at the time I didn't think it made much difference, even as my new friends from Fort Lauderdale and the northeast balked at my being from Birmingham. *You know not everyone's Christian, right?* I never noticed anyone commenting on my southern accent—maybe because I was oblivious, or maybe because it was common enough on our Georgia campus, despite the urbanity and ivy. Or maybe because, being from the biggest city in Alabama, I didn't have the strongest accent in the first place, though my parents and their parents and many of my friends from home did. When an English professor assumed I plagiarized my first Poetry 205 paper, another prof I was telling about it to suggested I didn't look as thoughtful as I was. Huh?

So maybe he assumed we were susceptible to the music that naturally emitted from our pickups... Inaccuracies aside, this would be something like teaching at an HBCU and saying, do anything but rap.

If, on the other hand, he assumed that we didn't much like or weren't very familiar with country (which would have been accurate, I think), then why make it his one point of reference? Was it just a lazy and uninformed way of saying (as we would have said then) *don't be lame?* A strawman, in that case? Preaching to the choir?

I think we can assume that in the year 2000 he wasn't worried about whiteness and homogeneity.

Distinguishing between poetry and song is a road I've gone down with my own students: that the language of a poem should stand on its own, without needing to be sung or accompanied by music, etc. But why country music? And isn't it likely that he had a particular kind of country song (or stereotype of one) in mind?

This was before anyone I knew was making a distinction between (bad) new country and (good) old country. If you'd even heard of it, alt-country (Sunvolt, for example) was presumably protected by that alt/indy designation—which meant...what? Less production? Conventional fundamentals but progressive politics? Less, or a different accent? Murkier, or slightly trippy lyrics? More distortion, mumbling?

I hated country because that's what the poseur-redneck popular kids at my high school listened to. Was that the problem, then? Was country too square? Not edgy enough?

Or was it that country was dangerously given to hokeyness and sentimentality? Cue a shmaltzy harmonica, George Strait singing, "Since I've been holding an angel / a little heaven's rubbing off on me." I think this was part of it. But I also wonder if there were formal assumptions at play.

Living with and loving a country music fan from the country has helped me to embrace country music in my 30s and 40s. Now I admire many of those neo-traditionalist 90s songs Junior High coaches would play in the locker room and on the bus ("Prop me up beside the jukebox when I die..."). I admire the storytelling, rhyme, wordplay. The wit! And what's too easily taken for granted: you can hear (you have to hear) *every word*. As tempting as it is to write-off post-90s country music, overproduced and endlessly reifying its own countryness, the formal qualities listed above remain in-tact. In a word, there is a maximal dependence on language.

So it's ironic, to say the least, that country would be the musical genre to poetically disparage.

Now I see better the knee-jerk liberal condescension and prejudice that makes the idea of country music its scapegoat: the same prejudice that's dogged my partner for being where she's from, talking how she talks. Today, we're witnessing something of a reclaiming of country music, and not just the old—supposedly the only "good"—country. Yes, the gay man behind the tasseled mask (Orville Peck) breaks the country singer man-mold, but Peck also sings a duet with Shania Twain, taking seriously the song's title that "Legends Never Die." You're fooling yourself if you don't think Appleton's own Boy Howdy respects all radio country. I think this new era of country has everything to do with the tradition's wonderful formal qualities, and nothing to do with the presumed politics and values that come with it.

Even given our classroom's southern context, however, it just doesn't pan out that our professor would evoke the idea of country music out of conscious political concern. Instead, I suspect he was using country music to deflect poetry's own poeticalness. In the 90s, with academia fully absorbing Continental literary theory, the hip poetic stance was to distrust language, especially "pedestrian" uses of language, or "translations of experience," as some put it. Poetry, as always, was uniquely susceptible to theoretical ideals—that is to say, to the anxieties of poets (an exercise in insularity). Language's ability to signify or represent was—and so had to be reflected poetically as—compromised. Embarrassed of itself, poetry, it seems, was more of a wasn't than a was, more like the ambiguous distortion of punk, or the city, than country. Meanwhile, narrative, rhyme, accuracy, authenticity, earnestness, and cohesion were thrown under the language bus (by no means for the first time).

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Hometown Girl Makes Good

by Ellen Rosewall



Entry Level, book cover.



The author, Wendy Wimmer.

Wendy Wimmer would be the first to admit that her road to literary fame did not take the traditional route. Short story collections are often the forgotten stepchildren of novels; or, as Wendy puts it, “Publishers rarely publish short stories first. After a few successful novels, the publisher usually puts out the short stories as a kind of ‘pity publish,’ allowing the author to get some of her favorite work in the public eye without the publisher taking a huge financial risk (recent volumes by Margaret Atwood and Ann Patchett bear this out). But while Wimmer’s novels haven’t yet attracted a publisher’s eye, her short stories did and quickly became a rare phenomenon: unknown Midwest author lights a spark with a short story collection and gets rave reviews from top critics, mentions in national publications and sellouts on the big online sites.

Wendy grew up in Green Bay, attending Howe Elementary School and East High School. “East was where I really started visualizing myself as a writer,” she says, thanks to a district-wide creative writing contest that she won, and which eventually led to East producing two of her one-act plays. When she was eighteen, she wrote a response letter to Sassy Magazine, which they published and paid her \$300, “which was an insane amount of money in the 1980s.” By that time, there was no looking back. Over the next several years, she earned a Bachelor’s degree from UWGB, Master’s from UW-Milwaukee and a PhD from UN-Las Vegas, most of that time working as a software developer (don’t ignore your coding classes, girls and boys!). Her dissertation was a novel about a pandemic that, by not-so-happy coincidence, was finished just as the COVID pandemic started. In the book, people treat the pandemic like a zombie apocalypse, because of course “movies have taught us just how to behave in a zombie apocalypse, but not a pandemic.”

Since winter of 2020 turned out not to be the right time to try and sell a novel about a pandemic lockdown, Wendy turned back to her short stories. The collection, *Entry Level*, won the Autumn House Fiction Prize in 2021, which included publication, a cash prize, and marketing support.

In July 2022, *Entry Level* received a starred review from Kirkus Reviews, who said that “Vivid, thought-provoking stories make for an enjoyable and challenging book.” A starred Kirkus review is somewhat of a holy grail for authors, and although I don’t know the stats, I can’t imagine that many debut story collections receive them. When the book came out at the end of October, it quickly sold out three times on Amazon and Barnes & Noble. Not long after that, it was mentioned in a featurette in People magazine (People?!??) and on October 19 it was included in The Washington Post’s “10 Award-winning Short Story Collections Worth Reading.” The Post’s Daphne Kalotay said, “If punchy first sentences are to your taste, Wendy Wimmer’s *Entry Level* is the book for you.”

Punchy first sentences? Thought-provoking stories? A challenging book? Okay, let’s talk about that. The first sentence in the opening story, “Strange Magic,” goes like this: “When Mary Ellen’s left breast grew back on its own during our Saturday dinner break, we had confirmation that something weird was happening.” In this story, employees at the Rola-Rena (Green Bay residents know that is...or was...an actual place) admit to each other that they have all noticed that time seemed to be moving backward when they skated counterclockwise (whether or not the disco ball was on didn’t seem to have any effect). Hair grew back in, scars disappeared, muscles left to grow soft started shaping up again. Yes, it’s a little off the beaten path, but one of the ways that Wimmer draws us into this and all her stories is that, in the midst of fantasy, her characters act otherwise like normal human beings, sneaking cigarettes, worrying about how their clothes look, complaining about their jobs.

These stories have varying degrees of connection to reality, but all of them feature characters who are damaged, searching or afraid. In “Texts from Beyond,” a cellphone salesman has deep doubts about the policies he is selling to elderly people, telling them that the expensive policy will allow them to receive texts from their dead loved ones. “Fuse” is told by one half of a pair of conjoined twins, jealous of each other for liking the same boy. In “Seven Minutes from Heaven”, a girl goes to great lengths to avoid other peoples’ attention. And “Where She Went” and “Flarby”...well, I don’t really want to say anything about those stories other than I needed to go into a dark room and lie down with a cool cloth on my head after reading them.

I haven’t been a big fan of short stories in the past...they are hard to do well. So often an author just starts you to get invested in the character when the story ends. Or, the story is really more ambitious than a short story and leaves important questions unanswered. In contrast, Wendy Wimmer’s stories are complex and complete, like a medieval mosaic where every piece is where it should be. I’m very open to more short stories, but I’m still looking forward to the zombie apocalypse pandemic novel.

Entry Level can be purchased at the Lion’s Mouth Bookstore in Green Bay, as well as the usual online sources. For more about Wendy, visit her website at www.wendywimmer.com.

Layna Wang's “bathtime?”

by Miri Verona

Layna Wang is an emerging artist and entrepreneur based in Chicago. A recent graduate of Lawrence University, Wang was the creative mind behind a recent performance art experience entitled “bathtime?”

The project was heavily informed by Wang’s lived experience, especially as a gender- and racially-ambiguous person who was abused during their education in the world of classical music. “It’s not one-off that I have experienced this pain in classical music and other systems which incentivize us to hate ourselves and each other, and it’s actually a privilege that I have a platform to address it and reclaim artistic agency,” Wang said.

I had the honor of participating in the labs as well as the performance of *bathtime?* over the past month. *bathtime?* took place at 7:30pm on Sunday, November 20th in Lawrence University’s Warch Campus Center just a day before finals week of Lawrence’s fall trimester.

In interrogating art and identity, Wang’s project asked large questions. These included “what is performance and a performing body?” as well as “who is encouraged to perform, in what ways, and why?” Wang’s collaborators explored these central themes in “laboratory” rehearsals with the “bathtime?” title, the physical centerpiece (an actual 250lb cast-iron bathtub Wang had acquired) and a three-hour room reservation looming in our minds as concrete anchors for what the project might turn out to be.

The community of musicians, studio artists, dancers and creatives which Wang coalesced around *bathtime?* invested an impressive amount of time and energy in the piece. It was no mystery to anyone involved that *bathtime?* (as its eponymous question mark reflects) contained planned and unplanned improvisations and uncertainties up until the last second of its performance. However, what *bathtime?* lacked in certainty it made up for in Wang’s impressive and infectious openness, sense of community, vulnerability, emphasis on consent and thoughtful creative vision in putting the experience together.

Wang’s sensibilities during the labs were inherently collaborative. While Wang would prompt various group improvisations that included explorations of movement, visual art and music, discussions which followed were open and empathetic dialogues for our feelings as collaborators: what we experienced, what we might change, how it fits into Wang’s project.

Initial ideas centered around a three-hour-long interactive artists’ salon which might include everything from collaborative drawing to a game of Jenga to a live email chain. The collaborators reveled in the open-ended creativity of Wang’s vision, but the rubbly pitfalls of incoherency loomed at least as strong. An important lesson came with the participation of Prof. Loren Dempster, one of Wang’s advisors, in one of the labs. He described how with the incredibly open-ended nature of Wang’s rehearsal, he couldn’t help feeling a disconnect while participating as an advisor to the project.

Wang echoed the disconnect as well given their and Dempster’s respective roles as student director and professor-advisor. “Prof. Dempster expressing his honest feelings made me realize how my intentions needed to shift,” Wang said. “As the director, I wanted to avoid perpetuating harmful power dynamics, but I needed to acknowledge these dynamics will always somehow be at play. Instead of wishing them away, I realized that they needed to be accounted for through a clearer structure.”

48 hours preceding the performance, Wang moved away from the open-ended format. Instead, working with the collaborators, Wang drew out a multi-scene script. “The script was a transcript of our improvised choices, informed by what we learned in our laboratories,” Wang said. “I was really happy when everyone’s input felt naturally a part of the process – it became less hierarchical when we felt safe around each other.”

The performance took just under an hour, centered around an intimately spotlit bathtub surrounded by large mirrors. Instrumentalists, dancers and performers filtered on and off center stage, performing various motives and improvisations. “Backstage” was unhidden on the sides of the audience seating not facing the bathtub; it included a lighting controller, props, collaborators moving about and a mic’d bucket of water and rag.

The nine-scene performance culminated with a deeply emotional scene featuring most of the collaborators and Wang intimately cuddled together on the floor humming in improvised harmony together. *bathtime?* was met with uproarious applause which led into an open space for discussion and more improvisation. “Having a fat, queer body and wearing a morph suit and then showing the audience exactly how I felt about wearing that morph suit and my feelings of being perceived by them was a hugely liberating experience... identity art is real,” Wang said in reflection.

Wang stated to the audience before the performance that the communal preparation of the project was the lion’s share of what made up the artistic experience of *bathtime?* For Wang, making an effort to share and expand the community of the project was always going to be a part of the project; fulfilling the capstone requirement, while a result, had very little to do with it. Despite sometimes frantic preparation and various uncertainties, through Wang’s open and empathy-driven approach they built an unforgettable, collaborative community of trust, of safety, of consent and of creative joy between us collaborators.

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Bursting Bubbles and Rusty Radios: Seeking the Fox Valley Soundscape

by Miri Verona

I sat in a car, driving out of the Fox Valley, just a week or so ago. My friend had a habit of flipping through the radio stations, which he knew was at times a pet peeve of mine to have to listen to. I feel a strange sensitivity to radio. It’s both the whiplash of station flipping and the specific sentimentality and niche of each wavelength. It all feels incredibly ephemeral. As a zoomer, I’m fully integrated into the media sphere of streaming services, podcasts and social media. All the same I still have warm enough memories of the network television my parents grew up with and even the radio of my grandparents’ generation.

The radio today is the grandparent of modern media and like a grandparent, it strikes certain feelings of nostalgia. It might still be around in your life, it may have passed on. As my friend went through the stations we heard a lot: a number of radio evangelists, some sporadic news, a handful of pop stations, and maybe a classical or jazz station or two. More than anything, though, we heard classic rock and country and a lot of it.

A grandparent it may be, the radio is still the highest “reach platform” according to a 2019 study by the media market research firm, The Nielsen Company. While it might not carry the most weight in the growing attention economy of today, in 2019 it still has the most consistent presence reaching 92% of adults every week compared to the TV and smartphone with 87% and 81% respectively.

Two years later, the Pew Research Center published a study which found radio making its first major dip in listenership for at least a decade. Radio’s grasp held at around 90% since at least 2010, but had a drastic drop to 83% in 2020. Revenue was down 24% as well, according to Pew. Many of us may even be surprised it took radio this long to start a significant downturn (maybe helped by the COVID pandemic), but it’s really not surprising for a few reasons.

The research also shows that most radio listening happens passively in the car. While radio has that specifically-catered sentimentality I mentioned before, it’s often on in the background. Network TV is much the same, just adding in our visual sense to the mix. Neither have really been able to compete or, in my opinion, will ever again compete with the internet that adds an interactive, quasi-kinesthetic buffet of choice to consumers. The radio has been rusting for a while, but it’s only just started to sputter out.

All this is to say: I think radio has a particular power to tell us something in terms of our local soundscape. A globalizing and digitizing world comes at a certain expense to local culture. One interpretation of radio’s particular and curated nature is that it’s a great way to understand the specifically local culture of a soundscape; what listening patterns are casually endemic to a certain area like our Fox Valley.

As I stated before, the stations I perceived the most among my friend’s station flipping were country and classic rock music. Our local Nielsen-participating stations’ ratings seem to reflect this as well, with our top genres being country, classic rock as well as radio genres like “classic hits” and “adult hits” which just seem to cater to the mainstream tastes (rock, R&B, pop, etc.) of a specific age-group of adults as opposed to any particular genre.

At Lawrence University, where I’ll be graduating from later this year, we talk often of the “Lawrence Bubble,” or the enclosed disconnect we can feel in the Lawrence community from the Fox Valley and even the world-at-large. To be frank, Lawrence is a liberal arts school through and through. While the Fox Valley is quite purple, at face-value, left-wing politics are what is acceptable at Lawrence. While radios

in the Fox Valley play country, classic rock and popular genres from the 60s-80s, Lawrence’s classical and jazz are certainly deafening amongst the variety of music that gets made here.

Students often refer to the Appleton “townies” with some amount of disdain, which I’ve grown increasingly uncomfortable with. I’m a part of this community, to be sure, but I point it out to ask the question: how might we use music to bring our Lawrence closer to the Fox Valley in terms of sound and music? Can we burst the Lawrence Bubble sonically, so to speak?

Lawrence’s own radio station, WLFM, has recently become defunct with a mass giveaway of free records, CDs and tapes from the WLFM archives in the hallways of the conservatory. The former studio is now being used for storage. Among many strange bits of music from apparently bygone times, I didn’t find anything I wanted and found myself more aroused and perplexed by the odd number of records from a music label called “Musica Helvetica” run by a radio station in Switzerland. Even the Great Midwest Trivia Contest moved away from WLFM to the streaming platform, Twitch.

Maybe it’s another symptom of COVID’s having shoved us all online that WLFM fell out of use. It makes me sad to think we’ve lost this way of potentially connecting with the Fox Valley through sound. Lawrence still offers almost exclusively free concerts that anyone in the public can attend. I’ve enjoyed doing a bit of community outreach through music with Lawrence’s Music For All program which gives free performances at a variety of venues.

Some of my happiest musical moments have come after performing with my klezmer band for Music For All events to have a few adults walk up to me, positively beaming about their shared love for this genre that means so much to me. An elective class which I’ve taken called “American Roots Music” is currently offered in the fall at Lawrence, co-taught by Lawrence faculty along with a local folk artist. That felt like it pointed in the right direction.

I’m definitely wringing my hands at least a little bit, but I do wonder what Lawrence could look like if it integrated closer with the Fox Valley. Would we have a conservatory that was dominated by a funny mix of polka, music of the indigenous Menominee people, along with the classic rock and country off the radio? To be sure, I’ve heard all of these traditions on our campus, but just in blips. Maybe I’m downplaying how important classical and jazz are to the Fox Valley.

Where is the local sonic culture of the Fox Valley coming from and where is it moving? What is the most authentic and integrated soundscape we at Lawrence could make in the Fox Valley? The picture I’ve painted and questions I’m asking are messy and even a bit overwhelming, but we shouldn’t be discouraged by this - culture and music culture in particular have always been messy. The pipes on the pipe dream organ I’ve been playing this whole time to no resolution might be detuned and out of whack, but the question above all questions is always going to be what the next courageous decision to make should be.