The Psychedelic Miracle
How Ayahuasca and MDMA are Radicalizing Treatment for Mental Illness

BETSY DEVOS’ HOLY WAR

INSIDE LOU REED’S ARCHIVES

PAUL McCARTNEY

KHALID

STEVIE NICKS’ LIFE ADVICE

Boozy Nights & Megahits: The Restless Life of Ed Sheeran
GO COMPLETELY ONLINE FOR A FAST, CONVENIENT APPROVAL.
FEATURES

Betsy DeVos
Trump’s education secretary is a crowning achievement for the Christian right’s plan to infiltrate secular institutions.
By Janet Reitman

Ed Sheeran
He used to be a misfit; now he’s a hard-drinking superstar. But what he really wants is a normal life.
By Patrick Doyle

The Psychedelic Miracle
Inside the underground movement to unleash the healing power of MDMA, ayahuasca and other hallucinogens.
By Mac McClelland

ROCK & ROLL

Roger Waters
Returns to Rock
The former Pink Floyd bassist preps his politically charged new album and tour

The Fab Two
Paul McCartney and Elvis Costello on their spectacular, newly released Flowers in the Dirt sessions

DEPARTMENTS

Letters
Playlist
Records
Movies

ON THE COVER
Ed Sheeran
photographed in Los Angeles on February 14th, 2017, by Peggy Sirota.

BREAK OUT
Meet Khalid, pop’s newest prodigy.
Page 15
We dig into the secrets behind the most famous LP design of all time, including which icons were left out of the collage and how much the album art eventually cost the Beatles.
No one has access to every music service.

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Pence: The Pious VP

In RS 1280, Stephen Rodrick investigated the Christian influence at the heart of Vice President Mike Pence’s political career (“The Radical Crusade of Mike Pence”). Readers, including many in Indiana, his home state, responded.

WOMEN’S HEALTH CARE choices were criminalized on Pence’s watch. Hoosiers definitely wanted him to go, and it will be a tough time for this country if his views on social issues are allowed to become national policy.

Sarah Salmon Noblesville, IN

MANY CHRISTIANS ADMIRE Vice President Mike Pence’s steadfast values and respect the fine job he did as governor of our state. Since Clinton lost, the true “radicals” are those rioting with disturbing behavior that attempts to silence any opposing viewpoint.

James Kirkpatrick Zionsville, IN

I ADMIRE MIKE PENCE for his courage, humility and unwavering commitment to stand up for what is right.

Jack Huguenard Valparaiso, IN

THE ILLUSTRATION OF Mike Pence with praying hands is a spot-on portrayal of the “pious bigot” we have known in Indiana for far too long.

Anthony Chilson Princeton, TX

I though trump was a piece of work, but Mike Pence is number one in that department. Oh, boy!

Gordon Levy Phoenix

Trump Democrats

I WORK AT A MACOMB COUNTY auto plant and voted for Obama twice. This election, I voted for Trump [“Trump County, USA,” RS 1280]. For all his inconsistencies, he has been remarkably consistent on trade policy. Until Democrats demonstrate that economic opportunity supersedes fealty to the global economy, they are in for a cold winter.

Mike Parsons, Macomb, MI

REGARDING WHITE WORKING-CLASS frustrations in Macomb County and elsewhere: I don’t buy it. The manufacturing economy has changed, opportunity for nonwhites has expanded, and the rest of America has evolved past the 1950s. Their whiny protest vote helped elect a clown.

Terrence Morrissey San Francisco

Rap’s True Gems

I HAVE ALL THE RUN THE Jewels albums [“Combat Rap,” RS 1280]. This group is vibrant and all-inclusive. The rhyming schemes rival Rachmaninoff.

Skip Wellington Via the Internet

Climate Fights

Bill mckibben is in denial about the role energy plays in the growth of the world [“Climate Crisis: A New Battle Plan,” RS 1280]. I get that energy production with oil and coal is not good for the environment. But energy production sustains our world. What’s hard is seeking ways to lower demand for energy without making our kids suffer because they cannot heat their homes or drive their cars.

Paul Derksen, Calgary, Alberta

Billionaire fossil-fuel energy leaders must join the fight against global warming if we are to succeed in saving the planet. Without electric-utility executives and fossil-fuel CEOs totally invested in the effort, it can never succeed.

Garry Tanner, via the Internet

Keep the Faith

George Michael will never be forgotten, regardless of the bumps in the road in his personal life [“The Genius of George Michael,” RS 1280]. What he will be remembered for is his music, and what he left to his fans. And what an incredible legacy it is.

Patricia Kisamore Via the Internet

Will you please schedule a tribute issue to the one and only George Michael? I am a fan who belongs to a site of more than 28,000 lovelies around the globe – and I know I speak for us all.

Terry Daniels, via the Internet

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The Playlist
OUR FAVORITE SONGS AND VIDEOS RIGHT NOW

1. Lana Del Rey
“Love”
As if we weren’t already hyped enough for her next album, Del Rey drops her most towering goth-girl-group benediction ever. “Don’t worry, baby,” she moans through waves of echo, quoting the Beach Boys. But her California is a dream world all its own.

2. Calvin Harris feat. Frank Ocean and Migos
“Slide”
Um, guys, it’s March. Why are you giving us a summer-breeze disco jam that’s perfect for blowing trees on the beach? This is sweet, spacey magic.

3. Lorde
“Green Light”
Lorde’s back! Our first taste of her new album, Melodrama, is this surprisingly upbeat club track – which rolls like a night out that could go in any direction.

4. Les Amazones d’Afrique feat. Angélique Kidjo
“Dombolo”
This supergroup of West African divas throws an off-the-hook dance party over talking-drum elation. The result is a desert trip you won’t want to come home from anytime soon.

5. Steve Lacy
“Dark Red”
Musician-producer Steve Lacy (of L.A. outré-soul crew the Internet) suggests pop-prodigy talent on this hazily swinging R&B dote, which goes down like Pavement doing a riff on Blackstreet’s “No Diggity.”

6. PWR BTTM
“Big Beautiful Day”
Glam-punk advice for small-town queer kids: “Look incredible as you make their lives regrettable.” Amen.

7. Parquet Courts feat. Bun B
“Captive of the Sun”
Brooklyn’s PQUs and Houston rap don Bun B hook up for some chopped-and-screwed surf rock. It’s a weird match, but it sure works.

8. The Police
“Synchronicity II”
The lyrics tell the story of how simple everyday life drives you bonkers. The best music that Sting ever made was with Stewart Copeland on drums.

9. Jane’s Addiction
“Pigs in Zen”
When this came out, the pop on the radio was just for making out with your girlfriend. Jane’s Addiction made hard rock interesting again.

10. Queen
“We Will Rock You”
I’ve heard Brian May makes $5 million a year from this song. They play that motherfucker at every football, baseball, basketball game.

11. Jeff Buckley
“So Real”
That was my “getting some business” song back on the Alanis Morissette tour. I’d put that motherfucking CD in and it was happening.

Taylor Hawkins
Five Songs I Wish I’d Written
The Foo Fighters drummer just released his debut solo effort, KOTA, on which he plays nearly every instrument.

The Hollies
“The Air That I Breathe”
Radiohead were sued because “Creep” sounds a lot like this song. I just discovered the Hollies last year. This was their last hurrah.

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Roger Waters Returns to Rock
Ex-Pink Floyd bassist preps new album, tour
BY KORY GROW

In the last months of George W. Bush’s presidency, Roger Waters wrote a poem of hope. “It was me musing on the idea that possibly, if Obama won, things would get better,” he says. Nine years later, with the presidency held by a man Waters calls a “true sociopath,” a “nincompoop” and an “unending source of absurdity,” the former Pink Floyd singer-songwriter has repurposed his old poem’s title, “Is This the Life We Really Want?” for a new concept album, due May 19th – his first solo rock LP since 1992’s Amused to Death.

The decision to finally make another “rock & roll record,” as he calls it, came from collaborating with longtime Radiohead producer Nigel Godrich, who first worked with Waters on his recent Roger Waters: The Wall movie (and has also produced Beck, Paul McCartney and many others). [Cont. on 12]
Secrets of the Funky Drummer

CLYDE STUBBLEFIELD, THE DRUMMER RESPONSIBLE for some of James Brown’s greatest grooves, died in February at 73 in Madison, Wisconsin. Stubblefield grew up in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Inspired by the train sounds he heard growing up, he created a style heavy on “ghost notes” – rapid-fire snare brushes between beats – helping Brown enter long-form funk territory. Those rhythms (recorded between 1965 and 1970) powered the hip-hop revolution, sampled on hits by N.W.A, Public Enemy and more; Stubblefield’s break on 1970’s “Funky Drummer” was sampled hundreds of times. After leaving Brown in 1971, he continued performing, keeping a regular nightclub gig in Madison. Here’s a guide to four of his best beats.

CHRISTOPHER R. WEINGARTEN

ROGER WATERS

[Cont. from II] Waters, whose last album was 2005’s classical opera Ca Ira (There Is Hope), had been composing an anti-war “radio play” about a grandfather and granddaughter – but Godrich convinced him to pivot. “He felt my theatrical idea was less than ideal,” says Waters, who did end up using “two or three” songs from that project for the new album. “I said, ‘OK, that’s interesting. Tell me more.’ And since then, we’ve been working backward and forward, and it’s been a very rewarding and interesting process.” In recent months, they’ve been hard at work on Is This the Life We Really Want? in Los Angeles and New York.

Waters began work on the new songs between 2010 and 2013, while touring the world on his revival of The Wall. “I always had a guitar with me in the hotel room and I had a lot of time,” he says. “At a certain point, I wrote this one song that demands an answer to a particular question. I’ve changed the title [to ‘Déjà Vu’], but the working title was ‘If I Had Been God,’ and it describes what would have been different – or might have been different – if I had been God.” As of early March, he had a lot of time,” he says. “At a certain point, I wrote this one song that demands an answer to a particular question. I’ve changed the title [to ‘Déjà Vu’], but the working title was ‘If I Had Been God,’ and it describes what would have been different – or might have been different – if I had been God.” As of early March, he had

“James Brown never told me what to play. I just played my own patterns, and the hip-hoppers that used the material probably paid him. But I got none of it.”

– CLYDE STUBBLEFIELD

The beat Stubblefield lays down on this seven-minute single became an essential building block of hip-hop when it was discovered by crate-diggers.

Songs That Sample It:
Dr. Dre’s “Let Me Ride”; Public Enemy’s “Fight the Power”; LL Cool J’s “Mama Said Knock You Out”; N.W.A’s “Funk tha Police”

Why Is It Fresh?: “The ghost notes,” says Hank Shocklee, who sampled it on “Fight the Power.” “Machines just don’t get that.”

Original Song: “Say It Loud – I’m Black and I’m Proud,” 1968.
Stubblefield’s loose, hard-popping snare work lit up Brown’s political anthem, which became a call to arms for the Black Power movement.

Songs That Sample It:
Pete Rock & CL Smooth’s “They Reminisce Over You (T.R.O.Y.);” Salt-N-Pepa’s “Do You Want Me?”


Give the drummer some!” Brown shouts midway through this seven-minute funk classic. Stubblefield responds with 10 seconds of fluidly gliding syncopation as Brown shreiks along.

Songs That Sample It:
Public Enemy’s “Welcome to the Terrordome”; Roni Size’s “Brown Paper Bag”; Ultramagnetic MC’s “Kool Keith Housing Things”

Why Is It Fresh?: “The stick play creates the frenzy,” says Shocklee. “When it hits right, it changes frequency. It’s the most important element.”

Stubblefield’s frenzied, chasing rhythm is a master class in speed, power and subtlety.

Songs That Sample It: Nas’ “Where Are They Now?”; MC Shan’s “Juice Crew Law”

Why Is It Fresh?: “His playing was a huge influence on everything I did,” says golden-era New York hip-hop producer Marley Marl, who sampled the beat on “Juice Crew Law.” “The grooves he made at practice were so good, James Brown would take them to the studio.”
Inside Lou Reed’s Archives

A new collection chronicles half a century of music and notoriety.

On March 2nd, Lou Reed — who died in 2013 — would have turned 75. The birthday present went to his hometown: That day, Reed’s widow, the artist Laurie Anderson, announced the acquisition by the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts of the Lou Reed Archive — a sprawling personal collection of memorabilia, papers and audio-visual material documenting Reed’s career with the Velvet Underground and as a solo artist. Demo cassettes, tour receipts and record-label documents show “the underpinnings of the art,” notes NYPL curator Jonathan Hiam. Anderson adds, “Lou was such an adventurer. You feel that come across in the archive.”

1 HOTEL AND BAR BILLS from Reed’s mid-Seventies European tours. “It blew my mind that so much was kept,” says archivist Don Fleming. “It showed so much of his performing life.”
2 A CASSETTE of solo demos recorded in 1971 at his parents’ home on Long Island, with songs that would later appear on solo albums such as 1972’s Lou Reed and 1973’s Berlin.
3 PASSPORT with his given name, Lewis Reed.
4 A LETTER from Czech President Václav Havel. In 2009, Reed played at a concert in Prague to mark the 20th anniversary of Czech independence.
5 A LIMITED-EDITION SONY WALKMAN presented to Reed to mark the cassette player’s 10th anniversary. Slightly rusted now, the silver case was custom-made by Tiffany.
6 REED’S SESSION NOTES. His fastidious documentations include amplifier-knob settings. There are more than 20 folders just for the 2000 album Ecstasy.
7 A CUSTOM-MADE KALEIDOSCOPE decorated with vintage photos of the Velvet Underground. An example of the inventive personal gifts presented to Reed by fans over the decades.
8 A CLASSIC BYRDS SINGLE sent to Reed by Led Zeppelin guitarist Jimmy Page. In 1968, with the Yardbirds, Page covered Reed’s “I’m Waiting for the Man” in concert.

Photographs by Shana Novak
Michelle Branch’s Second Act

How she overcame record-label limbo and rebuilt her sound with help from Patrick Carney of the Black Keys

It’s been 14 years since early-00s pop-rock hitmaker Michelle Branch, best known for her 2001 smash “ Everywhere,” released her last album. Since then, she’s tried out everything from collaborating with Timbaland to a country side project. But her label, Warner Bros., passed on two subsequent attempts at a follow-up LP. “They saw an opportunity to make a lot of money off me, so they wouldn’t let me go,” says Branch. “But they wouldn’t release my music.”

Then, help came in an unexpected form. In 2015, Branch was at a party in Hollywood when she bumped into Black Keys drummer Patrick Carney, a casual acquaintance and fellow indie-rock enthusiast. “Everybody was doing blow – it was a typical douchey L.A. thing,” she says. “We were the only two people who weren’t doing drugs.” Instead, they drank cheap beer, and Carney grilled Branch about where she’d been for the past 14 years. Carney suggested he produce Branch’s next record. “I was very curious as to why she hadn’t put out a record in a long time, and I offered, drunkenly, to help her,” he says.

The result is Hopeless Romantic, recorded in 2015 with the help of former Black Keys touring bassist Gus Seyffert at his L.A. studio. The album (due out April 7th) is a far cry from the Alanis Morissette-like anthems on Hotel Paper or Black Keys’ garage rock, often suggesting the Bangles’ Sixties romanticism or the synth-y dream pop of Beach House.

Lyrically, Branch addresses the dissolution of her 11-year marriage, which ended in 2015 – and her new relationship with Carney. The two started dating while working together, and Branch and her 11-year-old daughter recently moved into Carney’s Nashville home.

“He’s the patron saint of this album,” says Branch. In fact, when Branch’s current label, Verve, balked at her surprising new sound, Carney took it personally. “I’ve got millions of dollars,” he told Branch. “I don’t need some motherfucker to send me a check for a studio. Let’s make a record, and if they don’t want it, we’ll have it.”

U2 REUNITE WITH ‘WAR’ PRODUCER FOR NEXT ALBUM

U2 are finally putting the finishing touches on their upcoming album, Songs of Experience. Likely song titles include “The Little Things That Give You Away,” “Red Flag Day” and “Summer of Love,” which Bono described to Mojo as “achingly beautiful and empty.” They plan to finish it at Electric Lady Studios in New York, with producer Steve Lillywhite who worked on their first three albums along with 2004’s How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb. “We all very much feel like it needs to be out the end of this year,” says bassist Adam Clayton.

MAC DEMARCO KEEPS THE MELLOW VIBE ALIVE

Canadian singer-songwriter Mac DeMarco has finished work on the follow-up to 2014’s Salad Days. Leadoff singles “This Old Dog” and “My Old Man” are as wonderfully chilled-out and quirky as his earlier work. “Just wanted to keep this puppy real, kept it pretty simple, kept it pretty clean,” DeMarco says. “Found my self putting lipstick on a chimp a couple of times, but wound up letting the songs be what they wanted to be, used a lot of demo material and first takes as final recordings. Had a good time ripping it together, Jah bless it.”

WILLIE DECLARES HIMSELF ‘GOD’S PROBLEM CHILD’

Willie Nelson’s first album of new material in three years features guest vocals by the late Leon Russell (“God’s Problem Child”), a response to Trump (“Delete and Fast-Forward”) and a reminder that he’s alive, on “Still Not Dead.” “Two or three times in the last couple of years, I read the paper where I’d passed away,” he says. “So I just wanted to let ‘em know that’s a lot of horseshit.”

STUDIO NOTES

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A Pop Prodigy Breaks Out

Meet Khalid, the former Army brat who came up with his signature song before he’d even gone to prom

LAST SPRING, KHALID WAS an 18-year-old unsigned artist finishing high school in El Paso, Texas. He’d recorded a few tracks of minimalist R&B, full of spacious vibes and longing, uploaded them to Soundcloud and became a local hero—a change for an Army brat who’d grown up as a shy kid singing musical theater and opera. But when he moved to El Paso before his senior year, he began channeling his loneliness into his songs, working up melodies and lyrics on his iPhone, then putting them to music with friends. No studios—ideas for a track might be captured on a voice memo in the bathroom and recorded in someone’s bedroom. And Khalid had no car, so once, to get to a session, he hit up Twitter. He recalls, “I put this tweet out: ‘Can someone please come pick me up and take me to record at my friend’s house?’”

The track that made sure he’d never be without a ride again was a swoony groover called “Location.” “It was toward the end of my senior year,” he says. “A lot of my classmates were like, ‘When are we gonna get another song?’” And I’m telling my manager, ‘We gotta get this song out. Because I’m falling off, and prom is right around the corner.’” “Location” blended old-school touches of organ and guitar in new-school ways, as Khalid pleaded with a girl to let him know when and where to come through. After Kylie Jenner Snapchatted a clip of herself listening to the song, his growing fame became more than local. Within a few months he’d signed to RCA, and a few months after that he was putting the finishing touches on his debut album, A merican Teen, a mix of slow-moving heartbreak and pop thrills, as if Drake had reworked Katy Perry’s catalog as a soundtrack for late-night adventures.

Many of the songs—like “Saved,” where Khalid pledges to keep a number stored until an ex finally misses him the way she misses her—revolve around that millennial essential: the phone. “Falling in love in high school and falling out of love—it’s very digital,” says Khalid. “I’ve had breakups where they’ve called me to tell me we were done, and I’ve gotten a lot of text messages from an old girlfriend letting me know how she felt about me after we had ended everything.”

Growing up, Khalid Robinson’s mom told him how important music was. This was no artistic abstraction—she was in the Army, and singing with the U.S. Army Europe Band and Chorus meant she could travel the world performing rather than be deployed. “Music pretty much saved her life, and saved my own life,” he says. He cites his diverse influences: “Father John Misty, Brandy, Aaliyah, Bill Withers, Billie Holiday.”

Until he got to El Paso, he thought he’d be a music teacher. But in the past year and a half he’s discovered something of his own: music full of deep bottom and empty space that-as Khalid would put it—“the future.” I nas pande as me om th eA r m y ,a n d s i ng i n g w o m an’s toilet in El Paso, Texas. He’d re- recorded a few tracks of minimalist R&B, full of spacious vibes and longing, uploaded them to Soundcloud and became a local hero—a change for an Army brat who’d grown up as a shy kid singing musical theater and opera. But when he moved to El Paso before his senior year, he began channeling his loneliness into his songs, working up melodies and lyrics on his iPhone, then putting them to music with friends. No studios—ideas for a track might be captured on a voice memo in the bathroom and recorded in someone’s bedroom. And Khalid had no car, so once, to get to a session, he hit up Twitter. He recalls, “I put this tweet out: ‘Can someone please come pick me up and take me to record at my friend’s house?’”

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A New Marley: Bob’s Grandson Stirs It Up

Last year, Katy Perry was recording in L.A. with Max Martin when the producer played her “Lion,” a track he had worked on with Bob Marley’s grandson, Skip. Perry was so impressed, she summoned Marley to contribute a guest verse to her single “Chained to the Rhythm.”

As the son of Cedella Marley, Bob’s daughter, Skip grew up around music, often touring with his uncles Ziggy and Stephen. He never sang in public until Stephen pushed him onstage during a show to spontaneously perform a bit of his grandfather’s “One Love.” “I was shy before that,” Skip says. “But that experience confirmed that music is what I should be doing.”

After a friend went through a breakup, Skip wrote the mournful ballad “Cry to Me,” which his mother e-mailed to Island Records’ David Massey, a friend of the Marley family. Soon, Massey was standing in Marley’s house with a record contract in hand. Now, Skip hopes his debut will be out in the summer, giving him a chance to carry on his grandfather’s legacy. “Being [Bob’s] grandson has never been a burden,” he says. “It’s a light, because I’m carrying on his message of love and the unification of mankind to a new generation.”

ANDY GREENE

CATCH A FIRE
Marley and Perry at the Grammys in February.
For Paul McCartney, it was an all-too-familiar feeling. There he was, paired with an acerbic, rough-voiced co-writer with Liverpudlian roots, sitting face to face as they strummed acoustic guitars, finishing each other’s musical phrases and lyrics, singing in comfortable harmony. “We would write in the same method that me and John used to write,” says McCartney, recalling his wildly productive late-Eighties collaborations with Elvis Costello. “I figured, in a way, he was being John. And for me, that was good and bad. He was a great person to write with, a great foil to bounce off, but here’s me, trying to avoid doing something too Beatle-y!”

Those sessions, at McCartney’s rustic Hog Hill Mill Studio in East Sussex, England, were intended to yield songs for what became the ex-Beatle’s 1989 album Flowers in the Dirt, an Eighties high point. Four tracks, including the playful duet “You Want Her Too,” ended up on that LP, two on McCartney’s next one (1993’s Off the Ground), and the rest on Costello’s albums – most notably the hit single “Veronica.”

But as a new box-set reissue of Flowers in the Dirt reveals, the collaborative recordings – rough acoustic versions (long circulated as coveted bootlegs) and, later, full-band Costello-McCartney versions – stand on their own as an extraordinary document of a partnership that was probably too perfect to last. “It moved me forward, and it moved him forward,” says McCartney, who’s equally proud of other Flowers tracks, like the uncharacteristic blues funk of the Trevor Horn-produced “Rough Ride.” “That’s the best you could hope for. I don’t think either of us thought we were gonna become Lennon-McCartney Part Two.”

Still, Costello recalls, “There was sort of a plan to work on the sessions together, to co-produce the sessions.” (He also insists that he had zero intention of imitating Lennon – though learning to sing harmony from Beatles records inevitably influenced Costello’s choice of vocal parts.) But McCartney, determined to have an album that would stand up on his first Wings-free solo tour, ended up enlisting an array of producers and collaborators (including David Gilmour) for Flowers, and rendering songs like “My Brave Face” – distinctly raw and Beatlesque in its first demo, interestingly reggae-ish in the second – in what Costello calls “widescreen...elaborate productions.”

McCartney now acknowledges that “the energy and the performances on the demos were better in some cases. That’s really why we wanted to release them: for all the people who don’t buy bootlegs.” McCartney’s impassioned vocal on the original piano-demo version of “The Lovers That Never Were” is particularly striking. “That was the one where I was aware it was good while we were doing it,” says Costello, who played piano with McCartney over his shoulder strumming guitar. “You’d have to go some way to beat that performance.”

Costello was delighted to learn that McCartney is finally releasing their long-lost joint recordings. “In the continuity of Paul McCartney collaborators,” he notes with a laugh, “I’m the person that stands between Michael Jackson and Kanye West and Rihanna. You just didn’t know that about me. And that’s a pop fact with which you can probably win a bet.”
Let the magic find you.

ASHEVILLE

Steep Canyon Rangers

ExploreAshevilleMusic.com
Rising pop star Alessia Cara is about to get on a plane for her first trip to Tokyo, and she has big plans for the flight, which will afford her a rare 12-hour chunk of free time. “I’ll probably just watch a movie,” she says, “and eat some bread. I always eat bread on planes. And go to sleep, or maybe write some songs on my laptop.” The 20-year-old Ontario native broke through in 2015 with a distinctive ode to social anxiety, “Here,” from her debut, Know-It-All. Now, she’s writing for her next LP while reaching new audiences with a guest spot on the soundtrack to Disney’s Moana — and a bravura Saturday Night Live performance. “I kind of got too into it,” she says, “and I hit my mic pack off. It unplugged my in-ear, so I couldn’t hear anything. Which was the scariest thing ever. I was like, ‘Of course this would happen to me.’”

You started on YouTube, playing acoustic-guitar covers. What drew you to the instrument?

I loved the sound of it, and to be honest, I just thought it looked cool. I saw young women like Amy Winehouse and Lauryn Hill playing, and it’s weirdly empowering to be able to stand up there and just shred. And I can in no way shred! But I can play, like, a G chord and hopefully make it look cool. Tracy Chapman’s “Fast Car” was the first song I played, then Pink’s “Dear Mr. President.”

How did you master the uncanny Lorde impression you did on Fallon?

I’ve been a Lorde fan since forever, and after I listen to someone’s music a million times, I just start to sing it like them. She has such a distinct way of pronouncing words. Lorde said it sounded like her, which was a good stamp of approval.

You operate in a space Lorde helped carve out — sort of alternative pop.

Yeah, alternative pop is a good way to put it. People like her and Halsey and even Troye Sivan have done a really amazing job paving that lane for what “alternative” is now.

When Taylor Swift interviewed you last year, it was clear she knew your album really well. Were you surprised?

I was taken aback, in a good way. It taught me that no matter how big you become, it doesn’t mean you have to stop loving music or paying attention. When you got to perform with her on the 1989 tour, did you daydream about headlining stadiums?

Absolutely. But half of it is daydreaming and the other half is just complete terror. I’ve never been one to crave attention, which I know means that this is probably the worst career to pick. I get anxious even when people come up to me for pictures, sometimes. That’s the one thing that makes me hesitant about my future. But I love music too much to not do it.

Amy Winehouse was a key influence for you. What was it about her?

She was so different from everyone else I was hearing on radio and stuff. I was only 10 when I saw the video to “Rehab,” which is probably not the best video to see when you’re 10. But I didn’t know what it meant — I just saw this crazy-haired, curly-haired girl like me singing. And she didn’t sing like she was trying too hard. I was like, “This girl’s cool. I wanna be like her.” On “Four Pink Walls,” you come close to rapping. Can you freestyle?

Sometimes, if it hits me, I can do it. Other times, I’m really bad. When I write, I like squeezing as many words as possible into each bar — I’ve listened to the Fugees and Lauryn Hill for as long as I can remember, so probably a big chunk of it subconsciously comes from that.

You’re a writer on all of your songs, but you made an exception with “How Far I’ll Go” for Disney’s Moana. Why?

The movie’s story is a lot like my life, actually. This girl who wants to explore outside her traditional world — that was how I felt, trying to pursue music with my traditional Italian family. I got on Skype with [composer] Lin-Manuel Miranda, and he was like, “Just make it your own.”

You did a songwriting camp for a big pop artist’s album. What was that like?

It’s honestly a bit strange. They had a bunch of rooms with different producers and writers and stuff, and I was in one by myself. A guy comes in and he tells you what they’re looking for, in my case a song that wasn’t a ballad but is still heartfelt. And then they had a computer with beats on it, and I had to pick one of them and write to it. I don’t know if I’d do it again, but if I did, I would want the artist there so I can get a vibe of what they actually want. What are your goals for your own next album?

The last album was very metaphorical, lots of wordplay. Which I love. But I’m trying to see what will happen if I write a bit more simply. But sonically, I really wanna lean more toward the vibe of “Here,” that kind of gritty pop-soul, R&B thing. That’s where my heart is, and I think that sound kind of got away from me a little bit just because I was young and so unsure of what I wanted to do.
‘The Americans’: From Russia With Love

BY ROB SHEFFIELD

‘The americans,” FX’s masterful Cold War espionage saga, is the most heart-breaking and harrowing drama on TV right now. But as it heads into its final two seasons, The Americans feels weirder than ever, because it’s also timelier than ever – the Eighties Cold War doesn’t look as remote or quaint as it did a year ago. Thanks to Vladimir Putin (a young KGB agent in the Eighties), the world has warped into a scarier and shakier place, and our nation has suddenly remembered that nuclear weapons still exist. So there’s something almost nostalgic about the old-school Russian spies on The Americans. “To think they once had a Lincoln,” one KGB agent says sadly. “Now a Reagan.” The Americans feels like such a real portrait of America because it’s such a real portrait of a marriage. As the Soviet spies, Matthew Rhys and Keri Russell are the most emotionally devastating couple on TV, with sexual friction that just heats up whenever they kill people together. They juggle their multiple identities with wigs and fake mustaches that can’t hide the hard lines in their faces. You can see it in their sad eyes – they realize they’re the only two people in the world who will ever understand each other.

The new season picks up with raised emotional and geopolitical stakes. The couple’s teen daughter, Paige, is dating the boy next door, which drives her dad crazy because Paige knows the family secret – and also because the boy’s dad is in the FBI. So the situation calls for one of The Americans’ agonizing mother-daughter talks. “Being in a relationship is complicated,” Russell says. “You don’t share everything.” It’s a typically awkward attempt at bonding for this family. Yet it also sums up why The Americans feels more intimately disturbing, and more accurate, than ever.

‘Iron Fist’: An Avenging Kung-Fu-Fighting Bro

Iron Fist is the latest juggernaut from the Netflix galaxy of the Marvel universe, set in a New York where superheroes are suddenly spreading faster than Starbucks. To everybody, Danny Rand just looks like a hairy barefoot slob who got lost on his way to a Spin Doctors gig in 1992. But this hippie dude has the mysterious power to punch through walls. Turns out he’s the Iron Fist, inheritor of an ancient warrior tradition. When Rand’s plane crashed in the Himalayas 15 years ago, he was rescued by kindly Buddhist monks, who trained him in martial arts. Now he’s back in New York, ready to battle the forces of evil. Finn Jones (Game of Thrones) plays the kung-fu vigilante masquerading as a schlubby bro. Even in the virtuosic combat scenes, this Iron Fist always has that dazed “who, me?” demeanor, like he can’t understand why bad hombres keep trying to kill him.

R.S.
Besides being the two most notorious criminals in America in the early 1970s, Charles Manson and Patty Hearst had nothing in common. One was a cult leader hoping to start a race war; the other was a teenage heiress who was kidnapped by a group of inept revolutionaries. (Ironically, the demure Hearst was the only one of the two to actually participate directly in a crime.) The pair were media sensations who generated endless hours of news coverage, but it was two teams of Rolling Stone reporters that ran circles around the mainstream media, scoring exclusive, groundbreaking stories on both. In the process, the journalists elevated Rolling Stone from a small, youthful journal to a publication that could influence the national conversation.

It began in August 1969, when actress Sharon Tate was murdered along with her unborn baby and four other people in her Los Angeles mansion; the next day, a couple, the LaBiancas, were killed in their L.A. home. Manson, a songwriter and associate of Beach Boys drummer Dennis Wilson, was soon identified as the mastermind of the massacres, but many in the underground press thought he was innocent – including, at first, Rolling Stone. "He was a fellow hippie," says writer David Dalton. "I thought he'd been railroaded. I was spouting this stupid hippie bullshit, like, 'Which side are you on, man? The fucking government is corrupt!'"

Dalton was a rock expert with personal ties to Wilson. To investigate the Manson story, Rolling Stone paired him with veteran investigative reporter David Felton. The magazine hoped to land a jailhouse interview, which was planned to run with a provocative cover line: Manson is innocent. The cult leader was locked away in the L.A. County jail awaiting trial and had declined most interviews, but his new album, Lie: The Love and Terror Cult, was coming out and he wanted to promote it in Rolling Stone. "We had to pose as attorneys to get in," says Felton.

Felton and Dalton faced Manson, who sported a freshly shaved beard and a freshly carved "X" in his forehead, across a table in the prison. "He kept clicking his nails on the table," says Felton. "I could see how he'd have command over people." Dalton felt he was connecting with a fellow hippie. At one point, he meant to say, "You're a Scorpio, aren't you?" but it came out as "You're a scorpion." "Ten different emotions flashed across Manson's face – anger, shock, confusion," says Dalton. "He could swing from pure, vicious racism to environmentalism to statements like, 'I am God.'"

It was enough to convince Felton that this was no wide-eyed hippie being framed by police. But Dalton still believed Manson was innocent; in fact, Dalton and his wife had spent the previous week living with members of the Manson Family (including future Gerald Ford would-be assassin Lynette "Squeaky" Fromme) on Spahn Ranch, on the outskirts of L.A. "It was like any other hippie commune," says Dalton. "We'd raid dumpsters and make a kind of stew. We'd ride horses at night. It was totally pleasant."

Shortly after the Manson interview, Felton and Dalton talked to L.A. prosecutor Aaron Stovitz, who broke down details of the murders. "He took out this tray of photographs of the LaBianca murders," says Dalton. "I see 'Piggies' and 'Helter Skelter' [written in blood] on the walls and refrigerator. At that instant, I knew they did it. The L.A. Police Department would have had to be geniuses to plant that."

Dalton immediately thought of his wife, who was still living at Spahn Ranch. He raced over, persuaded her to ride a horse into the middle of the desert, and then explained that they were in danger. "We felt perfectly safe when we believed he was innocent," Dalton says. "Now [the Family members] looked like children of the damned. Their eyes were dilated, and they all seemed to be tuned into the same harmonic vibe." The couple went back to the ranch and staged a fight in which she accused him of infidelity, then stormed off and hitchhiked back into town. "It was a living horror movie," Dalton says. "The paranoia in L.A. was like a loose power line writhing on the Pacific Coast Highway. It was palpable."
The couple moved into Felton’s house in Pasadena, where the two writers spent six weeks threading their notes and transcripts into a 30,000-word feature, roughly the size of a short book. Felton handled the journalistic parts, and Dalton sprinkled it with wild, experimental prose. “I have a piece at the end that’s sort of a philosophical, metaphysical reflection on the whole thing,” says Dalton. “I still don’t know if it makes any sense.”

The finished product ran across 21 pages, helping Rolling Stone win a prestigious National Magazine Award, a first for the publication. “I have a deep feeling about it even today,” says Felton. “And I’m glad Manson is still in jail.”

Four years later, Patty Hearst was ripped out of her apartment in Berkeley and thrown into the trunk of a car by a radical group calling itself the Symbionese Liberation Army. In a series of bizarre missives, the SLA said it would release Hearst if her family—heirs to the Hearst newspaper dynasty—a couple of hours thinking the story was over, since the penultimate act was over,” says Kohn. “But Jann was clear we needed to keep going.”

A cover of Rod Stewart with girlfriend Britt Ekland was pushed back so the Hearst article could run. Guards were posted at the printing press in St. Louis so stray copies didn’t leak out early. Once the news hit that Rolling Stone had the exclusive story of Hearst’s two years on the run, the magazine was inundated with media requests. The story led every news broadcast on the networks that night, and Weir and Kohn appeared on the Today show. “I remember having a screaming match with [famed Hearst family attorney] William Kunstler, one of my heroes, on the phone,” says Scanlon. “He was trying to enjoin us from printing it.”

Kunstler wasn’t the only one outraged by the story. The FBI had been outmaneuvered by two twenty-something reporters and demanded they name their sources or face imprisonment (at the last minute, a judge allowed the reporters to skirt prison). The second Hearst cover, a month later, focused more on her family’s side of the saga, but it was also full of information from SLA members who came forward. One told Weir he would leave a packet of info at a phone booth under a freeway overpass. “I thought, ‘If they’re gonna shoot me, this is where they’re gonna get me,’ ” Weir remembers. “It was one of the scariest walks of my life, but I somehow got in, got out, and we had our material.”

More than four decades later, those involved in the story vividly recall the rush of events. “The memory of Rolling Stone leading off the three network news broadcasts that evening just kills me,” says Scanlon. “Patty Hearst was a leap forward in terms of credibility, in terms of convincing people yet again that it wasn’t just a rock & roll magazine from San Francisco. I can feel my adrenaline pumping just thinking about it all.”

Andy Greene
Chicago Cubs superfan Eddie Vedder attended the team’s fantasy camp in Mesa, Arizona. Last year, the Vedder-penned “All the Way” became an anthem at Wrigley Field as the Cubs won the World Series. He will hang up his cleats when Pearl Jam are inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame on April 7th.
Stipe Takes a Stand

Michael Stipe joined a crowd of thousands outside the Stonewall Inn in New York’s Greenwich Village (birthplace of the gay-rights movement) to protest President Trump’s Muslim travel ban. “It is so sad that we have sunk to this level,” Stipe said. “I blame the media completely for [Trump]. How have we created this monster?”

Blue Ivy’s Big Night Out

One week after her live-concert debut at the Grammys, Blue Ivy Carter joined parents Jay Z and Beyoncé in New Orleans for the NBA All-Star Game, where she ate Skittles and cotton candy. Beyoncé – due to have twins in a few months – also celebrated Mardi Gras from the balcony of her sister Solange’s place in the French Quarter.

KHALED’S KIDS
DJ Khaled visited a New Orleans YMCA during All-Star Weekend. Khaled’s been in the studio with Chance the Rapper and Justin Bieber.
I spy, with my little eye, something beginning with “S.”

Who knows what you’ll see in the backup camera of your new 2017 Corolla, but that’s kind of the point, isn’t it? That’s why it comes standard, along with Toyota Safety Sense™ P. Because, even though you might see almost anything, one thing we think you should definitely see is safety. How many things can you spy that start with the letter “S”?
A few weeks after September 11th, 2001, with the nation reeling from the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, D.C., about 400 or so of the country’s leading Christian conservative investors convened at the luxury Phoenician resort in Scottsdale, Arizona. They were there for the 17th annual meeting of the Gathering, a four-day, invitation-only philanthropic and networking event for the Christian donor class, whose members often describe themselves, simply, as “believers.” The perks awaiting them in their off hours included a 27-hole golf course, nine crystalline swimming pools and a luxury spa. At dusk, the ruddy hues of the desert rippled across the stone patios where, warmed by fire pits, some of the most important funders of Christian charity, and the Christian right, sipped cocktails and talked about expanding the Kingdom of God.

Among the evangelical super-rich at the Gathering that weekend were Donald Trump’s recently appointed secretary of education, Betsy DeVos, and her husband, Richard “Dick” DeVos Jr., scion of the multilevel marketing behemoth Amway. The DeVoses are conservative Christian royalty with deep roots in Republican politics, and Betsy, a skilled political operator, had just finished a stint as chair of the Michigan Republican Party. During a talk one evening in the Phoenician’s elegant grand ballroom, DeVos mentioned her latest project: recruiting Christians to run for the state legislature. “It is critically important that we have believers involved in public life,” she said.

Politics was one facet of a much larger effort the DeVoses called the Shfela. This is the biblical name for the fertile crescent of land between Israel’s Judaean Mountains and the coastal plain, where David fought Goliath and other historic battles were waged between the Israelites and the Philistines. During a recent trip to Israel, the DeVoses had been highly impressed by a story about an archeological dig that unearthed a trove of ancient pig
bones in layers of soil dating to the eras when the pagan Philistines held sway. But in other layers of the Shfela, the archeologists found no pig remains at all, suggesting that during these times, the Jews, who kept kosher, had come down from the mountain to spread their religious values among the people. For the DeVoses, the Shfela offered an essential metaphor of the challenges facing modern America. As Dick put it: “How do we get the pig bones out of our culture?”

In the 16 years since that meeting, the DeVoses – which includes 91-year-old patriarch and Amway co-founder Richard “Rich” DeVos Sr., his wife, Helen, their four children and their spouses – has been one of the driving forces behind a stealth campaign powered by a small group of Republican billionaires to chip away at America’s secular institutions: the pig bones, so to speak, of our society. According to a recent analysis by the Center for Responsive Politics, the family, whose net worth is estimated at $5.6 billion, gave $10 million to national GOP candidates and committees during the 2016 cycle alone. But this amount pales to the gargantuan sums they have channeled into state and local races, evangelical and free-market think tanks, advocacy groups, foundations, PACs, Super PACs and other dark-money organs that have effectively created a shadow political party within the GOP.

Regular attendees at the Koch brothers’ biannual summits, the DeVoses have been healthy benefactors of several Koch-seeded groups that advance an anti-tax, anti-regulatory agenda, including the charitable arm of Americans for Prosperity and the FreedomWorks Foundation. What distinguishes the DeVoses within the Kochs’ circle of power, however, is their conservative Christian worldview, which over the past four decades has helped fuel what is now a $1.5 billion infrastructure composed of thousands of churches and “parachurch” ministries, as well as Christian TV, radio and Internet channels; Facebook pages and other forms of social media; books; conferences; camps; prayer groups; legal organizations – an entire universe that many Americans may be wholly unaware of. Through these channels has come a single, unified message merging social conservatism, free-market capitalism and American exceptionalism: the belief that the rights and freedoms spelled out in the U.S. Constitution were mandated by God. Neither Betsy DeVos, who is 59, nor any of her children have ever attended a public school; her Cabinet post also marks her first full-time job in the education system. Even before her nomination, she was a controversial figure in education circles, a leading advocate of “school choice” through student vouchers, which give parents public dollars to send their children to private and parochial schools. During her Senate confirmation hearing in January, DeVos struggled to grasp some of the most basic fundamentals of education terminology, student-loan policy and federal provisions mandating public schools provide free and appropriate education to people with disabilities. At one point, Connecticut Democrat Chris Murphy, who represents the families of children killed at Sandy Hook Elementary School, asked DeVos if she believed schools should be gun-free zones. She responded that in the DeVos’s understanding of “Christ’s agents of renewal in the world.” Central to understanding the DeVos family, and particularly Dick and Betsy’s zeal for education, is the Calvinist doctrine of predestination, a belief that one’s salvation (or damnation) has been preordained by God. According to this
view, God’s “elect” must work hard in dedication to the glorification of Jesus Christ. Another of Calvinism’s central teachings is that God is the “absolute sovereign” over everything in the world, and followers must in turn claim “every square inch” of the Earth for Jesus Christ.

Betsy Prince grew up 30 miles southwest of Grand Rapids, in the small city of Holland, where by some estimates her father’s company, the Prince Corp., employed roughly a quarter of the town. Betsy and her three siblings – Eileen, Emilie and Erik – were all educated in Holland’s Christian schools, where Betsy was a champion swimmer. In 1975, she enrolled at Calvin College and won an uncontested race for the student senate her notes one of its mottoes, “is best achieved through earned success.”

Amway was one of the first companies to harness the multilevel-marketing concept – using positive thinking and other motivational tools to recruit “independent business owners.” The principles of Amway salesmanship, which a 1979 federal investigation determined do not amount to a pyramid scheme, were simple: Leverage your personal and professional contacts, or “circles,” into both customers and a sales force, which in turn will create more sales forces. Rather than a corporate hierarchy, success relied on shared goals – and shared values, in what one former Amway distributor, Stephen Butterfield, referred to in a 1985 exposé as a “cult of free enterprise.”

“We expect to foster a conservative governing philosophy consisting of limited government and respect for traditional American virtues.”

Amway doesn’t just sell products, Butterfield writes. “It sells a marketing and motivational system, a cause, a way of life, in a fervid, emotional atmosphere of rallies and political revivalism.”

Amway also sold conservatism, whose values were baked into its corporate culture. According to Butterfield, to be a “winner,” in the company parlance, salespeople were encouraged to read only Amway-approved books, use only Amway products and vote the Amway way. Religious leaders like James Dobson and Robert Schuller used Amway rallies to proselytize to the company’s million-strong sales force. In 1980, Butterfield writes, Amway leaders used tax-deductible business functions to drum up support for Ronald Reagan. Before long, Amway had turned its ever-growing distributor network into the foot soldiers of modern conservatism, as Butterfield writes, “extolling the virtues of possibility-thinking, positive attitude, prayer and wealth.” (A representative for Amway refutes Butterfield’s characterization of the company.)

Amway’s vast sales network had both economic and political applications. At the end of 1992, Rich DeVos passed the reins to Dick, who began the company’s expansion into Asia and parts of the developing world. Betsy, in the meantime, began moving up the ladder of Republican politics, serving first as the county GOP chair, then as one of Michigan’s delegates to the Republican National Convention, and in 1997, serving her first of four terms as state GOP chair. “If anybody had asked me
But the DeVoses, as well as the Prince and DeMasso clans, were also trying to change the culture in more covert ways. One of the organizations the Prince and DeVos clans have supported is the Council for National Policy, a secretive and little-known group of several hundred of the country’s most powerful religious and social conservatives. Founded in 1981 by evangelical leader Tim LaHaye, a co-founder of the Moral Majority and co-author of the Left Behind apocalyptic series of books, the CNP has been described as a conservative answer to the Council on Foreign Relations. Its members were advised not to discuss the group or mention its name, even to one another. “The media should not know when or where we meet or who takes part in our programs, before [or] after a meeting,” read another rule, reported in 2004 by The New York Times. Members’ names did, eventually, begin to leak out, among them, Texas oilman Nelson Bunker Hunt; financier Foster Friess; religious leaders Pat Robertson, James Dobson and Tony Perkins; right-wing operatives like Ralph Reed and Jack Abramoff; Paul Weyrich, co-founder of the Heritage Foundation; the NRA’s Wayne LaPierre; Reagan’s Attorney General Edwin Meese; and Republican members of Congress like Tom DeLay and Jesse Helms. More recent members now occupy roles in the White House, notably Stephen K. Bannon, Trump’s chief strategist, and Kellyanne Conway, counselor to the president. Rich DeVos, who described the group as a nexus of “the doers and the donors,” served two stints as CNP’s president.

“It was a clique [of] religious wackos who kept it all behind closed doors because they were afraid that people would see how nuts they were,” says Bruce Bartlett, a conservative economist who attended several CNP events in the 1990s. “I was there because I was interested in tax policy and economics. I also had to get the support of the religious kooks, who didn’t give a rat’s ass about economics. And they realized that they had to get our support. It’s about creating the big tent. ‘Maybe you want theocracy – we don’t give a shit as long as we have our tax cuts.’ It’s kind of frightening.”

What became clear as the 2000s progressed was just how much these two agendas had fused. Under the direction of Charles and David Koch, and with increasing influence from the likes of the DeVos family, the Republican big tent shifted, from the Grand Old Party to what one longtime strategist who’s spent years mapping these networks refers to as the “Grand New Alliance” of libertarianism, populism and religious conservatism. (In the last election cycle, the DeVoses pledged $1.5 million to Freedom Partners Action Fund, which has been called the Koch network’s “secret bank.”) This new perspective, sometimes called the “biblical worldview,” was being sold at special “pastor policy briefings” across the country.
in the hopes of politicizing the evangelical leaders who would then, in turn, rally their troops. At one I attended in Orlando, in 2012, David Barton, a former vice chair of the Texas Republican Party and a leading Christian nationalist, patiently explained to a room of Florida pastors why a radically reduced federal government was part of God’s plan. Jesus, for example, was opposed to the capital-gains tax, Barton said, citing passages in the books of Romans and Matthew.

“Without the libertarians and Tea Party brand, the Christian right would still be somewhat on the fringe of American politics,” the strategist, who asked for anonymity, explains. “But with the economic message, now we’ve got something that is more powerful and more dangerous from a progressive point of view.”

The result has been sweeping electoral power: According to figures published in The Washington Post, in states where the Koch network is most active, including the DeVoses’ home state of Michigan, Republicans control 100 percent of the state legislative majorities, 80 percent of governors, 77 percent of senators and 73 percent of U.S. House members. In 2016, evangelicals and born-again Christians constituted 43 percent of Trump’s total vote. Conservative Christians have been tapped to occupy the top Cabinet posts in the departments of Education, Energy, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, and Justice; they are also set to serve as the president’s director of National Intelligence and head of the CIA. The vision is simple, as the political strategist puts it: “What they want is for churches and nonprofits and business to run the country.”

During his 2001 talk to the Gathering, Dick DeVos lamented that “the church, which ought to be, in our view, far more central to the life of the community, has been displaced by the public school as the center for activity.” Public schools, like unions, are key incubators of democracy; disempowering them also strips locales of their ability to organize around secular values. “We just can think of no better way,” Dick said, “to rebuild our families and our communities than to have that circle of church and school and family much more tightly focused and being built on a consistent worldview.”

The previous year, Betsy had spearheaded an aggressive $5.7 million campaign to convince Michigan voters to amend the state constitution to allow for school vouchers, something critics said would divert millions in state and local funds to private and parochial schools at the expense of the public-school system. Though the initiative ultimately failed, Dick DeVos told the Gathering he hoped “more and more churches will get more and more active and engaged in education.”

The DeVoses quickly devised new ways to push that agenda. Rather than focus on ballot initiatives, they decided on a far more ambitious plan, funding nonprofits and political action committees to promote “school choice.” This was a national strategy, Dick said in a 2002 speech to the Heritage Foundation; to succeed, though, it had to appear local, “on a state-by-state basis, in order to be able to offer political consequence for opposition and political reward for support of education-reform issues.”

“We need to be cautious about talking too much about these activities,” he noted. “Many of the activities and the political work that needs to go on will go on at the grass roots. It will go on quietly and it will go on in the form that often politics is done – one person at a time, speaking to another person in privacy.”

An untold amount of money was spent by conservatives on the pro-privatization effort. This included working from studies by Michigan’s Mackinac Center for Public Policy, which has received funding from both the Koch and DeVos networks, that rebranded public schools as overbearing “government” education. Even more important was to somehow obscure the racist history of school vouchers – the idea was originally concocted in the wake of Brown v. Board of Education to channel white students, and their tax dollars, out of public schools – and appeal to blacks and Latinos. “Properly communicated,” Dick told the Heritage Foundation, school choice “can cut across a lot of historic boundaries, be they partisan, ethnic or otherwise.”

Betsy DeVos became the chairwoman of several nonprofits that were consolidated to become the national powerhouse behind the movement: the American Federation for Children. Along with its tax affiliate, the Alliance for School Choice, the organization published glossy brochures featuring pictures of smiling children of every race, with endorsements from African-American and Democratic politicians, including Sen. Cory Booker, then an upstart city councilman from Newark, New Jersey, who joined the board of Alliance for School Choice in 2002. But the movement’s real agenda was less about helping black families than creating a nationwide push for school choice. Leading the charge was the Great Lakes Education Project, or GLEP, a Michigan-based group created by the DeVoses to strong-arm state legislators. The result was a complete overhaul of the Michigan legislature. “In education policy, there would be times where they didn’t have votes – maybe 10 or 15 Republicans who didn’t want to vote for totally expanding the charter-school cap,” says Brandon Dillon, who served in the Michigan Statehouse before becoming the state Democratic chair. “And they would slowly, through the speaker of the house, bring them in, one by one, and basically threaten them with hundreds of thousands of dollars spent against them in the primary.” Though the voucher fight had been lost, charter schools, which receive government fund-
ents have opted for “choice,” only to be turned away. This is particularly acute with regard to kids with behavioral issues like attention-deficit disorder. “The words are ‘your child may be better served elsewhere,’” says one Michigan legislator.

As a result, public schools become dumping grounds for the most challenging cases. “Public schools have to educate them,” says Charles Hekman, a teacher in the Grand Rapids school system. “So we’re left with schools that have just so many needy children.” He tells me of entire classrooms full of kids struggling with various issues, one of the most significant being poverty, which is where “partnering” with churches comes in. “One church bought every child at my school a winter coat, a hat and gloves,” he says. “Now, I am an atheist. I don’t think the churches belong in the schools.” At the same time, he adds, “We can’t educate kids that are starving or don’t have clothes.”

As a candidate, Trump suggested diverting $20 billion in federal money toward private-school vouchers. School choice, he said, was the “civil rights issue of our time.” But mass privatization is about more than improving test scores, as was made clear in a report the Council for National Policy submitted to the Trump administration. Though CNP’s membership is closely held, the Southern Poverty Law Center recently obtained a copy of its 2014 roster. Betsy DeVos’ name didn’t appear on it, but her mother was on CNP’s board of governors and listed among its “Gold Circle Members.” The CNP’s view on education, as outlined in the report, is based on the definition in the 1828 version of Webster’s Dictionary: “To give children a good education in manners, arts and science, it is important; to give them a religious education is indispensable.”

The rest of the five-page document outlines a radical vision for the Department of Education, the first step of which would be to eliminate it, transferring responsibility for public-school education to the states. In its place, the CNP suggests creating a “President’s Advisory Council on Public Education Reform,” a sub-Cabinet-level department that would serve as a “consulting service” to state education departments. Among the other recommendations: Restore Ten Commandments posters at all public schools, encourage schools to “recognize traditional holidays (e.g., Easter, Thanksgiving, Christmas) as celebrations of our Judeo-Christian heritage,” and implement Bible classes. The authors advocate a “gradual, voluntary” approach to promoting “free-market private schools, church schools and home schools as the normative American practice.” But, they add elsewhere, “It is not unreasonable to believe that many state officials will be emboldened for change along those lines when the Trump administration is fully in place.”

One overcast January morning, I visit the Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty, a Grand Rapids-based think tank that Bellant, among others, sees as the “perfect synthesis of free enterprise and religion.” In the lobby of its $7 million headquarters, a glass plaque lists its core donors: the Richard and Helen DeVos Foundation, the Dick and Betsy DeVos Family Foundation and the Edgar and Elsa Prince Foundation. Acton’s president, Rev. Robert Sirico, feels that Betsy – who wasn’t a Trump supporter, he reminds me (“She supported Rubio”) – has been misunderstood. “She is not the stereotype that people have painted of her,” he says. Her approach is much more “loving.” The DeVoses have gay friends, for example, and Betsy was reportedly against the Trump administration’s rollback of transgender rights. “They’re going to have their beliefs on sexual morality and all the rest,” Sirico says of the DeVos family, “but these people are not personally looking to persecute somebody.”

The same is true, Sirico says, of the DeVoses’ vision for the role of government. Ideally, the state would hardly exist other than to promote “tolerance” between people with varying viewpoints, something he calls a “generous orthodoxy.” This is not the same as promoting pluralism. “If I tolerate something you’re doing, it’s that I don’t particularly like what you’re doing,” he says, “but I don’t stop you from doing it.” Private interests, ideally those engaged in what Sirico calls a “virtuous cycle of philanthropy,” would take over the role of modeling good behavior. “But not in a kind of disdainful or noble oblige…” He pauses. “Well, that’s not a bad concept.”

Grand Rapids, where the DeVoses have invested heavily in infrastructure and also, crucially, in the construction firm that managed many of the largest projects, offers a microcosmic example of what this might look like. Virtually every public park or event space is named for one of the city’s prominent Christian families. So are its university buildings, hotels and parking lots. There is the DeVos Place convention center, the DeVos Performance Hall and the Helen DeVos Children’s Hospital. The student center at Grand Valley State University is named for Richard M. DeVos. At Calvin College, there is the DeVos Communication Center. I stayed at the Amway Grand Hotel, where portraits of Rich DeVos Sr. and his business partner, Jay Van Andel, hang on the wood-paneled walls.

Recently, the DeVoses disclosed a lifetime giving tally of more than $1 billion, spread across five family foundations. The Dick and Betsy DeVos Family Foundation alone has given out $139 million in charitable donations, many of them to fund Michigan-based projects. With all that money comes complicity, or simply silence. Most of the people I spoke to in Grand Rapids refused to go on the record about the DeVoses. A lot of others wouldn’t return my phone calls. “The problem is that everyone
is so linked together here when it comes to real-estate development or nonprofits or a spouse’s job,” explains Elizabeth Welch, a Grand Rapids attorney and member of the area’s philanthropic community. As a Democrat and school-board member, Welch publicly questioned DeVos’ qualifications for education secretary. “I know about 10 people who thanked me for doing that because they wanted to say something and couldn’t,” she says.

Western Michigan is heavily Republican, though Grand Rapids, ironically, has been a Democratic stronghold since the Clinton era, notes Dillon, the chair of the Michigan Democratic Party. But the center of power in Grand Rapids is not, fundamentally, in its politics but in the relationships forged between the wealthy benefactors and those they support. “Ideology doesn’t matter at the local level” is something folks say around here,” says Tami Vandenberg, a human-rights activist who runs a nonprofit that secures housing for the homeless. Vandenberg decided a few years ago to not seek support from the DeVoses or other families whose politics she disagrees with, but many others haven’t been able to make that leap. “I talk to directors of nonprofits all the time who worry if they get involved with certain topics or candidates they won’t receive the funding they need to run their projects,” she says. “If you want to run for office, you have to think about that. If you’re a nonprofit, you have to think about that. You constantly have to think about how that might affect your daily life.”

One afternoon I paid a visit to a community development organization called LINC UP, which is located in the heart of Grand Rapids’ black community, a ZIP code that LINC’s director, Darel Ross, told me had the highest number of children with lead poisoning in the state in 2013. According to one financial news service, Grand Rapids, where some 20 percent of the 195,000 residents are black, is the fifth-worst city for African-Americans in the United States; some 38 percent of black residents in and around the urban center live in poverty. Since its founding, LINC UP has received millions of dollars from Dick’s younger brother, Doug DeVos, and his wife, Maria, who have invested in a number of projects in the city’s minority communities, some faith-based and others, like LINC UP, more secular. Ross, who had recently accepted a new job at an organization run by Betsy and Dick’s 35-year-old son, Rick, was careful to credit the local plutocracy for making the city more vibrant. “If there’s a kid on the corner without a coat, the city will rally behind him and there’ll be hundreds of coats donated,” Ross says. “But very rarely does anybody take the time to ask, ‘Why doesn’t he have a coat?’”

These are the systemic issues that Grand Rapids’ culture of charity fails to address. “We have a saying in West Michigan,” Jeff Smith, a community organizer, jokes: “Grand Rapids does charity really well, we just don’t do justice for shit.” Smith runs the Grand Rapids Institute for Information Democracy, a watchdog organization for people whose interests have largely been suppressed, he believes, by the local Dutch power brokers. “The philanthropic community here has their tentacles in so many places,” says Smith. “They’ll offer some form of safety net, but they do it primarily through mechanisms that are faith-based, so it’s an opportunity to evangelize.”

Many of these projects target Grand Rapids’ communities of color. Gatherings of Hope, a religious nonprofit funded by Doug and Maria DeVos, provides leadership training for black and Latino pastors, which one progressive ally of Doug and Maria’s conceives might be seen as paternalistic. But the counterargument, she says, is that given the traditional role of churches in minority communities, working with their leaders is simply more culturally sensitive. “It’s meeting people where they’re at rather than imposing a structure on them,” she says. “They don’t need white social workers coming in to tell them how to run their lives.”

“Whitney, stay out unless your partner,” in fact, is a direct quote from research commissioned by the DeVos family in 1995 to fine-tune ways to infiltrate minority communities—the Stylila of our culture. The family enlisted Christian management consultants to conduct interviews with ministry leaders across the country and held focus groups in cities including Phoenix, Orlando, Boston and Grand Rapids. Conclusions included a “need to reach youth before age 12” and a commitment to strengthening the urban church, which “is still the best place to influence youth.”

Out of this came the DeVos Urban Leadership Initiative, which, according to its website, “partner[s] with area churches and youth ministries to challenge approximate-ly 35 youth each year to become Christ-like, cross-cultural, servant leaders.” These “city coordinators,” as they’re called, in turn build out a network of youth ministers, who create their own mentoring programs—the same multilevel approach Amway has championed for the past 60 years. “It’s all about evangelizing people through sales and building your network,” says one Grand Rapids resident. “You transform the culture from within. That’s their model.”

One celebrated graduate of the program, a pastor and former corporate lawyer named Jeremy Del Rio, started the Thrive Collective, which “adopts” New York City public schools through partnerships with churches and an emphasis on the value of mentorship. It has since sent volunteers into 100 of the city’s cash-strapped public schools under the pretense of art, working on projects like painting murals.

In West Michigan, such pretense has been unnecessary. Over the past few years, with generous support from Doug and Maria DeVos, the Grand Rapids Public School system enacted its “transformation plan,” closing schools one public-education advocate described as “no longer serving the needs of the community well,” and restructuring secondary education around support from the private sector. Betsy DeVos, who has had limited involvement with the city’s school system, nonetheless paid for executive coaching sessions for the district’s superintendent, Teresa Weatherall Neal. Neal has since referred to Betsy as a mentor whose support has been invaluable to the district’s “transformation.”

(The Department of Education did not respond to a request for comment from Betsy DeVos. A spokesman for the family confirmed several figures with regard to its philanthropic and political donations.)

In many regards, the plan has been a success. Of the city’s eight public high schools, six now focus on college prep; three of these are “themed,” specializing in areas like art or environmental science. But this has its own cost, says Hekman, the public school teacher. “Parents have to provide transportation and make extra commitments,” he says. “And if they can’t meet all these requirements, the kids can get kicked out.” That leaves the city’s two “comprehensive” public high schools, Otwa Hills and Union High, which have been mostly left out of the district-wide transformation plan. They have, however, been fertile ground for a spinoff of the DeVos Urban Leadership Initiative, the Grand Rapids Initiative for Leaders, which works with 30 kids at both high schools. “They are training students to be peer mentors through a faith perspective in the public schools,” says Smith. “This is about injecting Christian values into public education. But it’s also about how they can have more control as they’re setting about dismantling it.”

“IT’S ABOUT INJECTING CHRISTIAN VALUES INTO PUBLIC EDUCATION, BUT IT’S ALSO ABOUT HAVING MORE CONTROL AS THEY Dismantle IT.”
SATISFACTION IN SECONDS™

HEAT IT UP. EAT IT UP.
Ed Sheeran used to be a misfit; now he’s a hard-drinking superstar. But what he really wants is a normal life.
Sheeran is celebrating tonight because he knows he’s about to score his first Number One hit in America with “Shape of You,” a sleek, funky stomper from his new album, + (pronounced Divide). We’ve joined by his girlfriend, Cherry, and his old friends Zach, Nathan and Catherine, who have been watching him perform since he released his first album, The Spinning Man, when he was 13. “I went potty,” Sheeran, now 25, jokes about that LP. “Not gold. I sold 100 copies.”

Sheeran has been going hard tonight: espresso martinis and rum-punch shots at dinner, gin and tonics at the bar. It’s my birthday, and at one point he grabs my phone, takes a selfie of us and posts to my Instagram, writing “It’s my birthday bitches #london #hashtag #believe #achieve #inspiration.” He encourages friends to knock back pints with a drinking song that ends “Na na na/Hey hey hey/You’re a cunt!”

Soon, we arrive at his house, a five-floor, industrial-style space with brick walls, wood floors and several personal touches: a Charmander Pokéman stuffed animal in his bedroom and a bong shaped like Benny Blanco’s head in the living room. There’s also a recording studio, a gym and a full bar, where he recently entertained several young cast members of his favorite show, Game of Thrones. As we arrive, Sheeran offers bedrooms to anyone who wants to “get rowdy,” then goes to work mixing drinks.

With the possible exception of Justin Bieber, Sheeran is the biggest male pop star alive. But pop-machine refinement is something he resists from the core. His life is a chaotic blur of too much pub food, 3 a.m. pool games, shots at dinner and impulsive decisions: “If you ever need a wedding band...” he says shortly after we meet and he learns I have a girlfriend. “I always say, ‘It’s free if I’m free.’ As long as you sort me out with a lot of booze and a bed, I’m there.” (During our time together, I will meet at least three friends whose weddings he has played.) He is filterless. “Powerful shit upstairs, man. Who did that?” he asks after emerging from the bathroom tonight, until a friend cops to it.

As his fame increases, holding on to a semblance of normalcy is important for Sheeran. He’s been hanging out with old friends a lot; he even wrote about them in his new single “Castle on the Hill,” a tribute to their rebellious high school days in Suffolk, England.

Senior editor Patrick Doyle wrote about John Prine in January.

Around 4 a.m., Sheeran runs upstairs to grab his guitar and then takes a seat at the kitchen table. He proceeds to play for two hours straight—a gig considerably more intimate than the stadium shows he plays all by himself, backed only with an acoustic guitar and a loop pedal. Tonight he plays songs from +, as well as several unreleased tunes he says are planned for future albums. He takes requests, too—including “Love Yourself,” the Number One hit he wrote with Justin Bieber. “You know ‘Love Yourself’ is originally ‘Fuck Yourself, right?’” he jokes before playing that version.

This is Sheeran’s gift in a nutshell: He’s a mix of old-school troubadour and Top 40 technician, a guy who could kill it at a coffeehouse open-mic night but is also one of the most pop-savvy songwriters alive. (He also raps surprisingly well.) His crowds are mostly teenage girls, but Sheeran is craftsman enough to impress someone like Elton John, who signed him to his management company in 2011. “He can write melodies so simply,” says Elton, who points to “Thinking Out Loud,” which won a Grammy in 2016 for Song of the Year. “Van Morrison would have been very proud to write that. He reminds me of me when I first came to America, in 1970. It was all systems go. Nothing was impossible. The unfortunate thing is, now, everyone sounds like Ed Sheeran: Shawn Mendes, Justin Bieber...”

“Sorry, I’m a bit drunk,” Sheeran says after flubbing a line to a new track. He stops to roll a cigarette and heat up a pizza. Then he sits down and plays “Perfect,” a fingerpicked waltz from +. Like most of his songs he writes these days, it’s about Cherry, whom he’s known since high school and reconnected with at an after-show party in New York. They kept their relationship secret for a full year, until Taylor Swift invited them to her Fourth of July party in the kitchen table. He proceeds to play

As he bags all the fun in the world. But be careful because if that elastic snaps, it could take a long time to recover from it.”

A single Twitter comment could ruin his day: “Everyone online was saying, ‘Ed’s going bald.’ And I’m not. But I convinced myself that I was. Ginger hair is just very fair—my hair is completely fine. I was also quite big at the time,” he adds, referring to his weight, “so I kind of got a complex about two things I would have never given a fuck about.”

He also lost some friends. “The Forbes list actually fucked it up,” he says, referring to a report in the magazine indicating he made $57 million in 2015. “I was getting texts from people with pictures of cars going, ‘I’d like this for my birthday, please. This one’s only .06 percent of your annual income.’” (He ended up ditching his phone; he uses an iPad to communicate and a flip phone for close family.)
So after attending the Grammys last year and winning Song of the Year, Sheeran skipped the afterparties and boarded a plane to Iceland. Once his foot had healed, the couple traveled around rural Japan for a month, from Hokkaido to Okinawa, where he was able to walk around in anonymity, “eat weird food, soak in the hot springs and ski.”

Sheeran stopped smoking and cut way back on drinking. In June, he spent three weeks in Ghana at the invitation of Ghanaian-English singer Fuse ODG. Working in Fuse’s house, he started writing African-influenced music. “Anytime we made a song, they would throw a party for the song,” he says. “He would invite 200-plus people ‘round, and we would just party to that song until the early hours.”

Only one of those songs, “Bibia Be Ye Ye,” appears on ÷, but the freedom Sheeran felt on his journey lingered. While Sheeran’s last album, ÷, featured bitter takedowns of exes, ÷ has songs like “Happier,” which he wrote after a wedding, when he ran into his ex and her boyfriend, whom Sheeran had always held a grudge against. “He was really sound,” says Sheeran. “I thought, ‘Of course, this is what’s meant to happen.’”

Elton says Sheeran’s travels “refreshed his soul.” “I’ve noticed, in the last few months, he knows it’s going to be all right,” says Elton. “He knows that he’s done a pretty amazing thing again. I think he reconnected to his friends and family, and he feels anchored.”

H I T S 1 1 T H E M O R N I N G A F T E R

Sheeran and Clapton first started talking over e-mail. Clapton invited him onstage in Japan last year and sometimes comes over for dinner. Sheeran isn’t a favorite with critics, but, he says, “I could give a fuck about what people think. Anytime anyone has a problem with me, I’m just like, ‘My heroes like me. The people I started music for are fans of my music. So why the fuck would I care about what anyone else thinks?’”

We head to lunch at a nearby pub, where Sheeran promptly orders a round of his hometown ale Adnams: “I love drinking really thick ale in January.” He talks about growing up in Suffolk, where he was made fun of for being bad at sports, for his red hair – and, most of all, for his stutter: “You’d put your hand up and not be able to speak. And kids are cruel. So once that would happen, someone would imitate it. And then you’d be like, ‘I’m not going to put my hand up next time.’” He credits rapping along with Eminem’s Marshall Mathers LP for helping him lose the stammer.

His parents were curators for art galleries, putting together exhibitions and lecturing around town. His dad taught him to surfing, putting together exhibitions and lecturing around town. His dad taught him to surfing, helping him lose the stammer.

His parents were curators for art galleries, putting together exhibitions and lecturing around town. His dad taught him to surfing, helping him lose the stammer.

“First Warner,” and they left him alone.”

“They basically say the joke before you can. Like, my first album is orange. There’s a reason it’s orange – I’m getting there before you can.” His father still doesn’t take any shit: Sheeran tells a story about him lighting a cigarette at a recent Warner Bros. party. “Someone said, ‘Sir, you can’t smoke here.’ And he said, ‘I am Mr. Warner,’ and they left him alone.” His mom is the opposite. “She is literally an angel,” says Sheeran.

Though his dad suggested fighting to deal with his problems, Sheeran preferred humor. “Most ginger-haired people I know are very outgoing and comedic,” he says. “They basically say the joke before you can. Like, my first album is orange. There’s a reason it’s orange – I’m getting there before you can.” He thinks those days have a lot to do with his career choice: “The whole musician thing kind of comes from wanting to be loved and wanting to be liked.”
Sheeran dropped out of school in 2007, when he was 16, and moved to London. He started performing, striking out at guitar open mics but finding an audience at hip-hop clubs, comedy shows and jazz open mics. “Anywhere it’s not the norm to have a singer-songwriter be there, I instantly stood out,” he recalls.

In 2010, Ben Cook, the head of Asylum Records, saw a clip of Sheeran online. Cook went to check out several shows – including one in Southampton, England, where Sheeran stood on a chair in the middle of the audience and played unplugged. “He was rapping,” Cook says, “so the guys were trying to keep up with him, and then there was the really romantic stuff the girls were responding to.” Cook signed him soon after.

Sheeran’s first big U.S. tour was supporting Snow Patrol in 2012, around the time his first single, “The A Team” – a ballad about a crack-addicted prostitute he met at a homeless shelter – was blowing up. “In Orlando, there were, like, 200 people in the front row to see Ed,” says McDaid, Snow Patrol’s guitarist. “By the middle of the tour, there were about 2,000. You could see it happening in front of you.”

His next tour was considerably bigger: a 66-date run opening for Swift. The two met when their managers put them together for a writing session. They ended up working on a trampoline in Swift’s backyard and wrote “Everything Has Changed.” Each night, Swift invited Sheeran onstage to play the ballad.

Offstage, this was his most romantically prolific period. He says he hooked up with some of Swift’s famous friends. “Taylor’s world is celebrity,” says Sheeran. “I was this 22-year-old awkward British kid going on tour with the biggest artist in America, who has all these famous mates. It was very easy. I would often find myself in situations just kind of waking up and looking over and being like, ‘How the fuck did that happen?’” (Katy Perry recently summed up his appeal as a secret ladies’ man: “Everybody loves him, no one’s scared of him, they want to date him. They can have him.”)

Sheeran chronicled some of these relationships on his second album, 2014’s x. He wrote “Don’t” about a filing with a fellow pop star that ends when he learns she’s had sex with a friend who was staying on the same hotel floor. Many speculated it was Ellie Goulding, who afterward released “On My Mind,” which included the burn “You wanted my heart, but I just liked your tattoos.” Goulding has denied having ever been involved with Sheeran.

One person he did not date on the tour was Swift, despite TMZ headlines. “I found that aspect quite lazy journalism,” he says. “There wasn’t any truth to it whatsoever.”

Sheeran and Swift see each other only once or twice a year, but he still feels close to her. He imagines them doing a stadium tour where they trade songs for an evening, much like the one Jay Z and Justin Timberlake did a few years ago. “She would be there if everything ended for me,” Sheeran says. “Taylor is kind of an anomaly in that sense.” He’s been annoyed at the backlash because she’s the most famous woman in the world, so she can’t make the decision to not be in the press. I always stick up for Taylor.”

Sheeran was made fun of for his stutter and ginger hair: “That’s where the musician thing comes from – wanting to be loved.”

Most weekends when he’s not on tour, you can find Sheeran watching field hockey. Cherry played for Duke until 2014. She moved to London last year with Sheeran, and signed a contract to play for Wimbledon about halfway done when several more teams pour into the room: high school girls. Several cliques of them inch toward his table. The whole room seems to be wondering why, exactly, Ed Sheeran is here. “I’m gonna need to get out of here,” he says. “I’m getting filmed a lot.” He pulls his cap down and walks out, head down, and makes his way out unscathed. “I just realized that was an entire school – all the sports teams,” Sheeran says back in the car. “Not ideal.”

This kind of attention freaks Sheeran out a little, and lately he’s been dealing with even weirder invasions of his privacy. Not long ago, a police officer pulled him over and asked for a selfie. Sheeran recently found a drone in his garden. He’s “100 percent” sure that someone on his 40-person team is selling information to the press. “I just want to know who it is,” he says. The worst part is getting stared at: “People film on the sly – I get really fucking anxious.” And one way he deals with that anxiety is drinking.

“Do you have any white tequila?” Sheeran asks a waiter at a New York restaurant. “Not Patrón, though.” Yes, they do. “Five shots of that, and one shot of passion-fruit juice, please. Put the tequila on ice, and then let it sit for a bit. And then pour it over ice into the juice, then shake it.” The waiter at New York’s ABC Kitchen gets on the case: They do not carry passion-fruit juice, but a store nearby does have it, and someone has been sent out. Since I saw him in London three weeks ago, Sheeran has been on a promo tour, visiting England, Norway, Germany, France, Asia and Australia, where he stayed at Russell Crowe’s house. “He has his own pub,” Sheeran says. “I was so fucking off my chops, and I didn’t realize he’d drank a bottle of gin and was off his chops as well.”

There was a minor crisis around 8 a.m., when everyone realized Sheeran had wandered off to bed and ended up in a grassy area riddled with deadly snakes. Cherry feared another Iceland-like debacle. “He was stumbling into the grass, falling into the bushes,” she says.

Sheeran escaped unharmed, but there are a lot of stories like this. In Nashville, in 2012, he was pretending to play drums with two beer bottles at 4 a.m., the night before an arena gig. He struck the table and ended up with a big piece of glass inside his right hand. He missed a nerve by a millimeter.

Then there’s the scar. Sheeran was recently attending a party thrown by Princess Beatrice at the Royal Lodge, near Windsor Castle, when he started messing around
with ceremonial swords. The story changes often – some say it was Beatrice herself; Sheeran says it was singer James Blunt – but someone slashed Sheeran’s right cheek. “He went to the hospital and came back ready to party with stitches on,” says a friend. “And everyone was asleep. He was like, ‘What the fuck? I bled for this party and you’re all asleep?’”

“He can be extremely naughty. It’s a good thing he didn’t appear in the same era as I did, otherwise we’d be up for three weeks together,” says Elton, who has been sober for almost 30 years. “He’s not a big druggy, but he likes a drink. He’s a lot of fun.”

The five-shot tequila drinks arrive. Sheeran gulps one down and requests another. He talks about going to Tokyo, where he met up with Bieber. They did karaoke and shot pool in a dive bar. “He’s in a very good place – very sober, very present,” Sheeran says. “There’s been a 180 that’s happened, and there’s no diva behavior whatsoever. It really suits him.”

Does Sheeran think he drinks too much? “Often, I’m like, ‘Is it bad that I drink almost every single day?’ And then I look at my friends and most of them do the same. And they’re actually worse than me. The first thing Americans say is, ‘There’s a problem, and you need to go to rehab.’ But I don’t wake up and drink. I don’t depend on drink. I can go without it completely. I just enjoy going out and having fun, being 25. And I think that’s a normal thing.”

IN HIS DRESSING ROOM AT “SATURDAY Night Live” two days later, Sheeran looks over the walls of the greenroom, which are full of pictures of past musical guests: Kanye West, Paul McCartney, Sheeran himself. “I look like a fucking gimp,” he says, remarking on a press shot where he’s leaning forward with a serious face. Soon, a live feed of the show’s dress rehearsal comes on. He cackles at Melissa McCarthy’s Sean Spicer impression – “Fucking hell!” he says – and host Alec Baldwin’s monologue.

He talks about the future. He’s in the process of auditioning members of a boy band he’s creating. He’s already written lots of songs for the group – “really, really decent. Superpop, but obviously credible. I’m gonna put three or four boys together and do all the songs, take them on the stadium tour with me.”

Sheeran starts busting his balls, pointing at Braff’s backstage pass: “Why does it have that on it, though – ‘Talent’?”

“You motherfucker,” Braff says. “You’re supposed to be my wingman.”

Sheeran heads straight from the greenroom to the stage to perform “Shape of You,” not bothering to do any sort of vocal warm-ups. Later, he’s on his way to do his second song, “Castle on the Hill,” when he and Cherry run into Tracy Morgan. The comedian steers the conversation from The Empire Strikes Back to The Godfather to Michael Jackson. “Michael was music,” Morgan says. “With every fiber of his fuckin’ soul. The problem with Michael was that he peaked too soon. Listen to ABC.” He was eight years old when he did that! And once you peak, there’s nowhere to go.

“You’re scaring me!” Sheeran says with a laugh. Morgan replies that Sheeran has nothing to worry about: “He’s good. He’s grounded. He’s got a woman right there. He’s gonna have a wife and family, and he’s gonna be fucking happy.”

The scene becomes more surreal when Baldwin approaches them in full Trump getup. All week, Sheeran has been admiring Baldwin’s two babies. “Whenever anyone brings babies around, I’m like, ‘We gotta get on that,’” says Sheeran.

After the show, Sheeran has to catch a plane to make a 9 a.m. soundcheck for the Grammys. “You’ll be fine,” says Morgan. “Get some sleep on the jet.” Baldwin asks about his tour plans: “Whatever you do, you’re young, you’re so talented. You guys are gonna have a baby. Just have it on your private plane.”

“There’s no time for babies!” says Cherry.

What Sheeran is really looking forward to is his 26th birthday next week, which he and Cherry will spend in the Austrian Alps. “It’s awesome meeting famous people,” Sheeran says. “But that’s not life. That’s not reality. One day this will fucking end. And I know the one person that’s going to remain constant is Cherry. I should just enjoy this while it’s there, but not let it become my reality. Because that’s not the reality I want to live in.”

Sheeran’s A-Team

(1) “I love his values – he’s naughty as well,” says Elton. (2) With Swift last year. (3) After joining the Stones onstage in 2015.

Sheeran’s ÷ tour will take him across the world – arenas this year, stadiums next year – before wrapping up by early 2019. He’s edging toward his ultimate goal: “I want to do stadiums everywhere,” he says. “Like George Strait’s level – he tours every four years, does a couple of stadiums and then fucks off again.” Sheeran also plans to star in a low-budget film, like Once, featuring his own acoustic soundtrack. “I want to have one in my career,” he says.

He’s showing a member of his team the “cash me outside” meme when his pal Zach Braff blasts into the greenroom, along with his date. “There’s nothing more fun than being at SNL – I’m so geeked out,” he tells Sheeran. “This is like you at a Star Wars convention.”

March 23, 2017
The Psychedelic Miracle

INSIDE THE UNDERGROUND MOVEMENT TO UNLEASH THE HEALING POWER OF MDMA, AYAHUASCA AND OTHER HALLUCINOGENS

BY MAC McCLELLAND

Illustration by GONI MONTES

Dr. X is a dad. Appropriately – boringly – at 4:37 p.m. on a national holiday, he is lighting a charcoal grill, about to grab a pair of tongs with one hand and a beer with the other. His kids are running around their suburban patio, which could be anywhere; Dr. X, though impressively educated now, grew up poor in a town that is basically nowhere. Like most Americans, he is a Christian. Like a lot of health-conscious men, he fights dad bod by working out once or twice a week, before going into his medical practice. ¶ Sometimes conventionally, two hours ago, he was escorting a woman around his yard, helping her walk off a large dose of MDMA. He’s the one who'd given it to her, earlier in the morning, drugging her out of her mind. ¶ This would be psychedelic-assisted therapy, the not-new but increasingly popular practice of administering psychotropic substances to treat a wide range of physical, psychological and psycho-spiritual concerns. “Some people stagger out” of the room in Dr. X’s home that he uses for these “journeys,” as sessions are called in the semiofficial parlance. Some have to stay for hours and hours beyond the standard five or so, crying or waiting to emotionally rebalance, lying on a mattress, probing the secrets, trauma, belief or grief buried in their subconscious. Dr. X recalls a patient who was considering a round-the-clock Klonopin prescription for anxiety; she reluctantly decided to try a journey instead. On the “medicine,” she spent seven hours unraveling ballistically, picturing herself dumping sadness out of her chest into a jade box that she put a golden heart-shaped lock on and tossed into the sea. She’d been skeptical going in, but after it was over, Dr. X says, “She was so angry that it was illegal.” ¶ Because Dr. X’s hallmark treatment
– an MDMA session or two, then further journeys with psilocybin mushrooms if called for – is, absolutely, illegal. MDMA is a Schedule I controlled substance. Psilocybin is as well. Exposure could get his medical license suspended, if not revoked, along with his parental rights, or freedom. “This should be a part of health care, and is a true part of health care,” he says in his defense. The oversimplified concept behind MDMA therapy, which causes intense neurotransmitter activity including the release of adrenaline and serotonin (believed to produce positive mood), is that it tamps down fear, allowing people to interact with – and deal with – parts of their psyche they otherwise can’t. Psychedelics in general are thought to bring an observational part of the ego online to allow a new perspective on one’s self and one’s memories, potentially leading to deep understanding and healing.

As an internal-medicine specialist, Dr. X doesn’t have any patients who come to him seeking psychotherapy. But the longer he does the work, the more “I’m seeing that consciousness correlates to disease,” he says. “Every disease.” Narcolepsy. Cataplexy. Crohn’s. Diabetes – one patient’s psychedelic therapy preceded a 30 percent reduction in fasting blood-sugar levels. Sufferers of food allergies discover in their journeys that they’ve been internally attacking themselves. “Consciousness is so vastly undervalued,” Dr. X says. “We use it in every other facet in our life and esteem the intellectual part of it, but deny the emotional or intuitive part of it.” Psychedelic therapy “reinvigorated my passion and belief in healing. I think it’s the best tool to achieving well-being, so I feel morally and ethically compelled to open up that space.”

Currently – legally – we’re in the midst of a psychedelic renaissance. New York University, the University of New Mexico, the University of Zurich, Johns Hopkins University, the University of Alabama and the University of California-Los Angeles have all partnered with the psilocybin-focused Heffter Research Institute, studying the compound for smoking cessation, alcoholism, terminal-cancer anxiety and cocaine dependence; the biotech-CEO-founded Usona Institute funds research of “consciousness-expanding medicines” for depression and anxiety at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Since 2000, the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies (MAPS), a nonprofit based in Santa Cruz, California, has been fund-

NYU Psilocybin Cancer Project. “Their value has been written about and is well known from thousands of years of recorded history, from their being used in religious and healing settings. Their potential and their being worthy of exploration and study speaks for itself.”

Optimistic insiders think that if all continues to go well, within 10 to 15 years some psychedelics could be legally administrable to the public, not just for specific conditions but even for personal growth. In the meantime, says Rick Doblin, MAPS’ executive director, “there are hundreds of therapists willing to work with illegal Schedule I psychedelics” underground, like Dr. X. They’re in Florida, Minnesota, New York, California, Colorado, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, New England, Lexington, Kentucky. “Hundreds in America,” he says, “though they’re ‘spread out all over the world.’”

As within any field, underground practitioners vary in quality, expertise and method. Some are M.D.s, like Dr. X, or therapists, and some are less conventionally trained. They don’t all use the same substances, and don’t necessarily use just one. Some work with MDMA or psilocybin or ayahuasca, which has become trendy to drink in self-exploration ceremonies all over the country; others administer 5-MeO-DMT, extracted from a toad in the Sonoran Desert, or iboga or ibogaine, which, according to the scant research that exists, may be one of the most effective cures for opiate addiction on the planet – but may also cause fatal heart complications.

Underground psychedelic therapists are biased toward their preferred medicines, and those they think work best for particular indications. But they are united by true belief. “People that are involved are risking their careers, their freedom, in order to help others achieve a certain emotional freedom, and they disagree with prohibition,” says Doblin. “The fact that people are willing to do these therapies at great personal risk says something about what they think the potential of these drugs actually is to enhance psychotherapy.”

“PSYCHEDELIC THERAPY REIN GORGED MY BELIEF IN HEALING. IT’S THE BEST TOOL TO ACHIEVING WELL-BEING.”

SAYS ONE PHYSICIAN.

in any of the clinical trials – though it’s not unusual for subjects to have tough experiences in their journeys. Dr. Charles Grob, a professor of psychiatry and biobehavioral science at UCLA, who has conducted studies with MDMA, ayahuasca and psilocybin, says that’s a function of screening, preparation and expert support. “This is serious medicine with a capital M,” he says, “and if you don’t watch yourself and you don’t pay attention to the essential basics, you could be in for a very difficult time.”

Even under the best of circumstances, the process catalyzed by psychedelic therapy is often far from painless. “It’s definitely not that people just get blissed out and it gets better,” says Dr. Michael Mithoefer, the lead clinician on the MDMA trials in Charleston, South Carolina (others are ongoing in Boulder, Colorado; Canada; and Israel). “It makes the healing process possible, not easy.”

When you take 125 milligrams of pure MDMA, enough to nearly immobilize you, and someone invites you to take a look at your deepest self, “it is a destabilizing agent,” Dr. X cautions. But it’s purposefully so. “It opens us,” he says. “Sometimes the medicine can stabilize someone in a difficult situation. Sometimes it stirs up madness, so they can process that. Some people feel rejuvenated and ready to go back into their lives, but other people feel frazzled, spent, fragmented. I’ve had a few people say, ‘That shattered who I thought I was.’”

Limitations and challenges aside, the evidence so far still makes researchers cautiously optimistic that psychedelics hold potential for great healing and change. If they’re right, medicalization could address the deficits in treatment options for afflictions – trauma, depression, anxiety, addiction – that collectively impact millions of Americans, and ultimately shape our world. “If we move forward and understand that these substances should only be used under optimal conditions,” says Grob, “it will have a positive impact on an individual, family, collective and societal level.” In aboveground clinical trials like his, subjects routinely report that psychedelic therapy is among the top five most important experiences of their lives, akin to the birth of a child.

We’ve been here before: From the 1950s to the early Seventies, more than 40,000 cases of psychedelic treatment were studied in 1,000 different papers in the medical literature, covering everything from addiction to PTSD to OCD to antisocial disorders and autism. Despite encouraging results, says Grob, the “wild, uninhibited enthusiasm of the Sixties” contributed to some bad recreational outcomes that gave in the underground, but some of them admired the willingness of certain health care professionals to act, however illegally, on their belief that sometimes healing can’t wait and that psychedelics are imperative to it. “I respect that in them,” NYU’s Guss says. “I really do. I’ve become a member of the most established establishment. And so in a way, we’re isolated from all the wisdom and knowledge in the underground community.” That vast, uncollected experience contains details about the medicines’ potential and pitfalls, challenges and inconsistencies – the variety of ways psychedelics might wholly, drastically change a life. “I’m very interested to learn,” Guss says, “what underground psychedelic psychotherapists have to teach us.”

The Cure?
The popularity of ayahuasca, a hallucinogenic concoction of Amazonian plants (left), has led to a boom in psychedelic tourism (below). An estimated 120 rituals take place each week in the Bay Area and New York.

M Y F I R S T INTRODUCTION TO UNDERGROUND PSYCHEDELIC THERAPY was when, years ago, a doctor told me my vagina was depressed. I’d gone in for a pelvic exam because something felt wrong; at the follow-up appointment, when my test results were all negative and my answers to her hundred questions about the post-traumatic stress disorder I was in treatment for were all related to sexual threats and reporting on sexual violence, she said my genitals were just fucking bummed out.

This was San Francisco, and I did a lot of yoga; but even I rolled my eyes at the idea that my privates had an emotional disorder. I was very intrigued, however, when the doctor said she knew a therapist who could heal years of trauma in one five-hour swoop, so long as I had the secret password. The doctor gave me the number for that therapist – who worked with MDMA.

I never called. I moved across the country. Years later, I was on vacation on the coast when my husband went out for a run, and I stayed behind and may or may not have contemplated suicide.

OK. I did. In the car, on the road, running an errand, I thought about driving off the edge of a cliff into the brilliant, crashing Pacific.
Yes, I had a history: the PTSD, with concomitant major depressive disorder, suicidal thoughts. On my official paperwork, I was technically permanently disabled, but I had been doing much better – working, going to karaoke, having a life. I had backslides and big episodes, but if my “issues” were not exactly handled, they were at least on a general upswing thanks to years of constant treatment. But then, the night before my drive, I had started yelling in a restaurant, feeling that I was spiraling out of control but unable to stop myself from making a scene. Now, having coaxed my car away from the cliff edge and back to the hotel, I lay face-down and screamed into the pillows. I called a local therapist and begged for an emergency appointment. As I lay there in her office, in the fetal position, I wondered aloud if I should try MDMA therapy.

Weirdly (or magically, as would later be obvious), she happened to have the number of another therapist who worked with it.

The therapist who gave me the second referral said she had a client with whom she'd been working for years who had done a journey. The difference in that patient’s suffering, she said, was like night and day. When I called the number, the woman who answered said we needed to meet in person, and when we did, she mentioned that my struggle was why the wait for MDMA to become widely available was untenable. She said, in a stunning lack of expectation management, that she could help me massively – more, in a few sessions, than all my years and dollars of hard therapeutic work had combined.

So after one more conversation, I showed up nervous, but excited, but desperate on a Monday morning (as scheduled) with an empty stomach (as directed) to a charming room with a couch at one end and a bed at the other. After we did something like a prayer, I took the see-through capsule of white powder and retired to the bed with the journal I was encouraged to bring while the therapist went out on the deck to give me space. I’d been told that the journey with psychedelics truly starts beforehand, the moment you decide to do it, and I had indeed been struggling extra since then. Waiting for the medicine to come on was no exception.

The Journey, 9:35 a.m.
I’m full of grief, and gratitude, and terror. I’ve been extra wound up and tight, extra untouchable, since we put this on the calendar. My body must be gripping and tensing in preparation to let go…

9:35 is when the doubt sets in… About the pointlessness, the uselessness, the futility of this endeavor. A moment ago, I was envisioning lots of purple tears. I’m like, let’s just go read a newspaper and drink some tea somewhere.

This is when the therapist, who had come back inside, told me I was higher than I realized, and to lie down and let it ride.

I hadn’t anticipated tripping, or time-travel. But there were movies of my life, and visits with loved ones. The therapist had turned on jangly guitar music, which struck me as lame at first, but soon became the most beautiful, dynamic composition I’d ever heard because: Ecstasy. I breathed deep with my eyes closed and a hand on my chest. I cried, often, as I witnessed my life. My therapist said very little. She had said before that our collective job was to trust my intuition. I went back to the scenes where my PTSD started. In one of them, I revisited a remote, bleak room where a stranger cornered me. I watched the scenario – which, in reality, I had escaped physically unscathed – play out with an alternating end. But I didn’t get overpowered and raped, which is what I’d always assumed was so scary about it. Instead, the stranger stepped forward and, in one swift move, landed his hands in a death grip around my throat.

Several times, the scene replayed. Repeatedly, I watched myself get strangled. Ohhhhhhhhhhh, I could see, suddenly. This isn’t just a rape issue, as I’d been working through it in therapy for years. This is also a murder issue.

For weeks after the journey, every man I walked past triggered an automatic but definitive – and elated! – voice inside me that said: That guy’s not gonna kill you! Down the sidewalk in a city, that guy’s not gonna kill you. If I had realized at the conscious level that I thought they would, I would have stopped leaving the house. No wonder I was always exhausted. After the journey, I stepped down the street with wild new energy. Seeing, finally, the ultimate fear of that moment, my fear of choking death, was sort of terrible, I guess, but not really, it wasn’t, because: Ecstasy. And as soon as I acknowledged it and saw it through, the moment lost its quiet, powerful rule over my system.

For some people, an MDMA journey ends after a few hours. They sit up and start talking. They drink the water and eat the snack given to them, and talk for a bit as the medicine wears off. And then they leave.

I had to be pulled out of mine. Whether because I have a genetic variation that makes people more sensitive to MDMA or because I am “a very intense person,” around 2 p.m. the therapist had to shake me; it was time to get ready to go – my husband was scheduled to pick me up, and the therapist had another appointment coming. She had me sit up and eat and drink and try to rejoin the present. When I left some half an hour later, I was cheerful and articulate, but still tripping. My husband, in utter bewilderment over how to handle me, took me to a nearby hotel, as planned. Later, we tried to go eat in a restaurant. I babbled, pleasantly at first, but then, about eight hours after my journey began, everything turned twitchy and dark. I called the therapist frantically and asked her if most people, post-journey, felt like every single thing in their entire lives needed to be burned down immediately; and she said no, not really, but that my job in any case was to “do nothing, very slowly.”
In the clinical trials of MDMA for PTSD, the protocol is to keep patients overnight. The sessions – typically there are three, spaced a month apart – last at least eight hours, because that’s sometimes when the heaviest processing will only begin to kick in, particularly for patients who have a history of dissociation, or severe detachment from reality – which I do. My MDMA therapist, who had been doing journeys for a long time, had never happened to see a person quite like me, but for people like me, researchers say, it’s not unheard of for the journey to get ugly at around the time I was in the middle of a dinner date.

But I didn’t happen to know any of that.

That night, I ran, fleeing from the hotel to the rural darkness, alone. I had total conviction that every facet of my existence was a mistake. I was engulfed in panic. I didn’t happen to know any of that.

That time, find quiet. And, in the final week, no meat, no spice, no fermented foods. “The cleaner you go in,” Dr. Y, who himself also thinks he’s ready, which he says he is after airing some hesitations ("You know," he says, “once you pull back a layer, there’s no going back, and you can’t unsee or unfeel what you saw"). Dr. Y will send him referrals to vetted, reputable providers in his preferred city. “Three nights [in a row] is better than two, and two is definitely better than one,” he tells him. First night, drink ayahuasca, open up; next night, dive deeper in. Layers of self-discovery. The soul as a somewhat coy onion. Sometimes, the peeling of it with ayahuasca involves experiencing your own death. Dr. Y gives the patient instructions for the month leading up to his journey: no other drugs, no alcohol, no sex. No reading news, no violent TV; reduce stress, meditate, find quiet. And, in the final week, no location. “Information gets shared, and people learn new things,” says one regular attendee. Another participant recalls lectures on practicalities like the best and most therapeutic doses, how to screen for patients with borderline personality – whom many believe are not compatible with psychedelics – and how different music and sounds impact sessions. But not nearly all the world’s practitioners are there. And none of the minutes or findings can be published.

Plus, not every underground patient gets care as elaborate or expert as Dr. Y’s. Some don’t receive the preparation or follow-up they may need, because they can’t afford it, or because in an underground, patients don’t have the luxury to be picky about their providers; they may have to take anyone whose number they can manage to get their hands on, and it can be hard for laypeople to adequately vet providers anyway. An M.D. who used to administer psychedelics (he prefers not to say which) for depression and anxiety (and who, when I tell him he’ll have a secret identity – like Batman – asks if he can be Dr. Batman) doesn’t provide underground psychedelic treatment anymore because it started to feel too threatening to his legitimate practice, but in extreme cases he still refers opiate addicts to underground providers who work with ibogaine. “I know quite a few people who do that,” he says. “But I only trust two of them. Out of about 10. These are nurses, or respiratory therapists – people that know how to resolve an emergency.” Outside of that, there’s “a whole subculture” of more amateur iboga and ibogaine therapists, Dr. Batman says. “It’s a movement that’s driven by addicts helping other addicts. I don’t think that’s good, per se.” It would be best, in Dr. Batman’s opinion, for people to get iboga-based addiction treatment in a reputable clinic outside the country. According to one such center in Mexico, one in 10 patients needs some medical care, one in 100 needs serious medical intervention, and, even in the hospital-like setting, people do occasionally die. But not everyone has the money to travel to the best treatment. “It’s very difficult for me to make that referral” to the underground for such a risky compound, Dr. Batman says. But sometimes his concern that someone will join the nearly 100 Americans who die of opioid overdose every day overrides his hesitation.

Even for comparatively safer MDMA and psilocybin, says Dr. X, “the fact that we have to do this and hide and send peo-
ple back to their lives, versus doing it at an inpatient facility,” where patients could stay for more integration, is less than ideal. But all these are risks that people who feel they need psychedelic therapy are willing to take. Nigel McCourry, a 35-year-old Iraq War veteran who participated in a MAPS MDMA study, was so transformed by the PTSD treatment that he was determined to get it for one of his fellow Marines. “This is my Marine battle buddy,” he says. “He needed help.” It took a lot of searching and ultimately traveling to another state to find an underground therapist, whom neither Marine knew, and McCourry was acutely aware of how difficult the process could be: For up to a year after his own treatment began, he says, “It was really wild. I had all of these emotions coming up out of nowhere. I would cry at random times. I had to give myself so much space to be able to let that out. I would be crying and I had no idea what I was crying about. It was just really intense.”

As a subject in the clinical trial, McCourry underwent three 90-minute preparatory sessions prior to dosing, another long integration session the morning after, a phone call every day for a week, and additional 90-minute sessions every week between the three journeys. His friend didn’t have the money or opportunity for nearly that kind of support. But he took the journey anyway. In their infantery unit, 2/2 Warlords, “guys are consistently committing suicide,” McCourry says. “I think [MDMA therapy] is really our best shot at solving the veteran suicide crisis.”

Elizabeth Bast, a 41-year-old artist and mother, also felt like she was out of options when she and her husband, Joaquin Lamar Hailey (better known as street artist Chor Boogie), flew to Costa Rica to get iboga therapy at a healing center after Hailey relapsed into an old heroin addiction that both of them felt was going to kill him. When he felt he needed a booster dose six months later, they turned to an underground provider closer by, in the States. Iboga “was crucial,” Bast says. “It saved his life.” The couple have started organizing and facilitating treatment trips for addicts to other countries (the drug is illegal in less than a dozen). But there are a lot of others they can’t help. Since Bast wrote a book about their experience, “I get inquiries every day: ‘My brother’s dying, and I can’t get out of the country.’ We would love to support that. But it’s too risky.”

Psychedelic medicalization isn’t without its own potential problems. There is squabbling in the underground community about whether it would provoke too much regulation over who can administer medicines, and who can take them and how; or whether it would lead to corporatization, or a boom in licensed but low-quality providers of substances that are so intense. Even now, in the afterglow in other countries, “There are places where it’s done that are very unprofessional,” says Ben De Loenen, executive director of the International Center for Ethnobotanical Education Research and Service (ICEERS), which provides resources for users and potential users of ayahuasca and iboga. UCLA’s Grob has been called by patients who’ve suffered severe, persistent anxiety for months after a psychedelic-therapy experience, which he says tends to be the result of bad preparation, ethics, or practices of providers. There are also questions about sustainability. As both deforestation of the Amazon and popularity of ayahuasca increase, shamans have had to trek deep into the jungle to find the plants that compose it. The increasing popularity of 5-MeO-DMT, called “the Toad” for its origins in the venom sacs of an amphibian – which are milked, the liquid then dried and basically free-based (smoking it is necessary; swallowing it can be fatal) – has led to incidences of people stealing onto Native American reservations to find the frog, leaving empty beer bottles and trash in their wake. If the broader culture ever accepted the species as the path to healing or enlightenment, one can surmise how long it might survive.

Guss, the NYU researcher, sees a future where psychedelic therapy is the specialty of highly and appropriately trained professionals and a robust field of scientific inquiry. For now, there’s the underground, some developing countries and the Internet. ICEERS offers tips for vetting practitioners, as well as free therapeutic support to people in crisis during or after ceremonies. MAPS has published a manual for how to do MDMA-assisted psychotherapy on its website, downloadable by anyone.

“Putting info about how we do the therapy is more likely to contribute to safety than anything else,” says Doblin. On the dark Web, sellers of iboga and ibogaine thrive. There were a thousand people on the wait list for MAPS’ most recently completed MDMA trial. “People are desperate,” Doblin says. “People are doing this.”

PERSONALLY, MY INTEGRATION after MDMA was brutal. Though I eventually returned to my hotel room that first night, my state didn’t improve. I didn’t sleep, lying next to my husband, garnering every ounce of willpower to keep from saying that I was leaving, immediately and forever; my husband didn’t sleep either, blanketeted in my agitation. For weeks, we found ourselves on the floor, or in bed, one or both of us crying as he asked if I still wanted to be married and I didn’t know; and I didn’t know, for that matter, what my personality was (callous? Funny? Was I funny? If so, was I really, or just performing?) or whether I was bisexual like I always thought or strictly gay. My moods swung from extreme openness and optimism to utter despair and stunned confusion. One day, I spent hours indulging a rich and specific fantasy about filling a bathtub with hot water, downing the years-old bottle of Ativan from when I was first diagnosed, and slitting my forearms from wrist to elbow. Later, in an entirely different temperament, I saw the plan in my Journey Journal and recognized it as active suicidal ideation; if someone had taken the notebook to the police, they could have legally committed me to an institution against my will.

From the beginning, my MDMA therapist had recommended more than one journey. Next time, she said in one of our multiple follow-up integration sessions, I’d stay all night. I agreed that another journey was in order, but I happened to talk to someone who mentioned an underground therapist with a different practice and whom I got a good feeling from when we talked, and so, three months after the first journey, in a dark and silent room with three other people after nightlife, concerns about my family history of schizophrenia thoroughly discussed and considered, I drank ayahuasca.

On the first night of the two-night ceremony, sitting on the “nests” we each built with yoga mats and sleeping bags on the floor, I was nervous again. But less than last time. After drinking about an ounce the initial sparkles and shooting stars be-
hind my eyes, and after a while, as the facilitators started singing – ancient songs they say come from the plant and help it work – a vision of myself as a five-year-old appeared. There was a suggestion at a history, something bad that happened that I didn’t remember; I did not like the direction it was going in; I also thought it was bullshit. The visions stopped. Instead, an abject, suffocating rage came over me, and I lay there in it for five hours thinking about getting in my car and driving away and wishing everyone else in the room would fucking die.

The next night, after a long, raw and still-irate day in the house, the first vision that showed up was five-year-old me again – pissed. She wouldn’t talk to me, however much I tried to coax her. I knew I had to get her to engage, which over the course of seven hours involved recognizing that I hated myself, that my self-hatred was my best and most reliable friend, and that my self-hatred would never die until I appreciated how it had protected me; when I did, and it did, I gave it a Viking funeral in the vision and in reality cried harder than I ever had in my life. Then I just had to reckon with shame. I sensed the five-year-old had brought it, actually, not me, but no matter, I assured her: I was the goddamn adult here, and I was going to take care of it. There was suffering and writhing and grief and nausea. I threw up, twice, prodigious quantities of black liquid, once so hard into a bucket that it splashed up all over the bottom half of my face.

A few inches away from me, a woman, whom recently been in a car accident that put her in the hospital and in a wheelchair for a time, lay perfectly still and silent; a few inches from her, a man gnashed his teeth at visions of his abusive parent. At the other end of the room, another participant re-lived the night of his father’s suicide. In the vision, as in real life, he was unable to stop him from slipping out into the garage to do it. But this time, when the man discovered his father’s body and cut him down from the rope, he didn’t falter under the weight of his father’s body and cut him down from slipping out into the garage to do it. There was suffering and writhing and grief and nausea. I threw up, twice, prodigious quantities of black liquid, once so hard into a bucket that it splashed up all over the bottom half of my face.

In November, the results of two large studies showed that the majority of cancer patients who received one dose of psilocybin experienced lasting recovery from depression and anxiety. In February, a paper in the Journal of Psychopharmacology found that “experience with psychedelic drugs is associated with decreased risk of opioid abuse and dependence.” Medical-journal papers about ayahuasca suggest it can treat addiction, anxiety and depression, and change brain structure and personality. So far in the MDMA PTSD trials, zero participants haven’t improved at all, and more than 80 percent have recovered to an extent that they don’t qualify as having PTSD anymore. Estimates for the effectiveness of other PTSD treatments range as high as 70 percent but as low as 50 percent. The number is somewhat contentious, but even if you think it’s only 25 percent for whom conventional treatments don’t work, says Mithoefer, the lead clinician on the trials in Charleston, “that’s still millions of people a year in the United States alone.” All the participants in the trials had previously tried medication or therapy, usually both; as a cohort, they’d had PTSD for an average of 19 years.

But ultimately, the decision to reschedule [psychedelics from Schedule I substances] is not a scientific one, “points out NYU’s Guss. “It’s a governmental one. We may be able to prove safety and efficacy. But there still may be governmental legislative reasons that rescheduling doesn’t move forward.”

Psychedelic use has been opposed and persecuted by authorities for centuries, both in Europe and in the New World. Among those reasons, believers believe, is the fear that widespread smart psychedelic use could foment societal upheaval. That’s not unlike the belief in the Sixties – but we know now more about what psychedelics do and how to optimize them. “We didn’t have as much data then as we do now,” says Dr. Dan Engle, a board-certified psychiatrist who consults with plant-medicine healing centers worldwide. “And we didn’t have as many of the safeguards as we have now.” He envisions “the psychedelic renaissance as a cornerstone in the redemption of modern psychiatric care.” Now, thanks to brain imaging, researchers can see that far greater “brain-network connections light up on psilocybin compared to the normal brain. More cross-regional firing. That’s what the brain actually looks like on the ‘drugs’ that we’ve been using for hundreds if not thousands of years.”

This has helped make psychedelics particularly popular in Silicon Valley, where a drive toward self-actualization meets the luxury of having the resources to pursue it. California, where Berkeley-born chemist Alexander “Sasha” Shulgin synthesized and distributed MDMA to therapists for decades before it was prohibited, has long been at the front of the movement; today, Dobin estimates, the state doesn’t have quite the majority, but probably 40 percent of underground psychedelic therapists in the nation. Last year, California Sunday Magazine reporter Chris Colin profiled Entrepreneurs Awakening (EA), a company that arranges Peruvian ayahuasca sojourns primarily for tech and startup CEOs. The customers, says owner Michael Costuros, are “supersuccessful type-A people who use it to be better at what they do.”

“These things are so powerful,” says Eric Weinstein, managing director at Thiel Capital, Peter Thiel’s investment firm in San Francisco, “that they can get into layers of patterned behavior to show folks things that they could change and could do differently. And the brain has probably been playing with these ideas in the subconscious. This entire family of agents is extraordinary, as they appear to be very profound, unexpectedly constructive and surprisingly safe. Most people who take these agents seem to discover cognitive modes that they never knew even existed.”

Weinstein has been considering trying to put together a series of opposite-land “This Is Your Brain on Drugs” public-service commercials, in which other Silicon Valley luminaries and scientists like himself – a Ph.D. mathematician and physicist – out themselves as having “directed their own intellectual evolution with the use of psychedelics as self-hacking tools.”

But even for the super-high-functioning, psychedelic use isn’t just about optimizing. It also, Costuros says, makes them better people: “What I’ve seen consistently happen is CEOs become a people-centric, people-focused person.” After well-administered and integrated psychedelics, “we’re not gonna see the kind of Donald Trump entrepreneurs that are only about extracting value.” After an ayahuasca journey with EA, an arms magnate left his multimillion-dollar company to build an art and music residency program. Chris Hunter, the 38-year-old inventor of caffeinated malt-liquor beverage Four Loko, went into his trip with EA’s Costuros as a regular former Ohio State University fraternity brother from Youngstown and came out a new man. “Why are you such a dick?” he says he asked himself on ayahuasca. “What if you approached masculinity in a different way – instead of being dominant and overseeing the women in your life, you came from the other side, underneath, fully supporting and lifting women up?”

Ayahuasca users whom UCLA’s Grob has researched in other countries “have become better partners to their spouses, better parents to their children, better children to their parents, better employees, better employers, just more responsible overall, bringing a higher level of ethical in... [Cont. on 56]
The New Protest Singers

Three albums offer a visionary take on American roots music in the age of Trump

Hurray for the Riff Raff
The Navigator ATO

Rhiannon Giddens
Freedom Highway Nonesuch

Valerie June
The Order of Time Concord

BY WILL HERMES

Ever since Woody Guthrie branded his guitar with the words THIS MACHINE KILLS FASCISTS, folk music has made defining American values a mission. So it’s fitting that in this immigrant-bashing, race-baiting era, a new generation of songwriters are putting their machines to work, and doing more than slinging slogans. That’s clear on potent new sets by three of the roots scene’s most compelling voices: Rhiannon Giddens (of string-band historians Carolina Chocolate Drops), Alynda Segarra (of New Orleans roots buskers Hurray for the Riff Raff) and country blueswoman Valerie June.

That these writers are women of color is more than...
The Shins’ New Adventures in Alt-Pop Romance

James Mercer home-brews a charming mix of studio grandeur and tender introspection

The Shins Heartworms Aural Apothecary/Columbia ★★★★½

James Mercer has been doing his amiably anxious alt-pop nice-guy thing since the Shins’ strummy-sad 2001 debut, Oh, Inverted World, expanding his sound without diluting his signature shy intimacy. Last time out, on 2012’s great Port of Morrow, Adele producer Greg Kurstin helped give Mercer’s world-weary melodicism a sleek polish. Heartworms has more of a home-brewed feel, heavy on Beach Boys grandeur, New Wave kicks, squiggly synth-pop and warm-weather soft rock – with lyrics tenderly balanced between midlife malaise and youthful romanticism. The result is some of the most charming music he’s ever made.

Crisply buoyant album opener “Name for You” is a sharp assessment of Betty Draper-style womanhood (“It’s a bland kind of torture”). Elsewhere, the lightly psychedelic “Fantasy Island” finds Mercer with tortures of his own, nose-deep in vermouth and self-pity. But his indulgences have always been as gentle as his melodies; “Mildenhall,” a countryish recollection of a family relocation to England and the first flush of love with “a band called the Jesus and the Mary Chain,” is one of several moments that leverage childhood memories toward adult realization. And when the spacey slow dance “So Now What” finds faith in the future via an ode to marriage, midlife as an alt-pop nice guy starts seeming like an OK gig.

\[LISTEN NOW!\] Hear key tracks from these albums at RollingStone.com/albums.

Spoon Hot Thoughts Matador ★★★★★

Veteran Austin post-punks double down on beat science

No one engineers post-punk propulsion into precision-tuned rock & roll better than Spoon’s Britt Daniel. With Flaming Lips producer Dave Fridmann on board, this set is as lushly trippy as it is rhythmically hyped. Berlin-era Bowie is a clear touchstone: see “First Caress,” Sharon Van Etten’s voice swirling in the mix, and “Can I Sit Next to You,” with its Arabic-scented synths. Dub breaks, post-rock abstractions and disco pulses bubble up and recede. But Daniel keeps things taut, even on the closer, “Us,” a five-minute free-jazz space-out that gives you time to grab another drink, hit “repeat” and dive back into the groove.

Sun Kil Moon Common as Light and Love Are Red Valleys of Blood Caldo Verde ★★★★★

Mark Kozelek’s two-hour stream-of-consciousness epic

Three years after the resplendently sorrowful Benji – Mark Kozelek’s apotheosis, 20-plus years as a songwriter-storyteller – comes this 130-minute stream-of-consciousness brain dump, delivered over dreamy grooves driven by ex-Sonic Youth drummer Steve Shelley. The obsessions (death, boxing, mass murder, indie rock, inside baseball) feel more obsessive; the diaristic style more diaristic. Sometimes it drags, hypnotically or solipsistically, then a line – about the Orlando shooting, or Bowie’s death – snaps things back into dazzling, desperate, furious focus.

\[WILL HERMES\]
Going (Very) Deep Into the Mind of Future

Two new LPs explore the Atlanta hip-hop superstar’s divergent personae

**Future** *Future* Epic ★★★★
**Future** *HNDRXX* Epic ★★★½

There have always been two Futures. There’s the pill-popping trap god whose hypnotic, watery vocals seem to reflect a darkness of the soul, and then there’s the jumpy, ecstatic kid who just wants to fuck up some commas. These two albums, released within a week of each other, explore his dark and light sides, with Fun Future coming out on top.

*Future* is at once downcast and ruthless: “Gotta be in a rush/I can’t be running out of time,” he tells us on “Outta Time.” The beats are fantastic (see Metro Boomin’s screwed-and-dusted sample loops on “Mask Off”), and he shows off gruff working-class humility on “Good Dope.” But it’s depressing to hear Future brag, “Grabbing that pussy like Donald,” on “High Demand.”

On *HNDRXX*, Future returns to his android-crooner persona with striking warmth. “We can take Vicodin tonight, baby/It’s all on me,” he offers on “Incredible,” setting a woozy, sensuous tone. He shows disarming vulnerability on “My Collection,” talk-singing about his troubles with ex-fiancée Ciara, and his performances dominate tracks with Rihanna and the Weeknd. He still plays the bad guy. But the thrill of being seduced by a sensitive rogue is part of the appeal.

MOSI REEVES

Depeche Mode

*Spirit* Columbia ★★★½
The veteran synth-pop gloomsters lash out at a world gone mad

For nearly four decades, Depeche Mode have majored in gloomy meditations on their own personal shortcomings. But their 14th LP offers a bitter, sorrowful elegy for the outside world. Nearly every song on *Spirit* laments the death of human decency, often in disarmingly beautiful ways (see the fuzzy ballad “Fail,” the forlornly crooned “Poison Heart”). They sometimes drift into heavy-handed polemics (“Where’s the Revolution”). But with a smart mix of techno-leaning keyboards and bluesy guitar, à la their 1990 high-water mark, *Violator*, it’s easy to get swept away in their gospel.

KORY GROW

Little Big Town

*The Breaker* Capitol ★★★★
Fleetwood Mac-loving country quartet get back to basics

Shortly after 2014’s “Girl Crush” provided Little Big Town with their first taste of pop crossover stardom, the country group quietly released *Wanderlust*, a Pharrell collaboration that drew from funk, R&B and dance music. *The Breaker* is a back-to-basics record, with the group’s Fleetwood Mac power harmonies forming the emotional backbone of tear-jerkers like “When Someone Stops Loving You” and “Better Man.” But muscular, radio-friendly songs “Night on Our Side” and “Drivin’ Around” feel too vague in their escapism to sound convincing.

JONATHAN BERNSTEIN
Essential Elton John

A guide to his best and most overlooked albums – from glitter-rock hits to yellow-brick ballads and beyond. By Rob Sheffield

**MUST-HAVES**

**Honky Château**

1972

Elton John had already scored a few hits as a mild-mannered piano man, but **Honky Château** was the breakthrough where he learned to rock. He banged out the songs in a week with his lyric wingman, Bernie Taupin. For anyone else, this could have been a greatest-hits album: the New Orleans boogie of “Honky Cat,” the country-rock strut of “Hercules,” the slow-burn grooves of “Mellow” and “Hercules,” the slow-burn epic “Saturday Night’s Alright for Fighting.” And he reaches his gender-bending zenith with “Bennie and the Jets,” the b-b-b-brilliant stomp that got him on Soul Train.

**Goodbye Yellow Brick Road**

1973

Elton’s most grandiose and ridiculous manifesto, a double LP indulging all his kinkiest stylistic whims and decadent fantasies. He goes hard in the 11-minute progfest “Funeral for a Friend/Love Lies Bleeding” and the leather-boy rumble “Saturday Night’s Alright for Fighting.” And he reaches his gender-bending zenith with “Bennie and the Jets;” the b-b-b-brilliant stomp that got him on Soul Train.

**Greatest Hits Volume II**

1977

Elton treated his hits collections as a key part of his statement, and this one was an iconic Seventies artifact, right down to the cover photo of him playing a late-night game of cricket. It features his gaudiest singles: “The Bitch Is Back,” “Island Girl” and “Don’t Go Breaking My Heart.” There’s also “Philadelphia Freedom,” written for tennis champ Billie Jean King.

**Songs From the West Coast**

2001

Elton spent the Nineties as a cherished showbiz institution – while paying less and less attention to his actual music. So it was a shock to hear him and Taupin regaining their hunger as a songwriting team, with weathered tales like “The Emperor’s New Clothes.”

**Tumbleweed Connection**

1970

Elton and Taupin were team, with weathered mystique of our thing is less and less attention to his actual music. So it was a shock to hear him and Taupin regaining their hunger as a songwriting team, with weathered tales like “The Emperor’s New Clothes.”

**Madman Across the Water**

1971

Part of the magic of ballads like “Levon” and “Tiny Dancer” is the piano Elton was playing – the legendary Bechstein grand at London’s Trident Studios. It’s the most famous piano in rock – the same one heard on the Beatles’ “Hey Jude” and Bowie’s “Life on Mars?” It really flatters Elton’s melodies here, as he and Taupin get far-out with “Razor Face” and “Holiday Inn.” So what is “Levon” about? Elton has no idea. “Part of the enjoyment and mystique of our thing is we’ve never collaborated,” he said. “I’d never ask Bernie what it means.” (For the record, Taupin swore the song had nothing to do with Levon Helm – he just liked the name.)

**Caribou**

1974

“The act is going to become a little more Liberace-ized,” Elton announced in ROLLING STONE in 1973. “I’d like to have nine pianos onstage, a cascade of pianos, and make my entrance like that.” He wasn’t kidding. For Caribou, crashed out in nine days, Elton upped the candelabra ante with “The Bitch Is Back” and “I’ve Seen the Saucers.” Caribou also has the delicate valentine “Pinky” – but Elton made no apologies for turning on the glitz.

**Captain Fantastic and the Brown Dirt Cowboy**

1975

Elton made history with this autobiographical concept album – the first album ever to debut at Number One. Not bad for his most defiantly unpop album ever to debut at Number One. Not bad for his most defiantly unpop statement; “Someone Saved My Life Tonight”
was seven minutes of morbid angst and butterfly symbolism. But it was so undeniable, it became a smash anyway.

**The Union**

2010

A labor-of-love duet with one of Elton’s Sixties heroes, Leon Russell, capping a career that just ended with Russell’s death in November 2016. "I slept and drank Leon Russell," Elton said in 1973. He paid back the favor 40 years later on songs like “Gone to Shiloh,” which stands as a tribute to them both.

**Elton John**

1970

Elton was still finding his voice as a buttoned-down singer-songwriter. This album gave him his first hit with “Your Song,” but other highlights, including “Take Me to the Pilot,” show off his weirdo side. And the gospel-blues piano raunch of “No Shoe Strings on Louise” might even have helped inspire the ballads on Side Two of the Rolling Stones’ *Exile on Main Street*.

**Go DEEPER**

Elton John

1970

Elton was still finding his voice as a buttoned-down singer-songwriter. This album gave him his first hit with “Your Song,” but other highlights, including “Take Me to the Pilot,” show off his weirdo side. And the gospel-blues piano raunch of “No Shoe Strings on Louise” might even have helped inspire the ballads on Side Two of the Rolling Stones’ *Exile on Main Street*.

**Stand Out**

1973

*Don’t Shoot Me I’m Only the Piano Player*

He cut this demo for a fellow struggling songwriter named Nick Drake. Within a few years, Elton was a jet-set star, and Drake had died in obscurity.

**Too Low for Zero**

1983

Elton won over the New Romantic kids with a pansexual video for “I’m Still Standing,” and crooning one of his finest ballads, “I Guess That’s Why They Call It the Blues.”

**The One**

1992

Elton’s first post-rehab album set him up as a Nineties-rock elder statesman. The highlight here is “Runaway Train,” his rhinestone-blues duet with Eric Clapton.

**Wonderful Crazy Night**

2016

After 50 years in the game, Elton can still bring it in style. He and Taupin pen upbeat chestnuts, and the bluesy roots move “I’ve Got 2 Wings.”

**Lost Glitter**

Great moments from Elton’s less-memorable albums

**“Way to Blue” Demo 1968**

He cut this demo for a fellow struggling songwriter named Nick Drake. Within a few years, Elton was a jet-set star, and Drake had died in obscurity.

**“I Saw Her Standing There” B side 1975**

At a 1974 New York show, Elton duetted with Lennon on what Lennon introduced as “a number of an old estranged fiance of mine called Paul” – sadly, it was the last public concert performance of his lifetime.

**“Mama Can’t Buy You Love” Single 1979**

Like the Bowie of *Young Americans*, Elton fled to Philadelphia in search of soul. He partnered with R&B master Thom Bell for his biggest and best hit in years.

**“Little Jeannie” From ‘21 at 33’ 1980**

A summer jam with the chorus, “I want you to be my acrobat.” Why was he in such rough shape? Well, the album had a song called “White Lady White Powder.”

**“Elton’s Song” From ‘The Fox’ 1981**

A surprisingly stark confessional about growing up gay. The lyrics came from out-and-proud punk-rocker Tom Robinson, author of *Glad to Be Gay*.

**“Wrap Her Up” From ‘Ice on Fire’ 1985**

If you ever wonder exactly how insane the Eighties were: Elton sang this ode to hetero sex with, of all people, George Michael. Naturally, it was an MTV hit.

**“Born to Lose” From ‘Duets’ 1993**

Elton sang with pals like Tammy Wynette and Kiki Dee on this collaborative LP, but the unlikely standout is this country-blues ballad with Leonard Cohen – these two had chemistry for days.

**“They Call Her the Cat” From ‘Peachtree Road’ 2004**

Elton serenades Atlanta, his adopted hometown, with a Dixie-fried ode to a trans Delta diva: “She got hips like Mick/She’s a Rolling Stone.”

**“Postcards From Richard Nixon” From ‘The Captain and the Kid’ 2006**

A sequel to *Captain Fantastic* that’s a superb portrait of 1970s California.

**“Oscar Wilde Gets Out” From ‘The Diving Board’ 2013**

An elegiac tribute from one great English queen to another.

He’s weird and he’s wonderful: Elton in 1974.
Old Man Wolverine

**Logan**
**Hugh Jackman**
Directed by James Mangold

Do X-Men age? Hell, yeah. Think of this renegade chapter in the boffo film franchise as X-Men: The AARP Years. No need to panic. *Logan* is a hardass, R-rated rager that explodes with action. But what makes it raw and indelibly touching is the sight of mutant heroes going up against the dying of the light. The year is 2029; the X-Men are practically extinct. No mutant births is 2029; the X-Men are practically extinct. No mutant births are on the fritz. But enough to Wolverine in powers are on the fritz. But his self-healing powers are on the fritz. But he's committed to care for his aging newcomer Dafne Keen), a mute 11-year-old girl close to Wolverine in powers. Laura (smash-who's wheelchair-bound and rattled by seizures. Hiding out in a vacant factory in El Paso, Texas, these two are laid low.

Then they get discovered. And director James Mangold (*The Wolverine*), in peak form and working deep and true, unleashes the dogs of war. Logan and Professor X unite to protect Laura (smashing newcomer Dafne Keen), a mute 11-year-old girl close enough to Wolverine in powers to be a chip off the old block of adamantium. They're soon on a road trip that would test Mad Max. In hot pursuit are bio-engineer Zander Rice (Richard E. Grant) and his evil cybernetic henchman, Donald Pierce (a terrific Boyd Holbrook), the first movie villain of the millennium named Donald. I'm sensing a trend. Loosely based on the Old Man Logan comic-book arc, this sparking live wire tempers its violent showdowns with tender emotion. *Logan* earns its tears. In their X-Men swan song, Jackman and Stewart forge a testament to family. It's a heartfelt valedictory.

The King Returns, Ready to Rumble

**Kong: Skull Island**
**Brie Larson, Tom Hiddleston**
Directed by Jordan Vogt-Roberts

The dialogue is clunky, the A-list actors are slumming and, yeah, you've seen it all before. But *Kong: Skull Island* is a creature feature that's damn interesting. Set in 1973, with a killer soundtrack and a thing for the surreal kick of *Apocalypse Now*, this second try from the MonsterVerse franchise, following 2014’s bland *Godzilla*, is a rip-roar-ing rumble in the jungle. Jordan Vogt-Roberts directs like a war photographer. Every kind of giant beastie steps up for a go at Kong. The effects are way cool. And, really, what else do you need to know? Grab your popcorn and strap in for the ride.

Shopping: A Ghost Story

**Personal Shopper**
**Kristen Stewart**
Directed by Olivier Assayas

Nothing scares Kristen Stewart. Her latest risk as an actress—and it pays off brilliantly—is *Personal Shopper*, a gripping ghost story that reteams her with director Olivier Assayas (*Clouds of Sils Maria*) to once again play a woman living in another woman’s shadow. Stewart’s Maureen is an American in Paris who buys fashion for Kyra (Nora von Waldstätten), an entitled model-actress who forbids Maureen (by text) to try on her clothes. As a working medium, Maureen is more focused on making contact with her twin, Lewis, who died of a heart defect, an ailment that also plagues her. Instead of Lewis, Maureen invokes both a malevolent force that invades her phone with creepy texts (“I want you and I will have you”) and a trail that leads to murder. Stewart’s tour de force is virtually a one-woman show. Even the one sex scene is solo, as Maureen masturbates in Kyra’s bed. Stewart puts flesh and blood on Assayas’ indictment of a digital society where social media is replacing human interaction. Assayas is skilled at holding us in a vise and squeezing. This mesmerizing mind-teaser is chas-ing something ephemeral that snakes its way into our consciousness. It’s pure cinema, a hypnotic and haunting dream that tempts us to dive in and get lost. Do it.
If you’re spending too much time in the bathroom, you’re not alone. Your symptoms may be caused by a digestive condition called EPI, or exocrine pancreatic insufficiency. Even if you have just one of these symptoms, you could still have EPI.

• Frequent diarrhea
• Unexplained weight loss
• Oily, foul-smelling stools that float
• Gas and bloating
• Stomach pain

EPI is a manageable condition, so don’t keep a lid on it. Go to CouldItBeEPI.com, complete the symptom checker, and talk to your doctor about your symptoms. Find out if it could be EPI.
THE PSYCHEDELIC MIRACLE

[Cont. from 47] Integrity to everything they do,” he says.

It’s possible that psychedelics could transform a wide array of people. Clinical trials have included subjects across demographic categories, including soldiers and conservatives and the elderly and people who’ve never taken drugs at all before. Some of Dr. X’s patients most definitely do not vote Democrat. But the people who have access to psychedelic treatment underground (or overseas) do tend to have something in common: They are usually well-off. “If I could do it legally, I would not turn away anyone for treatment, if I could be aboveground and I could get them to supportive services [afterward],” Dr. X says. Because of the necessary secrecy and lack of outside support now, he considers it irresponsible to provide journeys to anyone without the time and resources to also pay for integration sessions. (McCorry had to pay for the first journey of his Marine friend, who didn’t have any money; they had to find a wealthy benefactor to cover the next two.) Clients are also mostly white – as are providers. “Sentencing for middle-class white people is a hell of a lot friendlier than for minorities and poor people,” Dr. X says. “It’s a tragedy that people with the most vulnerability, who need it most, we can’t do it with them.”

Doblin, for his part, speculates that the DEA hasn’t cracked down on underground psychedelic therapists because they have more pressing priorities than those trying to heal a select few of the rich, the traumatized and the addicted. It’s also one thing for psychedelics to be popular with millionaires – and some Nobel laureates and business celebrities you’d never believe; Costuros maintains – and the hip participants of the estimated 120 ayahuasca ceremonies that take place in New York City and the Bay Area every weekend. But who knows what might unfold if psychedelic therapy were available to people for whom the status quo doesn’t work so well?

It’s unclear if the current presidential administration, which includes some extremely drug-unfriendly members, will alter or slow the course of possible medicalization. For the time being, the researchers soldier on, and the underground grows. This year, K., a therapist with a traditional practice in an Appalachian state, administered her first MDMA journey with a client (with two additional medical professionals on hand for safety); the client, who’d still needed occasional suicide watch stemming from symptoms of complex PTSD despite 16 years of therapy, had brought her the MAPS manual, downloaded off the Internet. “I’m trained to provide the best care to my clients in a way that’s ethical,” K. says, “so if research is backing up that things that are now illegal are really helpful with little to no side effects, especially compared with psychiatric medications, which have a ton of side effects, then it’s something I’m open to.” When dosed, K.’s client, S., talked through a childhood of severe abuse and torture – “but none of it was terrifying,” S. says. “I talked in detail about a lot of horrific shit that happened. Then I said: The thing is, all those things are over, and I know they’re over, and my body knows that everything is going to be OK.”

For Silicon Valley’s Weinstein, the success stories show the importance of advocating for broader access. “If we don’t legalize, study and utilize these plants and other medicines, people who could be saved will die,” he says. “Families will break apart. Parents will continue to bury depressed children who might have been saved by these miraculous agents. Can we bring ourselves to ask if a single professionally administered flood dose of legal ibogaine could have saved Prince from opioid addiction? Some of these agents are anti-drug drugs…and we are still against them. I definitely would like to attack the idea that any of this makes any sense.”

Psychedelics, they say, will not give you what you want. But they will give you what you need.

So I’d done an underground MDMA session, and a weekend of illegal ayahuasca ceremonies. The integration, as the months went on, seemed to go a bit smoother.

After ayahuasca, I still had good and bad days. The process was still intense but less earthshaking, either because I’d done the first big, tough layer of processing post-MDMA, or because the journey was different, or I was getting used to being unsettled, or all of the above. Or maybe the smoother time was a little reprieve, since something more shattering was about to happen.

After all the months, all the pieces that had been stirred up were not quite connected. I felt I needed one more sitting with the therapist and the psychedelic that at that point felt right. So I settled into a nest on a little patch of floor, again, in the same house as last time, but in a large, high-ceilinged living room full of moonlight coming in through the windows, and I whispered into a cup of ayahuasca a plea for wholeness, and drank it.

The vision is about me, as a five-year-old. Again.

Psychedelics, they say, will not give you what you want. But they will give you what you need.

I’m shocked to encounter the child again, but ready to see what she shows me this time. The child remembers; I remember, though the realization is slow, and the acceptance is slower.

When I thought I cried the hardest in my life the last time I drank ayahuasca, I was wrong.

I cannot (and would not) begin to encompass, in a brief space, what happens in the next long hours, and the next day, and the next night. The second night, the facilitators have to end the ceremony without me. They bless and blow smoke and perfume on the others because after so many hours, they’re done, but I’m still deep in it. They take turns staying with me and singing. It goes on for so long, with so much shaking and sickness, that to be kind to my nervous system, my facilitator, who in her day job cares for homeless children, puts me in a bathtub of hot water.

I hyperventilate, for a long time, until I don’t. I remember the bathtub-suicide fantasy. The facilitator is sitting next to me, on the floor, putting a soaked hot washcloth against my face, my neck, on my head. I tell her about the fantasy, and that I have come to know, in this bathtub, that I am not going to kill myself.

For a second she thinks I mean I won’t kill myself in her bathtub, rather than in general. Then when she gets it, the two of us laugh about what a drag that would be for her; if I killed myself here, on drugs in her house, both of us joking about it: me, naked, her, trying to help me save my life.

We’re laughing, but this moment is a big deal, and we know it. I am not healed. But I am whole. I can go ahead and get divorced if that turns out to be the right thing, but not because I was violated too many times to bear intimacy. There will be many more spectacularly challenging, professionally supported months of working through the terror and pain imprinted on my body when it was tiny, powerless under adult darkness and weight, but one of the end results has already arrived. The too-many years of my life where I sometimes actively, and maybe always a little bit passively, thought about killing myself are over.

But what has changed, people keep asking me, since the journeys. In my life, what difference did it make?

Every single thing is different, I tell them. Because I was splintered before, but now: I’m here.
ONE FOR THE BOOKS

‘ROLLING STONE’ HOSTED THE MOST ANTICIPATED BIG-GAME-WEEKEND PARTY, AT THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, HOUSTON, WITH PERFORMANCES BY DIPLO, NAS, BIG SEAN, BUSTA RHYMES AND DJ CASSIDY.

1. EDM superstar Diplo headlined the party.
2. Nas kept the crowd hyped with classics like “Made You Look.”
3. Big Sean performed hits off his new album, 1 Decided., which dropped the night before the party.
5. DJ Cassidy amped up the party with new and classic hits.
6. Big Sean posed in the Budweiser #ThisBudsForYou photo activation.
7. NFL stars Ezekiel Elliott and Victor Cruz showed off their fashionable duds.
8. Chanel Iman posed in front of the Mercedes-AMG C63 S Coupe.
9. Actress Olivia Culpo arrived in style the night before watching boyfriend Danny Amendola of the Patriots win Super Bowl LI.
10. Artist Gregory Siff worked with Nas on a custom design projected on the 2018 Mercedes-AMG GT C.
11. Baked by Melissa created a custom ‘Rolling Stone’ cupcake display.
12. Adrian Grenier, Alyssa Milano and Anthony Anderson caught up at the event.
13. New York Giants’ Odell Beckham Jr. began his off-season by attending the party.
14. Guests enjoyed the event with cold Budweisers in hand.

Photography: Koury Angelo and Getty Images

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IN PARTNERSHIP WITH: TALENT RESOURCES SPORTS
The singer on approaching 70, what she learned battling Klonopin, and when she’ll be back with Fleetwood Mac

What’s the hardest part of success?
I work very, very hard. I have a piece of typewritten paper here that says, “You keep going and you don’t stop.” You do your vocal lesson. I have a lot of friends from high school and college who want to hang out when I play in their city. I have to rest for my show. It breaks my heart, but what comes first? Don’t endanger my show. That’s been my mantra my whole life: Don’t endanger my show.

Who is your hero?
Michelle Obama, because she has such an optimistic outlook and she was able to move into the White House with kids and do such a beautiful, graceful job. That had to be really hard. After spending two weeks with my family for the holidays, which was long and emotionally difficult, I know that’s superhard. I think she’s wisdom personified.

What advice would you give to your younger self?
How about my early-forties self? That’s when I walked out of Betty Ford after beating coke. I spent two months doing so well. But all my business managers and everyone were urging me to go to this guy who was supposedly the darling of the psychiatrists. That was the guy who put me on Klonopin. This is the man who made me go from 123 pounds to almost 170 pounds at five feet two. He stole eight years of my life.

Maybe I would have gotten married, maybe I would have had a baby, maybe I would have made three or four more great albums with Fleetwood Mac. That was the prime of my life, and he stole it. And you know why? Because I went along with what everybody else thought. So what I would tell my 40-year-old self: “Don’t listen to other people. In your heart of hearts, you know what’s best for you.”

What do you understand about men that you didn’t understand in your twenties?
I understood men pretty well in my twenties. Lindsey [Buckingham] and I lived together like married people. I had one girlfriend in Los Angeles in those years, so I really had a lot of different types of men in my life that I really got to know and respect.

I made a choice to not get married. After eight years of Klonopin, I was just gonna follow my muse, and if somebody came into my life, they would always end up being second. I wanted so badly to do what I’m doing right now.

What have 42 years as a member of Fleetwood Mac taught you about compromise?
A lot, because when you’re in a band you have to be part of the team. There’s something comforting about that. But in my solo career, I get to be the boss. Having both, for a Gemini like myself, is perfect. And I knew that in 1981: that me having a solo career would only make Fleetwood Mac better.

Lindsey Buckingham and Christine McVie are about to release an album as a duo. It seems like it started as a Fleetwood Mac album, but you chose not to participate.
I’ve been on the road [solo] since last September, so I don’t understand their premise. Christine was gone [from Fleetwood Mac] for 16 years and came back, did a massive tour, and then it’s like, “Now I’m just gonna go back to London and sit in my castle for two years”? She wanted to keep working. I will be back with them at the end of the year for, I think, another tour. I just needed my two years off. Until then, I wish them the best in whatever they do.

Do you want to make a new record with them?
I don’t think we’ll do another record. If the music business were different, I might feel different. I don’t think there’s any reason to spend a year and an amazing amount of money on a record that, even if it has great things, isn’t going to sell. What we do is go on the road, do a ton of shows and make lots of money. We have a lot of fun. Making a record isn’t all that much fun.

How do you feel about turning 70 in two years?
I don’t like that number. I see lots of people my age, and lots of people who are younger than me, and I think, “Wow, those people look really old.” I think it’s because they didn’t try. If you want to stay young, you have to make an effort. If I wanna walk onstage in a short chiffon skirt and not look completely age-inappropriate, I have to make that happen. Or you just throw in the towel and let your hair turn white and look like a frumpy old woman. I’m never gonna go there.

Do you ever see yourself retiring?
I’ll never retire. My friend Doug Morris, who’s been president of, like, every record company, said to me once, “When you retire, you just get small.” Stand up straight, put on your heels, and get out there and do stuff. I want to do a miniseries for the stories of Rhiannon and the gods of Wales, which I think would be this fantastic thing, but I don’t have to retire from being a rock star to go and do that. I can fit it all in.

INTERVIEW BY ANDY GREENE

Illustration by Mark Summers

58 | Rolling Stone | RollingStone.com
The choice is yours, and it’s simple.

Why enjoy just one cookie when there’s a whole stack in front of you?

The same goes for car insurance. Why go with a company that offers just a low price when GEICO could save you hundreds and give you so much more? You could enjoy satisfying professional service, 24/7, from a company that’s made it their business to help people since 1936. This winning combination has helped GEICO to become the 2nd-largest private passenger auto insurer in the nation.

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