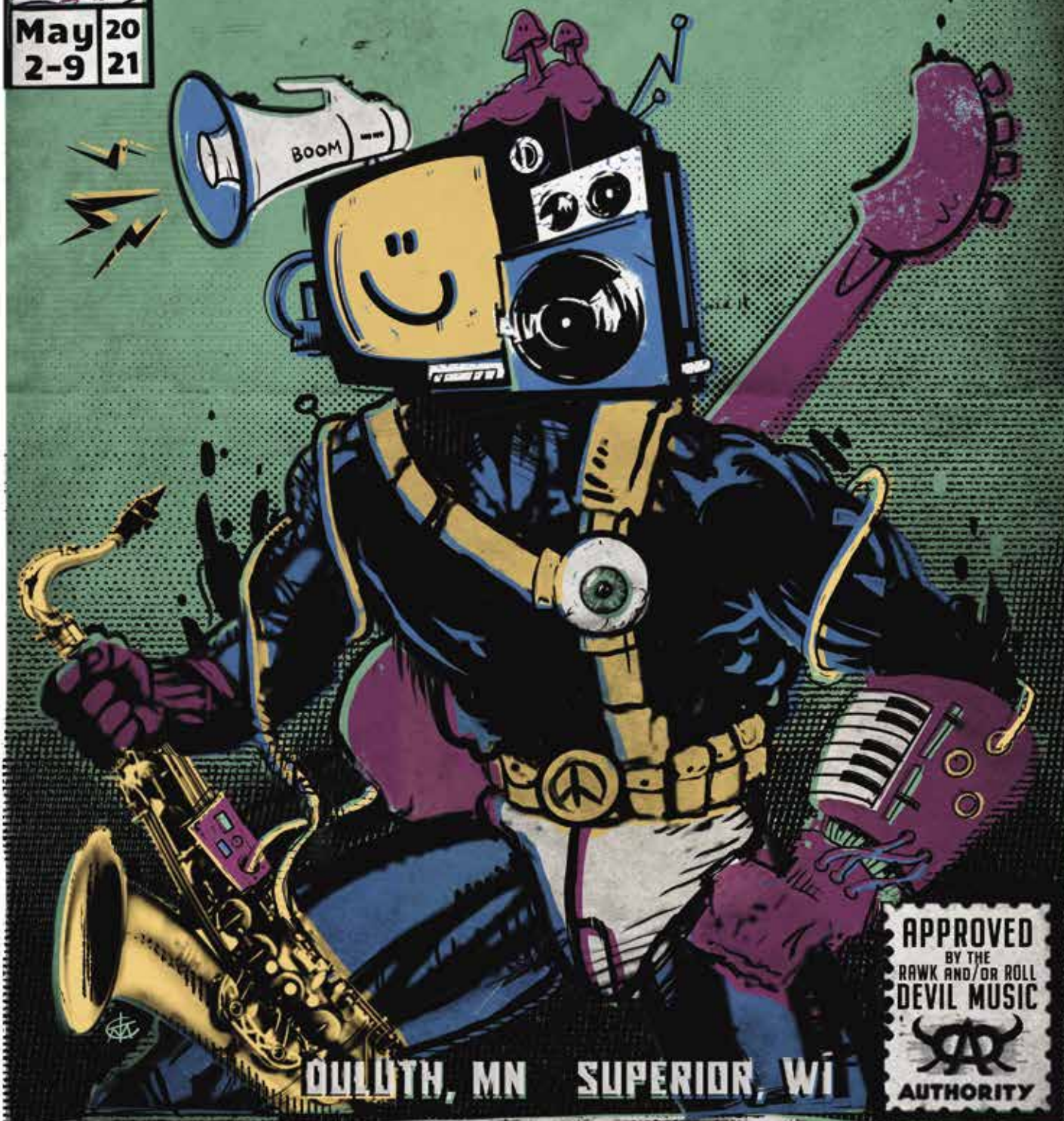


May 20  
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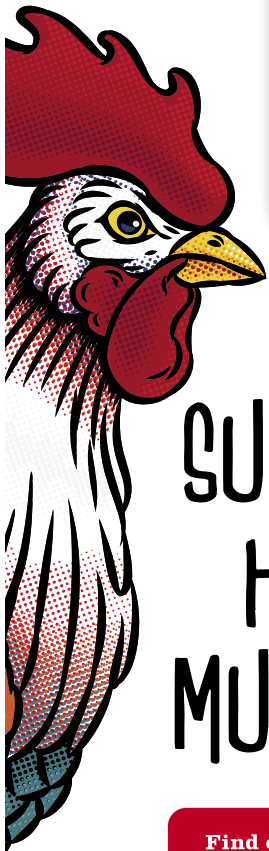
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# Happy 53<sup>rd</sup> Birthday, Starfire

THE 2021 HOMEGROWN STEERING COMMITTEE

After so many decadent years of crowded shows with spittle-spraying mouths, sweaty hugs and shared sips from sticky bottle-tops, things took a turn for the physically distant in 2020. The Homegrown Music Festival barely happened. There were no public concerts, just online shows and an unofficial scavenger hunt. **THANKS, COVID-19.**

Though last year was by far the worst Homegrown ever, we've already forgiven ourselves. We did our best. And we're still here.

With any luck, the worst is behind us. Still, much adversity remains, and we fully expect the 2021 Homegrown will be the second-worst of all time. Hey, consider it progress.

We hate being so lame, but we don't want to kill anyone. So events this year will be mostly, if not entirely, online ... again. The plans you read about in this publication were laid out in February, so a lot could change in the two months prior to festival week, May 2-9. Therefore, this year's Field Guide makes only the feeblest attempt to lay out a schedule. For up-to-date festival info we point you to [duluthhomegrown.org](http://duluthhomegrown.org).

We realize it's very likely there will be live, in-person music performances happening in Duluth by the time Homegrown rolls around, which makes it awkward to not have in-person Homegrown events, but

Homegrown is more than live music — it's a party. And it's too soon to be packing people into bars for a party. But we support all the responsible people holding small concerts in outdoor and physically distanced spaces while the vaccines roll out.

Homegrown will be producing curated YouTube content during the festival, but we also encourage music fans to follow their favorite bands on social media and watch for independently organized shows. There is a limit to how much online content our steering committee can wrangle together, and we fully expect there will be numerous performances outside the purview of our planning process. Follow #hgmf2021 on social media to keep up with things that happen faster than we can report them.

Instead of the usual band profiles and festival logistics, this year's Field Guide offers stories about the state of the music scene during the COVID-19 pandemic. Again, it's the best we can do.

One way or another, we'll be back in 2022. We hope it'll be a big in-person bash where we fearlessly rub faces together, but, you know, we'll just do the best we can do.



Homegrown founder Scott "Starfire" Lunt joined Dance Attic's front-porch concert during last year's slap-together festival. (Photo by Aaron Reichow)

Obviously 2021 will be the second year in a row our little non-profit festival loses money. We mostly use the currency of rock and roll anyway, so we'll be fine, but there will be a pledge drive happening before and during the festival in which supporters can contribute toward the planning of future Homegrowns. **Visit [duluthhomegrown.org](http://duluthhomegrown.org) and click or tap the red bar on the top of the page to make a donation.**

Homegrown's online events are free, but a weeklong festival pass during a normal year is \$30, so maybe donate something in that range and call yourself a philanthropist. If you don't have the spare cash, no worries. Take care of you first.

In conclusion we must issue the usual credit/blame for this annual train wreck to Scott

"Starfire" Lunt, who founded Homegrown in 1999. This year is the 23rd annual Homegrown and marks Starfire's 53rd birthday.

We hold up Starfire as the folk hero, but for more than two decades there have been legions of directors, committee members, venue owners, sponsors, sound engineers, gear luggers, hand stampers, identification checkers and carpet cleaners who have held this thing together. And then there are the musicians, duh. It takes a village.

Please stay vigilant with us as we ride out the pandemic. We'll have a legit party in the not-too-physically-distant future, when we can go back to being spaced out in the fun way. ★

★ **Want to Donate? Visit [duluthhomegrown.org](http://duluthhomegrown.org)**

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★ **Festival Overview**

A Vague Sketch of Homegrown 2021

Prior to the pandemic, the trick to the Homegrown Music Festival schedule was that it included roughly 200 bands and sometimes up to a dozen of them were performing at the same time. This year the trick is that there's barely a schedule at all.

But there is a schedule. Expect it to be wrong. Expect things to not happen on time or just not happen. Expect things to happen unannounced. Or don't expect things to happen unannounced, because they will happen anyway

and preparation won't help much. The best bet for staying up to date with the plan is to visit [duluthhomegrown.org](http://duluthhomegrown.org) during festival week, because a lot will have changed between the time this guide was written and the day it's printed and distributed, and even more will change in the weeks that follow.

The general idea this year is that Homegrown is producing curated videos for its YouTube channel and partnering to support others who are producing

**Sunday, May 2**

**11am Unofficial Homegrown Music Festival Scavenger Hunt Begins**

Scavenger hunt organizer Kala Moria calls upon local music fans to make teams and compete in a variety of challenges from shotgunning a beer to picking up garbage. Participants post their accomplishments on the Facebook event page throughout the week and Moria judges, awards points and announces the winner at the end of the festival.

**Noon Children's Music Showcase**

Music on the Homegrown YouTube channel begins with songs for youngsters — some of it by youngsters. The list of performers was not yet available as this guide went to press, but organizer Jenny Armstrong said to expect some "young performers with adult-level skills." She was also fairly confident there will be some instructional segments to help other young artists cultivate said skills. Also, Dan the Monkey Man has purportedly been working on a new song about a dog with intentions of premiering it during this event.

**4pm Mayor's Reception**

Duluth Mayor Emily Larson is expected to read the official mayoral proclamation via the internet this year. Hoops Brewing is releasing a special Homegrown beer — Emily's Extra IPA — and will screen Homegrown YouTube broadcasts.

**7pm MN Music Summit Livestream**

The Minnesota Music Coalition's 2021 State of Minnesota Music Summit allows musicians, music industry representatives and fans to come together as a statewide community and discuss the state of the industry. The two-day summit features a livestream concert on Sunday from Sacred Heart Music Center in Duluth. For more information visit [mnmusicsummit.org](http://mnmusicsummit.org).

**Monday, May 3**

**7pm Poetry Showcase**

Similar to the 2020 Homegrown Poetry Showcase, this year's event will be a prerecorded program released on YouTube featuring a variety of poets reading short works.



Homegrown Music Festival, Inc., is a Minnesota nonprofit under section 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Operating support is made possible in part by the voters of Minnesota through a grant from the Arrowhead Regional Arts Council, thanks to a legislative appropriation from the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund.



**YouTube channel name: Duluth Homegrown Music Festival**  
**The URL is [youtube.com/c/duluthhomegrown](https://www.youtube.com/c/duluthhomegrown)**

livestreams and other events. In mid-March Rich Narum announced he's planning a full week of livestream concerts from his home featuring a variety of bands. Go to [2104.us](http://2104.us) for a schedule and the latest details.

The Embassy, Duluth's "friendly neighborhood art cult," will also have livestream events during Homegrown. For the scoop visit [theembassy.love](http://theembassy.love).

It is possible Duluth and Superior will be edging toward herd immunity in May and in-person events — not technically affiliated

with Homegrown but maybe held loosely in association with Homegrown — could occur. We encourage everyone to lower their expectations that the usual crowds of people who attend Homegrown events will be permitted in such numbers at those shows.

It bears emphasizing again that all of the information here is just a best attempt at guessing what might happen during Homegrown week. With that in mind, below is a loosey goosey schedule.



**Tuesday, May 4**

**7pm Homegrown Music Video Showcase**  
Some amount of music videos — perhaps new or perhaps from the past — are pretty likely to be assembled and posted to YouTube.

**8pm Crunchy Bunch / Embassy DJ Stream**  
Our spiritual leaders at the Embassy are planning a livestream from their harborside headquarters, which will include sets by a variety of local DJs. The Crunchy Bunch, remotely connected from a separate location, will fill in the gaps with more music and take calls from the community between Embassy acts.

**Wednesday, May 5**

**6pm Bent Paddle Special Beer Release**  
We might not have the date or time right, but we know Bent Paddle Brewing is releasing a beer called Chicken Scratch. Those who purchase a crowler or growler will receive a free Homegrown Music Festival patch.

**7pm Homegrown on YouTube**  
The full force of online music begins with a curated collection of local musicians performing a single piece of pre-recorded music on YouTube.

**Thursday, May 6**

**7pm Homegrown on YouTube**  
More carefully arranged music to watch while spilling food and drinks on the couch.

**Friday, May 7**

**7pm Homegrown on YouTube**  
Another installment of online musical goods.

**Saturday, May 8**

**6pm Duluth Superior Symphony Orchestra**  
The DSSO closes out its season with *From Beethoven to Milhaud*, performing works by Milad Yousufi, Mozart, Osvaldo Golijov, Darius Milhaud and Beethoven. Visit [dssso.com](http://dssso.com) for information on how to stream the concert at home.

**Sunday, May 9**

**4pm Scavenger Hunt Concludes**  
Watch the event Facebook page for the announcement of the winning team, and scroll through the discussion to see the ridiculousness of the week's tasks.

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# ★ Transformations

★ By Paul Lundgren

Four artists who changed direction during the pandemic

The tradition of holding the Homegrown Music Festival during the first week of May is connected to the birthday of its founder, but it also coincides with a significant time in the seasonal cycle of Duluth. Winter drags into April, and the muddy month of May teases summer warmth but mostly brings foggy sleet storms. When the flock of restless artists finally breaks the monotony and lets new expressions out, stir crazy audiences are ready to eat it up.

That yearning was largely put on hold in 2020, and remains on hold in 2021. Many of Duluth's bands haven't practiced together in a year. What passes for live music during COVID-19 are limited-attendance, keep-your-distance, muzzle-your-face affairs and stay-at-home YouTube sessions.

Though the passion to perform has been largely curtailed by the precautions of the pandemic, the creative process has continued to flourish among many artists. Instead of mourning lost gigs, they got to work reinventing their musical personas, writing new songs and recording albums in preparation for the end of our collective seclusion.

## ★ Lyla Abukhodair

At the start of 2020, Lyla Abukhodair was a member of the six-piece folk band NorShore Summit. The group put out a 16-track double album, *Blue Jay*, prior to the 2019 Homegrown and had been performing extensively on the heels of the release.

"A couple shows a week, and practicing every week," Abukhodair said. "Once the pandemic kind of hit, we weren't meeting a lot. A few of the bandmates moved to Minneapolis, so we ultimately decided that's not gonna work out."

The end of the band and the start of the pandemic made the decision to go solo pretty easy for Abukhodair.

"I decided I have so much music, I really need to do a solo thing," she said. "I've always wanted to do it. I love songwriting. It's kind of what keeps me sane."

Work on her solo record, however, would come after a summer of performances. The schedule could be considered fairly light by pre-pandemic standards, but Abukhodair probably spent more time on stage last summer than 90 percent of Duluth artists.

It started when sound engineer Tom Fabjance, who had recorded the NorShore Summit album a year earlier, reached out to her about performing an outdoor residency in July on the festival grounds between the Cedar Lounge and Earth Rider Brewery in Superior.

"I was really excited about that opportunity," she said. "I'm someone who is used to playing, you know, with a big group of people. That's kind of my social time."

It should be noted, though, that Abukhodair is seldom solo when she plays "solo." George Pooks Radosevich often accompanies her on cajon to

"add a little more oomph," she said.

More opportunities to perform outside followed, including a show on the pier at Glensheen Mansion in August. Though the grounds at the historic Congdon estate are fairly expansive, that performance might have

instead of roaming around.

"At Concerts on the Pier, there were some moments that were like, you know, you have to remind yourself to keep that distance, because someone else isn't going to do that. It was busier and people were kind of exploring the grounds."



Top: Lyla Abukhodair, center, performs with Ingeborg von Agassiz and Gavin St. Clair at Hammarlund Nursery in August. (Photo by Jesse Angell of Magic City Visuals)  
Bottom: Abukhodair, in fall 2020. (Photo by Carlino Creative)

come the closest to violating the nebulous six-foot physical distancing guideline.

"At Glensheen, people are walking around more and not sitting," she said, noting the raised stage at Earth Rider put her more at ease, along with how more people were seated

The next day she performed a "sold out" show at Hammarlund Nursery, a landscaping business in Esko. Tickets were limited to 20 people.

Then came the livestreams. First, a Dinner Music show in Richard Narum's living room, a space also known as 2104.

The year ended with a Rent Party Live show in December at Zeitgeist Teatro, streamed by Joe Olivieri of Wherehouse Productions.

Transitioning from a job advocating for victims of domestic violence into work as a preschool teacher, Abukhodair perhaps had more potential exposure to coronavirus during day jobs than as a musician. After her second COVID-19 vaccination in February, she said she was grateful to have avoided any serious illness, though the shot made her briefly sick.

"I had a fever for about three days, pretty low achy nausea, but it got better," she said.

Abukhodair plans to release her debut solo album in the spring, supported by an Emergency Working Artist Grant from the Arrowhead Region-

al Arts Council. When interviewed for this article in February she was in the process of recording in Adam Herman's home studio.

"I kind of want a really intimate, raw sound," she said of the upcoming release, titled *Scream*. She hopes when the album is ready, live performances will be safer and more open for audiences.

"I'm definitely missing just meeting new people through music," she said, noting she particularly misses going out to shows at places like Blush.

"There's no way you could do it during COVID," she said of attending shows at the small Duluth venue that's been closed throughout the pandemic. "I miss those loud punk shows. That was a really unique part of Duluth."

## ★ Cory Coffman

Before there were signs of a pandemic, Cory Coffman retired the trio he'd been playing in to focus on recording a solo album. It turned out to be his best option, because the pandemic would have made it challenging to get together with his group.

But the Cuckoo Bees was far from Coffman's only band. He was a popular drummer, booked to play the doomed 2020 Homegrown with Red Mountain, the Owls Club Big Band, Nudecolors and Sadkin.

"I'm pretty good at saying yes, so I get myself kind of a little bit too overwhelmed with bands," Coffman said, breaking into a laugh. "I think there's a shortage of drummers in Duluth."

His freelance work went beyond the rock scene, includ-

ing classical percussion work, a few years with Randy Lee's Big Time Jazz Orchestra and a role in the house band for the live-performance radio/podcast show *Take it with You*.

"I just really enjoyed getting involved in every sort of performance situation that I could," he said. "It was fun, so it just kind of had me all over the place."

Coffman's first canceled show was part of the Ides of March Bacchanalia Festival, a multi-night showcase of Duluth musicians who form one-time cover bands and play the music of a well-known artist. He would have drummed with Nyssa June and the Highway Kings, performing the music of country artist Nikki Lane. The show had been scheduled for the Saturday before St. Patrick's Day.



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“From there everything started dropping off,” he said. “I just remember going from being very busy week to week with shows and rehearsals ... to nothing happening. I haven’t had such a wide-open schedule like that for ... I can’t even remember how long ... over a decade for sure.”

When the initial shock wore off, Coffman started to feel like slowing down could be something he enjoyed.

“Maybe I was a little too busy for my liking,” he said. “Especially, you know, having to move a drum set around all the time. Once there kind of was a break I sort of realized, like, wow, I’ve got all this free time now. It was an opportunity for me to focus on my own craft.”

Coffman has been a songwriter since his high school days playing in punk rock bands.



Cory Coffman performs during his album release livestream at Wussow's Concert Cafe in November. (Photo by Alyssa Johnson)

“I’ve always played guitar and I’ve enjoyed writing, but I’ve never really pursued it,” he said. “Partly because I just got really busy performing with so many different acts.”

Coffman’s work with the Cuckoo Bees was the beginning of his move from the back of the

stage to the front.

“That was, like, my tiptoeing into it,” he said. “I’m continuing to gain confidence with performing on guitar and being the singer and the focus of attention.”

The opportunities to gain stage experience as a solo perform-

er were interrupted by the pandemic, but the chance to hunker down at home and work on songs was something he embraced.

“Once the whole shutdown took place and I was in a good spot to actually put some time and energy into my own stuff, I



didn't waste time at all," Coffman said. "I jumped right into recording ... I kind of just got to work and did it all right out of my apartment. I made the most of it rather than sit here and be, you know, upset that everything is stopped. I focused on getting other things done and creating the foundation for this whole solo career that I want to give a shot."



**Top:** Diona Johnson launched her new stage persona, AfroGeode, in July. (Photo by Diona Johnson)

**Bottom:** Johnson, left, made her performance debut as AfroGeode during "This Moment in Time," a livestream event at Sacred Heart Music Center in January. To her right is Tasha "Royalty" Lancour, who also performed. (Photo by Mark Nicklawske)



When he started working on the album, titled *Canvas and Color*, he hoped the pandemic would end in time to allow for a summer tour. As shows that were booked far in advance were slowly canceled, Coffman put off the album release until November. Since then he's primarily used music videos to promote it, but there have been a few performances.

In May, Coffman was one of the first musicians to play a "Dinner Music" show at 2104. It was his first livestream.

"That was really a fun time," he said. "Rich (Narum) has kind of become sort of the leader as far as the livestream thing around here goes. The invite to do it came with all the precautions. They were following every sort of safety measure that could be done, so I wasn't worried about it."

Narum was also behind the camera for Coffman's album release livestream in November, shot at Wussow's Concert Cafe. Also there, along with Jason and Tina Wussow, who were working the soundboard and handling drive-through coffee-shop customers, was Coffman's girlfriend Alyssa Johnson, who was reading Facebook comments that came in. That brought the total attendance to four — the largest crowd Coffman performed in front of during the first year of the pandemic.

"It's a little bit awkward performing to just ... kind of a quiet emptiness," Coffman said of playing livestream shows. "You really realize how much you feed off of a live audience."

Coffman is already working on his second solo album, titled *Wilting Point*. He said the

mixing and mastering should be done by April, but the release might wait until touring can happen. He's optimistically looking for a travel van for post-pandemic album-release adventures.

## ★ Diona Johnson

One year ago, Diona Johnson was poised to perform at Homegrown with the vocal quartet Me-n-Her. The scheduled slot carried some ceremonial significance; the group would have followed the mayoral proclamation that essentially launches the festival.

"That would have been monumental in the respect that it was an all-women group," Johnson said. "All of us are Black. I'm pretty sure that would have made Homegrown history. Not being able to have had that opportunity was obviously kind of a bummer."

Other opportunities were on the horizon, however, and as the pandemic set in Johnson started developing a new musical identity: AfroGeode.

"The closing down of things and the canceling of in-person shows kind of gave me an opportunity to sort of turn inward and begin focusing on my own independent content," she said. "So I think it was both a blessing and also, you know, a disappointment that things were canceled."

Johnson had been involved in planning events surrounding the centennial of the 1920 lynching of three Black circus workers in Duluth. The Clayton Jackson McGhie Memorial Committee was hoping to ask for more than 10,000 community members and visitors to join in

honoring Elias Clayton, Elmer Jackson and Isaac McGhie at the intersection where they were lynched by a mob. Instead, the pandemic pushed observations online.

"I probably would have had some slated performances there," Johnson said. She did sing in front of a large crowd on the Duluth Civic Center grounds during a Juneteenth event that served as a celebration of Black life and a peaceful protest for George Floyd, who had been killed by Minneapolis police officers the previous month.

Before all that, Johnson had a breakout performance in a music video project spearheaded by Daniel and Sandra Oyinloye of DanSan Creatives. Appearing as "Di Jay," Johnson raps on a segment of the 13-minute track "Own Mine," which combined the talents of several Duluth-area artists.

Working with Daniel "Seyi" Oyinloye's musical vision for the song, Johnson wrote lyrics for her segment.

"Daniel and Sandra both find a way of bringing all those components together," she said. "We really end up working well together and all have a pretty common vision for how we want things to turn out. I just trust Daniel and Sandra with everything."

Another DanSan project in summer 2020 featured Johnson singing with a variety of local artists to encourage Duluthians to complete the 2020 U.S. Census form. "Let it Shine," was composed by Charles Obije based on the century-old gospel song "This Little Light of Mine."

The release of "Let it Shine" came just a few days after Johnson announced the new artistic persona she had been conceptualizing for months, AfroGeode.

"My big thing is that I'm multidimensional in how I present," she said. "That could be in band form. That could be an individual performance. It can be on stage at the NorShor Theatre, or it can be, you know, someday in the future with a full band in the middle of the mountains. It's an identity, but it's also a way for me to maintain flexibility."

That flexibility includes theatrical performances. Johnson was a writer and actor in the Duluth Playhouse's online Hallow-

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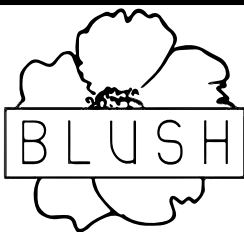
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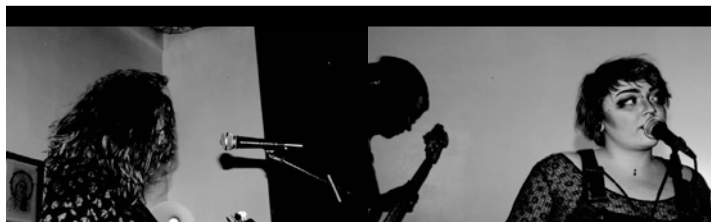


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een production *Tales from the Ghost Light* and sang in the Valentine's weekend online musical performance *From Broadway with Love*.

Between those gigs came the AfroGeode performance debut during DanSan Creatives' "This Moment in Time" livestream at Sacred Heart Music Center in January.

Sacred Heart was also the location where the first AfroGeode single, "Unprotected Woman," was recorded with sound engineer Eric Swanson. Jeremy "JayGee" Gardner did the mixing and mastering.

A grant from the Minnesota State Arts Board is funding AfroGeode's debut EP, planned for release later in 2021. A music video is also in the works.

"I'd like to be able to celebrate that ... throw a big show in the community," Johnson said. "Obviously we have to sort of restrict that and make sure it's safe."

Johnson said she's mostly been working on her music at home, maintaining safe practices during the pandemic, but she misses the experiences that come with live performance and the comradery of Duluth's arts scene.

"We have some of the best and coolest creators here," she said. "There have also been amazing performers who have lived here and moved on. People know Bayfront, they know Barker's Island, they know the venues here that typically come alive when live music is here."

The connections made at those events might be what Johnson misses most.

"It can be really isolating to think about sometimes, be-

cause everybody that I have made friends with in this town I've met at some kind of show or event," she said. "It's been really difficult to have those options taken away for socializing and for creating. You get a lot of creative ideas about how you want to perform or who you want to collaborate with."

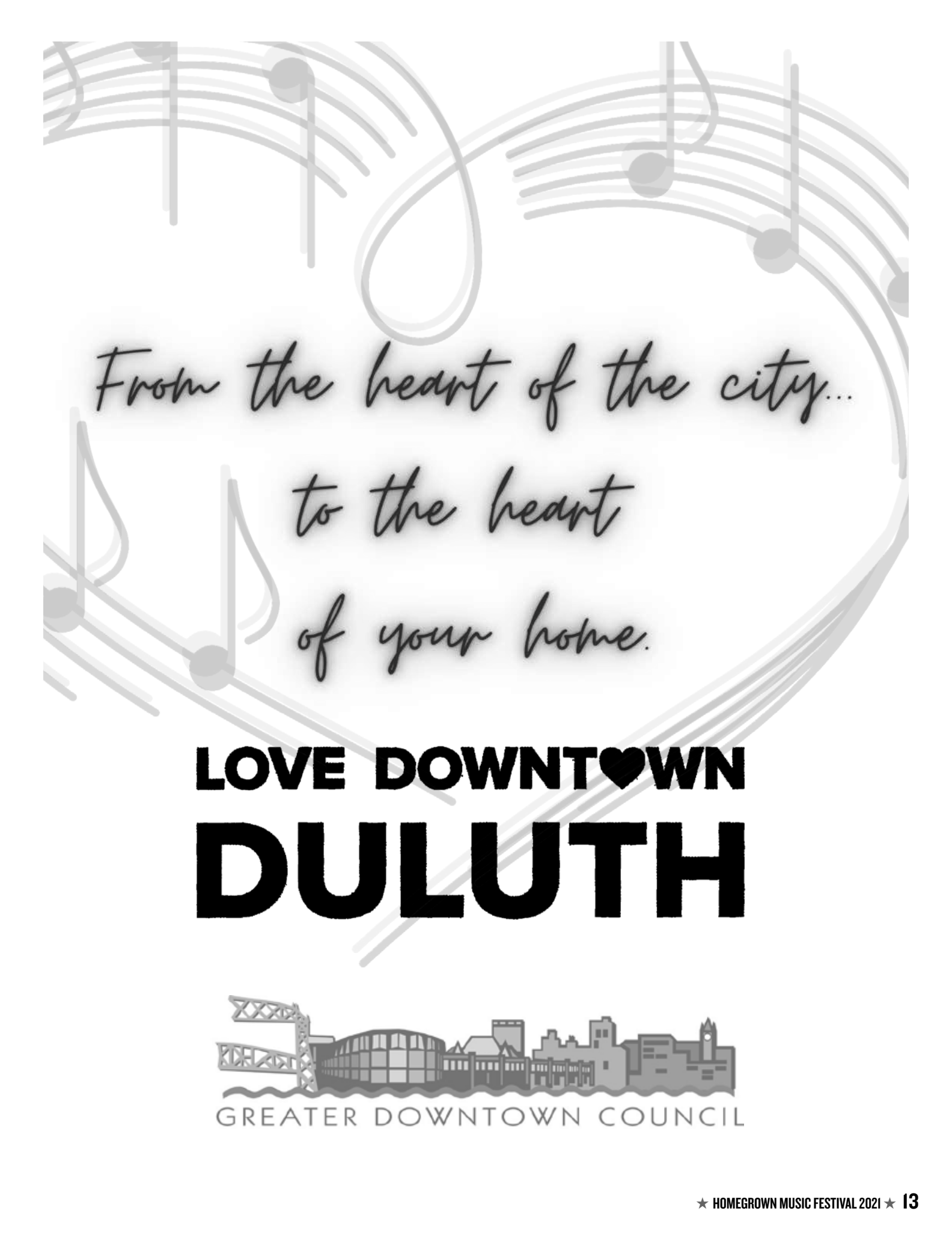
One collaboration that will show up on the AfroGeode EP is with Lauren Cooper of the band One Less Guest, who plays violin and sings the chorus on the song "Just Be."

"I wouldn't have known that I wanted to collaborate with Ren if I hadn't heard her for the first time at the Spirit Room and been completely enamored with her voice," Johnson said. "It's just, like, those moments where you can make those connections. Sending somebody a message and asking if they want to do something is not the same as walking up to them at the end of the show and shaking their hand or asking for a hug and telling them they did an amazing job and offering information about yourself and making those initial like, you know, intentions to collaborate."

Like each of the artists profiled in this article, Johnson continues to prepare music for the day when she can share it on stage and in person.

"I have a lot of hope and excitement in my heart for music to return in its gradual stages," she said. "I believe it's going to be a gradual return. I just want everybody to stay safe so that we all can be together again. And to all the other



A decorative background featuring a musical staff with various notes and a large heart shape formed by the staff lines. The text is centered within the heart.

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musicians: I see you, I hear you, I honor the resiliency that you have had this past year.”

## ★ Sarah Krueger

At the same time Johnson was developing the AfroGede persona, Sarah Krueger was working on a creative project called Lanue. She had been on a bit of a hiatus from music, having not released a full-length album since 2014’s *Lustrous*.

Collaborating with a variety of musician friends during sessions at Hive studio in her hometown of Eau Claire, Krueger finished her new album in early 2020, then sat on it.

“When the pandemic hit I just kind of put everything on hold because I wasn’t sure what the best move was,” she said. “Thinking about the rollout and the release and all of that, I really felt like it had been so long since I released music, and I was really feeling like I was in a completely different place creatively.”

That “different place” led her away from branding the new release as a Sarah Krueger album. She felt the songs were disconnected from her previous work.

“I wanted some fresh ground to stand on creatively,” she said. “I decided that it felt a little different in terms of the sound and the feel of the record. So I made the decision, I guess kind of during quarantine, to release it under Lanue.”

Krueger said the name comes from a poem by Alan Seeger, an American writer who moved to Paris and died serving in the French Foreign Legion during World War I.



Sarah Krueger during shooting for the Lanue video “What I Love the Most” last summer. (Image by Zoe Prinds-Flash)

“I have this habit when I’m in thrift stores and antique stores of taking books home with me,” Krueger said. One of those books is a collection of Seeger poems that has stayed with her through multiple moves. She said a poem titled “La Nue” resonated with her.

---

**“I really liked the idea of a text changing over time, and having different meaning over time.”**

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“I always thought it was really beautiful,” she said, “but the meaning of it — what I thought it was about — changed over the years ... I really liked the idea of a text changing over time, and having different meaning over time. I like the title of the poem and so that’s what I landed on for the project title.”

The term “project title” might be confusing to music fans who are accustomed to seeing an artist name and album title on a record; Lanue is sort of both and neither.

“It’s not a band called Lanue. I don’t call myself Lanue. It’s more of a creative project that kind of allows some space for me to not pigeonhole myself into a certain genre or into my past work,” Krueger explained. “It’s kind of like a creative umbrella.”

Krueger’s music has transformed in recent years into something representing a mood — a warm day, a breeze, a beach, a garden. Those elements show up quite literally in her music videos.

“I’m a really visual person when it comes to music and I like the idea of being able to mix a lot of different creative mediums and sort of let Lanue serve as that vessel for getting those out into the world,” she said. “It’s like a way to kind of synthesize all of the creative things that I like to dabble in and put it all together

into a project.

The video for the debut Lanue track, “What I Love the Most,” was shot and directed last summer by Zoe Prinds-Flash and edited by Lauren Josephine. The second video, “September,” Krueger made herself.

“I’ve been looking forward to playing around with that more, because I don’t get that excited about live streaming,” she said. “I like the idea of connecting music through visual mediums, so I’ve been playing around with making music videos.”

In “September,” Krueger weaves half-century-old public domain footage with her own, “letting them just kind of be weird together and play off each other and make new meaning out of those completely separate texts,” she said. “I think that’s a really fun way to explore visuals that can go along with a song. So that’s been fun.”

More recording could be in the works soon for Krueger, perhaps resulting in another Lanue album.

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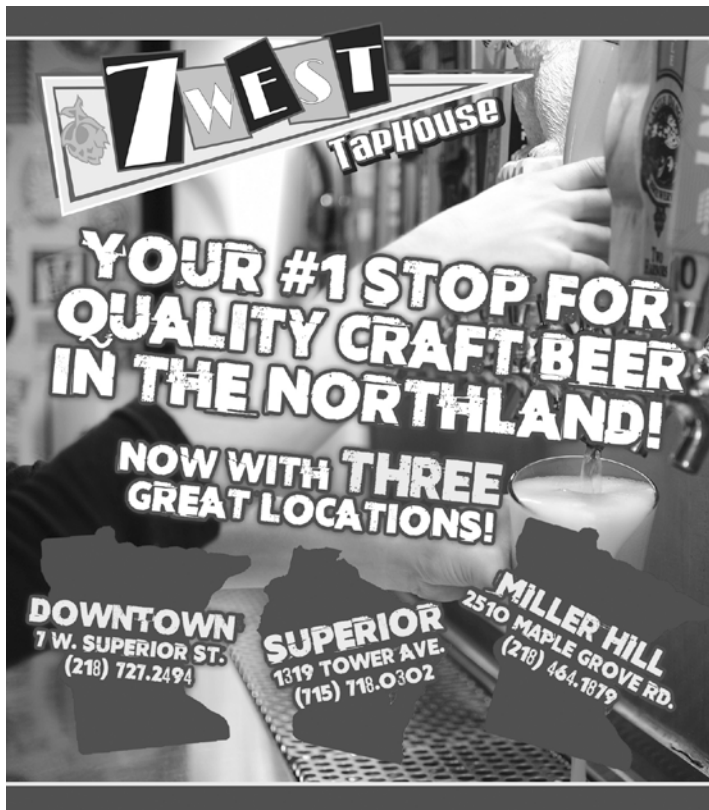
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“As long as I’m still feeling connected to the fact that this project is Lanue, then that’s what I’ll release music under,” she said. “During the pandemic I’ve been able to focus on the fact that I like recording music. I like writing and I want to release work more often. In the past I was teaching full time and had all this other stuff going on. And it’s just got in the way of my creative endeavors.”

In addition to leaving the teaching profession a few years ago, Krueger is on an extended break from working as a server at Grandma’s Saloon & Grill, where she was employed for more than a decade.

“I’ll probably go back to serving once it feels a little safer,” she said. “I like to do that a couple nights a week. I miss waiting tables, which is weird.”

Krueger also sells vintage clothing and makes jewelry, promoted online as the Ochre Stone. The distinctions between careers and side hustles get blurry; what’s important to her is music and fashion both feel like creative projects.

“Once I quit my teaching career and decided I didn’t want to do that anymore, that’s when I started recording this record and working on those songs,” she said. “And I just had this space open up. It was so nice and I feel like I want to take advantage of that moving forward. Because I have a lot of flexibility in my life right now.”

Whether she has one new record to promote or two, she’ll keep waiting for the right moment to get back into performing.

“I am not planning on anything in terms of live in-person,” she said. “What I am planning on is using this time to write and record more. By the time I feel like it’ll be safe to share it in per-

son, yeah, I’ll probably have another record, and that’s OK. At first I was sort of mourning that and I dragged my feet thinking about releasing this record because I was just like, ‘oh, it just feels like such an icky time to do that and makes me feel sad.’ I can’t let that be something that’s limiting me creatively. So when it feels safe and good to plan something I would love to have a room full of people and be playing music, but it’s probably not going to be for this record.”

Still, Krueger said she’s been reflecting on the music scene in general and how she might have taken it for granted as a performer and an audience member.

“Moving forward, I feel like I will not just sink into a show and let it be running in the background as this thing that’s just like a basic right to all of us,” she said. “I really feel way more appreciative of the energy behind seeing live music. I’ve missed that so much, and when it was normal to be able to just be out and about seeing shows all the time, I really took it for granted ... even though I thought I recognized the special thing we had, I really took live music for granted.”

Perhaps all of Duluth’s artists feel that same sense of gratitude and loss. Though the celebrations have been muted, the music survives.

“It feels like when you have time for reflection, even if it’s stressful and a fucking pandemic and it’s terrible, there can be big shifts that happen creatively,” Krueger said. “I think that’s kind of cool.” ★





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# ★ Outdoors and on Screens

★ By Mike Creger

Music venues adapt and change due to COVID-19

Nobody knows how music fans will gather after more than a year of being mostly shut out of live events. There are theories, marked mostly by hope. There are beliefs in the strength of the Twin Ports scene surviving the COVID-19 pandemic, shrouded in that lingering unknown, the weirdness of the worldwide calamity.

Masterminds behind some of the Twin Ports' venerable music spaces are certainly hedging their bets. One thing they can agree on is that 2020 marked their businesses permanently, and adaptation will have to win the day.

At Earth Rider Brewery, the field between it and the Cedar Lounge taproom has served as a music festival space that is expected to increase its concert dates dramatically in the next year.

Venues such as Wussow's Concert Cafe and Sacred Heart Music Center are banking on improved online production of in-house music.

And small but dutifully attended places like Sir Benedict's Tavern on the Lake and Blush, whose identities are wrapped in the constant thrum of live music, are simply hoping that minds can adjust post-pandemic to be comfortable cramming shoulder-to-shoulder again to hear that music.

## ★ Outdoor Vibe

Tim Nelson burst into craft brewing in Duluth two decades before it became the many-pointed star of the scene. Brad Nelson is a founder of the Rip-

saw newspaper, which documented the local arts scene from 1999 to 2005. The brothers were instrumental in fostering the Homegrown Music Festival as it got its legs and became the monster it is today. In more recent years, they've been in the craft beer and music business in Superior.

Earth Rider Brewery's business plan included slowly creating a small festival-type outdoor



Earth Rider Brewery added a large, heated tent to its festival grounds last fall, extending its outdoor concert season to the end of November. (Photo via Earth Rider Brewery)

venue to fill a niche in the Twin Ports music scene, Brad said. COVID sped things up.

"I hate to say there's a positive to COVID," Brad said sheepishly. "But it was a push to create an outdoor venue."

Playing and promoting events across the country showed the pair that there could be an audience for small-tent shows in the Twin Ports, the brothers said.

"It just seemed a niche wasn't being filled for the smaller outdoor venue where you didn't have to have 10,000, 12,000 people to make the numbers work," Brad said.

Earth Rider wants to serve up acts that have strong follow-

ings but can't support a venue like Bayfront Festival Park. Its grounds can host 1,500 comfortably, Brad said. Last year brought more permanence to the site, most notably with a permanent stage.

Tim Nelson opened Earth Rider in 2017 in the railyard and warehouse area of north Superior. The Cedar Lounge eventually came along, mimicking the vibe of the Fitger's Brewhouse

Tim co-founded in 1995. Brad, in a similar role he later had at Fitger's, heads the marketing for Earth Rider.

And they are musicians, so live music has always been in the business plan.

In the past few years, use of the open space between the brewery and lounge has increased with music events.

The risk of COVID was much less outdoors last summer, so it was natural to step up with outdoor music. The pandemic just served to speed up original plans, Brad said.

"I think a lot of us as music consumers started to realize it was pretty fun in the summertime to

just stay outside. It's kind of a bummer to step into a dark and dingy bar when the sun is still shining."

Pandemic protocols were all new a year ago, and the Nelsons said they took every precaution to keep people safe when they invited customers to the grounds in June. The lounge had been closed from last March until Feb. 1.

"We were really careful," Tim said of the decision to have an outdoor option. "Especially with staff. Customers can take their own risks but staff don't have that luxury."

They made it through a busy summer schedule without one health issue traced back to events at Earth Rider.

"We treated it like there was a virus around every day," Tim said. "Were we nervous the whole time? Yeah. Were we confident we were doing everything we could? Yeah. Is it a calculated risk? Yeah, it is. Would it have been ideal to not be open at all? Sure. Can we afford to do that? No."

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"It's like skiing down a mountain," Brad said. "There's a certain amount of calculated risk we all take to enjoy life."

"This town is in large part built on rock and roll," Brad said. Earth Rider wanted to keep that audience fed. "We were really happy to step in and keep that role going."

Customers told the Nelsons that they felt comfortable attending shows there, Tim said. For some it was a first venture into the public since the pandemic began. "People were going pretty nuts last summer."

The success of the outdoor shows has the pair confident about bigger and better things in 2021. They're all in. Long-time engineer, producer and local and national band wrangler Tom Fabjance was brought in last summer to increase the capacity and efficiencies at the

grounds and secure acts that would make the outdoor concerts feasible on the business end.

"That really opened some doors in terms of just doing more than we've ever done," Brad said.

Fabjance said the venue is prepping for events to start in mid-April. There aren't a lot of major touring bookings going on until 2022, he said, meaning there will be musicians available who usually might not be.

"I think people will come out," Fabjance said. "People are emotionally warming up to the idea (of live music), especially when things warm up."

As COVID fear ebbs with vaccinations, bookings will go up, he said. "I don't want to do too much, too big, too soon. We'll just ease into it and see what

the comfort level is."

Live shows online are one thing, Brad said. "I just think live music needs to be experienced with others. It's awesome, just the way sound works, feeling the music through a big system where it hits you in the chest.

"Hopefully it will be an awesome summer for outside shows."

Tim shares the optimism.

"I think the psychology is that people are really pent up. The Roaring '20s came after the flu pandemic of 1918. I think people are going to be ready to party. They're sick of this. They're going to feel so blessed to be together."

"I think outdoor shows will be one of the (pandemic) hold-overs," Brad said. "I think people will say hey, it's pretty nice to be outside. Let's do that

more often."

## ★ Indoor Idling

Earth Rider, of course, has the benefit of space, and brewing your own beer doesn't hurt the bottom line, either.

In Duluth's Lincoln Park Craft District, the beer and cider brewers like Bent Paddle and Ursa Minor can take advantage of the wider spaces there for outdoor music.

Some venues just don't have that luxury.

Sir Ben's on Superior Street has a hopping patio with a classic view of Lake Superior during warmer weather. That, and online ordering, helped to keep at least a semblance of drinkers and eaters coming in the past year, owner Josh Stotts said. But the back-and-forth of forced closings, and "very little opportunity" to prop-



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erly distance people inside has had an “emotional toll” on staff and musicians, he said.

The Sir Ben’s calling card for decades has been music from its stage seven days a week.

Stotts, who has owned the venue since 2015, said every time he sees a show from the past online, or talks to someone about how things were in normal times, he gets emotional.

“It sucks,” he said. “Music is part of our business.”

There were plans while the bar could be open to build a “music box” on the tiny stage inside to shield musicians from customers. But the forced shutdown in the fall put an end to the idea, as specious as it was, Stotts said.

Sir Ben’s is intimate by nature, he said. It’s where strangers share the big round tables in



A crowd at Sir Ben’s takes in music during a past Homegrown. (Photo by Matthew Moses)

front of the stage. It’s where you go shoulder to shoulder to get a beer or get to the bathroom.

It’s the type of place Stotts is praying people will feel com-

fortable going back to.

“The staff here is talking about the end (of the pandemic) and maybe getting back by this summer,” he said. “I’m leaning

toward the fall.”

Musicians have asked about playing on the patio to the tables with individual heaters, or playing on the roof. A reminder

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of cold realities brought them to reconsider. Some younger players have offered to strum inside, with no singing to avoid any possible COVID projections.

Stotts said he's staying loyal to the base of musicians Sir Ben's has had over the years. Many of them are older and understandably cautious about going out with COVID still lurking.

It's a mixed bag on how people feel about returning to the status quo, Stotts said. "Will they come back to a small, packed place? Will people just blow the doors off (post-pandemic)? I don't think anybody knows."

Stotts will ramp things up depending on where the pandemic leads.

"We have to feel it's the right time," he said. "We don't want

to be in the news as a COVID hotspot."

It's tough, he said, because Sir Ben's has prided itself on a feeling of "welcoming people into your home." Now real fears have loyal customers rethinking things.

"If there were no rules, it'd be nice," he said. "We miss having live music."

He hears from customers daily about how much they miss the old vibe.

"We haven't lost our identity," Stotts said. "Just some wind out of our sails."

### ★ In Wait

Relevant newcomer Blush, a micro-space cooperative operation on First Avenue West in Downtown Duluth, missed hosting a third birthday bash last August. It really hasn't had anything going on for the entire year. It gained traction in its first three years in supporting smaller touring acts and local artists.

"We're doing all right," co-owner Mike Preston said. "We should be fine."

Some grants have helped keep the dormant business alive. Preston said the goal is to have a "grand re-opening" for its fourth

anniversary in August.

### ★ The Church

Sacred Heart Music Center is smarter for the pandemic, board member Mark Nicklawske said. It has joined a state network of pandemic-affected venues, led by First Avenue in Minneapolis, that could lead to more cooperation when it comes to drawing touring acts — in the future, of course. For now, the place known for its acoustics is focusing on live streams of shows, and getting better at it.

Most in-person activity — concerts, classes and recording — at Sacred Heart is at a standstill.

It survives, as it has in the past, on the kindness of volunteers. Rich Narum, known for producing live shows and streaming them from his East Superior Street home, has included Sacred Heart in his rounds to get venues up and running with audio and visual moxie, Nicklawske said, in order to generate live streams.

"We wanted to remain relevant," Nicklawske said. But the former Catholic church had a dicey internet connection it was borrowing from a neighbor.

The sound was there, he said, but anyone who wanted to do a live stream had to bring in their own equipment that had to be massaged by renowned in-house sound engineer Eric Swanson.

"The space itself is a studio," Nicklawske said. But it needed a better connection and permanent equipment.

There is now a dedicated YouTube channel and grants are coming in to keep things active. Sacred Heart has almost ex-

clusively featured acts that can best take advantage of the acoustics offered by the high ceilings and big space there. Rock and roll bounces off the walls and is annoying to a live audience, Nicklawske said. With the new technology, rock acts can play there and the sound for a live stream sounds fine, he said.

The National Independent Venue Association created a separate nonprofit foundation last year to focus on fundraising "through individual, corporate and foundation donations" to "save music venues, as well as support entertainment industry workers and artists."

The Save Our Stages initiative will bring federal COVID-19 relief funds to venues and artists.

A Minnesota chapter has formed, MIVA, and Nicklawske and the board that runs Sacred Heart saw an opportunity to be part of a larger stage.

"I wanted to get Duluth on the list," he said. "We want to make connections and get more acts here with those connections."

And getting people into Sacred Heart to play a show usually means they will come back, he said. It's the beauty of the sound there, the vibe.

"I hope that's something positive that comes out of the pandemic."

A little outside help can't hurt, Nicklawske said.

The love for Sacred Heart was shown in late January when two other venues teamed with it for a fundraising concert on YouTube. About \$20,000 was collected from streamed concerts at Sacred Heart, Ursa Minor Brewing and Wussow's Concert Cafe. The event was



Charlie Parr performed a livestream concert at Sacred Heart Music Center on Dec. 12. (Photo by Michael K. Anderson)



Chris LeBlanc of the Crunchy Bunch DJ collective, and Daniel Benoit from Tall Rocks Design, performed for livestream cameras at Sacred Heart Music Center on Halloween night. (Photo by Mark Nicklawske)

also a kickoff for Urša's new sour beer, with proceeds from its sale going to Sacred Heart.

"We are grateful to the community," Nicklawske said. "People have spoken up with donations, money and expertise. The board appreciates that. Hopefully it's just a few months

and we can get people back in."

### ★ Changing Tide

Jason Wussow is a whirl of emotion regarding the massive pandemic changes in a life defined by music. He's gone from a touring artist, as well as booking and managing guru for

his Wussow's Concert Cafe, to basic frontline work.

"I went from maybe one shift a week at the café to now, up at 5:30 a.m., five days a week, making muffins."

The pandemic and slowing of traffic at the café meant paring down a staff of 20 to six or eight. He hasn't seen numbers like that since the café opened in 2002.

"I feel like I'm starting over. It's been an interesting reset," Wussow said. He's worked with advice from other venues, like Sir Ben's, in stepping up the online ordering from the café.

Before COVID, he relied on touring with his band Woodblind to pay personal bills, heading out for as many as 180 shows a year.

"Touring is a haul," he said, and he sounds a little relieved to take a pause, forced or not.

His parents and in-laws are getting older, and getting back into a more exclusive restaurant role fits for the time being.

"It's family stuff now," he said. "It's good to stay closer to home. Maybe we all grow smart out of this."

Not that the music is going anywhere. Despite all the pandemic upset, he said he still feels an obligation to the community.

Wussow's put on a half-dozen shows outdoors last summer by borrowing the parking lot next to the café. It's something Wussow called "scary fun" in the setup and trying to make it work financially. In the end, he just can't do it on a regular basis.

"We have this great sound system inside," he said. "Outdoors, it's on the fly." And it's tricky, he said, to gauge the

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investment right now without knowing if people will show up. So he's putting his energies into stepping up the recording capabilities inside, for live streams and video, until things get back to normal with live music and audiences.

The annual *One Week Live* CD recordings are likely a thing of the past. It will be a video production event now, he said.

"I know people are missing the live," Wussow said. "At least it's not dead. Art is not going to die."

There is a growing stream of inquiries about shows, he said in February. "For a while it was crickets, now it's back. There's positive energy building."

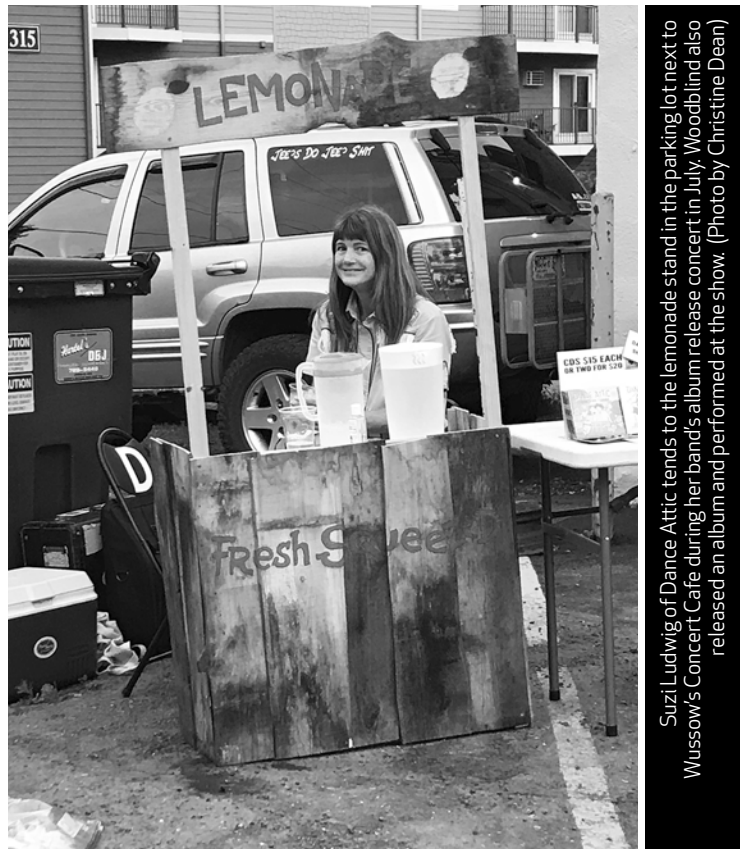
He thinks of all the first-time touring bands that have

come through the café, the open mics, the artists with work on the walls, the community around the music. He misses hosting musicians in his house.

"I hope we can get back to that," he said, admitting he still has no idea who is "clamoring to get out" and see a live show. He said he's certainly seen a lot of nostalgia for the scene in social media the past year.

He thinks things might get back to a semblance of normal by November. But he knows from his own experience that "normal" might be something unreachable. Enter psychology.

"With something so changed for so long, our basic brains have changed," he said. "Some of it has to be permanent. I've never felt more introverted. Hugs feel illegal."



Suzi Ludwig of Dance Attic tends to the lemonade stand in the parking lot next to Wussow's Concert Cafe during her band's album release concert in July. Woodblind also released an album and performed at the show. (Photo by Christine Dean)

He wonders if habits of going out will change if people realize they aren't spending money on beer and cabs. "It's a forced reset for everyone," he said. "What do you want to do with your time?" ★





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Bb C

Musical notation for the first staff of the piece. It begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (Bb). The melody starts with a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note G4, an eighth note A4, a quarter note Bb4, and a quarter note C5. A double bar line follows. The second measure contains a dotted quarter note Bb4, an eighth note A4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter note F4. The third measure contains a quarter note E4, a quarter note D4, and a quarter note C4. The staff ends with a quarter note Bb4, an eighth note A4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter note F4.

Am Dm

Musical notation for the second staff of the piece. It continues with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The melody starts with a dotted quarter note Bb4, an eighth note A4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter note F4. The second measure contains a quarter note E4, a quarter note D4, and a quarter note C4. The third measure contains a quarter note Bb4, an eighth note A4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter note F4. The fourth measure contains a quarter note E4, a quarter note D4, and a quarter note C4. The staff ends with a quarter note Bb4, an eighth note A4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter note F4.

Gm C Am Dm

Musical notation for the third staff of the piece. It continues with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The melody starts with a quarter note Bb4, an eighth note A4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter note F4. The second measure contains a quarter note E4, a quarter note D4, and a quarter note C4. The third measure contains a quarter note Bb4, an eighth note A4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter note F4. The fourth measure contains a quarter note E4, a quarter note D4, and a quarter note C4. The staff ends with a quarter note Bb4, an eighth note A4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter note F4.

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# ★ It Sucks

★ By Tony Bennett

## Recording engineers struggling in pandemic isolation

In the age of easy digital recording with free gear that would've cost thousands just a few short years ago, recording engineers are still in demand. Even though home-recorded albums are easier than ever to do, those who know the score know making a band sound good requires someone who has a track record of doing it.

In the Duluth area, there are several names that pop up often when musicians talk about recording. They're referenced by first names: Jake. Eric. Everybody knows who these people are, and it's because they're highly skilled engineers and creative artists in their own rights who can capture the electricity of a group of people in a bottle with a minimum of mucking about. And they've been

silenced during COVID-19, along with the artists they often record.

Jake Larson has been involved with so much stuff over the years, it's hard to even pick representative things to credit him with. He's engineered and mixed and mastered records for Charlie Parr and Retribution Gospel Choir and a million others. He's played in Manheat and the Social Disaster. He's busted his hump volunteering for Homegrown. If you were going to give out awards for Duluth music scenesters, you'd give Jake one for just being a god-damned Swiss Army knife of skills with a chill personality and a great laugh. As is the case with most everyone, the pandemic presented a challenge for him. Although he'd largely

backed away from doing live sound before the world went haywire, the loss of that work was tough.

"Livelihood-wise, it was nearly impossible to make a living off sound engineering alone, even before the pandemic, so what little supplemental income it did create pretty much vanished," Larson said. "Lately, the DSSO (Duluth Superior Symphony Orchestra) has figured out how to put on safe shows for very small audiences with a livestream to their website. This requires some pretty tricky engineering, so at least I've got some quality, challenging gigs."

Larson's a whiz in the recording studio, but he's been almost totally removed from that side of himself over the past year, save

for some mixing, mastering and archival projects.

"I decided to completely cut out studio sessions until the whole pandemic is over," he said. "There's a few other engineers that really need that work more than me, so it's not a big deal. I've been catching up on some legacy projects that have been back-burnered for a while. There's lots of studio work I've done in the past that never got fully finished, so there's always something that could be dug up and worked on."

Then there's the question of whether new projects will be coming around in the near future. Larson worries that artists might have suffered permanent damage to their inspiration.

"I think this pandemic has been



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devastating for creativity,” he said. “Sure, some people have figured out ways to keep being creative, but it’s been super difficult. I know also that a lot of groups haven’t been practicing. Who knows how many are going to survive until bar shows come back? It’ll be the last thing that gets back to normal.

“Studios in particular were running on razor-thin margins before,” Larson said. “The pandemic is just the latest thing trying to shut them down. That being said, I think musicians will go back to studios. The ones that are left are real destinations. The romantic idea of making the ‘real album’ in the ‘real studio’ will never go away.”

Yet Larson is still unsure what it will all mean for him in the long run.

“Maybe I’ve been pulled into something else and the music-production career is over?”

he said. “Who knows? On one level, I’ll never give it up, since making music is a compulsion, but as a livable business — at least for me, right now — it ain’t gonna happen.”

Rich Mattson runs Sparta Sound recording studio in Sparta, about 50 miles north of Duluth. He sums the past year up succinctly: “It sucks.”

In addition to his own long résumé as a singer/songwriter, Mattson has made a name for himself as an engineer on the recordings he makes for bands such as Trampled by Turtles, Dan Israel, Wolf Blood and a long list of others. It’s been tough for him to go from an always-full slate of gigs and sessions down to nothing.

“At first, everything was canceled,” he said. “Then I saw it was going to go on for over a year, so I figured out a way to have some sessions last sum-



Eric Swanson, shown here at Sacred Heart Studios working on mixing Sara Thomsen’s album *Song Like a Seed* in November 2019, is among the recording engineers who has struggled to make a living during the pandemic. (Photo by Sara Thomsen)

mer and fall. But not having people in the control room for playbacks and having windows open and masks on all the time is a drag. We got work done,

and we made good music, but it wasn’t the same loving, communal vibe we usually have around here.”

“In November, we quit having

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Michael Miller looks over the shoulder of sound engineer Rich Mattson during work on a 2016 session with the Michael Miller Project. (Photo by Dan Thorson)

anyone in the house and studio after I had a very close call," Mattson said. "I got tested and came back negative, but I was pretty damn scared. I was in close contact with a person with COVID. I am proof that masks work."

Mattson has found ways to stay active, though.

"I've managed to find projects that have gotten me through, so far — mixing, archiving, tracking guitars and bass for people," he said. "I've even done some full-band arranging completely through emails and Dropbox-ing tracks back and forth."

Watching his musician friends go without work for a year has been tough for him.

"I know several drummers who are basically full-time gamers now, and haven't played at all for the whole year," Mattson said. "It's bullshit. Bass players, too. Give these guys work, people. Prop them up. Everybody sitting home working on their sample pads, letting the computer do all the work making magical sounds: big deal. Meanwhile, your favorite drummer is on his third bag of Doritos and hasn't put on a fresh pair of pajama

pants in a month."

Like everyone, Mattson's looking forward to the future.

"I can't wait to get back into it, and I have several projects waiting in the wings," he said. "I just really would like if it could get back to how it was: high fives and good vibes, singing into the same microphone as everybody else. I hope everybody gets vaccinated as soon as possible."

Eric Swanson of Sacred Heart Music Center has a similar story to Larson and Mattson.

"I survived, but barely," he said. "The workload is off by 50 to 70 percent. Livestreaming helps, but the recording studio is cut back drastically due to the pandemic. I am semi-retired, so Social Security helps, but not enough to make a living on it."

"I did some work during the pandemic," Swanson said. "Mostly mastering and mixing — not a lot of live stuff. Musicians have cut back, at least as far as recording."

Swanson's not sure what his future workload will be, but he's hoping to jump back in with both feet.

"I am open and ready to record,"

he said. "I had my first vaccine shot and I feel good. Hit me up if you're ready to record."

Ryan Rusch has been an engineer for about 20 years. His home studio in Washburn, the Weight Room, was a longtime dream. He got it dialed in and paid off just in time for the world of recording to come to a screeching halt.

"There's an industry publication — Tape Op magazine — and in the last year, I've read that the live room is mothballed," Rusch said. "Mine was a home theater for the last year. It's just gear storage. That's not great."

"I'm lucky that I don't owe anything," Rusch said. "There was a time when it was \$1,000 a month to have the studio, and I'm past that. It doesn't cost anything to have it, right now."

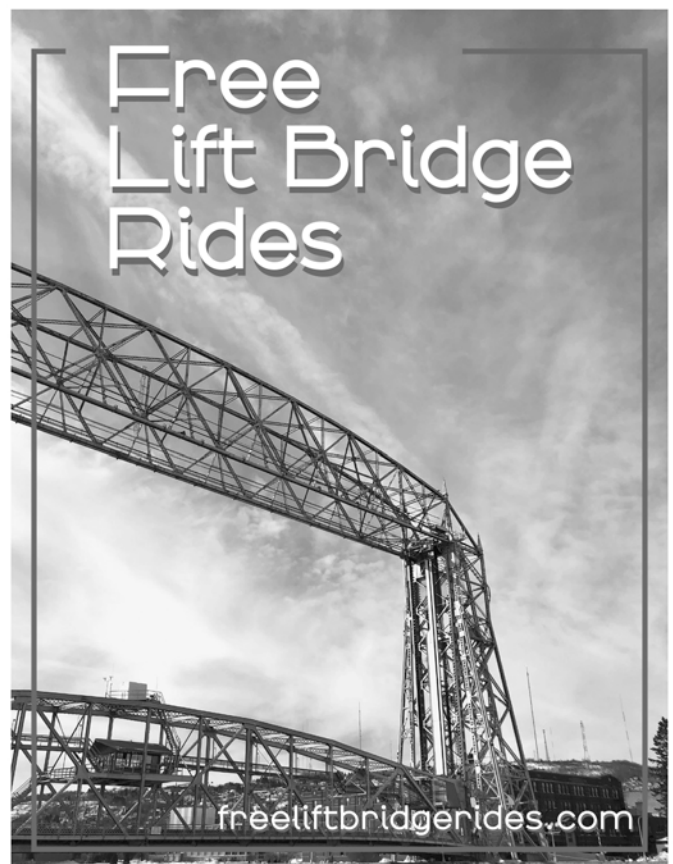
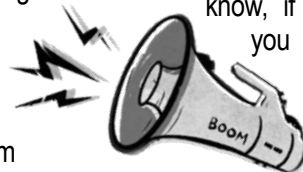
And yet, things have changed.

"It's paid off, but I'm

like, should I be selling some of it? It hasn't come to that, for me, but I did hand off a bunch of projects," Rusch said. "I'm working with bands from Minneapolis, and we're not accepting visitors, so: I'm going to get you the stems of the project, (and you can) find somebody local in Minneapolis to take it from here. I'm not trying to slow anybody's artistic output down. So I did a bunch of that. It was not fun. I was choosing these projects, and then to track them and then give them away was like, fuck, I was gonna mix that. I had ideas for it, you know."

Rusch worries, too, about whether people will be able to come back to him when the pandemic is over.

"A lot of musicians' revenue dried up," he said. "You know, if you can't tour, you can't sell shit, then you can't pay me to mix or track." ★



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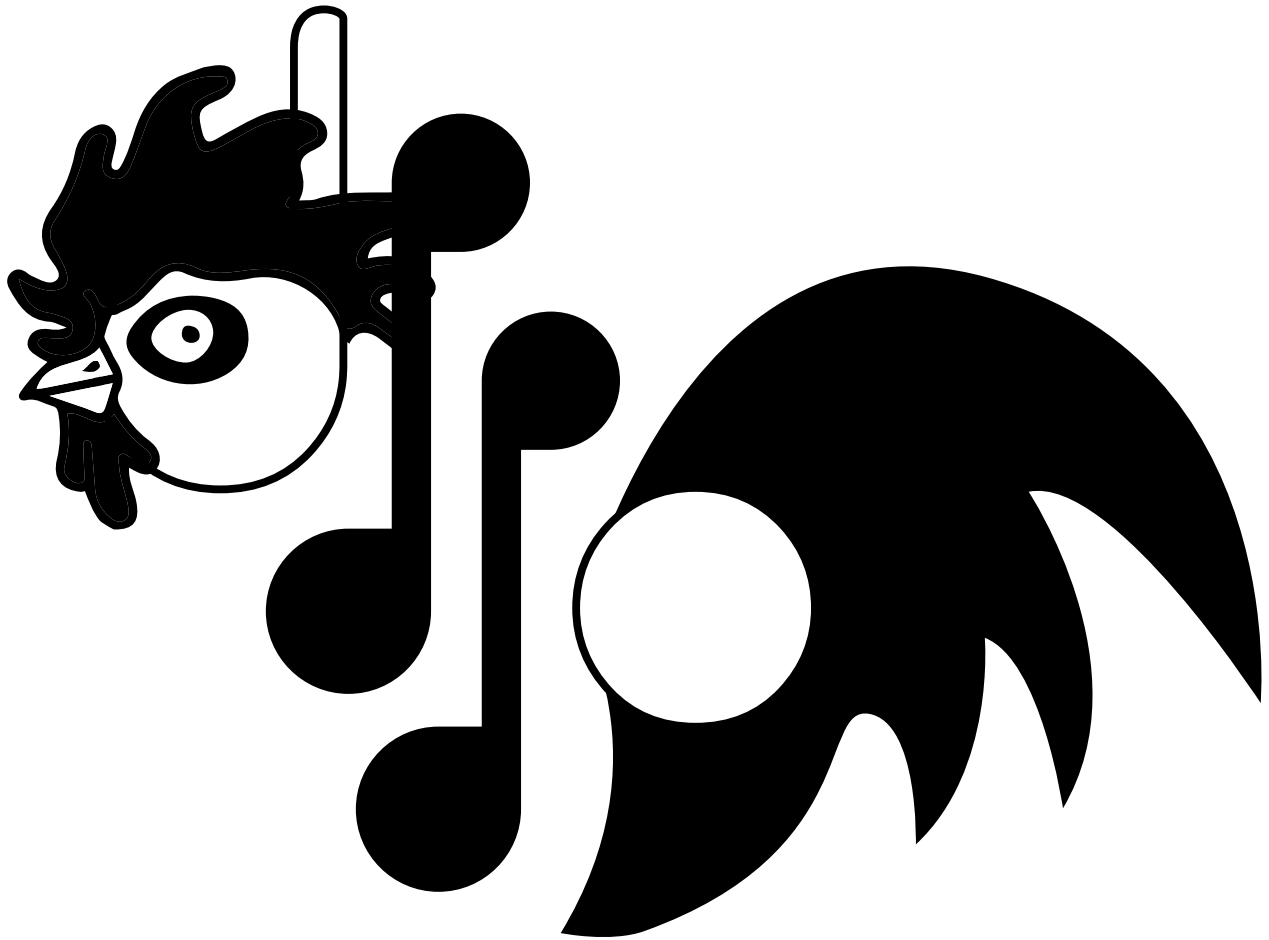
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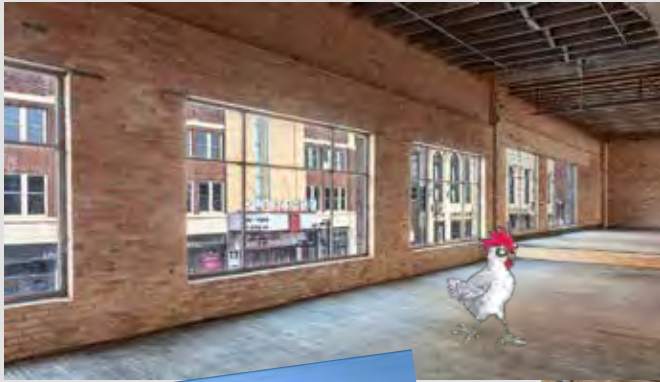
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# ★ Reformulating

The year concert promoters became seed savers

★ By Sara Floerke

Whether in open fields, under canopies or in concert halls, the transcending experience of live in-person music has been mostly on hiatus. The COVID-19 pandemic left the grass at parks to the geese and left auditorium seats to gather dust. But Duluth-area music organizations have also adapted. Online performances and physical-distancing measures will likely remain the norm for many months to come.

Here's a rundown of how a few stalwart organizations have carried on through the pandemic.

## ★ Big Top Chautauqua

Bayfield's long-running summer concert series at Mt. Ashwabay delayed cancellation of in-person events for its 2020 season until early April. Ultimately, Big Top Chautauqua Board Chair Kim Ogle, a medical doctor, insisted the health of participants

be the prime concern. The organization quickly switched to offering an online series called the Tiny Tent Show, finding new audience members wandering into the virtual tent. The move made it easier for more people to enjoy performances without traveling.

After in-person shows were canceled, supporters began donating tickets and sponsorships. The nonprofit garnered 704 new donors in 2020, 55 percent of which were from the Tiny Tent Show.

The combined support of new fans with old enabled Big Top Chautauqua to keep its office open without layoffs, although employees did take a reduction in salary and hours were abbreviated.

Big Top is scheduling a live 2021 season with reduced capacity, a new seating plan and a mandatory mask policy.

## ★ Matinee Musicale

Tim Churchill, board chair of Matinee Musicale, was disappointed to cancel the 2020 season, but when a new board member suggested switching to a digital format, it opened new possibilities for the 120-year-old organization.

Musicians who normally might not be available to travel to Duluth could now be part of the Matinee Musicale season. Donors provided money to enrich the pool of performers through the Sphinx Foundation, which represents artists in underrepresented populations.

In January's virtual performance, cellist Ifetayo Ali-Landing thanked Matinee Musicale for giving her the chance to play for an audience when COVID has severely limited her performances. She speaks for many artists who appreciate the op-

portunity for new ventures and new successes.

Looking back at the history of the Matinee Musicale, Churchill was encouraged. Thirteen women organized Matinee Musicale in 1900 to bring hope and optimism by way of classical music concerts. They didn't stop playing when World War I began to darken reality. The influenza pandemic of 1918 didn't get in the way. Performances continued during the Depression, World War II, the Korean War, Vietnam War, Watergate, the Great Recession ... and on and on. Irrepressible.

## ★ Rock the Big Top

Last summer, Grandma's Marathon's popular music event Rock the Big Top was sheared off. As Minnesota continued with safety precautions, marathon organizers streamlined. Because the race is the crucial







Approximately 10,000 people attended a July 2018 concert at Bayfront Park featuring Trampled by Turtles, Bad Bad Hats, Charlie Parr, the Last Rebel, Superior Siren and the League of Alexy Band. (Photo by Matthew Moses)

activity, ancillary events like Rock the Big Top needed to be temporarily trimmed.

This year's post-race celebration will be a more intimate affair for runners to converse and relax rather than party hearty.

Zach Schneider, marketing and public relations director for Grandma's Marathon, said the plan is to bring back Rock the Big Top in 2022 if conditions allow.

### ★ Duluth Superior Symphony Orchestra

The Duluth Superior Symphony Orchestra is primed for the 2021 season. For safety protocols, it has winnowed pre-COVID numbers of 72 musicians on stage down to 22 and will increase the numbers as the state health standards change.

The Duluth Entertainment Convention Center upgraded its filter system to prepare for live concerts with limited capacity, which began in late February. When live concerts had to be canceled, DSSO built up its online platform and began to give virtual audiences the opportunity to listen to archived performances for a discounted price. The goal was not revenue but the opportunity to listen and provide hope. More than 1,000 people have signed up for the

virtual concerts since last May, with 20 percent of the virtual sales new to DSSO.

Executive Director Brandon VanWaeyenberghe noted the pandemic gave DSSO the opportunity to reformulate. The organization had been recording concerts for WDSE-TV, but had done little with the recordings. VanWaeyenberghe mused, "Every concert we can perform is a success. We want to be in a good place to return when all of this dies down."

### ★ Bayfront Festival Park

For Bayfront Park the pandemic was a somber and serious loss. All events were canceled and there was only one gathering at the park — a rally after George Floyd's death. The end of March 2020 saw ticket and event cancellations with a loss of millions of dollars.

This year will feel like a grafting of new stock with bookings nearing the 2019 level. Safety features for 2021 events will involve capacity limitations with six pods of 250 concert goers. The goal, according to Jeff Stark, DECC venue operations and Bayfront Park director, is to keep relationships germinating to keep the music alive. If events are canceled two years in a row, audiences and performers may erode away.

This pandemic gave event promoters the opportunity to pull back the curtain on how things work and ask, "Why have we done things this way?" and "What's the best way to keep the seeds of live events alive?"

Maybe all the sanguinity and hope should not be surprising. Stark summed up his optimism with an anecdote. Apparently the DECC and Duluth Parks and Rec have been "gently ribbing" each other for years about the wear and tear on the grass at the Bayfront Park after concerts. Trying to keep

grass healthy when thousands of people tramp all over it every weekend is an endless frustration. Stark said this year the Parks and Rec department has been very happy with him. The grass, left alone for a year to thrive, has grown healthy, strong and thick in preparation for this year's events.

A lot of seeds, literal and metaphorical, were saved this year due to flexibility and creative thinking. They will be scattered with a new appreciation in 2021. ★



# ★ Closer Through Distance

★ By Rick McLean

Music lessons go online; teachers and students jam on

From soothing piano ballads to face-melting guitar solos, there's no shortage of approaches to the craft of music. But the unifying element of all artists is that at some point in their lives, they didn't know how to play an instrument.

While many are self-taught and some grow up around music, a large number are guided by the instruction of fellow music lovers. And that's where another type of talent comes in to play: the music teacher.

As is the case with nearly every element of society over the past year, music lessons have needed to adapt to survive. Moving from studio spaces to computer screens, online lessons have become the new



Jimi Cooper of Twin Ports Guitar Lesson Studio teaches online from his home in Duluth's Riverside neighborhood. Prior to the pandemic he gave lessons in person in a space above Wusow's Concert Cafe. (Photo by Jimi Cooper)

norm. The change has brought new challenges and new opportunities.

"There can be moments of frustration with online lessons because of delays in audio and glitches in bad internet con-

nections, but it's much more good than bad," said Emma Rustan, better known in the music world as the electro-folk



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artist Ingeborg von Agassiz. Having taught music off and on for nearly two decades, Rustan has been pleasantly surprised with how well the transition to digital teaching has gone.

After all, we are in the Digital Age. Computer literacy and device familiarity continue to be established as commonplace to most, regardless of age. So after clearing the hurdles of spotty Wi-Fi and the lost ability to physically assist with lesson plans, many instructors are finding that the current obstacles aren't much different than they've always been.

"The only students that I have been unsuccessful with are the ones that talk themselves out of learning," explained Ian Alexy of Driftless Guitar Lessons. "It's all about a person's attitude."

A singer/songwriter who often partners with his brother Teague Alexy in Hobo Nephews of Uncle Frank, Ian Alexy finds teaching guitar lessons provides much needed relief during these difficult times.

"For some (students) I am sure it is an escape from reality," he said, "and reality has been pretty heavy this last year. It's actually a great time to take music lessons."

The positivity felt from the music can, in turn, aid in the drive to keep at it, piano teacher Jazmin Wong pointed out.

"My students' overall wellbeing and happiness plays a key role in their reception," Wong said, adding that "sometimes it takes longer to get through a piece for students, but with extra positivity they keep trying. My new favorite thing is to say, 'You must be proud of yourself for all of your hard work!'"

Beyond the value of learning a new skill that holds limitless opportunities of discovery, having a teacher means having someone to talk to. Former Duluthian Kat Hansberry, who teaches music in Minneapolis through Twin Town Guitars, said she has built a stronger connection with students, perhaps as a result of being one of the few people they interact with consistently.

"It seems a little backward, but I feel like I've gotten a lot closer to my students through distance learning," she said. "We've gotten to know each other super well in the past year."

The integral bond that students and teachers can maintain, in an era of isolation, is one of several benefits that online learning can provide. As many extra curriculums, social gatherings, and overall concepts of normalcy continue to sit in limbo, some form of regularity becomes crucial. Achieving that through a positive learning experience that fosters creativity, is more important than it's ever been.

Through the mechanics of online learning, teachers have found some other benefits as well.

"I also get to hang out with my cat all day *and* I get to meet my students' pets, which is maybe the biggest bonus of all," Hansberry said.

Many within the remote workforce can likely relate to the perks that come with operating from their

homebase. Cutting out the commute, working in pajamas and catching up on chores between conference calls have all come to be part of the daily routine. For music instructors, working from home can also mean easy access to extra gear they otherwise would have had to lug across town.

"I don't miss packing up and driving to work at all," said local guitar virtuoso Jimi Cooper. "Instead of having to play one guitar all day I can grab any of my guitars off the wall and play them if I'd like. So many guitars, so little time!"

Cooper, who performs most frequently in the duo Dance Attic and plays guitar in several Duluth-area bands, owns and operates Twin Ports Guitar Studio. He said the digital nature of the lessons has opened new doors to reaching students from farther away.

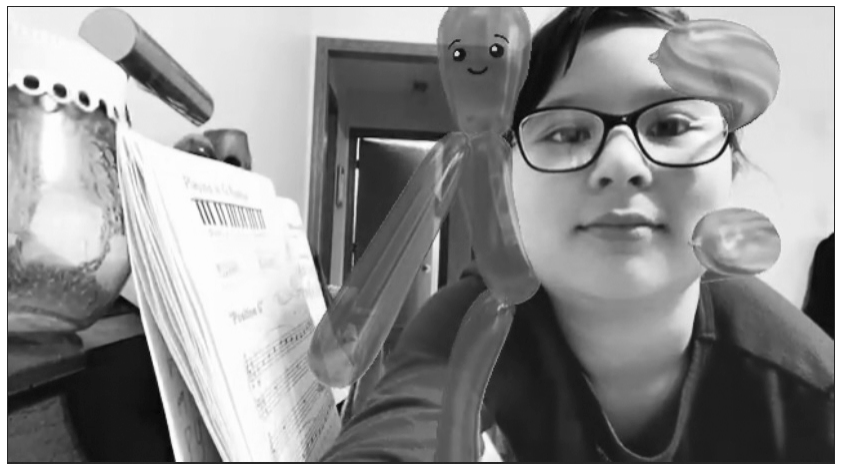
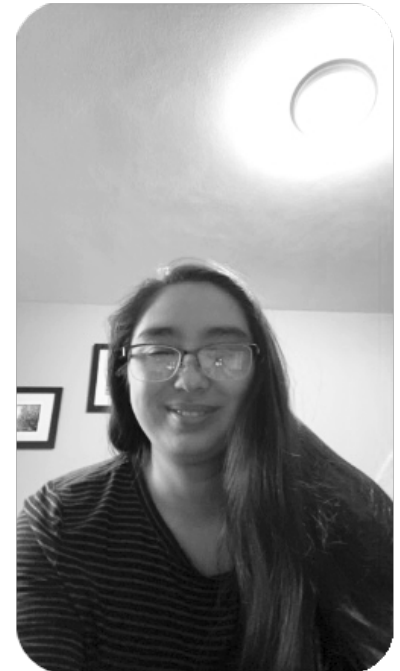
"One of my students moved to Maine and we kept up with lessons," he said. "I'm also teaching someone who lives up in Alaska."

In balancing the pros and cons of distance learn-



ing, will people come out of this era preferring the new way of doing things?

"I'd be willing to bet that in the post-pandemic future many students will probably continue doing online lessons or a combination of both online and in-person lessons in order to take advantage of the best of both worlds," Rustan predicted. ★



Jazmin Wong (top) teaches piano to Jagger Ripley-Jaakola via smartphone.



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## Concert tech crews fear bigger shows will be slowest to return

During the pandemic, there's been a lot of conversation about the music industry and how it continues to suffer, but it's usually of the "how-will-artists-feed-themselves" variety. This problem is absolutely real and is playing out in ways that will not be apparent until years down the road, but so is the one with the people who work in a more behind-the-scenes fashion.

Concert-goers often don't give much thought to the technical aspects as much as what happens on stage. Which is how it should be, of course. It's a sign of someone doing a good job when the audience isn't thinking about who is flipping the switches. This goes for big, loud, flashy arena shows all the way down to a local coffee-house gig.

the pandemic along with the musicians they work with. Though there have been gigs here and there, the people who run sound and light at regional venues have been almost totally without work, and they're all waiting to see what remains of their livelihoods when things start to turn toward some semblance of whatever "normal" will look like in the future.

John Farrell is a well-known figure on the local scene. Chances are, if you've set foot on a stage to play music in Duluth in the past few years, he's been back there at the board at least a few times, working the faders. He's a musician himself, with a part-time job as a guitar teacher at Lake Superior College. Farrell said the past year for him has been a struggle.

Farrell said. "I was doing regular business. We shut down. They stopped all concerts really early on. I lost, you know, \$2,000 in the first week that we were closed down." When the warmer weather came around, he was able to do a few outdoor shows, but Farrell said he lost 90 percent of his business for the year.

"I have one thing booked for the summer," Farrell said in February, "and I would normally have 20 or 30 shows at least tentatively booked." He explained that this is unlikely to change until the infection rate goes down significantly, as no one wants to book shows and pay to promote them if they're just going to be canceled.

"They don't want to put too much work into it," he said. "You start having to pay guarantees for artists, and nobody wants to do that. I really don't see bigger shows coming back until at least fall. It'll be almost two full business years, for me."

Farrell said he immediately applied for as many loans and grants as he could.

"I ended up getting a small-business loan and a small-business grant, and that kind of pays the basic expenses of loans that I have and some credit-card debt that I had that was business-oriented," he said. "I got

be able to provide work for other people as he normally would have.

"The guys who work for me during Homegrown, they do 80 to 100 hours of work during that week, and it's a really healthy paycheck, and I feel bad," he said.

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**"All these shows, all these events, all these rentals— every day, it was disappearing, dropping off."**

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It's possible that those people might not be able to come back on the other side of the pandemic.

"Business is just going to come out of this looking way different than it was," Farrell said. "There's gonna be a lot of people that are not gonna go back in."

Scott Lillo is a sales manager at Sound Central Production Services. He's also been in a kind of stasis over the past year. Where his schedule would normally be filled with all manner of jobs on any number of crews, he's been helping out with livestreams, mainly. It's a different life for him now.

"It pretty much got shut down," he said of his livelihood. "I mean, it was done ... I was hoping it was gonna be a short-lived thing, and here we are almost a year later. I didn't think it was ever gonna be this bad, or this weird. All these shows, all these events, all these rentals — every day, it was disappearing, dropping off."

Lillo's been getting by however he can.

"I didn't have any real problems getting unemployment from the



Left to right: John Farrell, Shawn Landeira and Scott Lillo, seen here after setting up gear at Lake Superior Zoo during the 2019 Homegrown Children's Music Showcase, are all eager to get back to work in the concert tech industry. (Photo by Matthew Moses)

In the Twin Ports, there are a lot of people who are involved with making shows possible, and all of them have been grounded by

His company, JDF Sound and Lighting, lost all its clients in one fell swoop.

"It pretty much just shuttered us,"

a really small amount of unemployment, like \$100 a week, or something like that."

Farrell was also saddened to not

state of Minnesota,” he said. “You get half your wages, but that’s better than nothing, you know.”

He describes himself as an “optimist,” but when asked to picture his industry coming back, it’s hard for him to do, at least as far as the near future is concerned.

“I can socially distance from the people in the audience,” he said, “but I’m still gonna be around 100 other people backstage, and you can’t do that.”

Mark Messina is a local drummer who works as a backline tech for T&E Concert Services when he’s not busy touring the world as a crew member for acts like the Smashing Pumpkins or Greta Van Fleet. Today, he’s working as a driver for a medical transport company as a result of the pandemic.

“Overnight, I lost every single revenue stream I had built up over the years,” Messina said. “It was pretty stunning. My industry is not



Scott Lillo checks the microphone sound during the 2019 Rock the Big Top, an outdoor music event held as part of Grandma’s Marathon race weekend. (Photo by Matthew Moses)

coming back anytime soon. The industry is concerned that, when it comes back, there’s not going to be enough people, because so many people have moved on.”

Messina thinks local shows will come back before national ones.

“You need less people to get together,” he said. “For a casino, it’s four, five hundred people, versus the Xcel Center, which needs 10,000 people to make it worth their while.”

Smartly, he’s not making any predictions about his

future prospects.

“I just gotta cross that bridge when I get to it,” he said. It’s a thought that is now all too common for people who established themselves working behind the scenes in the music industry. ★



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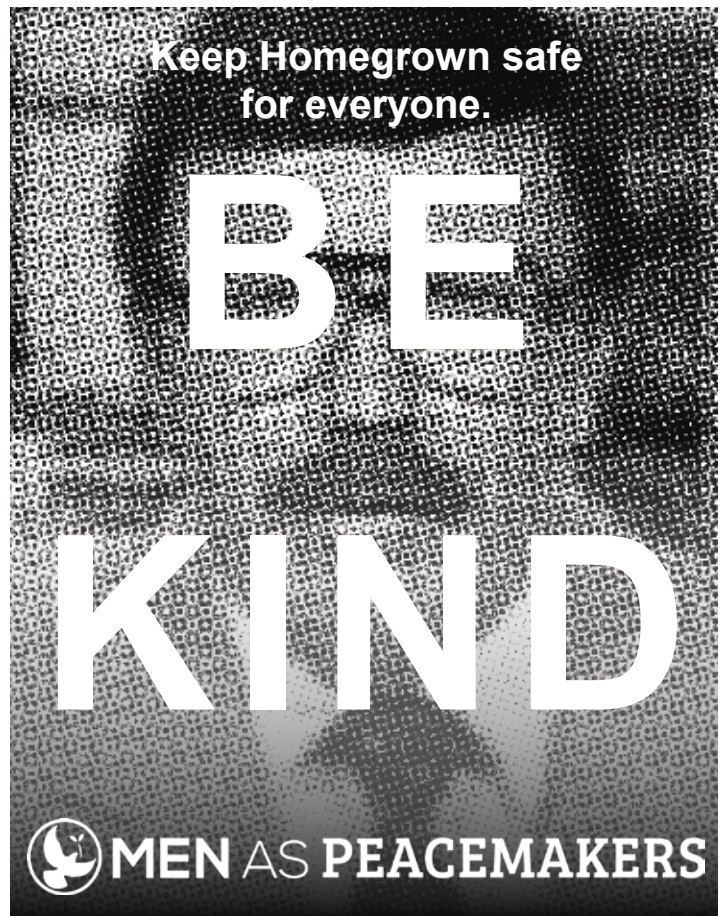
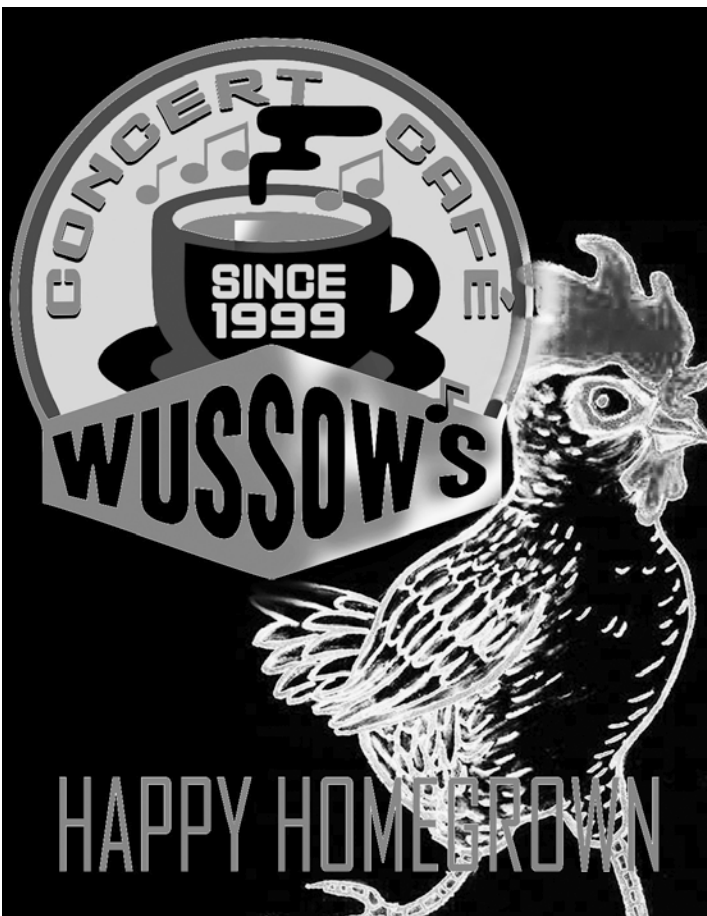
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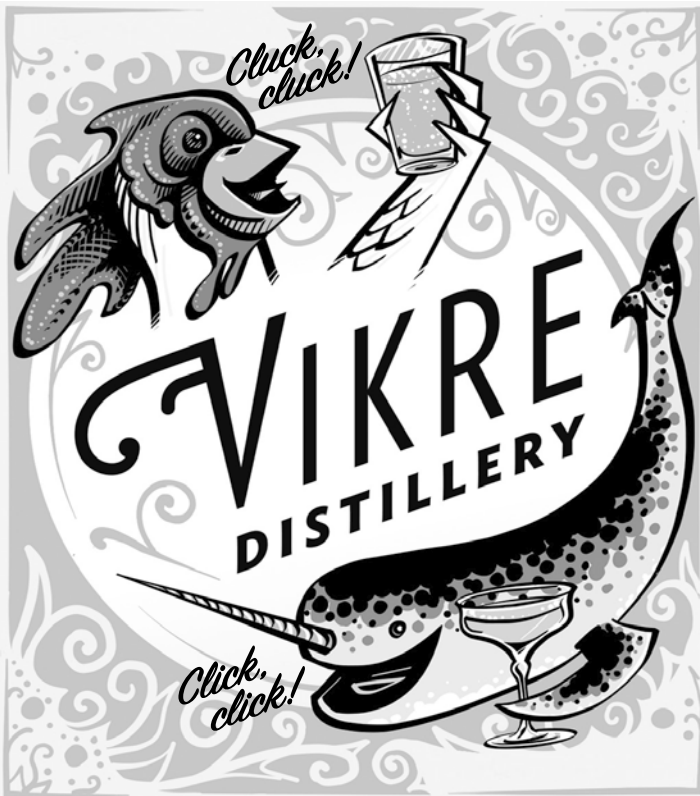
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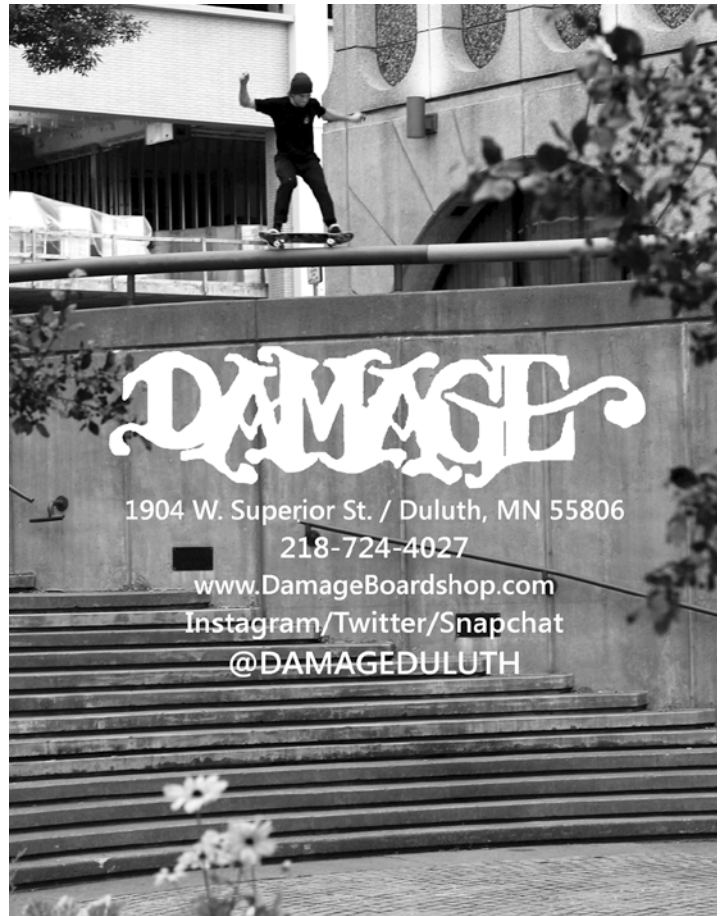






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# There's only one way to get to the NorShor

★ By Walt Dizzo

... but finding practice space can be tricky for Duluth bands

Starting a band can be as easy as huddling with friends, picking up some instruments and choosing a cool-sounding name. But before that group sees the bright lights of the NorShor Theatre — or for that matter a dark corner in a dive bar — there will have to be a few practice sessions.

For string duos, a corner of the living room will do. Those who want to make some noise, however, are a bit more challenged. Suitable garages and basements are available to some, but others need to hunt for real estate.

Bob Olson has added a cranked-

up guitar to a half-dozen or more Duluth bands over the past three decades and has found himself in some interesting places to practice — including living rooms — but also the beautiful art-deco basement of a Superior bar, an unused space above the former Shish Ka Bar, and a “mop closet” off a dance studio above the Electric Fetus. The dance studio proprietor, who Olson recalls was named Nancy, was supportive of the arts and opened the door to local bands looking for places to practice. That mop closet would eventually house fellow rockers the Dames and Both, and also host some epic punk shows in later years.

None of those locations were advertised as practice spaces and weren't necessarily on anyone's radar.

“You'd start off going through the phone book and calling commercial buildings about spaces,” Olson said. “When they found

out what you wanted to do, you wouldn't get a call back. Or you'd find an empty building and agencies would still want \$1,500 (mid-1990s prices) for a space that had been empty for years.”

Getting creative can include approaching local businesses about spaces not used during off hours or getting lucky with an abandoned building.

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**“When you find a spot you have to hang on to it... These spaces are hard to find, but they're essential to being a good loud band.”**

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Greg Cougar Conley, dubbed the “Godfather” of local practice spaces, has been renting rooms consistently for more than 25 years.

“The first practice space we had was with some other bands in a building that was slated to be demolished,” Conley said. “These dudes we knew were doing it and asked us to join up and split the cost.”

Thus the story began for Conley, who has lost more practice spaces to landlords and building sales than many bands play gigs. Besides joining Olson above the Fetus and later at a space near the Plaza Super One, Conley has also rented rooms from Great Northern Music in Superior (a place he kept for nearly 10 years), a spot the Duluth Flame Nightclub now occupies, a room at the Clubhouse (more on that later) and a former art gallery up the avenue from

Top: Tony Bennett, seen here performing with the Dames at Clyde Iron Works during the 2018 Homegrown, rehearsed with the band two decades ago in a utility closet on the second floor of the Electric Fetus building. (Photo by Matthew Moses) Bottom: The Acceleratii rehearsing at the Clubhouse in 2011. Left to right: Steve Mahlberg, Ben Marsen, Scott Millis and Chad Lyons. (Photo by Barrett Chase)



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Members of the band Ballyhoo at Ballyhäus Studio in 1999. Left to right: Leon Rohrbaugh, Andy Krubsack, Nate Heydt and Sean Erspamer. (Photo by Merritt Mortensen)

Fond-du-Luth Casino. He is currently renting space in a former fire hall. Although his bands haven't always been active, Conley knows the value of finding a space and keeping it.

"I think it's pretty clear that fairly few members of the music community here need or at least prioritize a dedicated space for practicing," he said. "But as someone who has rented a space for the entirety of my music life I have, every single year, let someone borrow my space to practice. I've been plugged into the process for a long time and know that when you find a spot you have to hang on to it. Even if your band breaks up, you're not playing, someone moves out, whatever — have places in mind for when the current one falls through. These spaces are hard to find, but they're essential to being a good loud band."

Leon Rohrbaugh of A Band Called Truman moved to Duluth in 1996 and played with Gild, 4 lbs. of Pretzels and in an incarnation of Giljunko where he remembers practicing "in basements, upstairs apartments, and kitchens and occasionally at R.T. Quinlan's." In 1998, Rohrbaugh formed Ballyhoo, and the band's basement practices eventually led to renting out 9 N. Lake Ave.,

across from Pizza Lucé.

"We ran Ballyhäus Studios outta there and recorded some cool folks like Greg Brown ... Charlie Parr would come in and lay guitar solos over some of our stuff, and it was a cool hangout," said Rohrbaugh. "We did share the space after a while with Bone Appetit and Onus B and it was basically an out-of-control party and it was awesome!"

Currently, Rohrbaugh and his well-populated band practice at his own above-garage studio rehearsal space. Although the shared party space can have its advantages, there's something nice about the convenience of having a permanent setup in your own home.

The Dames has long been one of Duluth's loudest bands, with Tony Bennett's amp seemingly stuck on 11. It's a group that's much too loud for an apartment. Bennett's first turn in a high school band was bolstered by the support of his drummer Scott's mom, Kris, who let the group "make noise in her basement." As that band petered out, the Dames were formed and found refuge in that utility closet in the dance studio above the Fetus.

"It was really just enough space



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Dad's Acid performs during a 2014 party held during Homegrown in the basement practice space of the Keep Aways, who lived upstairs. (Photo by Andy Miller)

for the three of us and a sink ... but it was ours alone,” Bennett said.

After a lineup change, the band relocated to Superior in a space in the same building as Conley's band Both. Bennett liked the community that formed in the Great Northern Music Center building and eventually the shared space led to a collaborative musical effort called Bloodstool.

When Bennett was forming his next band, Cars & Trucks, he found a great fit in a rehearsal/studio space known as the Clubhouse. Prior to being called the Clubhouse it was known as Ballyhäus, built by James Matheson after moving out of that original space on Lake Avenue. The idea was to have a recording studio with four practice spaces attached to help cover the rent. Around 2004, Bruce Woodman took over managing the space and with a recommendation from Bob Olson he rented the recording studio to Jake Larson. At points, in order to make sure

the rent was paid, all the rooms in the building — including the four practice spaces, studio live room, drum room and control room — were rented by different groups. Scheduling at times could be chaotic, but Larson tried to record during the day and let bands practice at night.

“I got good at recording while other loud things were going on,” he said.

Management of the Clubhouse eventually went to Kyle MacLean of Hog Damage Collective when that group of bands was forced to vacate the former Twin Ports Music and Arts Collective space, now the location of the Flame. The Clubhouse was a unique setup that hosted a wide variety of acts including the Acceleratii, Big Wave Dave and the Ripples, the DTs, Ire Wolves, Cars & Trucks and many more.

“Personally, the Clubhouse was the closest thing to a perfect communal space I've been in,” said Bennett. With bands coming

and going and a shared lounge it was a great way to fraternize with fellow musicians one might not see otherwise. The Clubhouse offered a chance for feedback and collaboration as well as a place to set up a show in person rather than through a litany of easily ignored emails.

Larson eventually landed an opportunity to utilize Sacred Heart Music Center for studio sessions and the Clubhouse recording studio was taken over by John Farrell. When the property owners went in a new direction, bands had to find a new home as the building was taken over by Duluth Screen Printing Company.

For Cars & Trucks, the band ended up in the basement of drummer Mat Milinkovich's house. A true advantage of home ownership is a place where drums can be left set up. That's part of why home rehearsals are still the most popular choice for Duluth bands. Whether the group is loud with understanding neighbors, as the Keep Aways had in

their Central Hillside basement space, or the situation is more like Breanne Marie and the Front Porch Sinners, a group that currently practices from home and moved from the living room to the dining room and eventually the basement as the band grew in size.

Still, the need for a place to play loud and get away from the distractions of home is needed for many area acts. As live music makes its way back to in-person audiences, bands will have to get together and remember how to play their songs. Groups formed on Zoom will be meeting each other in real life. Where will they wind up?

Jake Swanson of the Social Disaster and Dad's Acid attempted a rehearsal space and very small venue in Superior called the Barbershop that attracted a handful of loud acts. The space was born from the necessity of getting Swanson's gigantic amp rig out of his bedroom. Originally designed as a practice space that would occasionally host shows, the place eventually hosted weekly gigs and turned into a very communal event space. However, a move out of town and a global pandemic has ended Swanson's Superior venture.

What will be next? Will the Duluth area see another artist-friendly practice space like Clubhouse? Bennett hopes so.

“I think that if lots of bands and musicians could find themselves supported in a safe, affordable and central location, the local music scene can totally benefit,” he said. ★



A black and white photograph of a person wearing a wide-brimmed hat, captured in profile as they sing into a vintage-style microphone. The background is dark and out of focus, suggesting a studio or stage setting.

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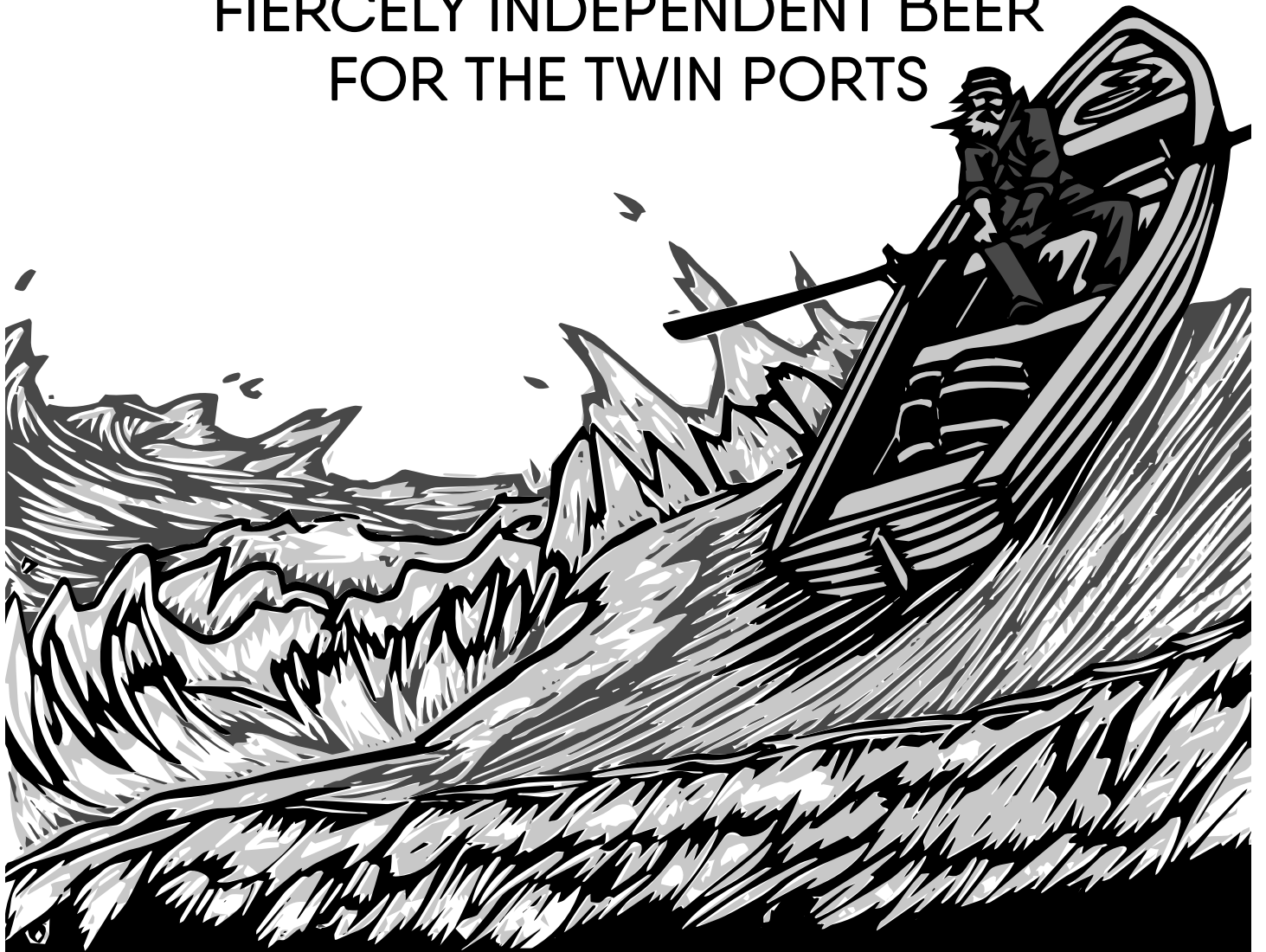




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# ★ Closet Radio

★ By Mark Nicklawske

Duluth music gets more time on KUMD, goes statewide on the Current

Music fans witnessed the coronavirus pandemic unfold on live radio last year when local supergroup Glitteratti made a promotional appearance at the studios of 103.3 FM KUMD.

The band, featuring Marc Gartman, Kyle Keegan, Dave Carroll and Tim Saxhaug, joined KUMD Music Director Christine Dean to play music and answer questions for a Live From Studio A session March 13. The session was booked to promote an album release show later that evening at the Duluth Pizza Lucé.

Shortly before air time, word went out that the concert was canceled due to health concerns associated with COVID-19. Glitteratti played a few songs in the studio that afternoon and canceled the final leg of its Midwest tour.

“We didn’t really know what was going to happen. It was just when things were starting to shut down — some things were being canceled and some things weren’t,” Dean said. “It just was really uncertain and then: Boom.”

Live From Studio A has been a long-running KUMD programming staple. Local and nationally touring musicians sit-in with a host to promote new releases and upcoming performances. The show has been redesigned under COVID-19 protocol.

“We didn’t want to do nothing,” said Dean. “We were like, ‘Well, we need to figure out how to do some virtual stuff.’ That’s when I started using this program called Cleanfeed.”



Kevin Stanke has been hosting *The Local* on KUMD since 2016. His on-air name is Marvin Themix. Malachy Koons hosts on alternate weeks. (Photo by Paul Lundgren)

Using the Cleanfeed recording platform, KUMD aired five virtual Live From Studio A sessions during Homegrown 2020 and posted others through the end of the year, including interviews with Steve Roehm of the New Standards and John Hermanson of Storyhill.

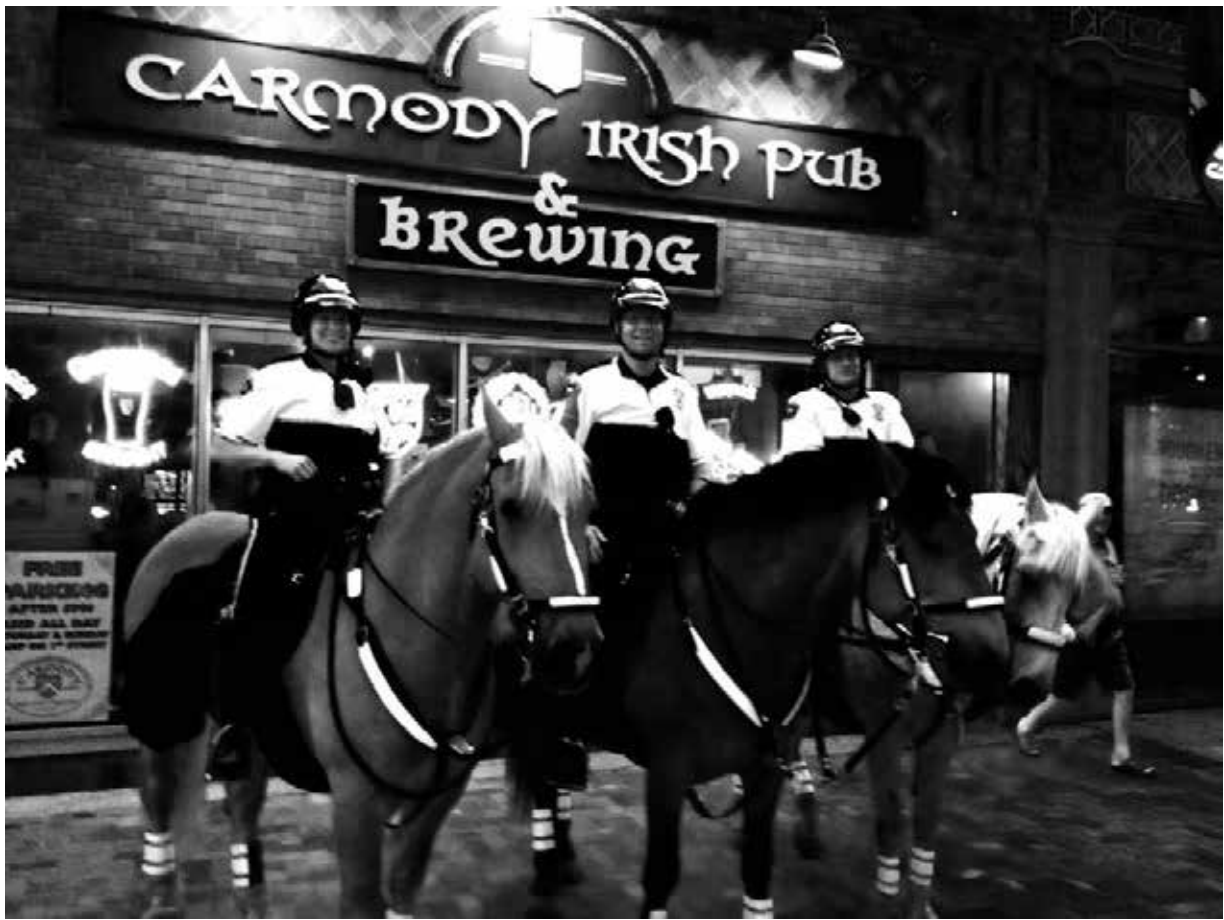
Dean said KUMD has carried on under COVID-19 safety measures which drastically limited station access by staff and volunteers early in the pandemic. Engineers also started a studio remodeling project which caused scheduling issues and led to suspending Live From Studio A recording.

While COVID-19 has made broadcasting difficult, Dean said the pandemic has not slowed down local musicians.

“Honestly it doesn’t seem like there’s that less new music



Walter Raschick, aka Walt Dizzo, has been hosting *The Dean’s List* on KUWS for 15 years. (Photographer unknown)



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## 91 Jazz Street & The Dean's List

coming in from Minnesota artists," she said. "As a person whose email is constantly clogged with music — at the very beginning (of the pandemic) it was a little slow but it ticked up pretty quickly, so I don't feel like there's been any dearth of music."

In fact, KUMD has increased its local music programming. The station announced in February it would expand its 5 p.m. Wednesday night feature — *The Local Show* — from one to two hours. A Minnesota Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund grant was used to take the show from volunteer to paid hosts.

"That's kind of exciting," said Dean. "They're going to do more interviews, more features and things, and be more active on social media."

Walt Dizzo, host of the KUWS 91.3 FM Wednesday night *Dean's List* show, said the station's COVID-19 access restrictions and resulting technical issues led him to put the show on hiatus for the summer of 2020.

"I've been doing the show for 15 years so it was kind of a nice little break," said Dizzo. "At the same time, I'm glad that they took our health seriously. So that made me very happy."

Returning to the airwaves, Dizzo has been recording his show at home for rebroadcast.

"The big downfall of course is that I can't have any guests," he said. "I'm sure there is a way I could call and record an interview from home, but I'll leave that for the more technologically advanced."

Dizzo said radio loses its energy and spontaneity when it's

not live.

"The biggest thing is not having students have access to the radio station," he said. "So all that energy that the new students come in with, and their own music tastes and their connections to the community have been lost this last year."

Dizzo has seen a drop in new music releases but has found a way to counter it. He digs deep into his personal record collection to play lost or under-appreciated local music from the 1970s and '80s.

"I'll be on the radio as long as they let me and one way or the other I'll make a show happen," he said.

The Current has carried on as well.

Sometime last August Minnesota Public Radio officials shipped a box of equipment to *Duluth Local Show* host Britany Lind so she could record her Sunday night program at home.

The new recording equipment served as a precautionary measure against COVID-19. Lind would no longer need to travel to an MPR studio in Downtown Duluth where she shared space with a reporter. But it also meant she needed to carve out a sound studio in her apartment.

A closet-sized office space with a stand-up desk received a creative upgrade. She covered foam squares with old Duluth Superior Film Festival, the Crunchy Bunch and Bent Paddle Festiversary T-shirts, attached the squares to the wall and loaded up a couple clothing wracks to sound-proof the space.




"The sound is actually really

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Brittany Lind hosts *The Duluth Local Show* Sunday nights on the Current. (Photo by Brittany Lind)



good in this room," she said. "It's just absurd but I really like it."

The COVID-19 inspired home recording space gives Lind more time and flexibility to record her one-hour program, which airs at 8 p.m. every Sunday night on the Current, 94.1

and 104.3 FM in Duluth.

"I kind of prefer recording at home," said Lind. "I have a full-time job so it's not like I got to see anyone in the office anyway. I would go in to record after hours because that would be after my work hours. This

way it's just significantly more comfortable. I can stand up at my desk and it's brighter — the MPR studio is so dark."

COVID-19 also led to another change at the Current for *The Duluth Local Show*: Instead of just airing in the Twin Ports

market, the show was added to a statewide Sunday night lineup. Now Duluth artists take over the airwaves for 60 minutes from Rochester to Roseau and beyond.

Lind said the change makes her show more accessible to radio listeners all across the state and worldwide through the Current phone app and computer stream.

"We actually have a bunch of listeners not only nationally but internationally," she said. "My show is just our music scene. So the fact that I have this opportunity to not only go statewide but really nationwide and a little bit worldwide, to focus on just Duluth artists, that's spreading it out, that's getting the word across."

While the pandemic has knocked out hearing music live and in person, Lind said she has kept in touch with artists on the web. She tracks new releases through websites, social media and news releases. She also started interviewing musicians like Woodblind and Cory Coffman through Zoom.

"It's weird not to see them in person, but now I think I'm finally in a place where I can interact with them in a different way," she said. "I get a ton of messages from artists, pretty much every week because people have been rolling out music like you wouldn't believe. The pandemic has been the perfect opportunity for people to just sit down and get stuff done." ★

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# Together Online

★ By Jessica Morgan

## Unofficial Homegrown Scavenger Hunt returns

Social-distancing measures didn't stop Kala Moria from connecting community members during the 2020 Homegrown Music Festival. After in-person concerts were canceled, Moria put her "unofficial" event-making passion to work promoting a pandemic-friendly scavenger hunt on Facebook.

Moria didn't ask permission from the Homegrown committee before jumping into action.

"It's something that I set up because I love Homegrown," she said. The fanbase of one of her favorite shows, *Supernatural*, also provided inspiration for the hunt. She used the Greatest International Scavenger Hunt the World Has Ever Seen, founded by actor Misha Collins, as part of her model.

Several Homegrown committee members participated last year. They even provided her with a blue "unofficial" Homegrown jacket, modeled after the red ones the committee wears to events.

"It's a cool thing that we can still obviously support," said Homegrown Festival Director Melissa La Tour. "She put this whole thing together on her own time while she was in school with finals around the corner."

Creating Homegrown events is something Moria has been doing since 2016. These activities have included a trading-card game and a pep band that plays for the Homegrown kickball game.

"Me and a bunch of other people show up with random band instruments and play terrible renditions of songs that people used

to play in high school," she said of their group, the Wrong Notes Pep Band.

With another virtual festival on the way this spring, the Unofficial Duluth Homegrown Music Festival Scavenger Hunt is making a return on Facebook, though Moria "had been planning on doing this again even if Homegrown could happen in person."

While she is eager to interact in large groups again, the nature of doing it virtually has a few upsides. Beyond keeping everyone safe, it helps participants engage with each other online.

"There will be plenty of time to do these things in person with one another when there isn't a global pandemic," she said. Last year allowed kids to get involved and create a unique space for people uncomfortable in bars. "Honestly, in some ways, I like that it has to be virtual because it gives people an opportunity to be more creative."

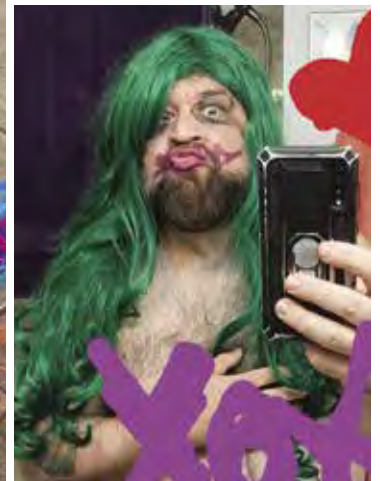
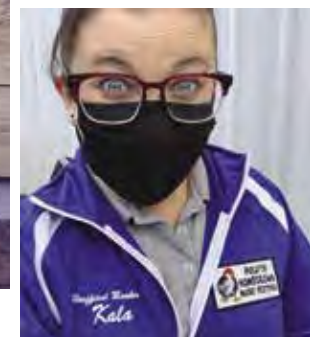
"It was really fun to go on (Facebook) every day and see what other people were coming up with," said Cory Jezierski, who played on last year's winning team, Look Good, Don't Die. Part of the fun was getting to "see everyone get creative with it," he said, echoing Moria's sentiment about the platform.

"It all gets submitted into the Facebook event so that it's all in one place and everyone can enjoy it as it's getting released," said

Moria. And with this year's event being announced ahead of time, she hopes to see even more engagement. But this foresight will not affect the length of time participants have to complete

daily tasks, which are released the night before. "I don't want a bunch of pre-recorded videos, so (they) have to be spontaneous."

"One that sticks out and kind of got messy was when we did the



Top: Suzy Jezierski of the winning scavenger hunt team Look Good, Don't Die strikes a pose in a chicken suit with an egg, responding to the task asking who started Homegrown theme nights. (Photo by Cory Jezierski) Inset: After organizing the hunt, Kala Moria was presented with a Homegrown "unofficial member" jacket. (Photo by Kala Moria) Bottom left: Annmarie Geniusz of the team Snazzy McSnazzertons produced sidewalk art in front of Wussow's Concert Cafe, completing two scavenger-hunt tasks at once. (Photo by Annmarie Geniusz) Bottom right: Cory Jezierski of the team Look Good, Don't Die completes the "crazy hair day" task. (Photo by Cory Jezierski)

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beer challenge,” said Jezierski. “I had the idea to tape them onto my garage door and then open it and let the beer fall into our mouth,” he laughed. The beer challenge, asking participants to shotgun a beer or sparkling water for one point became a meme.

Moria expressed surprise over the popularity of the beer challenge, saying “nobody genuinely likes shotgunning a beer. It’s not fun.” But still, “somehow that one task got included in so many other videos that people were doing. (Teams) already (earned) the shotgunning a beer point. But then the next thing you know they would be posting a video for another task and be shotgunning beers in the background of that one. It showed up in so many tasks.

“My husband’s team made ... a video of playing a lot of different sports but playing them wrong and there were people just shotgunning beers,” Moria said of the team Steve on a Stick, which used a kickball in place of what would traditionally be used for each sport in the music-video task. The video featured music from the local band G’narwals.

For La Tour, the most memorable task was to “re-enact winning the Grandma’s Marathon.” Running down her street while two team members cheered her on and neighbors peeked through their windows, La Tour stopped for water, poured it over her head and fell toward the imaginary finish line.

“I was totally into it,” she said. “I had road rash, my sweat pants hiked up over my lower leg and I crawled through a puddle as it had rained earlier that day. It was pretty fun.”

But it wasn’t all about goofing

around. The goal of the scavenger hunt was connection.

“It brought a bunch of community members together and helped us feel some sense of normalcy,” Moria said. And people hopped on teams together before they ever met each other, using Facebook to find other team members. La Tour also described how family in the Twin Cities contributed to her team’s efforts, which would not have happened during a normal Homegrown.

Together, participants raised \$930 for CHUM, Life House and the Damiano Center. Nearly every team donated money to these organizations. Another task awarded points for picking up trash from Duluth’s streets, parks and other public locations. This was the only challenge teams could complete more than once. “The teams that won definitely got their edge by picking up a whole lot of trash,” Moria said.

Extra points were awarded for cleaning up from creeks because it wasn’t just picking up trash, but it was picking up wet trash, she said. In total, 35 full trash bags were collected among the 16 participating teams. “We picked up a lot of trash around the parks and trails that were near my house,” Jezierski said.

The community and hilarity that came from the videos were beyond what Moira ever expected and imagined, she said. Homegrown fans looking to participate this year can send suggestions of tasks to complete to the 2021 event’s Facebook page. Prepared with an Excel spreadsheet, an upgrade from the notebook where she hand-wrote teams’ points last year, Moria is ready to connect the Homegrown community in another round of fun.

★



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# 5 WAYS TO HELP PLANNED PARENTHOOD

**BECOME PART OF THE MOVEMENT** to increase access and protect the right to sexual and reproductive health care.




## BECOME A PATIENT!



Becoming a patient is a great way to get the care you need and support something you believe in. Your visit strengthens Planned Parenthood and our ability to provide care to others.

Planned Parenthood is in-network for most insurance and offers low- to no-cost care for those who qualify. Schedule a visit at the Duluth Planned Parenthood or a telehealth visit. **Schedule online at [ppncs.org](https://ppncs.org)**



## VOLUNTEER

Support our daily work by becoming a volunteer. **[ppncs.org/volunteer](https://ppncs.org/volunteer)**



## DONATE

Make a contribution to protect the right to expert, affordable reproductive health care. **[ppncs.org/give](https://ppncs.org/give)**



## JOIN THE ACTION NETWORK

Stay in the loop on reproductive health care issues and how you can get involved. **[ppncs.org/action](https://ppncs.org/action)**



## SHARE YOUR STORY

Tell us how Planned Parenthood has impacted your life to help us communicate the importance of our care. **[ppvoices.org](https://ppvoices.org)**

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